“Faith is not about everything turning out OK; Faith is about being OK no matter how things turn out.”
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To those of you who have taken the time to put your thoughts on paper and share memories with us in this issue of our Newsletter I am most grateful. Your generous sharing of your time in putting pen to paper is much appreciated. This issue differs from recent efforts in so far as almost all of the photographic work is from the lens of our own Noeleen Moore. Noeleen’s camera is a great recorder of events which otherwise would most likely have disappeared into the mist of time. Thank you.

November is a time for remembering the dead and allowing ourselves to be challenged by their lives and values, as the Word from the Provincial reminds us. It is a time of conversion. But the conversion process should not mean long faces or a loss of our sense of humour.

There is a story told of a confirmed and aggressive atheist who was flying his private jet over the Arctic Circle when the plane ran into technical difficulties. To his great relief he managed to land on the ice. As he descended from the plane a large hungry looking polar bear came menacingly towards him. He ran as fast as he could, but looking over his shoulder he saw that the bear was closing in on him. His heart was pumping frantically and he tried to run even faster. He tripped and fell on the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up but saw the bear raising his paw to take a swipe at him. And at that instant the atheist cried out: ‘Oh my God!...’ Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest was silent. It was then that a bright light shone upon the man and a voice came out of the sky saying: ‘You called to me. Are you ready for conversion?’ The atheist looked directly into the light: ‘it would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask for conversion because of my present predicament, but perhaps, could you convert the BEAR?’

‘Very well,’ said the voice. The light went out, and the sounds of the forest resumed. And then the bear meekly approached the atheist, joined his paws, bowed his head and began to say his grace before meals.

It would seem that right now is the time for turning to the Lord, without playing about and waiting for tomorrow. But as you turn to the Lord do keep a smile on your face that hopefully comes from your heart, and may the contents of this issue give you some joy.

Fogra eile: Remember “Faith is not about everything turning out OK; Faith is about being OK no matter how things turn out.”

Frank
As I write I sit in Jinja, Uganda where I am visiting the Confreres. This is my 9th visit to this beautiful country. The Brothers here are all well and it is encouraging to see the enthusiasm and commitment; not without challenges. We hope that Fr. Johnson will attain the visa necessary to allow him entry into Ireland to participate in our Provincial Chapter which will be held in Killucan from January 7-9, 2013. As well as focusing on the life of the Province we will also have the opportunity to deliver the fruits – perhaps motions too – of our reflections at Local Chapter on the 3 documents sent to us by the General Consulta, namely The Camillian Project and the 2009 and 2012 documents on the Constitutions that have received some amendments from the Order’s review group that will be voted on at the General Chapter next May. I encourage all to read these documents, not as an option of preference but rather an obligation from St Camillus to put one’s house in order. What is approved at next year’s General Chapter will affect all of us, so it is important that we know that for which we are voting.

The time of writing is early November when we celebrate all the saints and pray for all the dead. For some Christians of other denominations, it is a strange thing to be praying for the dead; but it is written in the Book of Maccabees: ‘it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins.’ (Macc.12:42-46). It is a daily traditional prayer of the Church – Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine on them. May they rest in peace. The saints who have gone before teach us that life is short – ‘As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place shall know it no more. (Psalm 103:15-16)
Our only duty is to worship God and do his will after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It’s important for us like St Paul to show forth our Christianity as he himself says, ‘I am not ashamed of the Gospel’, (Romans 1:16) and ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel,’ (1 Corinthians 9:16). This is particularly relevant in Europe today and North America where there is an ideology that presents itself as Christian tolerance and openness to all, yet in actual fact is anti-Christian, seeking to remove Christian symbols from work place and institutions and even to what people can wear around their necks. This is not tolerance and respect for the sensitivities of others but rather an absurd and intolerant stance towards Christianity. It has often been said of the liberal quarter - that it is liberal until it meets disagreement with its views. There is an intolerance particularly to Catholicism in this country in certain sections and can easily be promoted by those who claim to have no agenda. It is ironic that shortly before the Children’s Referendum held a few days ago that a Government minister said he would welcome the intervention of the Bishops on this matter. This obviously means provided they agree with the Government line. It was not so long ago that a previous Government minister stated that the Bishops should stay out of public debate; thus symbolizing the anti-Christian and particularly anti-Catholic ideology present in some influential quarters as well as the undemocratic and illiberal stance behind the comment.

The Holy Father has on many occasions referred to this ideology as relativism and secularism. It’s important to be aware of this. As we examine the issues of life it is important that we first reflect on the message of our Lord Jesus Christ on the mystery and purpose of man’s (woman’s) life, his destiny, his call, his duty and his rights vis a vis those of others. This message of Christ must be shown forth by the Church with unremitting energy and strength. Convince others and show them why you have a reason for your hope. ‘And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to offer the reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.’ 1 Peter 3:15. To remove Christ and his symbols from the public places is not tolerance and respect for others but rather is an absurd notion and at worst anti Christian/anti-Catholic stance that will have negative consequences for all.

We are now at the beginning of Advent when we prepare for the Saviour of the world’s entry into the human race. Let us go forward to welcome Him in our Liturgies and our lives. Maranatha! ‘Come Lord Jesus.’ Revelation 22:20

God bless you all.

Stephen
Inspirational

(Feeling a bit dispirited at how things are panning out – perhaps this will inspire you as it did me)

In my father’s time, winters were much darker than now. Work ended with the light, and we sat around the open fire, drawing closer as the night deepened – hoping for a place on the hub, or on my father’s knee. When the wind rolled in the chimney, or the hail tapped on the window pane, we added turf or wood and felt secure enough to tell our stories.

We heard the story of that holy night, and how no fire was to be lit on Tara Hill. And now in this night, heads turned round when flames rose from the Hill of Slane. Trembling druids told the king: “if this fire is not put out tonight, it will never be extinguished”. The flame that Patrick lit that night spread like a forest fire over all the land, pushing back the demons and the ghosts that haunt the darkness.

And the fire became so intense that when the lights went out all over Europe, in the dark ages, men and women left this land of ours, carrying fire, to start fires of faith, of learning and of hope... light in the darkest days.

And in that light people became free again to see that all creation was a gift and good; all prisoners could walk out of their Egyptians, dig deep for water wells in desert sands, and sing new songs in a promised land.

But our rich autumn days turned to bitter winter. Fires burned low... we were slaves in our land, our sons and daughters slain or sent in convict ships to new Babylons; our crops destroyed, our stalls empty of cattle, not a plant to see from Cashel Rock to Mizen Head ..... we were as good as dead .... our hope was gone.

