



African MISSIONARY



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India revisited



Volleyball is a very important afternoon recreation for both students and staff at Mangadu

Fr Tom Curran SMA (from Gorey, Co Wexford) is a member of the SMA General Council working at the SMA Generalate in Rome. In 2010 he spent several months in India assisting the SMA in the training of our Indian seminarians. Here he gives an account of some aspects of that visit.

It was not my first time in India. With a group of SMA missionaries I went on pilgrimage there in 2006 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the SMA by a French-born missionary, Bishop Melchior de Marion Brésillac. He was a missionary in India for twelve years (1841-1853) before he founded the Society of African Missions in 1856. He had written extensively of his missionary experience there and this led to his appointment as the first bishop (Vicar Apostolic) of Coimbatore in 1846.

SMA in India

25 years ago, as part of the SMA expansion to involve new countries in our missionary work, the Society began to recruit members from India with a view to their working as missionaries in Africa. This was a momentous event for the Society which saw India as having had a profound influence on the missionary career of our Founder. It was a natural step forward to involve Indian missionaries in the work he had begun in Africa.

Chennai

My visit enabled me to see how the SMA had developed in those 25 years and to become acquainted with the expansion of the Indian SMA missionary effort. I stayed at the SMA House of Studies in a suburb of Chennai called Mangadu. Chennai, formerly called Madras, is the capital city of Tamil Nadu State, one of the 28 states that make up India. Tamil people have lived there since 500 BC and there is some evidence that it was the cradle of many of the peoples of Europe including the Celts.

Tamil Nadu with its neighbour state, Kerala, makes up the extreme south of India and together they are the most Christian part of the sub-continent. They trace their Christian beginnings right back to the Apostle, St Thomas, who was martyred in Chennai.

Continues on page 2

Society of African Missions (SMA)

Blackrock Road, Cork, Ireland • Tel: 021 429 2871 • Email: amnewsletter@sma.ie • www.sma.ie

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At Mangadu we have twenty-one seminarians preparing to become SMA missionaries. They study at a nearby university or at the local Major Seminary. I had the opportunity of being with the students and the staff, sharing their life of prayer and work and study as well as being introduced to the wonderful varieties of rice dishes and spices and herbs for which India is famous.

Karamathur

500 kilometres south of Chennai is the famous temple city of Madurai, near which is the town of Karamathur, the location of SMA Illam, the second formation centre for the SMA in India. Here our students spend two years. It is the beginning of their journey in the SMA, learning about the history and aims of the Society as well as improving their English. They then do philosophy and theology studies. We have twenty students there and I spent some weeks with them, involved in liturgy, prayer and catechesis as well as telling them a little about my own missionary journey.

Karumattampatti

250 kilometres north-west of Madurai is Karumattampatti which is a short distance from the city of Coimbatore. It was at Karumattampatti that our Founder was ordained as bishop of Coimbatore which then was a small town with a handful of Christians and no church building. Today Coimbatore is a thriving city with a magnificent cathedral that was started by Bishop de Brésillac. At Karumattampatti the SMA has a small house that is used as a promotion centre. During my visit I had time to see the Coimbatore cathedral, some 25 kilometres away. I was also able to visit the parish of Kilimbadi which our priests were looking after for a time. It is at the extreme east of the diocese near the town of Erode. A very large river, the Cauvery, flows nearby. In one of his accounts the Founder describes his journey down the river in a basket boat (pictured). I saw some of these still being used today. They are circular in shape, about two metres in diameter, covered in animal skin, somewhat like a smaller version of the

Irish currach. But it made me wonder how such a small craft could survive while the river was in flood.

SMA Supporters

During my time in Tamil Nadu, the climate was hot but tolerable. Towards the end of March the temperature begins to increase. When I left at the end of April the heat was becoming more and more unbearable.

I visited the town of Gudalar, in the Ghat Mountains area, where the climate is much cooler. There I met some of the growing number of SMA supporters. Most of the people are quite poor, but they make great efforts to supply their "widow's mite" with unbounded generosity as they become involved in the missionary work of the Society. It will take a long time for the Indian SMA District-in-formation to become self-supporting; they will continue to rely on help from overseas. But the

goodwill is there and a good beginning has been made. Please God in time, the project will grow in self-sufficiency as more and more people become involved in the missionary task of the SMA and of the Church. The future of the Indian SMA District-in-formation is assured with such support and generous young men who want to preach the Gospel in Africa.

