

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF VOLUNTEER MISSIONARY MOVEMENT (VMM)

XAVERIAN GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTRE COATBRIDGE

HOMILY PREACHED BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN

SATURDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER 2009

INTRODUCTION:

It is indeed a privilege being with you this afternoon to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Volunteer Missionary Movement.

To direct our thoughts initially, I ask you to think of that passage from Scripture in St Mark's Gospel in which he writes: "A man throws seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know!" – perhaps we can say that of the growth of the VMM.

Other words about which I would ask you to think on this occasion are those words of the late Pope John Paul II addressing the lay people of the world, following on the Synod of Bishops on the Laity: "You have an exalted vocation and there are many and varied forms of mission open to you!" – I am sure those words must have inspired so many of you in your own exalted vocations in VMM.

HISTORY OF VMM:

In thinking of the history I continue quite simply to mention some highlights about which you will know more than myself: After some ten years of prospective volunteer missionaries travelling to Mill Hill and London Colney for initial selection in 1980, Alice Taggart a returned VMM from Bothwell offered to help with the recruitment of VMMs here in Scotland itself. Other names come to the fore since that time: Gerry Doran, Anne Johnston, Joanna Quirk, the late Sara Paton and Dr Senga Greig – all provided background support and leadership with of course headquarters being very much home based in those days.

The Volunteer missionaries worked as part of a team here in Scotland along with our own Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, the Justice & Peace Apostolate, and especially the Missionary Orders to support a programme of development on mission initially working in our secondary schools, taking part in caring church weeks, and ensuring that the basis of their apostolate was always firmly scriptural.

Various Missionary Orders in particular helped in the development of the VMM – and I think I can mention here in a special way the Montfort Fathers in Barrhead, those who assisted at Gillis Centre in Edinburgh, followed by those workers in the VMM office in Glasgow, and now here in Coatbridge, with VMM becoming part of the Global Education Centre of the Xaverians where VMM is now firmly established.

ONGOING STRATEGY OF VMM FROM 2009 UNTIL 2011:

As with the history of the Volunteer Missionary Movement I am not attempting to give either a history of, or the content of, the ongoing strategy of VMM – that is the subject of your own discussions.

However, I can say as you already know that in the first year of your plan in 2009 you **celebrate 40 years of mission and development work**. You acknowledge with wonderful thanks the fact that VMM has recruited, trained and assigned over 2,500 volunteers to work with partners overseas in Africa, Latin America and Asia – and now as part of your ongoing plan you are having **a time for reflection and change**.

However, you are aware of **some things which never change** – the present world situation and the situation with regard to poverty in our world. Recent United Nations estimates show the number of people going hungry every day has increased because of the present economic crisis by 130 to 155 million. That current crisis is adding an estimated additional 46 million people to the millions who have to survive on less than 1.25 dollars per day, while an extra 53 million will stay trapped on less than 2 dollars per day. In these changed circumstances the work of VMM in servicing the poor and the marginalised has become even more urgent.

And in facing the future you are of course fully aware that the significant resources that you have are the most precious of all – **human ones**. VMM's specialist skilled workers will be deployed in the service of the poor and building the programme capacity of local and international agencies who serve the poor.

While your outreach will consist in your **overseas programmes** you will also have a **development education** here at home as well as of course an organisational development programme.

Aware as always of the present world situation and particularly the dwindling number of missionaries from the Northern Hemisphere, VMM as a **lay development movement** sensitive to the missionary traditions of the past is well placed to play a critical strategic role in supporting missionaries and civil society bodies to carry out development work.

Consequently with regard to your work overseas four themes are coming to the fore: Diocesan development, community development, education and health.

CONCLUSION:

Aware as I am that I have only been able to give a brief history of the Volunteer Missionary Movement and touched on your ongoing strategy I now as the President of the Bishops Conference of Scotland as well as being a Director of SCIAF and one intensely interested in the ongoing missionary role of the Church thank and congratulate all connected with VMM most sincerely for all that has been accomplished over these past 40 years.

Like the Church itself however you have no intention of standing still – and you face the future with confidence.

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon recently stated: “Rather than retreat, now is the time to accelerate progress towards the millennium development goals and to strengthen the global partnership for development”.

I know that this is what you are about to plan for, for the future. There is no consideration of any retreat nor indeed even of standing still – rather in union with all peoples of goodwill in the Church and in the world I know that you will be to the forefront in accelerating progress towards those millennium development goals which we all hope to see achieved.

Thank you indeed for all that you have accomplished: may God bless your endeavours now at this present time; and may God continue to inspire you to continue to “go and teach all nations” as he inspired the first Apostles – living true to those beatitudes which Jesus Christ himself taught on the Sermon on the Mount, those beatitudes so firmly based on love of God and love of neighbour particularly those neighbours so much less fortunate than ourselves.