Yet somewhere under the ashes of defeat, our fathers and mothers found some smoking embers, fanned them into a courage that braved the yeoman and the traitor, met hunted priest at mass rock, stared down the Penal Days and war and famine, and through their passion became a pobal de, a muintear dheas where people knew that “is ar scath a cheile a muireann na duinne” – it is in the shadow of each other a people really lives. Nothing else remains ..... only themselves.

And morning broke through the darkness again ...... and God sent them prophets ..... some they killed .... Plunketts, Pearses, Connolly .... Other lit a different torch ..... Catherine McAuley, Nano Nagle, Mary Aikenhead, Bishop Furlong, McHale, Edmund Rice and Margaret Aylward... and these fires burned out of control... in mission, medicine and mercy.

But our parents again grew weary. They had walked too far ... worshipped too long in waste
and desert sands. It was easier far to settle down, eat, drink and forget their story. And our hearts grew coarse ... we became a people faceless, nameless, spaceless, without a dream to guide us.

Yet somehow in the empty plenty of our hearts, we heard again a whisper as if echoing down the corridors of memory, and touching our very darkness: “I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols. I shall raise you from your graves, my people .... I shall be your God and you shall be my people”.

And the promise became flame-shaped again to-day, leaping out from our story, rainbow rich in hope. Our fathers lit a fire on Slane. We light a fire where we are, as we tell the tales of long ago and find our face in every age and time.

And in the telling someone draws near, to walk with us, urging us inwards, sowing new seeds for a new spring in the hope of fresh autumn fruit – secure in the Breastplate of faith well tried and sure – we build on Christ alone.

Author unknown

There was our own Eucharistic Congress

And then there was the real thing
Hexham Happenings

I will start with the death of Fr. Martin Deegan, our Parish Priest for 35 years. RIP. He is buried in St Mary’s Church Yard. His successor is Fr. Christopher Warren, who hails from Chester le Street, a well know town in Co. Durham. He has settled in well to Hexham. He is a mere 31 years old. You may all soon get an opportunity to meet him in New Year at the Provincial Chapter.

St. Camillus House has been sold on to new people, and has been divided back into two homes. The original purchaser Brian has move down the Tyne Valley to the Stocksfield area and is now converting a farm there.

The St. Camillus Hospital has been sold a few times and is now being used as a Care Home and rehabilitation centre for young people with varying addictions. They have a shop outlet in Hexham which sells furniture made in their workshop in St Camillus hospital. They also refurbish old units and sell them in the shop along with new material.

The St. Camillus Statue on the driveway to Hospital has now been moved and placed in St Mary’s Car park. A couple of smaller statues from the London House were kindly donated by Bro. Camillus and are now in St. Mary’s Church.

The Hexham Lay Camillian Family are now getting low in numbers as some have moved on to the Eternal Home, some have moved from the area, while still others are not as committed as they once were in the past. But we still manage to get 6 or 8 attending the meetings.

We meet in Carntyne on a monthly basis. Our Mass is celebrated by Fr. John Campbell who retired to Carntyne from Swinburne and Dunston some time ago. All of the LCFs are involved in the Ministries of the church, with many of them Ministers of the Eucharist visiting the housebound and the hospitalised.

On 3rd November a group of 10 parishioners were commissioned to the Ministry of the Eucharist. It is hoped to offer them the opportunity to join our LCF Group in the New Year.

Many people here in Hexham and Corbridge were saddened by the deaths of Fr. Noel and Fr. Pat Ben. They had given a lot of their years and lives in the work of the Lord for the people here. Almost everyone of that era was touched by their ministry in the Hospital and Homes. Noel is particularly remembered for his gentleness and love of his priesthood. Many also remember Fr. POB from his time in both Hexham and Blyth with the late Fr. Tom Power. As we say this time of year “we will remember them” in their resting place.

I wonder does anyone remember this poor soul? When Fr. Walsh celebrated his silver jubilee in 1926, Prudhoe was very much a mining village and mindful of the hardship his parishioners
were undergoing due to the general strike he would not allow any celebration which caused 
expense. Instead he gave the children a party on the flower show field, now Highfield estate, 
opposite the church. The 1930’s, before the advent of the Welfare State, were difficult and 
often poverty-stricken for his flock. In 1931 Station Road was built under the Unemployment 
Relief Works Act to provide work for the jobless. Fr. Walsh was the last priest in Prudhoe to 
have a curate – Fr. Costello. A genial well-liked man, Fr. Walsh served the parish so faithfully 
through momentous times. He died at St Camillus Hospital, Hexham, aged 79 in March 1954 
and he is buried at the Catholic Cemetery, Moor Road, Prudhoe, near Fr Simmons. He was 
succeeded by Fr Maddison.

Greetings and blessings for all here
Philip

Nursing Centre Calling

This is Brigid and Lillie on the line again.

Summer has come and gone and the weather was very disappointing with very few days to sit 
out in the courtyard or go for walks through our beautiful grounds. However, it didn’t dampen 
our spirits. We had some great days over the summer.

We celebrated the **Feast of St. Camillus** with a Triduum of Prayer leading up to the 14th July. 
On one of the evenings we had our own special mass for the Residents of the Centre and their 
families. It was very special as many of the residents were actively involved as readers, sharing 
the prayers of the faithful, and organising the offertory procession. The music provided by the 
Mulligan Sisters from Longford was beautiful, and of course our beloved Fr. Frank celebrated 
the mass. After the mass we had a get together with those who had attended the mass with 
the food provided by the Lay Camillian Family, and how splendid it was too – they are such 
great people.

In September one of the highlights was the **100th birthday party** for one of our residents, 
Moly Nolan. Originally from Kinnegad, Molly had a great bash surrounded by all her family, 
friends and fellow residents. She also received that very important letter from “you know 
who”. She even had her name mentioned on the TV.

**Positive Aging Week** was a big success with numerous activities. We had music from Sean 
and Larry, Bingo with Anne, Art with Annette and a concert with music from the movies of the 
fifties, and it included sketches and dance routines. This concert was put on by a 3rd 
age group. It was just great fun and certainly this was an example of ageing at its most 
positive. The week concluded with a special visit from John Joe Nevin, our Olympic silver 
medal winner, who presented each resident with a gold medal in recognition of their own lifetime 
achievements and to mark their participation in Active Aging Week.
Marie Keaney, our administrator, has been using the donations from the Patient Comfort Fund to refurbish our dining rooms with new curtains, table cloths, lighting and beautiful new chairs. A very nice job Marie.