The highlight of my last week in Chennai was the ordination of Fr Ashok Kumar, the first of three Indian SMAs to be ordained in 2010. With these new priests there are now 38 SMA priests from India at the service of the mission of the Church. They work alongside other SMA missionaries in Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Benin and Ivory Coast as well as serving the international needs of the Society in France, USA, Canada, the Philippines and Rome.

My visit provided me with the opportunity to see how this young branch of the SMA family was progressing. Our Indian SMA priests will bring their enthusiasm and energy to their missionary work in Africa.

Fr Don Bosco (SMA India) hears Confession in his parish in Lodwar, Kenya.



Nigerian OLA Sisters celebrate



Fr Augustin Planque founded the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles in 1876 in order to have Sisters to work in developing the life of women in the African Missions where the SMA already had a presence. The Irish OLA Province has its headquarters in Ardfoyle, Cork. Sr Dominique O’Riordan was the first Irish OLA to arrive in Nigeria (1877). The first Nigerian OLA Sisters joined the Congregation in 1958. Today there are 104 Nigerian Sisters ministering in 10 African countries as well as in Lebanon and Argentina. Taking account of this blessing of almighty God the OLA decided, in 1990, to establish Nigeria as a separate Province within the Congregation.

Limerick-born Sr Eithne Mac Devitt OLA (pictured) went to Nigeria more than 50 years ago. Here she writes of the 20th Anniversary celebrations of the Nigerian OLAs.

... The event began with a Gala night: a dinner held in the Assembly Hall of the OLA Girls’ school in Maryland, Lagos. OLA Sisters, friends, family, and a considerable number of OLA past pupils were present. It was a splendid affair. Colourful decorations and flower arrangements transformed the Hall into a kaleidoscope of colour. But, most importantly, the atmosphere was enhanced by the joyful meeting of ‘old friends’, some of them initially unrecognizable after so many years, even decades! However, the passage of time did not diminish the joy of reunion, and everyone seemed to take up where they had left off. One past pupil remarked: “The years have closed the gap between us, we all are now friends.”

There was much talk, laughter, and song and entertaining anecdotes were related during our meal. Sr Assumpta Mordi, the Provincial Leader, gave an excellent speech briefly reviewing the history of the OLA presence in Nigeria which stretches back 133 years! Her speech ended with an appeal for help, which everyone expected to hear!!

The project in question is a new school in Benin City struggling in its infancy. Its Principal, Sr Rosaleen Legunsen OLA, explained the challenges facing them. Shortly afterwards, very generous donations were made or promised and gratitude duly expressed. But there is still need for more. Soon the event came to an end and everyone went home with happy memories, most to return next day for the Thanksgiving Mass.

It was celebrated by HE Anthony Cardinal Okogie, the Archbishop of Lagos, assisted by several SMA and diocesan priests. This was the peak of our celebrations: our thanksgiving for the grace of God that enabled us to carry out his mission as best we could since our arrival in Nigeria in 1877.

After Mass everyone enjoyed an excellent lunch with dishes prepared by so many of our OLA friends. Dances and dramas, performed by our different primary and secondary schools in Lagos, entertained the guests. Towards the end of the meal there were several speeches, all of them commendably short, and in the mid-afternoon everyone left in the rain for their various destinations.

In Africa, whether at a wedding or a funeral, rain is generally regarded as God’s blessing on the occasion, a guarantee of fertility and His approval and promise of continued grace. I think that everyone, especially our Sisters, hoped that this downpour was a seal of God’s gracious acceptance of the small, human, sometimes mistaken, but always courageous efforts made in the past by OLA Sisters to help in the growth of His kingdom on this earth. We hoped, too, that the rain signified his promise that this growing Province would be graced to continue the mission our founder envisaged for this ‘little Congregation’.



Srs Mary Rita O’Mahony and Maire O’Driscoll, both from Cork, have spent over 100 years between them as OLA missionaries in Ghana. They are pictured here with some of the past pupils they taught in Vroom Polytechnic. Also in the photo are two Ghanaian OLA Sisters: Sr Theresa Roberts (on left) who teaches in Vroom and the OLA General Bursar, Sr Theresa Quansah who is based at the OLA Generalate, Rome.



Fr Fachtna O'Driscoll SMA at the Justice Office opening ceremony.

