

# FRONTLINE REPORT

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Society of African Missions  
American Province

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Vocation is a journey, a call from God to follow His path. It can take a lifetime! In this issue of *Frontline Report*, we see three generations of S.M.A. priests at different stages on the journey: celebrating many years of service; taking a new direction at the midpoint; and just starting out on the path. We celebrate the mystery of God's call through which He cares for His Church!

## Priesthood—Sowing the Word of God

In his book entitled *Ministers of Your Joy*, Pope Benedict XVI asks: "Does it still make any sense today to become a priest, a sower of the Word? Are there still not for a young man more promising, more profitable and more successful occupations in which he can develop his gifts?"

Pope Benedict answers with the Parable of the Sower: "In fact, God is continually moving incognito through history. He is still continually veiling his power in the garb of powerlessness. And still continually the true values, the divine values, truth, love, faith, justice are the forgotten and powerless things in this world. And yet—this parable says: 'Be comforted!'

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## Leaving the Green Hills of Kenya: A Reflection by Fr. Frank Wright S.M.A.

Fr. Frank Wright, S.M.A., has been serving faithfully in his mission assignments in Kenya since his ordination on June 26, 1993. A good guide for one's mission is the saying of Bishop

James Walsh, M.M.: "Go where you are needed, but not wanted—stay until you are wanted but not needed." In this spirit of mission, Fr. Frank sent us the following reflection: My name is Fr. Frank Wright, and I have been on the missions in Kenya for the last fourteen years. I was in an inner-city parish in Nairobi for ten years but then was asked to come here roughly four years ago to the green tea hills of Mataara. In concert with the U.S. Provincial Council, I have decided that this year of 2007 is an appropriate time to make a change.

I am very happy in my current mission assignment. Mataara is a rural parish, straddling the foothills of the Aberdare mountains sixty miles outside of Nairobi. There are four churches in the parish. Normally three of these would be termed "outstations," however, I try to treat them all similarly so that no one feels they have a second-rate church to go to. You see, it's very important for



Above: Beautiful countryside in the green tea hills of Mataara.



Above: Fr. Frank meets with parishioners.

# Jubilees Mark 110 Years of Mission Service



**Fr. DANIEL CULLEN, S.M.A.** is a priest, poet and artist. His missionary journey has been marked by sacrifice and faith. He always had the desire to be a priest from his youth in Northern Ireland and began serving in the Church as an altar server when he was seven. He was inspired by Fr. Tom Hughes, S.M.A. who came to his Parish and gave a talk. Fr. Danny said, "He was a beautiful singer and full of light and joy." At the age of thirteen, he won a scholarship and was able to pursue his education, which would help him realize his dream. Despite the struggles and anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent in Northern Ireland at that time, he persevered. His mother was a musician and his father was an expert linen producer. Fr. Dan was ordained February 11, 1947 and was one of the first three S.M.A. priests from the American Province to serve in Liberia, West Africa. Afterwards, he spent 19 years tirelessly doing mission appeals and promoting mission throughout the U.S. As Fr. Danny reflects on his missionary vocation and response to God's call, he says, "I didn't choose Him. He chose me." He adds, "I am completely happy as a priest, as I know this is what God wants me to be." His encouragement and advice to those discerning their vocation is:

*Left: (L-R) Jubilarian Fr. Danny Cullen S.M.A. is congratulated by Most Reverend Peter Gerety, D.D., Archbishop Emeritus of Newark, on the 60th Anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood.*  
*Right: (L-R) Fr. Tom Wright, S.M.A., Provincial Superior; Jubilarian, Fr. John Murray, S.M.A.; and Fr. Jim Gessler, S.M.A., Provincial Councilor, process down the aisle after the Jubilee Mass on February 10, 2007 in St. Anthony's Chapel, Tenafly, NJ.*



"Be a missionary for the right reason. If you are not true to yourself, you can't be true to others. If genuine, you will further the Church, spread the Gospel and help people get to know Jesus. Everything is for the love of Christ."  
**Heartfelt Congratulations go to Fr. Danny Cullen on the 60th Anniversary of his**

*"...if you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for."*  
*Thomas Merton*

**Ordination to the Priesthood. Fr. JOHN MURRAY, S.M.A.** a native of Flushing, New York, attended St. Dunstan University in Canada before entering S.M.A. Queen of Apostles Seminary in Dedham, Massachusetts. He graduated from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC and earned a Master's of Divinity from Darlington Seminary in New Jersey. He was ordained to the priesthood on February 10, 1957. He served in African American parishes in South Carolina and Illinois and Georgia before receiving his assignment to Cape Palmas, Liberia. After his assignment in Liberia, Fr. Murray returned to the U.S. and served as Vocation Director and in S.M.A. Promotional work. He also did a term as Assistant Superior of the S.M.A. House

## Jubilees Mark 110 Years Mission (Continued)

in Tenafly.