Noeleen Moore from the Lay Camillian Family has come in to help in the Rubuschini dining room in the evening, and we also welcomed the addition of Adrienne Gillick who sets up shop on Thursdays with the aid of one of our residents, Mary Lynam. Adrienne seems to be able to supply everything from a needle to an anchor. You are both deeply appreciated.

Meanwhile our new extension is coming on nicely and we can now begin to visualise what it will be like when completed.

November is now upon us and it is time to remember our deceased residents. Our mass which this takes place on 16th of the month this year, the feast of our Lady Health of the Sick, is always a very special and moving occasion. It takes place at 8.00pm with a ‘standing room only’ sign needed long before the proceedings get under way.

It is time now to sign off as we begin to direct our thoughts and creativity towards Christmas, which is always so special in the Nursing Centre.

Until the next time may God bless you. And do try to stay warm, healthy and happy over the cold months ahead.

Brigid and Lillie.
Killucan News in Photos

The religious community in Killucan has been blessed with two new vibrant additions. They are a real source of hope and joy to us all. They now bring the number of Indian Camillians working in the Province to ten.

1. **Fr. Baby Joseph Naikarakudy**, seen below with the Bishop, is forty-three years old and eighteen years a priest.

![Image of Fr. Baby Joseph Naikarakudy and the Bishop](image)

Fr. Joseph is the first Indian born religious to be given a permanent appointment in the diocese of Meath. He is a curate in the Cathedral parish of Christ the King in Mullingar. Welcoming the appointment, Bishop Smith said: “**we have a long friendship with the Camillians and I am grateful to Fr. Joseph for coming to Mullingar. He has wide pastoral experience which will serve him well here, especially in the local hospital chaplaincy which is an important part of the parish work**”.
2. We also welcome Fr. Suneesh Matthew Memana. Born in Kerala in India thirty-three years ago, Matthew is five years ordained and a qualified nurse. He has already taken up nursing duties in the Nursing Centre and is helping out with masses and other priestly duties carried out by the community throughout the week. We wish them both well, and pray that the approaching winter won’t scare them away.

3. The old monastery vegetable garden in the process of getting a make over

4. Our new extension began after the builders’ holiday in August and is progressing nicely. It is expected to be completed in nine months.
5. The first summons to attend the forthcoming General Chapter in May 2013 was issued on 2nd October. This names those who will attend the Chapter by right. It includes our Provincial Fr. Stephen Foster, and Fr. Frank Monks as former Superior General. The other chapter members will be elected at the respective Chapters taking place around the world during these months.

6. The Lay Camillian Family continue with their busy involvement in so many aspects of our lives

![Happily doing the hard slog](image)

Shall I tell you something?

*(Another young Indian Camillian says hello)*

I will always remember the day I arrived in Dublin airport in Ireland in the company of Fathers Baby and Suresh. It was amazing for me to see houses dotted around the green landscape which was bordered by a beautiful coastline. As we landed, the Irish weather was misty with soft rain and grey skies.

The airport was also a new experience for me. Perhaps Irish people would think that the airport was very busy but to us Indians, it was so different from the crowded Bangalore airport from where we had flown. When I came outside I felt cold and the soft rain was so different to the rain to which I was accustomed. There was great joy at meeting Fathers Stephen and Vincent who had a great welcome for us in the airport.
As we drove from the airport to Killucan I noticed how advanced the infrastructure in Ireland was. I saw many double decker buses in Dublin. The roads look so different from our Indian roads- no rickshaws! And not many motor bikes or pedal cycles either. Finally the greenness everywhere in the countryside was breath taking. When we reached Killucan the whole community showed great hospitality.

The first week in Killucan was spent integrating myself into the Irish culture. A big part of this was the food. Potatoes are a large part of the Irish diet, whereas we Indians would eat rice. I really enjoyed the different varieties of food. The elderly confreres in the community were an inspiration to me with their deep commitment and respect for their vocation and for their individual and community responsibilities. Two of our elderly confreres, Fr. Pat and Fr. Noel went to their eternal reward during my first week in Killucan and this was a very sad experience for me ---May they rest in peace. Though I only had a few days interaction with them, I felt close to them. Since the celebration of the liturgy is very different in India, participation in Holy Week was a totally different experience for me.

After a week’s stay in Killucan Fr. Suresh went to St Vincent’s hospital to do CPE and I came to the Mater hospital, also to do CPE. I started my first unit of CPE in April and as I write this I have eight weeks done in my second unit. Since I have now finished one and half units of CPE I would understand a chaplain to be someone who can help the sick to feel the touch of the heart and be consoled in their suffering moments. I feel that I am a professional person whose role is to offer pastoral care and support to the sick and the family. When I started the unit I felt that it was a little difficult because the accents of the people from different counties were so varied. I felt it was going to be tough for me but my confidence in the fact that I could manage it grew with the passing weeks. As I began my first unit of CPE Bro. Camillus also joined our community. His elderly presence and wisdom helps us to be more committed and he is an inspiration to all of us. As I have spent the last eight months in Ireland I learned that the Irish people have got great respect and understanding for the foreigners who are living here in this country. Finally I have to say that Irish people have been very kind and generous to me.

Now I am looking forward to completing CPE and continuing my ministry more effectively. I am very grateful to the Irish community for giving me this opportunity to do CPE and continue the charism of our founding father St Camillus in “the land of Saints and scholars.”.

Fr. Tomy Paradiyil
The Recent Triduum of St. Camillus

Mary Briody

In preparation for the feast of St. Camillus on 14th July here at Killucan we began a nine day novena in his honour. Each day concentrated on some aspect of his life. On day one we remembered his mother’s dream in which she saw the child she was carrying with a banner held aloft bearing a red cross and leading a group of young boys. The Red Cross is still worn today as a symbol of salvation and hope. On day two we reflected on his amazing conversion in the Val dell’Inferno (the Valley of Hell). His “yes” to God springing from his recognition that “God is all and the rest is nothing” did strike a chord for many of us. On days three and four we were to be found remembering the saint’s own sufferings which he patiently endured throughout his life - a life that was lived in charity caring for the sick, neither neglecting nor rejecting anyone, always aware that he was serving Jesus. Day six invited us to reflect on the challenges that faced St. Camillus and like him we were encouraged to seek the help of the Holy Spirit in overcoming the many challenges to our faith in today’s world. On days seven and eight we acknowledged his great love and steadfast faith in Jesus as he lived his Christian life to the full, caring for the poor, the sick and suffering, in keeping with the gospel and the teachings of Christ. And then on the concluding day we sought Camillus’ intercession for all those who were near to death.