WORKING FOR JUSTICE

The new SMA Justice and Peace Office was officially opened and blessed by Fr. Fachtna O'Driscoll, Provincial Leader at African Missions, Wilton in October 2010.

This office serves as a resource for members of the SMA, schools, parishes, faith and justice programmes and SMA supporters. It researches issues affecting not only Africa but also concerns emerging in a multicultural society here in Ireland.

Faithful to the SMA Founder's vision of mission to the most abandoned, the SMA in its work, and now in a special way through the Justice and Peace Office, accompanies and supports the peoples of Africa in their struggle for a more just society.

In particular the SMA is concerned with highlighting the often unjust impact that the developed world has on Africa through the policies and actions of Multinational Corporations and international institutions such as the World Bank, and the

More information about Justice and Peace issues and the work of the Justice Office can be accessed via the SMA Website at www.sma.ie under the Justice and Peace Section.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Check under the Advocacy heading in the Justice and Peace Section of the SMA Website to see how you can support campaigns that promote Justice and Peace in Africa.

European Union. To combat these negative effects the SMA cooperates with other agencies promoting and campaigning for Justice and Peace in Africa and for Africans.

Practical work being done through this office is research, education, advocacy and pastoral support for African immigrants as well as awareness raising on issues affecting millions of Africans.

Some of this work is done through publications such as the SMA Justice Briefings which look at issues such as Climate Change, Migration, Debt and Access to Medicines. - These are available on the SMA Web Site - www.sma.ie

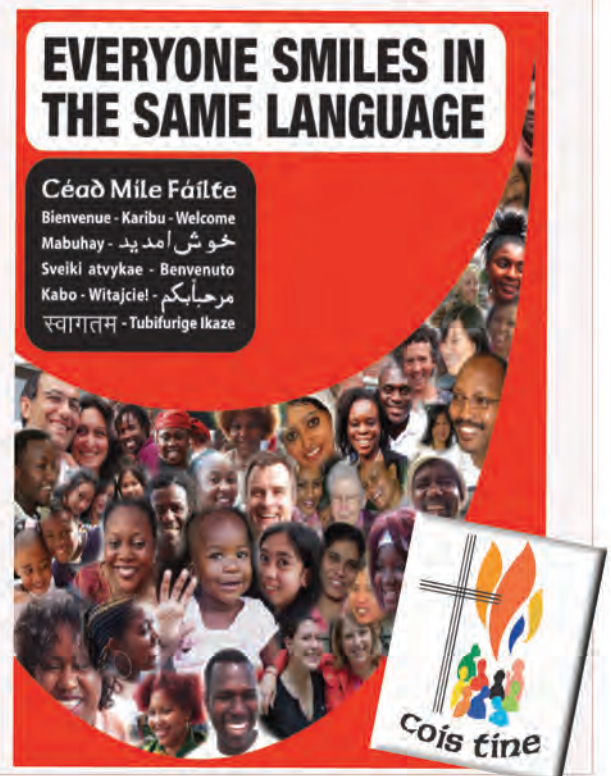
The SMA Justice Office is also involved in campaigning and training on justice issues.

Cois Tíne

Since 2002 the SMA Justice Office has run a project called Cois Tíne at Popes Quay in Cork City.

This project provides practical pastoral support to African immigrants. It takes the form of information, training, counselling, organisational support, the provision of premises for African groups, spiritual direction and social activities.

One of its core guiding values is respect for our common human dignity a fact reflected in the Cois Tíne poster shown below.





CLIMATE JUSTICE: One of the most urgent Justice Issues affecting people in Africa is Climate Change. Africans are responsible for less than 4% of the Carbon emissions that cause climate change yet it is they who are most affected by it.

In northern Ghana women have to travel miles for water as climate change has caused the water table to drop significantly. Boreholes ninety meters deep are dry. Land once fertile is now sand. Many people have been forced to move to cities such as Accra and Kumasi in search of work to support themselves and their families.

What we do here in Europe, how we live and the energy we waste, has a direct effect on Africans even though they are far away. Already many Africans have had to leave their homes because their land can no longer feed them.

The carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases we generate to maintain our lifestyles are the main cause of Climate Change in Africa - in

effect we are dumping our pollution on Africa. This is unjust.

The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole....we may use it responsibly, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation."

