



## *Dialogue Is The Way of Following Jesus: Christians and Muslims in Nigeria*

In general, relations are cordial between Christians and Muslims in West Africa. However, tragically, in the last ten years, violent clashes have occurred in **Nigeria**, with thousands of people killed, tens of thousands displaced, and houses of worship burned on both sides. Besides the religious differences, there are complex factors of economics, ethnicity, and national and world politics that cause these violent conflicts. Even the Iraq war has been a factor. With attacks on Christian minorities in parts of Nigeria, and vengeful counter-attacks, the stakes are high for peace and stability in the country.

In 2007 the Catholic Bishops of five countries in West Africa said, **"We want to open new doors in dialogue because we believe that this is the only way that we can truly cultivate respect for each other and together stand up for human dignity and peace."**

In Nigeria, **Bishop Joseph Bagobiri of the Diocese of Kafanchan** is one Bishop facing the challenges of life in a region where tensions have been high. Kafanchan is in the north of Nigeria and is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  Muslim and  $\frac{1}{4}$  Catholic. Bishop Bagobiri, 50, is its first Bishop. During a stay at the S.M.A. headquarters in Tenafly,



Above: **Bishop Dr. Joseph Bagobiri**

New Jersey, he shared his experience of interfaith relations.

He reports that problems arise at a basic level. For example, Muslims do not permit free intermarriage between young people of the two religions, even though Christians may do so. The imposition of Islamic (or *Sharia*) law on top of the secular Nigerian

criminal law, is a greater problem. Islamic law has special rules and penalties which are not the custom of non-Muslims. He also notes the need for reciprocity, as some Christians feel that most of the tolerance and accommodation comes from the Christian side.

However, Bishop Bagobiri believes that the question of attitude is what is most crucial to peace. He says there are real differences between the religions, but **these differences "are not supposed to become a reason for conflict, but an invitation to try and understand each other very, very well."** Sadly, some fundamentalists do not see that they can hold onto the truth of their own religion without attacking those who hold to another religion.

So he welcomed a 2007 statement by 138 Muslim leaders which affirmed that Islam is not against Christianity, nor Christianity against Islam. Bishop Bagobiri says such a statement is "something that we are very happy with . . . As we continue in this direction, we are going to strengthen the bonds of relationship between us, and the whole world will see that **religion will become more a solution to the problem of violence,**

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## Celebrating Our S.M.A. Missionary Calling



Above: **Bishop John Flesey, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Newark**, ordained **Eliecer Sandoval, S.M.A.**, to the Diaconate at St. Anthony's Chapel in Tenafly, NJ on June 8, 2008.



Above: Family and friends came from Panama to celebrate the joy of Eliecer Sandoval's Diaconate Ordination. (Front Row L-R) **Fatima Cosme, Belinda Chang, Judith de Mata, Deacon Eliecer Sandoval, S.M.A., Libia Sandoval, Choly de Garcia.** (Back Row L-R) **Eloy Cruz, Jose Franco, Pierre Cruz and Cesar Garcia.**

### Missionaries Needed!

Everyone, by their Baptism has a Missionary Calling! There are great needs in Africa. Not everyone has heard the Good News of Jesus or experienced it. Share your life and your love. Reach out to a brother or sister in need of food, healing, respect, shelter, comfort in their sorrows, and hope for eternity.

Do you feel called to mission service in Africa or with our brothers and sisters of African origin wherever they are? Please call our **S.M.A. Vocation Director, Deacon Keith McKnight**, at

1 (888) 250 4333

or E-mail:

deaconkm@smafathers.org

You are needed!

## 40th Anniversary



Above: (L-R Front) **Fr. Brendan Darcy, S.M.A., Fr. Ulick Bourke, S.M.A., Fr. Abu Cole, S.M.A. and Martha Paladino.** In the background, **Amanda Mijangos, Fr. Dan Lynch, S.M.A. and Fr. Dan Cullen, S.M.A.** The celebration was to honor the 40th Anniversary of Fr. Ulick's priestly ordination, and his 40 years of service in Africa and the U.S.

