

July 26th 2021

Dear Friends,

I am completing this letter on a chilly, wet Sunday morning in Robertsport: its 24°C inside the sacristy – much cooler outside with the sea breeze. The Church of St Peter The Fisherman, is only a five minute walk to the Atlantic Ocean: idyllic at Christmas time in the Dry Season, but more 'challenging' in the middle of the Wet Season. Musa and I come



here each Saturday. Since our arrival yesterday evening, there have been heavy outbursts of rain, especially during the night. There are two rooms in the sacristy with a bed in each room. Musa, my 'carer', occupies one, while I sleep in a room that leads directly into the sanctuary of the Church. So I can come into the Church and pray at 6.00 a.m. without disturbing a soul.

I really look forward to these weekends and on the way here, pause for a few minutes at the scenic Lake Piso, Liberia's largest lake. Anthony Mensah is the Robertsport catechist. The small congregation at Sunday Mass is comprised mainly of Fanti and Kru fishermen and their families; occasionally, there may be a visitor from Monrovia. Our association with the people of Robertsport goes back to 1977, when I started going there. In 1983, Fr Tom Ryan, our present Provincial, arrived and worked tirelessly for six years. Fr. Tom built the fine church, which is aptly dedicated to St Peter the Fisherman.

As the Independence Day of Africa's oldest republic draws nearer, July 26, (1847), I would like to share some reflections: for any repetition of points in previous letters, please excuse me. By the way I am very grateful to Mrs Cecilia Skudder of Holy Innocents' Parish, Orpington, Kent, for kindly helping me with the editing, as I would grade my computer literacy at less than 20%!

Thanks to our friends in the U.K., and Dr Paul Effler and Family in Australia, and the St Dominic's Alumni in the United States, Canada and Liberia, the solar system is in operation at St Dominic's, providing 24 hours current to the convent, rectory and the church. Recently, Fr. Emmanuel managed to run a line from the Convent's solar system, to provide light for the Casa Nova. So we are 'green': no more noisy sounds at night from the 20 KVA generator, emitting fumes into the atmosphere.

I am also pleased to say that most of the St Dominic's students, whom we have been assisting in colleges in Monrovia, have now graduated. However, there are still a few in college. Rebecca and John are studying Environmental Science. Nicholas, Sumo and Samuel are studying Civil Engineering. Moses has recently graduated with a degree in Social Work. Mustapha is reading Biology, in order to take the entrance to the Medical College. I am very grateful to the families, who are helping these students. I am also thankful to Nicole, in Canada for helping Jacob in Grade 12, and Richard and Mary in Kent for helping Thomas in Grade 11 – both are attending St Dominic's High School.

A concern I still have is for James Nyanku. We have helped him from Grade 4 in Elementary School through the Stella Maris College of Health Sciences, until he obtained until a degree in Biology. He was then successful in passing the entrance examination to the Medical College. Next Semester, in September, James will enter the Fourth Year as a medical student. However, the person who was assisting died several years ago. Although James is not required to pay tuition, I need to give him \$20.00 weekly, for his food, clothing stationery and transport. But when he asked me recently for assistance to purchase PPE for hospital work, sadly, I apologised and said it wasn't possible, at this time. For the scholarship fund that I've managed over the years, especially since the Ebola crisis, is now exhausted. So I have been wondering if some family could please assist us, to help James.

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Being from the Belle Forest, which is far in the Interior, James hasn't the contacts in Monrovia. However, I feel that James has the qualities to be a good, caring doctor.

As well as helping these students, there is also Sando Nyumar: I have registered Sando at the local Bomi Community College. Sando hopes to obtain an associate degree in Education. The expenses involved in sending someone to the local College, are considerably less. Sando is presently at home, helping his elderly parents to haul sugar-cane to the village, en route to the market in Monrovia. I informed two of other school leavers, Boimah and Borkai, that they should be patient, until I can find a way to help them. They have both returned to their villages; their families are subsistence level rice farmers.

Following the COVID lockdown one year ago, the cases in Liberia became less. Then people began to forget to take precautions, some even thought that the pandemic had passed us by. But during the past several weeks there has been a noticeable increase in cases. People are once again taking matters seriously with social distancing and wearing face masks.

On a positive note, the OLA Sisters, (Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles), are settling down well. They are helping the children on Sundays at Mass. Sr Naetali and Sr Maureen have started the Holy Childhood Society for small children. And Sr Sophia is very much interested in re-establishing the Junior Legion of Mary within the parish.

Moreover, I can already sense the difference with the Sisters' presence in St Dominic's School. There is punctuality! And the behaviour of the children has much improved, so the classrooms are now conducive to study. Sr Maureen is helping across the road, at the Oscar Romero School, for children with hearing disabilities. For a number of years, we have had the readings and homily 'signed' at Sunday Mass.

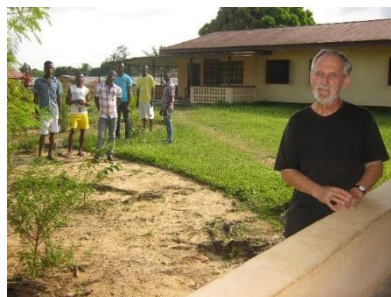
When I returned from the U.K. in November 2019, I indicated to the Archbishop that it was time for the parish to have fresh leadership. Consequently, early last year, Fr Firmin Kouassi, from Côte d'Ivoire, arrived here, as the new Parish Priest. Fr. Firmin and I have served together on the Society of African Missions Regional Council, so we know each other well.

I was given the option of retiring to the United Kingdom or remaining in Liberia. I expressed the desire to stay in Liberia, so that we can continue to help the people. It was agreed that I could live in the Casa Nova. It is a former student dormitory that I refurbished about ten years ago and changed into a 3-bedroom house, for lay missionaries; it has been empty for over one year.

So this is my home. I am using the middle room as an oratory; that leaves the other room as a guest room. I am grateful to the archdiocese and the SMA for allowing me to remain in Liberia. I arrived in Liberia in January 1973 as a 29 year-old and I'll be 78 this month, on Liberia's Independence Day.

I'll close for now.

With kindest regards, Fr. Garry.



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A visit to the Mission by Edwin Snowe, newly elected Senator for Bomi County: From left to right (me) Sr Maureen, Sr Cyria, the Senator, Sr Sophie and Sr Nateli

(Edwin was baptised as a child by Fr Garry.)

The sisters take a break from school and visit the Leper Colony at Massatine.

Facing the picture, Sr Sophie is on the left, Mr Tailor, a member of the community at Massatine, and a former patient, is in the centre and Sr Maureen is on the right side.



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Sr Maureen with the Children belonging to the Holy Childhood Society.
(slightly different poses!)