Pope Benedict XIV - Caritas in Veritate



LETTER FROM ETHIOPIA In this translation of a letter from a woman living in Ethiopia to her nephew in Ireland we can see how climate change impacts on her life.

Dearest Tata,

How are you? I am very well, Glory be to God and our Mother, the Virgin Mary. It is good to thank our Creator however hard life has been lately. Since you left, the roof in my hut has holes in it and the heavy rain is flooding my room. Many bad things have happened since you moved out to Awropa (Europe).

What nowadays is not easy to deal with here in Motta is the changing of the weather. This time last year all the talk on the radio was of a meeting held in Coop-ee-n-hagen, to fix the problem of weather change. I haven't seen anything good happening here in my village since then. In fact a flood destroyed my crops in the field, spoiled the road to the market. This big meeting has not helped us, some people are leaving because their land cannot feed them. They talk now about another meeting in Cancun will it be any better?

Tata, I still work on my small plot of land trying to get enough food to feed my family but it is getting harder. Sometimes its floods and then sometimes drought. Feeding the family and paying for schooling expenses is becoming impossible. This past year the rain has been ok and came on time in all the seasons, what was unbearable was the scorching sun. Quarter of my crop dried up and the pond ran dry. We had to travel for two hours every day to fetch water. The weather in Ethiopia has brought suffering and changed our lives. The rainy season used to run from January to September but these days it's fickle. We cannot grow Teff (a staple grain crop) like before. The yield is down by half. We are now trying millet and other root foods we never used before.

My son, Lebna, says that people in Awropa are the big cause behind the weather change. We cannot reach them or force them to accept their burden. Can you do something to let them know the trouble they are causing us? I hope the Cancun meeting will be more than just talk like the one before. I pray it brings us relief.

Your loving Aunt,

Meherat



Volunteering in Tanzania

Mary O'Connor is studying Nursing in University College, Cork. As part of her plan to gain experience in her chosen field Mary spent some time as a Volunteer with the OLA Sisters in Bugisi, Tanzania. Here she gives a brief description of her time there.

On 31 June 2010, I set off on my journey to Bugisi in the Shinyanga region of Tanzania to spend time as a volunteer in a rural clinic run by the OLA Sisters in this very remote area. It's nearly impossible to put into words the experience that I had out there... but here goes.

Leaving Cork, I left behind everything familiar and striking, off on an adventure I had only dreamed about. On landing in Dar es Salaam I quickly became aware of how welcoming Tanzanians are. Even with all the hustle and bustle of day-to-day life they always stayed calm, happy and relaxed – a trait that I am still absorbing into my own life! I then travelled to Mwanza, the beautiful 'city of rocks' looking out on Lake Victoria. This is where I met Sr. Kate Costigan of Templemore, Co. Tipperary, and had my first experience with the OLA in Tanzania.



From Mwanza I travelled with Sr Kate to Bugisi, where I would spend the next five weeks; and I must say they were the most fulfilling and happiest weeks of my life. Bugisi is a beautiful community, with schools, churches, and clinic, and is home to several missionary groups: OLA Sisters, SMA priests, Notre Dame Sisters and Salesians. All of them are ministering to the Sukuma people.

I worked with Sr. Kate in the clinic, which ran a maternity service, a HIV/AIDS service, and a treatment centre for the sick. One of the things that struck me, and has stayed with me the most, was the gratitude the people showed for the simple things one did to help them; and you get a high level of satisfaction from working with such beautiful people. I noticed that even where there is a great deal of hardship the Sukuma tribe never gave up the struggle, never let adversity get in the way of their quest for happiness. They kept struggling and battling against whatever troubles came their way - and that is one of the great things I brought from my experience.

I will be forever indebted to Sr. Kate for the skills and knowledge which she passed on to me during my time in Bugisi. I learned a great deal from my time there - not alone about nursing and caring for the sick, but about new ways of life and new practices. I experienced at first hand the great work of the missionaries, and the amount of help they give to the people who need it most. I feel truly privileged to have been part of it. The OLAs are an amazing group of women. I have learnt so much from them and admire them greatly. With many fond memories of the OLA in Tanzania and Ireland I now feel that I have made a new network of friends.