A real moment of relaxation by happy campers

The more intense Triduum of specific preparation for the feast began on the 11th July. Our Church and the altar, with the painting of St. Camillus prominently displayed, was lovingly prepared with flowers, lights and candles - all symbols of the love and trust we place in our patron and in his intercession on our behalf. The theme of this year’s Triduum was “Spiritual Renewal - the Struggle for the Soul of Ireland”.

Each day began at 5.00pm with prayers, veneration of the Relics of St. Camillus, and the possibility of confession, the great sacrament of pardon and healing of soul – a healing that was more important to St. Camillus than a healing of the body. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was held each evening @ 5.30pm, and the prayer was
led by the Lay Camillian Family. This was a wonderful opportunity to pause in our busy lives and simply be in the presence of God. I had the privilege of leading the prayers for a half an hour on day one, not that I thought it was a privilege at the time. When I said “yes” at a meeting I thought initially I was agreeing to say a prayer of the faithful, but God through St. Camillus works in mysterious ways. In my panic I asked St. Camillus and his guardian angel, in whom he had such faith, for help. This led me to reflect in my prayers on his conversion, his faith, his prayer life, his “yes” to God, his love of the cross, and the words that Christ spoke to him from the crucifix: “courage faint hearted one. Continue the work you have begun as it is my work not yours”. Naturally, some prayers had to be said for the sick and the dying as this is so central to his spirituality. We all had great moral support and encouragement from Fr. Monks who introduced the Adoration, remained on the altar with us, and played suitable hymns during the course of the Adoration. He managed to put us at our ease by assuring us not to worry if two of us prayed the same prayer as it would simply mean that the particular prayer was meant for some individual who was present in the congregation. People came in large numbers, male and female, young and old. They came with the sick and they came with their worries and their anxieties. They were to be found praying aloud or privately, writing petitions, lighting candles or venerating the relics. All of this created a great well of prayer and peace. It was such a privilege to be part of it all, whether it was just welcoming people, or showing them whereto place their petitions, or simply handing out novena leaflets.

I was so touched by the parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters who arrived with a baby who was on his way for a major heart operation. It was deeply moving to see their joy at the fact that Fr. Monks spoke to each member of the family and involved them in the prayer. Their hope and faith was so visibly strengthened that they did not want to leave the Church and remained for hours, baby and all. One of the saddest stories I heard was from a lady who asked me to pray for a relative of hers who was dying but was very angry and saying hurtful things to those around about him. Apparently, he was angry with God and the Church and did not want a priest or a single prayer said when he died. He just wanted to be cremated without minister or blessing. I have been praying since for them, as Fr. Monks is always telling us that one of the great privileges and moving experiences of life is to be present and involved at the holy and happy death of a fellow traveller.
Of course the highlight of our preparations for the feast is always the Triduum which we celebrate in the days immediately prior to the feast. Our celebration of the Eucharist began each night with invited speakers giving the homily. Each night we had different singers and musicians and they certainly enhanced our liturgy. The speaker on the first night was a young man, David Cleary, who had volunteered to help at the recent Eucharistic Congress. He spoke of the importance of meeting like-minded people there and the joy of being able to speak openly about his faith and unashamedly proclaim his love of God.

On Thursday night the homily was delivered by Stephen Cummins who is the director of marriage education with ACCORD. He spoke of the challenges families face in our world today and our responsibility through Baptism to share the Good News, to be witnesses by passing on our faith, especially through the example of our lives. He stressed the importance of the role played by grandparents in the passing on of the faith. Our job is, he reminded us, to sow the seeds which have the potential to grow with God’s help. On the final night the mass was celebrated by Fr. Monks and was especially for the Residents and their families. The residents of the Nursing Centre took a very active part in the liturgy through the readings, the prayers of the faithful, and the bringing up of the gifts which they had prepared and symbolised their life in the nursing centre: a rosary beads reminding us of the numerous rosaries recited every day; a collage of paintings which had been painted by themselves in the art class – this to represent the various activities they enjoy in the Centre; the bread and wine to remind us of their love of the Eucharist which they would never consider missing any day while they can.

In his homily Fr. Frank spoke of pain and suffering, and reminded us that like St. Camillus we too can be a light for one another in our suffering. Pain and sickness is not always negative, he assured us, and can be an opportunity for growth. I liked his distinction between disease and illness. He said that pain can be brought about not just by a diseased limb but also by the effect that this has on the rest of the human person, such as the intellect, the spirit and the emotions. He was passionate about the importance of presence: to be with the sick is a sign that they are not alone, that God is with them through us. It is not our visitation of the sick that keeps us faithful but rather it is the sick that we visit who will keep us faithful. As Christians we are called to give and receive, to help and accept help. If we love our sick and elderly we will learn so much from them and find great fulfilment in what we do. We were invited not to look back.
in anger or forward in fear but around us in awareness. It was such a beautiful celebration with the huge crowd just happy to be there and none wanting to leave the Church at the end. The hymns, the beautiful singing and the sheer peace of the Church made it an unforgettable experience. At the conclusion the residents invited us all into their home for tea and cakes with their families – they were truly the hosts and hostesses with their own sign on the dining room door: “welcome to our home”.

And then it was Saturday, the feast of our beloved St. Camillus. It began with the celebration of mass at 7.00pm and concluded with a night Vigil of Gratitude from 10.00pm – 2.00am. The Bishop of Meath, Rev. Michael Smith, spoke on the unconditional love of Jesus for each one of us. He reminded us that each person whether young or old, strong or weak is God’s work of art to be protected, nourished, loved and helped. We are all unique in God’s eyes. He said that St. Camillus’ message was as relevant today as it was in the 16th century, as the elderly and vulnerable are under threat in today’s world. A society that allows abortion is not far away from allowing Euthanasia. We as part of society should fight to protect the rights of the sick and the vulnerable just as Camillus did. He is our example. The Bishop assured us that Camillus’ spirit is as venerable today as it was in his day and maybe even more needed today.

Our night Vigil started with an hour of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, which varied from shared prayer to silent worship, and concluded with Benediction. We were then led in song by Annette and in prayer by Fr. Frank for our candle lit procession as we made our way through grounds now darkened by the light of night. It was beautiful. As the procession was wending its way back to the chapel towards midnight I was moved by the sight of a car coming in the drive-way with a child on oxygen, too sick to be taken from the car. They had come from the hospital looking for a blessing. On that peaceful night as I watched Fr. Frank in the car with the sick child I felt sure that St. Camillus was interceding for us and that God was answering all our prayers and requests.