### Giving: Another way of fulfilling our missionary calling

"The material and financial needs of the missions are many: Not only to set up the Church with minimal structures (chapels, schools for catechists and seminarians, housing), but also to support works of charity, education and human promotion—a vast field of action especially in poor countries. The missionary Church gives what she receives, and distributes to the poor the material goods that her materially richer sons and daughters generously put at her disposal. Here I wish to thank all those who make sacrifices and contribute to the work of the missions. The sacrifices and sharing are indispensable for building up the Church and showing love . . . All that we have received from God—life itself as well as material goods—does not belong to us but is given to us for our use. Generosity in giving must always be enlightened and inspired by faith: then we will truly be more blessed in giving than in receiving." (Mission of the Redeemer by Pope John Paul II)

We thank all who have participated in their missionary calling by supporting S.M.A.: Those in Parishes where we do our annual mission appeals, individual donors, those who respond to our mailings and those groups affiliated with S.M.A. who have helped us over the years.

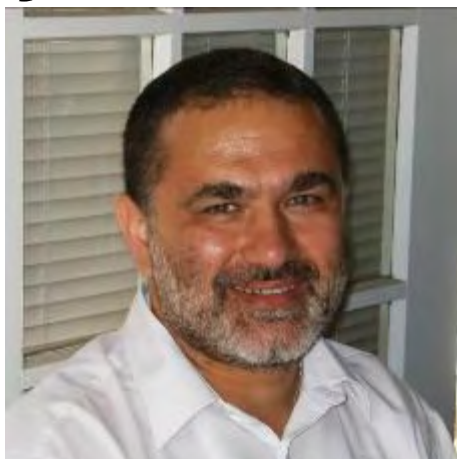
# Springtime for Mission in Poland

In early 2008, the S.M.A. American Province had the joy of welcoming **Fr. Wojciech Lula, S.M.A.** to the U.S. He is on sabbatical after serving a term as **Superior of the Polish District-in-Formation**. Fr. Lula gave the following update on the **S.M.A. Polish District-in-Formation**.

**History:** S.M.A. was in Poland before WWII. Between 1931—1939, S.M.A. had a house and property. It was confiscated by the Nazis and later the Communists took the place over to make farms. S.M.A. lost everything. In the 1980's, the S.M.A. General Assembly made the decision to establish a new District in Poland to recruit vocations for S.M.A. In 1988, the first Polish Seminarians joined S.M.A. From that time there has been a continual growth in numbers. Today there are 23 Polish S.M.A. Priests, 2 Associate Priests and 5 Seminarians. For the first time, 5 S.M.A. Lay Associates were commissioned in Poland on December 8, 2007.

The Polish District-in-Formation has two houses: The headquarters is at **Borzecin Duzy** where we have Administration, Vocation, Mission Animation, Formation and Development. In the south, we have a retreat house at **Piwniczna Zroj** which also serves for Vocation and Animation work.

**Challenges in Poland:** People are very generous in support of mission but don't have a long tradition as in Western Europe. Poland's history has had an impact. When S.M.A. was being founded in France, Poland didn't exist because of partition for 123 years. Then there were two World Wars and Communism ruled. S.M.A. Priests had to go outside the Iron Curtain to follow their



Above: **Fr. Wojciech Lula, S.M.A.**

missionary vocation. Now it is a new day—Springtime for Mission in Poland.

Still, **Pope John Paul II** says **“spiritual life is a journey upstream to the source.”** I believe that following our vocation is going against the stream. **God is our source. In our life, to go to the source, we must go upstream. There are obstacles, rocks and waterfalls. It takes faith to make the journey—not to turn back when it gets hard.** It is not easy for modern people to choose to serve in difficult places.

The S.M.A.s in Poland are looking for Lay Missionaries to work with S.M.A. in the missions where we are. With the strong Catholicism in Poland at this time, there is great potential. They need language and culture studies and must be prepared to work with the priests in Primary Evangelization. It is important to show we are one in mission. The Church needs both Priests and Laity living a true witness to the Gospel.