I travelled to Tanzania on my own, but I never felt alone there. This was down to the people I encountered during my time there - the OLA Sisters and everyone I met there, as well as the nurses in the clinic and the Sukuma people – all of whom made me feel so safe and welcome. I was very raw to 'Africa' before this summer; but my time in Bugisi has given me a very special feeling for the place; and I am well and truly struck by 'la maladie africaine'. I would recommend the opportunity of volunteering to anyone - because I really believe that it has something to offer every type of person!

Further information about volunteering with the OLA Sisters at www.olaireland.ie

Friends of Africa (FOA) are a group of dedicated young adults who collaborate with the SMA in South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. Further information on short and long-term volunteering possibilities at www.friendsof africa.org.uk



Sr Anne McCormick OLA (from Bray, Co Dublin) supervises a class in the OLA Homecraft Centre, Bugisi



Fr Martin McNeely SMA

1 August 1933
- 22 September 2010

Fr Martin (Mattie) McNeely SMA, was born in Castlebar, Co Mayo, and was ordained a priest on 13 June 1956.

Appointed to the Diocese of Jos, Nigeria Fr Mattie ministered in Nigeria for a total of 25 years during which he founded the Minor Seminary at Akwanga. In 1975 he undertook studies in Communications in Lyons, France. After that he, along with the late Fr John O'Mahony SMA, founded the Media Centre in Kaduna Archdiocese.

In 1982 Mattie moved to the SMA Generalate in Rome as Guestmaster and Anglophone Secretary. When Mattie brought you on a 'tour of Rome' it was a unique experience, laced with wonderful stories and amazing driving!

In 1991 Mattie returned to Africa - to serve the English-speaking people and pilgrims in Alexandria, Egypt. It was during a trip home from Egypt that he fell ill and died peacefully in his beloved Mulrany on 22 September 2010. His funeral took place at St Joseph's SMA Parish, Wilton, Cork. RIP.

Read full Obituary and Funeral Mass Homily at www.sma.ie



Fr Gregory McGovern SMA

31 October 1921
- 27 December 2010

Fr Gregory (Greg) McGovern SMA, was born in Tonlague, Bawnboy, Co Cavan, and he was ordained a priest on 13 June 1951.

Appointed to the Prefecture of Kaduna, Nigeria Fr Greg was to spend a total of 47 years in that part of the Lord's vineyard. Despite contracting a form of polio within ten years of ordination he never allowed it to limit his pastoral work. Today, three of the parishes he worked in are now separate dioceses under the leadership of Nigerian bishops. He served in both rural and urban parishes and before ill health forced his return to Ireland (1998) he was Chaplain at St Gerard's OLA Hospital in Kaduna City. Fr Greg was called home to eternal life on 27 December 2010 and is buried in the SMA community cemetery in Wilton, Cork. RIP.

Read full Obituary and Funeral Mass Homily at www.sma.ie



Sr Perpetua Hanbury OLA

8 June 1921
- 3 November 2010

Sr Perpetua (Una) Hanbury OLA was born in Derryvonlan, Portumna, Co. Galway, and entered the OLA Sisters in Ardfoyle, Cork in 1943. Following First Profession and studies in

U.C.C. she began her active mission life as a teacher in the new OLA Secondary School in Ho, Ghana. From 1955 to retirement in 1992, she served with distinction in teaching and school administration in Nigeria - Lagos, Benin City, Agbor and Kakuri. She is remembered with much affection by all who knew her, including former students who kept up contact with her during her retirement in Ardfoyle. Sr Perpetua died in Ardfoyle on 3rd November 2010. RIP.



Fr Anthony O'Donnell SMA

28 April 1926
- 20 December 2010

Fr Anthony (Tony) O'Donnell SMA was born in Upper Templecrone, Kincasslagh, Co Donegal, and he was ordained a priest on 17 June 1953 in St Colman's Cathedral, Newry, Co Down.

Fr Tony was appointed to the Prefecture of Ibadan, Nigeria and for 40 years he served in both rural and urban parts of what has now become the Archdiocese of Ibadan. Always soft-spoken, his quiet nature endeared him to all and his gentle pastoral approach was a source of comfort to people in their time of need and an example to younger priests, both Nigerian and Irish, who lived with him. After heart surgery Fr Tony convalesced in his native Donegal and assisted when asked to in parishes in the diocese of Raphoe until his retirement to Blackrock Road in 2004.

Fr Tony was called to his eternal reward on 20 December 2010 and is buried in the SMA community cemetery at Wilton, Cork. RIP.