After a tea break and a good chat we returned to the chapel for the concluding Eucharist. In the stillness of the night our mass was so special and intimate. We knew and felt that we were in the presence of God and St. Camillus. It was a life changing experience as I felt my faith being strengthened. The concluding rendition of the hymn to St. Camillus was heartrending as we felt that he would stay close to us all our lives.

Looking back over our time in prayer and dedication to St. Camillus I could not help thinking how blessed he was to know in great detail how Christ wanted him to live his life: give and forgive, cherish every person, visit, console and heal. Camillus was convinced that what he did to people he did to Christ, who surely welcomed him home on 14th July 1614 with the words “come my good and faithful servant. Well done, enter into the joy of God”.

Mary
Next year we will be celebrating the bi-centenary of the Booterstown parish church. Built in 1813 it is regarded as one of the first churches to have been built before catholic emancipation in 1829 to put an end to the dreaded penal laws about which the famous Dublin-born Edmund Burke (1729-'97), statesman and orator, had the following to say in a letter to a friend:

“You abhorred it, as I did, for its vicious perfection. It was a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance, and as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people and the debasement in them, of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man.” Built on protestant land with the encouragement of the owner, Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, the church was meant to appear as a shed so that the owner could save face among his anti-Catholic peers. Thus it had no tower or spire to resemble a church.

To prepare for the centenary celebration a special parish committee has been appointed. There are seven religious congregations (four female and three male) and we have been asked to reflect on how we might participate meaningfully. So far this group has had two meetings. The first thing we discovered was that though we knew of each other’s existence there has been neither interaction nor even minimum encounter among us! The question could be asked: is it that we’ve got so big as not to need encounter or indeed so small as not to have time to meet? Has our communication been no more than that of a ship passing in the night? With shared theological foundation in vows, prayer life and apostolic life style, surely in these times of fading glory we have reason (and need?) to meet and share encouraging words from out of a heritage of rich pickings that have borne the test of time in faith and perseverance in charism and ministry alike. Our seven-person group has still to work out in some detail what our contribution to the parish centenary celebration next year might be. Still, a general consensus seems to be emerging: the sharing of a concise account of our respective Founders
and histories, charisms and ministries. Our challenge will be that of finding today’s dot-com language needed for the parishioners and especially the young.

Since our last issue of the newsletter Suresh and the present scribe have been appointed to chaplaincy ministry in St. Vincent’s and St. Luke’s respectively. Fr. Suresh expects to take up a second unit of CPE in the new year as soon as the supervisor recovers from broken bones following an accident. Meanwhile Gabriel is fully involved in looking after his hospitalised sister, while Denis and Jayan continue to blaze ministerial trails in Beaumont and James’ hospitals. Fr. Raul is already half way through his CPE Unit.

We all took part in the Killucan Mass for our deceased confreres and Camillian Family members. The lively liturgy in the community chapel was further boosted by the presence of a goodly number of the residents from the Nursing Centre who braved a nasty November wind as they wheel-chaired their way across the bridge. This was followed by the blessing of the graves and an equally lively and appetising lunch with the usual finger-licking and fraternal banter. Thanks Frank and Killucan confreres all.

With the clocks already in winter time and with Advent and Christmas in our sights, an easterly wind is a constant reminder to batten down the hatches as the threat of another freeze may well be our lot again this winter. Gura fada buan sibh!

TOC

From the Archives

In the history of the diocese of Meath (chap. 42 on Killucan), the author had this to say referring to the letter below:

“Rev. Richard Kelsh, P.P., Dysart was translated [to Killucan] on 8th December 1874. He died in Lisdoonvarna on 1st August 1900, aged 82 and was buried at Raharney It was he who built the present presbytery in Rathwire. He attained notoriety for himself in an amusing manner. Following the introduction of the Coercion Act Fr. Kelsh wrote to Mr. A.J. Balfour, the Chief Secretary, informing him that he proposed to denounce him in both his chapels as a tyrant and a murderer. Balfour, evidently impressed, sent the letter to Dr. Nulty so that he might deal with the writer. The Bishop was no admirer of the Chief Secretary and he thoroughly enjoyed the letter and meeting Fr. Kelsh some time later he expressed the hope that he would be less bloodthirsty in his correspondence in future. Fr. Kelsh then recovered possession of the document, which he used to exhibit as a precious relic”.


St. Joseph’s, Killucan.
Sept. 1887
This is to notify Butcher Balfour, the merciless, blood-thirsty abettor of assassination, that on next Sunday 18th, I intend, in both my chapels in Rathwire and Raharney, to hold up to public execration and hate, the murder by his Myrmidons the police, of our brethren at Mitchelstown. I will endeavour there, to excite to the highest pitch I can, the feelings of the people, against the Constabulary, as assassins and murderers of their own fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers. I will work with all my might and power, to create, keep alive and continue a feeling in the people of hostility and hatred to them, and their British Employers. I will, in future, denounce and publicly stigmatise any father, who allows his son to join the murderous gang, and by every influence I can, will prevent my people from having any social intercourse with them, or extending to them any interchange of civil courtesy.

After my two Masses I will have a public meeting here, and I now challenge you, I dare you interfere with me. I spit on you and your coercion acts. Send your spies, send the ruffian Trail, send the bloated drunkard King-Harmon – the Orange bully Saunderson, come yourself, you Saxon Assassin, and you and they will hear the new Creed now proclaimed, from hill and housetop, despite you coercion bills and convict cells.

This letter will be duly published to the world and read for my people on Sunday. Refuse to notice it, and that will proclaim you to be what the world knows you are, a sneak, a bully, a liar, and a coward.

Signed: R. J. Kelsh, P.P., V. F.
Rathwire and Raharney

Thirteenth Ordinary General Synod
The New Evangelization for Passing on the Christian Faith

John O’Brien

If you happened to be in Rome during the second half of October you would have noticed (among the ever present throng of pilgrims and tourists) more than the usual number of purpled-robed bishops, brief-case carrying lay people, exotically dressed clergymen from other denominations and even a large group of laptop wielding journalists. Their presence in Rome was one indication that the Pope had convened the Thirteenth Ordinary General Synod of Bishops.