Currently the S.M.A. Polish District-in-Formation has members and Associates serving in 5 African countries: **Morocco, Togo, Central African Republic, Kenya**

**and Tanzania.**

When I served in the **Central African Republic (C.A.R.)**, I worked with the Pygmies. My main mission was to help them know their rights, recognize their dignity, help them enter into society and see that they are respected. What impressed me most was how the life in the mission was like the early Church—the beginning of the Faith. When I read St. Paul's Epistles, it was the same happening right there in C.A.R. There were problems. Our challenges were to respect the culture, the faith of the people and always, to respect the people and to bring a new message to them from the Gospel. I saw the power of the message of Christ and experienced how people's lives changed when they encountered the “Word of God!”

Our mission is to be with the people and together, try to live the Gospel each day. We answer their questions and help them to understand the Word of God. **We are companions with them in their day-to-day life.**

**New Developments:** We are experiencing the new S.M.A. structures. We see clearly our place in a changing Poland and the importance for the mission. By our presence, we open the local Polish church to Mission. In Africa, we witness to the Gospel by our lives. By our activities, we are a challenge for the Church in Poland. We work for the universal Church. **There is a lot of work to do.**

In Poland we are developing our structures to work more and more to involve the Polish people

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## Dialogue Is The Way Of Following Jesus

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**rather than become a cause of violence and conflicts in the world.”**

Dialogue between the religions is needed to help get over the attitudes that lead to violence. Sometimes the dialogue is formal meetings between religious leaders, but at other times it is simply peaceful daily sharing of life. In the face of the difficulties, Bishop Bagobiri says that **“dialogue continues to remain, not an option, but a necessity and an imperative that we have to pursue. And in pursuing dialogue we are not giving any favor to Muslims, but we are simply obeying what Jesus has commanded us to do: The parable of the Good Samaritan, for example—caring for those who are totally away, different from you. Or the whole question of love and care, not just for those who are your own relations, but for those who are far from you. Jesus commands us to love even our enemies. So we cannot say because Muslims are refusing to reciprocate, therefore we are not going to deal with them. If we do that, we are gradually disobeying the command of Jesus to us. So we see dialogue not as an option, not as doing something as a favor to Muslims, but as part of obeying the command of Jesus Christ to us.”**

(For the full interview with Bishop Bagobiri see [www.smafathers.org](http://www.smafathers.org) under “Justice and Peace.”)

## Springtime for Mission in Poland



Above: A very young and vibrant S.M.A. Polish District-in-Formation. Fr. Lula is at far Right.

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in the mission in Africa. It is important to show the future of the Church in Africa—not only preaching the Gospel, but witnessing to the Gospel by our actions. Evangelization must include working for Peace and Justice for our brothers and sisters in Africa.

I have a dream—To build a structure in Poland to promote internationality so Priests and Laity can come from anywhere to be ambassadors of African culture and life for the Polish Church.

**Polish—American Province Connections:** Fr. Lula expresses gratitude to the American Province. When they were starting up in Poland, the Ameri-

can Province helped them. Now they are happy to reciprocate and help the American Province in whatever way they can.

There have been other connections. Three persons associated with the American Province were originally from Poland: **Joanna Pawlicka**, the **Provincial Secretary**, renders vital service to the Province through her secretarial work.

**Grzegorz Cwynar** is a former Lay Missionary in Liberia, and S.M.A. Lay Missionary **Iga Figula** currently is serving in Bomi Hills, Liberia. One of the S.M.A. Lay Missionaries, **Janet Muckenthaler**, who served for 4 years in Jericho, Kenya, was invited to Poland to teach English to the S.M.A. Seminarians.



The many students who are fortunate to attend school in Liberia hold a hope for a better future. We, missionaries, are extremely grateful that your generosity has enable us to continue to offer a message of joy and hope in a country where there are so many difficulties facing the children. Know that they all are very grateful that they have a chance to better their lives.