Read full Obituary and Funeral Mass Homily at www.sma.ie

MY LIBERIAN EXPERIENCE

Fr Patrick Okenyi was born in Nigeria in 1977. After primary school, Patrick went to the Minor seminary where he began to consider a vocation as a missionary priest. He joined the SMA in 1996 and was ordained in 2006. His first appointment was to one of our oldest mission territories: Liberia. Irish SMA were the first to go to Liberia in 1906. Today there are SMA priests from England, Ireland, Ivory Coast, Togo, USA and Zambia ministering there. Here is an edited version of an account Fr Patrick gave of his early years there.

Liberia is a country that suffered from 14 years of war. It is now in a post-war period though you can still easily see the results of the war. The war experience is indelibly marked in the daily life of the people. My first appointment was to the north of the country, to Sanniquellie in the diocese of Gbarnga. It is the capital of Nimba County where the war started. My coming to Liberia was as necessary as the intervention in Liberia of the numerous non-

and they feel happy when a missionary sits down to eat with them. I have so much put into practice the message of St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians (9:20-22) "and to the Jew I became a Jew that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them under the law. To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to everyone that I might save them for Christ".

However there are some inevitable difficulties that one experiences in Liberia, especially at this time. First and foremost, from my own point of view the war experience has taken Liberians far from God. You might find a Liberian who will say "I am baptized but I don't go to church". After receiving the sacrament of baptism many stop going to church services. Secondly they have a greater expectation from the Church for material benefits rather than spiritual ones. They are so used to the image of the church as an organisation that gives scholarships, cares for the sick, a church that clothes the naked etc. I once met a newly baptized member from one of my outstation churches. I asked her why she didn't go to the church and she said "Father, I have to go to the farm because if I go to the church who will give me food and I am hungry". In the face of these difficulties a missionary needs to be patient, down to earth and not be judgemental. As the priest continues to educate the people towards building a self supporting church, he also

needs benefactors to come to his aid whenever he is materially stranded.

When I came first to Liberia the Regional Superior, Fr Augustin Houessinon SMA (from Benin Republic) said to me that "the mission in Liberia is patience, patience, patience..."

After four years in Liberia Fr Patrick was asked by his Superiors to move to St Joseph's SMA Parish, Gowon Estate, Lagos, Nigeria where he now is. We wish him continued blessings in his ministry.



This icon was written by Fr Sean Hayes SMA

Fr Sean Hayes SMA writes of his recent experience at an Icon Retreat in the Redemptoristine Monastery, Drumcondra, Dublin.

An Icon Retreat is a unique experience that combines art instruction with spirituality which takes place from Sunday afternoon to Saturday morning concluding with Mass, when the Icons are blessed and anointed. In the Eastern Church, Icons are there to inspire us spiritually.

Our teacher was Master Mihai, a Romanian. The cost was €380 - no meals or accommodation.

The Retreat takes place in a monastery - an open bible with a large candle lighting in front, sets the scene. Prayers are offered before each session. The nearby chapel was available for Adoration, Mass and Divine Office.

Pigments, brushes and all materials are supplied. Each pupil chose an Icon of their choice, worked on it for the week and you ended up with your own Icon. (you don't paint an Icon - you write an Icon). It is a huge spiritual experience and very fulfilling.

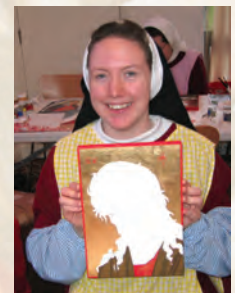
Many monasteries in Ireland are involved in Icon Retreats. More information can be found on the internet.



Taylor the Tailor at Cape Mount, Monrovia

governmental organizations (NGOs). I joked with some friends: "I am not going to Liberia with a gun but rather with a Bible". As we all know a post-war period is a time for reconstruction. I always wanted to contribute to the reconstruction of "Mama Liberia".

There are 3 dioceses in Liberia (the Monrovia Archdiocese, and Gbarnga and Cape Palmas dioceses). Vocations to the priesthood and religious life are not very plentiful. Years go by before you hear of priestly ordinations or of a religious profession. From my little experience of Liberia I can see that one of the best ways of reaching out to the people is through social interaction. They love social activities



Sr Monica shows her icon which is still in the process of being written.



Monica, Sean and Evina with their blessed and anointed icons.