What actually is a Synod and why does the church call them? We hear about Synods in connection with the life of the Church but very little about what actually happens at them or the impact, if any, they have on our life as a faith community. Historically a Synod or council is usually convened to decide an issue of doctrine, administration or the application of doctrine. In modern usage, the word often refers to the governing body of a particular church. The word Synod comes from the Greek σύνοδος (synodos) meaning “assembly” or “meeting”, and it is synonymous with the Latin word concilium - council.
Nowadays, it can be seen as an advisory body to the Pope. It is “a group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet together at fixed times to foster closer unity between the Pope and bishops, to assist him with their counsel in the preservation and growth of faith and morals and in the observance and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world”. Quite a mouthful!

The Synod of Bishops was established by Pope Paul VI in September 1965. It was to be, he said, “an ecclesiastic institution, which, on examining the signs of the times as well as trying to provide a deeper interpretation of divine designs and the constitution of the Catholic Church, set up in the wake of Vatican II in order to foster the unity and cooperation of bishops around the world with the Holy See”. It does this by means of a common study concerning the conditions of the Church and a joint solution on matters concerning Her mission to bring Jesus Christ into the world.

Of its nature, the Synod of Bishops is permanent, even when not in session. Periodically, it comes together either generally, if called to consider matters directly concerning the universal Church, or special, if called for problems of a particular geographical area. The general assemblies are either ordinary (held at fixed intervals) or extraordinary (held to examine some urgent matter). As well as holding these periodical assemblies, the Synod of Bishops has a permanent secretariat which is headquartered in Rome, but is not part of the Roman Curia. This year hundreds of bishops from around the world gathered in Rome between 7th and 28th October to confront an external threat: a mounting tide of secularization.

This year’s Synod was timed to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which not only transformed the role of the laity and liturgy of the church, but also reoriented the church’s engagement with the modern world and revolutionized life inside the Roman Catholic Church.

They came together to consider the theme “New Evangelization”, in fact over two hundred and sixty church leaders from around the world were present, they were joined by lay experts and representatives of other Christian churches, including the outgoing Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. In his address he expressed the view that the “true enterprise of evangelisation will always be a re-evangelisation of ourselves as Christians first, as well as a rediscovery of why our faith is different and transfiguring: in other words a recovery of our own new humanity”. 

Pope John XXIII at the opening session of the Second Vatican Council in 1962
Pope Benedict, who himself attended Vatican II as a young theologian, has called for the “Year of Faith” to mark this historic anniversary and he celebrated Mass with the few surviving council fathers during the Synod.

In a wide-ranging speech aimed at setting the tone for the bishops’ discussion, Cardinal Donald Wuerl from Washington called on Christians “to overcome the ‘syndrome of embarrassment’ about their faith with a more assertive offense against the ‘tsunami of secular influence’ that is sweeping away marriage, family, the concept of the common good and objective right and wrong.” Cardinal Wuerl was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI as the “relator general” of the synod, with the key task of summing up the main points of the discussions.

While the Second Vatican Council marked a moment of renewal and enthusiasm for the church, Wuerl believed that it was followed by decades of poor teaching and substandard worship that made “entire generations” of Catholics incapable of transmitting the faith to their children and to society at large, ushering in today’s secularized society. Symptoms of this trend can be seen in a decline of faith and a shrinking number of Catholics in the Western world and even in traditional Catholic strongholds such as Latin America.

In an off-the-cuff meditation in front of the gathered bishops Pope Benedict spoke of “everyone’s role in the new evangelization”, we are to cooperate with God, he said. “We can only let people know what God has done”. Professor Ilaria Morali, of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, said that the “New evangelization means announcing the faith to those regions that have been Christian for centuries, but are now swept by the winds of secularism and religious indifference”. She stressed that while it is important for the church to harness modern technology to “spread the good news,” the essential part of new evangelization is “revitalizing” the church itself, letting Christians rediscover the “joy” and the “responsibility” that comes from faith.
Pope Benedict stressed that we should be “intent on gathering the signs of the times”. Faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world. What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.

Therefore, the New Evangelization, commented one observer, is about more than distributing glossy pamphlets or costly TV ads that welcome Catholics home. Before we invite people to re-enter the doors of our church, we must take a critical look at what awaits them when they cross that threshold. Yes, we are to welcome Catholics home. But first, the commentator went on, we need to get our home in order and prepare ourselves so we can offer the kind of hospitality that will draw others to come and see - and stay. The New Evangelization means giving others the reason for our own faith. The global economy has changed the world in which we try to preach the gospel, and that global economy does not share or recognise many of our gospel values.

Many of the Synod members present expressed the belief that the crisis facing the Church may result from our inability to recognise what has been happening, or address it sooner. We may have been too complacent. It is now a matter of urgency. Unlike global economic expansion, at the root of all evangelization lies not a human plan of expansion, but rather the desire to share the inestimable gift that God has wished to give us, making us sharers in His own life.

The new evangelization does not mean a “new Gospel”, because “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13:8); but rather, a new response to the needs of humanity and people today, in a manner adapted to the signs of the times and to the new situations in cultures, which are the basis of our personal identity and the places where we seek the meaning of our existence. Consequently, a “new evangelization” means to promote a culture more deeply grounded in the Gospel and to discover the new man who is in us through the Spirit given us by Jesus Christ and the Father.
What on earth does “Incarnation” mean to someone who’s never been near a church? What does salvation or proclamation or reconciliation mean in our current Christian context? Archbishop Martin of Dublin puts it this way: “How do you talk about the transcendent in a language which tries to reference everything in what is actually taking place?”

Language and the use of language has been, in a sense, what this Synod on New Evangelisation has been all about. It has been a river of words, in half a dozen languages, including Latin, from over 400 participants working in countries right around the globe. That’s what the final list of propositions is about too: a list of 58 key points that Pope Benedict will now take and work into a new document of his own. First of all it will attempt to describe what the message at the heart of our Christian faith is. Then it will seek to work out how and where and through whom the message of the Gospels can best be shared, explained, taught and strengthened. Perhaps it is a question of finding the right words (the “new expressions” as Pope John Paul II called them) and also through people simply putting their faith into practice in their daily lives. That is the challenge facing the Christian today.

Quo Vadis?

*Musing on the “Camillian Project” document for the forthcoming General Chapter*

AFM

Everybody should have a dream. The wisdom of the Sacred Scriptures would seem to suggest that when vision and dreams depart death is inevitably lurking in the corner. What tops my list of priorities right now? What is uppermost in my heart at this moment on my pilgrim journey? How would I like to be remembered?