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Fr. Murray was always ready to serve anywhere that he might be assigned. He ministered in Arizona, Washington, DC and Andros Island in the Bahamas. As chaplain in Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck, NJ., he was available to respond to the needs of patients and their families. He is known for his close association with the **Knights of Columbus** and held the post of **New Jersey State Father Prior** for their youth division. **Congratulations Fr. John on the 50th Anniversary of your Ordination!**

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### ***The S.M.A. and the F.H.M.***

**Connection:** When Fr. John was assigned to the African American Parishes in the U.S., he got to know and serve alongside the **Franciscan Handmaids of Mary**. This friendship was strengthened by their faithfulness to the Gospel, as they did all they could to battle

racism that was rampant in the U.S. in the mid-1900's. Their best witness was their lives lived in respect for all God's children. S.M.A. and the Franciscan Handmaids of Mary are closely linked. In 1915, the Georgia State Legislature proposed a bill that would outlaw the instruction of Black children by White teachers. The bill alarmed everyone who was interested in the education of African-American children, particularly **Fr. Ignatius Lissner, S.M.A.** Seeing the great need, he petitioned Bishop Keily of Savannah, Georgia for permission to start a new Religious Congregation. With the Bishop's "Yes," his next task was to find the right person. He met a devout Catholic, **Miss Elizabeth Barbara Williams**. Sharing his vision, and through prayer and trust in God, she knew this was the answer to her prayer, "Lord, what would you have me do?" She received the habit on October 15, 1916 and took the name **Mother Mary Theodore**. So, the **Franciscan Handmaids of Mary**

## Leaving the Green Hills

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people to feel they have a vibrant community center that anchors them in their hope and faith.

I have discovered over the past four years that I work better in beautiful surroundings. When I get up in the morning at six o'clock, and I do this because the dog and cats insist on it, I can watch the sun from my bedroom window edge over the eastern sky with its orange and pink hues. Later I can look out over the surrounding ridges and see the wide expanses of tea fields, gripping the sides of the ridges. Yes, it must be said that it is easier to work here than elsewhere.

Being in the rural area has its disadvantages. I do a lot of home visits to the sick and elderly and on many occasions I have to go up and down ridges on paths that have been carved out from the side of the hill. When it rains, the footing on the slopes becomes treacherous, and I have to chart new paths. I visited one elderly lady last week and was caught unexpectedly by an afternoon storm. As I worked my way down the hill, and it's harder to go down a hill than up it, I felt my shoes slip on the path. It would have made a dramatic picture for the *Frontline Report*, but there was no one with a camera.

Closing up shop is hard to do on the practical and the human levels. On the practical level, I have already taken six suitcases full of fiction to the Regional House and eight suitcases full of scripture, theology, and ecology to the Formation House. I held a "potlatch" [a celebratory giving of gifts] of the major part of my cookbooks, at our Apostolic Community meeting. I am still trying to figure out how to get my professional linguistics books back to the States.

On the human level, I have a wide network of friends here in Kenya,



Left: (L-R) **Sr. Jacqueline Banks, F.H.M.;** **Sr. Maria Goretti Mannix, F.H.M.;** **Fr. Tom Wright, S.M.A. Provincial Superior;** **Mrs. Margaret English** (Fr. John Murray's Sister); **Fr. Brendan Darcy, S.M.A.;** **Sr. Loretta Theresa Richards, F.H.M.;** and **Sr. Vincent Marie Wilson, F.H.M.**

The Sisters are members of the **Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary** founded in 1916 by **Sister Mary Theodore Williams** and Co-founded by **Rev. Ignatius Lissner, S.M.A.** The Sisters continue to serve generously and faithfully in New York.

Leaving the Green Hills (Continued)



Above: (R-L) Fr. Frank Wright, S.M.A. and Michael Maliti, (driver) visit the outstations. Fr. Frank makes regular home visits and brings the sacraments to his parishioners who are shut-ins.

both in my first parish and in my  
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present one. I have become accustomed to the place, and quite frankly, on my last several visits to the States, I have felt myself to be in strange terrain, but change occurs, no matter

As Fr. Frank says good-bye, we are reminded of St. Paul's farewell blessing to his beloved Corinthians, "We wish you joy; try to grow perfect; encourage one another; have a common mind and live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you."  
(2 Corinthians, 13: 11-12)

**Priesthood—Sowing the Word of God**

(Continued from Page 1) *God's harvest is growing; however much there are also fellow-travelers who run away as soon as this seems advisable; however much is done in vain, somewhere the word is ripening. It is still not in vain that there are people who venture to proclaim the word and be there for the sake of the word; who venture to resist the flood of selfishness, of covetousness, of unscrupulousness, and to build a dam against it . . . Secretly the world lives from the fact that people are still continually believing, hoping and loving."*

Are you willing to become a 'Sower of the Word?'

*On the Journey: S.M.A. Vocations*

Ordination to the Deaconate



Above: Deacon Keith McKnight, S.M.A. Vocation Director, recruits priesthood candidates for service in the African Missions.



Above: Dermot Roache, S.M.A. Seminarian with the American Province, is scheduled for Ordination to the Deaconate on May 12, 2007. Also, on May 12th, he will make his final Oath with the Society of African Missions. Please pray for Dermot and all the S.M.A. seminarians as they prepare for priestly mission service to our African brothers and sisters in Africa, and to those of African descent.

The S.M.A. Vocation Director, Deacon Keith McKnight, brings his wonderful zeal, strong faith and joyous spirit to his work. Currently the American Province has three seminarians: Dermot Roache, Elicer Sandoval, and Damian Alan Truslow-Trudeau. This is a great blessing, and the fruit of much prayer and hard work. However, Deacon cannot rest. Priesthood candidates are needed. **If you are interested and discerning your vocation to the priesthood, please call Deacon Keith at:**

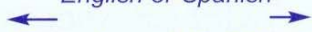
1 (888) 250 4333, or e-mail: deaconkm@smafathers.org .

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