Some dream of leaving a monument such as a Church, a Hospital, or a seminary, maybe even bearing our name; others would like to be immortalised in print by writing a book or having an article published in some noteworthy publication; still others dream of having one moment of brilliance which might impact on their community; while others are quite content to simply do some good where ever they are while they are there. It would be nice to think that at the end of one’s earthly existence that the Church we love and the Camillian Order we have committed our lives to, are some little bit better off for the fact that we passed this way.

*A great add for Active Ageing*
Me, I like to dream. I am pleased that I still dream a bit and that advancing years have not yet meant the loss of interest in what is happening and in the new processes that are going on. I dream that the forthcoming General Chapter and the subsequent celebration of the 4th centenary of the death of our Founder will be a grace filled time for our Order. I dream we will enter a period inspired by vision, and experience a renewal where people actually seek to live what they preach and what they say that they profess. I dream of managing to close the gap between what I profess to believe and how I actually live my life. I dream of encountering fresh thinking which is so badly needed in the Church as we gropingly make our way through a world where not alone structures, but now even values, are in continual fluctuation and change. I dream of seeing the Church being more relevant to the life of our society and to the people who love her and give so much of themselves for her.

I dream of witnessing sacrifice and commitment on a wider scale in consecrated life. I find myself looking for people who are prepared to suffer and sacrifice for their dreams. I look to see suffering as I feel there must be visible sacrifice and a certain amount of anguish as any fresh thinking will almost inevitably cause tension, and will most likely encounter denial and even nasty opposition. This may even lead to accusations of lack of loyalty and faithfulness because someone dared to question the status quo. I dream that the people out there who have vision and dreams will get the courage to come forward and challenge all of us.

I dream that somehow in the empty plenty of our hearts, we will hear again a whisper as if echoing down the corridors of memory, and touching our very darkness: “I shall cleanse you of all your defilement and all your idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you, and make you keep my laws and sincerely observe my observances. I shall raise you from your graves, my people …. I shall be your God and you shall be my people” (Ezek 36/37). I dream of this promise becoming flame-shaped again to-day, leaping out from our story, “rainbow rich in hope”. Camillus lit a fire in Rome in 1591. We light a fire where we are, as we rediscover our true Camillian roots and find our face in every age and time. And when we have the courage to tell our story someone will draw near, to walk with us, urging us inwards, sowing new seeds for a new spring in the hope of bountiful summer rich in flower, beauty and fruit – secure in the knowledge that as recounted in St. Patrick’s Breastplate, we do not walk alone.

**The future – young enthusiastic Camillian**
The future – collaboration with committed Christians

The other evening I was listening to our former president Mary McAleese being interviewed regarding her beliefs. I was touched by her passion for the Catholic Church, her understanding of the Eucharist and her espousal and total conviction of God’s love for her, and all of this mingled with a willingness to share her vision without flinching in asking the hard questions of our leadership and indeed of us all. One issue she correctly pointed towards is that communion and collegiality have been buzz words for 50 years within the Church, but questioned what structures the Church had put in place so as to implement these lofty concepts. This constructive criticism highlights the fact that values need to have structures if they are to be implemented, and while the values don’t change the structures must be regularly evaluated and if necessary replaced. As I listened to her and as I read her book “Quo Vadis? Collegiality in the Code od Canon Law” I found myself thanking God for the fact that more and more we are seeing the emergence of an educated, vocal and dedicated laity. I don’t have to agree with the Mary McAleeses of my Church, but let me not doubt their sincerity and love for the Church. I dream that I may remain open to be disturbed and challenged, as we will only find the truth by walking together, open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as He works through one another, and from the most unexpected of quarters.

I am presently attentively reading the “Camillian project” for the next General Chapter. If we were to take this document to heart and seek to implement it in all its radicality it could certainly make a huge difference to our little province and to the Order.

It invites us to engage in a critical look at the present day reality, and this in itself is a challenging exercise. “This examination animated by faith and hope invites us to engage in a discernment that must be translated into action”, the document states. Ah, there’s the rub! We are always good at the talking bit and the theory, but the translation into action is another question. In the document we are told that what is required is “an interior and endogenous revitalisation through personal and community discernment”. I firmly believe that if we are faithful to our own inner faith journey and engage in honest reflection on our own lives, prepared to take the corrective medicine as required and indicated to us by our conscience and our spiritual guides, then we will be more alive to the working of God’s Spirit in the world where “we live and move and have our being”. But we do have to face the hard fact that we may be wandering down a few cul-de-sacs without having the enthusiasm, willingness or courage to turn around and retrace our steps.
My private reading of the document was both beneficial and disturbing. I now look forward to the community discussion. I found the reading a bit like going through an examination of conscience. I began to feel uncomfortable at how far I fall short and how easy it is to fall into slipshod ways: “the cardinal element of consecrated life, the foundation of every other existential and religious dimension, is to have, nourish and cultivate a spiritual life ‘according to the Spirit’, which, in turn, allows a permanent ‘rebirth from on high’ (Jn 3:4) in the renewed identity of sons in the Son” (page 5-6).

We are asked in the document whether we are still prepared to look at how we live fraternal life as proposed by the Constitution of the Order. This obliges us to look honestly at what we are building together. Am I prepared to sacrifice myself and have my comfort zone disturbed in the process, or have I settled for flat style living and lodging within a big building, and then brazenly calling it community living? Poor old community!

The fact that I have a vow of poverty in this period of global recession disturbs me not a little, especially when I hear a religious dismissively shrug and say “sure it has no effect on us”. I would like to think that this was said in the sense of being so detached from worldly possessions that it should make no difference to us. But could it not also imply that as a member of the new aristocracy, of this super international club called “the Order”, that we are financially above it all and so not affected, or worse that I have become so institutionalised that I no longer worry where my life’s necessities come from as they will appear anyway, and someone else can do the worrying? Not a very pleasant scenario if true.

“We are told we should harmonise and make fertile a chaste life”. I found myself pondering was there real love in my life, where did the community stand in my life? To what extent am I sacrificing for it? We here in Ireland have been blessed by the arrival over the past few years of ten Indian confreres. How do I show my appreciation? What have I done to make them feel at home? They are in a strange culture and don’t have the friends and contacts that I have. So how available am I to them in sharing my time with them?
I liked the second part of the document which has as its theme; a future of hope. Surely the greatest challenge facing us today is, in the words of Tim Radcliffe, “how do we face an uncertain future with joy?”. The greatest challenge for us all is in the area of faith. In this section of the document there are some really radical proposals, the implementation of which would require an awful lot of good will and a willingness to “change mentality”.

It will require the mental conviction first of all that we are in mission not just engaged in ministry. Are we engaged in evangelisation or maintenance? It seems to me that we are struggling and using all our energy just to keep the ship afloat and not engaging in enough reflection as to what the signs of the time might be saying to us. I know this is true of myself. Are we hankering after a past that can never be retrieved and thus missing the possibilities of the moment?

My perusal of the document made me realise once again our need to be truly convinced that the laity are adults, and be happy that there are still some of them who are vocal, well-educated and don’t necessarily suffer fools gladly, nor can they be fobbed off anymore with clichés. Am I truly capable of listening to them? Is it possible that I belong to a group that is stuck in a rut, and that I resent being told anything by anybody, especially when it is to do with “church” affairs. In my experience listening to the laity is not easy as I tend to retreat into defensive mould, and often end up attempting to defend the indefensible. I was struck by the remark of Radcliffe that “it is far more wonderful to share the bread than to be the one who consecrates it”. This of course makes sense but do we priests truly believe it? It is interesting that of the three great patrons of Europe, Saints Benedict, Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena, none of them were priests, and yet they renewed the Church of their day and for many a day after. There is a simple tribute to Bl. John Henry Newman in San Giorgio al Velabro in Rome which numerates the honours he received in life and which ends with the words “sed ante Omnia Christianus” (before all else a Christian) – beautiful and thought provoking. True communion must begin with the realisation that we are all Christi fideles (Christian faithful), that it is our baptism that unites us and makes us all unique, and not the fact that we are clerics.

This “change of mentality”, suggested by the document, will certainly effect how we see the Central Government in the Order. Should the Chapter agree to these proposals we will need strong leadership and a carefully chosen General Council that is capable of leading from the front while bringing the foot soldiers back in the provinces and local communities along with it. The Annual Meeting of the General Consulta with the Provincial’s and Delegates needs teeth. If the proposed “new mapping” is to take hold then it will call for an actively involved Central Government that has a good overview, is prepared to suffer in protecting fidelity to the Charism of the Order, while at the same time remaining above petty local interests or being confined to simply protecting the status quo.

The possibility of the appointment of a religious from outside the Province as Provincial would be very innovative, and both interesting and challenging. More rationalisation of formation
between groups of provinces and delegations would seem to be an obvious route to take and would surely bring benefits to all. This has been talked about for years and some progress has been made, but surely the time has come to make it more of a reality.

I have only begun scratching the surface of the document and there are so many other interesting suggestions contained therein, and I look forward to the ensuing discussion which hopefully will arrive at practical conclusions.

We need a road map to negotiate our way around the world of today. For this we need decisions from the General Chapter as vision and values need structures if they are ever going to be implemented. But let us not forget that the Provincial Chapter must work to feed into that General Chapter.

Interesting times ahead!

AFM

My Encounter with the Enchanting Pearl of Africa

The well-known words of Winston Churchill describing Uganda as the Pearl of Africa is undeniably true, as can be seen by the beautiful and serene landscapes, coupled with lovely and unassuming residents. As I begin to jot down these words of my experiences (only a handful) I am reminded of the words of Jesus our Lord and Master who said to the first disciples whom he called to follow him, “come and see”. In my opinion coming to any distant country for mission is demanding and challenging. I had made up my mind to travel to Uganda notwithstanding the reservations and qualms I held about the place and it’s people. I was not the first one to fly from India to Uganda as a missionary, yet personally speaking it was a radical missionary journey for me in many ways. I remember a sentence which I hit upon while reading an article on Mission which suggested that mission is first of all an issue of Faith, because ‘faith is the assurance of the things hoped for, or proves the existence of realities that are unseen ’(Hb:11-1) and in truth, that was what I was feeling at that time. It all began at the airport where I boarded my flight, as it was my first time to fly! Nevertheless, I knew God had a design in store for me! It was a smooth and swift flight for me. On my arrival in Uganda, to be honest I was stunned to see the amazing landscape; I thought to myself - “I am not going to miss my home.”

I was pretty happy with the warm reception the local people gave me whenever I celebrated mass for them. For my part, the faith of the people looked straight forward and simple. They don’t have any reticence or reservations before God. They do enjoy every moment of being in the presence of the Lord. One of the first learning curves for me about this place is the way
people greet one another. They begin any conversation by enquiring about the wellbeing of the other, which is not very ordinary or customary way of greeting in my homeland of Indian. As regards to the farming and agriculture, the extraordinarily productive soil prevents people from maneuvering energetically!

Another thing one has to appreciate is the level of endurance that the people possess. Sometimes the appalling situations in the villages prompt you to ask certain agonizing questions; however, they stoically put up with the deplorable conditions they face. I did get an opportunity to be part of a mobile clinic program for a few months, which is run by a religious nun belonging to SRA congregation. The program covers three villages every week, which is highly beneficial to the local people. Without fail the numbers of the needy increased each week. What struck me most was the approach and outlook of the local people towards life, despite their diverse constraints and limitations. They still manage to genuinely smile at you, as though there is nothing affecting or upsetting them.

My encounter with the seminarians in formation has been both challenging and exciting. Let me quote the ancient Greek philosopher Seneca’s words, “while we teach, we learn”. I do believe that my experiences with the students will help me significantly in the days to come. Occasionally some students say that seminary life is hard and tough. I am inclined to think that the hardness and toughness of life is relative, but that in general life is difficult. Renowned psychologist Scot Peck says ‘life is difficult: this is a great truth, one of the greatest truths because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it’. As I am assisting these young men in varied though limited ways, I do make it a point to seek to help them to rise above the difficulties, and to realize that the difficulties are part of life, and if one dares to get involved that they no longer become complicated.

It has been a wonderful and great time for me to be alive and be part of this humble beginning in my own little way. When all is said and done, I can honestly say that I have encountered the enchantments of the Pearl of Africa. Let me conclude with an anecdote from the famous author Antony Demello.

‘The explorer returned to his people, who were eager to know about the faraway place. But, how could he ever put into words the feelings that flooded his heart when he saw the exotic flowers and heard the night sounds of the forest; when he sensed the danger of wild beasts or paddled his canoe over treacherous rapids? He said, ‘go and find out for yourselves’ and to guide them he drew a map of the place. They pounced on the map and they framed it in their town hall. They made copies of it for themselves. Moreover, all who had a copy considered themselves experts about the place.’

God Bless…!

Jacob Russel MI
Can you recognise anybody in this photo from 1965?

There are three Irish Camillian priests besides Frs. Egan and O’Brien and one diocesan priest.