

DIARY OF VISIT OF CARDINAL O'BRIEN TO KENYA:

SATURDAY 31ST OCTOBER – SATURDAY 7TH NOVEMBER 2009

INTRODUCTION:

The visit was organised by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception – founded in Glasgow some 140 years ago and now with missionary outreaches in Nigeria and Kenya; and having recently agreed to care for the domestic arrangements at the Pontifical Scots College Rome. I was accompanied on the trip by Mr Paul McSherry who was the official photographer.

SATURDAY 31ST OCTOBER 2009:

Following on departure from Edinburgh Airport on the morning of Saturday 31st October Paul and I arrived in Nairobi on time at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport on time at 8pm. There we were met by Sister Placida and the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and taken to the Kenyan Headquarters of the Kiltegan Fathers in Nairobi itself. The house also acts as a “rest house” for Kiltegan Fathers in Kenya – and next morning we met two elderly Kiltegan Fathers who were leaving Nairobi to travel north to the Turkana Desert where drought and a famine were ravishing the people.

SUNDAY 1ST NOVEMBER 2009:

After an early start on Sunday we visited the IDP (Internally Displaced People) Camp on Nakuru some two hours journey away. There we met a considerable number of the seven thousand or so people resident in that particular camp – witnessing scenes which reminded me so much of my previous visits to Darfur in Northern Sudan. The homes were the usual ramshackle tent type structures held together with cardboard – and quite inadequate in every way for housing human beings who manage to eke out an existence through aid from various agencies. Women and men parents of families were completely desolate and longed to get back to their homelands from which they had had to flee by the inter tribal warfare from some one year before.

We were entertained to lunch after that visit at the nearby “House of Prayer” run by the Kiltegan Fathers – a place of retreat and rest for missionaries and one which hosted regular days of recollections for the Kiltegan Fathers themselves as well as for priests from the Archdiocese.

Journeying on we then visited the Kiltegan Formation House in Nakuru. There staff cares for about ten young men from different parts of Africa preparing for the Missionary Priesthood with the Kiltegan Fathers and hoping to serve in different parts of Africa. Following on their initial formation in this house they would study philosophy in South Africa and theology in Nairobi – before hopefully being ordained to the Priesthood.

I celebrated evening Mass in Christ the King Cathedral in Nakuru with a vast congregation including very many young people especially secondary school children from neighbouring schools. The liturgy was indeed vibrant and most enjoyable – with the young people not being perturbed at all by an electricity failure at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer.

I reminded the young people in my words of their own “exalted vocation” speaking of their role in serving the Church in Kenya as dedicated lay people; as also serving the society in Kenya through their careers and professions including also giving consideration to the profession of involvement in politics in a country where abuse of position is rife as in many others.

We were entertained to supper by the local Bishop, Bishop Philip Anyolo – with whom we stayed overnight before departing for Molo the next morning.

MONDAY 2ND NOVEMBER 2009:

Initially in Molo we visited St Thomas' "Pre-Seminary". This is a national seminary established by the Bishops of Kenya in which young men prepare for entry in to the usual form of seminary training. There were over seventy students in this pre-seminary arranging in age from 17 to 35, all being from Kenya, with four members of staff appointed by the Bishops Conference of Kenya.

The basics of the Catholic faith were emphasised to the students at the seminary with emphasis on a study on the Priesthood, the teaching of the Church at the present time and moral and dogmatic theology being based on the catechism of the Catholic Church.

Later in the morning on this All Souls Day I celebrated Mass for the deceased missionaries who had served in the area with the celebration taking place at the Convent of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Molo. About 50 missionaries had gathered from all over the area. I spoke of the opportunity not only of thinking of the death and resurrection to new life of individual missionaries – but also of the ongoing death and hoped for resurrection of our Church especially the Missionary Church at this present time where so many new forms of religious life and training for religious life being encouraged.

Later in the day I celebrated a further Mass in the Franciscan Convent at which three new aspirants to religious life were received; and then five of the present aspirants were admitted as novices to begin their training for full commitment.

TUESDAY 3RD NOVEMBER 2009:

We began Mass at St Thomas' Priests Seminary – with not only the Rector, staff and students but also being joined by the Nuns from the nearby Franciscan Convent and other guests including some of the Franciscan Brothers.

After Mass a tour was organised of Baraka Agricultural College in Molo – a College founded in 1974 by the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru to educate men and train the newly settled farmers of Rift Valley Province. Some two years later the College was placed under the management of the Franciscan Brothers – which arrangement still remains to this present time. Over the years Barak Agricultural College took the initiative and pioneered the strategy of sustainable agricultural and rural development and has continued to evolve to date. Today the mission of the College is to promote "SARD" (Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development) in Eastern Africa and is registered by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology to Offer SARD Courses. Other diplomas and shorter courses are organised including rural youth programmes, day release courses, and a bee keeping development programme. The College is acknowledged as a leader in its particular field and is a wonderful example of co-operation by the Church and its Religious with the State in helping the communities of Kenya and East Africa.

We then travelled to Londiani for lunch with the Kiltegan Fathers who described something of their own experiences sharing the tribal unrest which had taken place during the year previously. Their Church and grounds had become a refuge for those whose homes and livelihood had been destroyed – but deep appreciation had been shown to the missionaries for the way in which they cared for their people. The Parish itself was continuing to thrive with its own IT training school, a flourishing bookshop for primary and secondary schools and residential facilities for visitors to the area.

We then journeyed on to Motobo initially visiting the Parish Priest another Kiltegan Father where we were made most welcome. We then journeyed on to the local prison in Motobo with our path being smoothed over by a very experienced lay visitor who introduced us to the Governor and various officials at the prison. I was given the opportunity of addressing over 200 prisoners in one of the halls; and then meeting those men who were HIV positive for prayer and healing both physical and spiritual.

We then returned to the Convent of the Franciscans of the Immaculate Conception where we would be staying for the next few days and visiting projects organised by the Sisters and supported with considerable help from Scotland in the area.

WEDNESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER 2009:

This was to be a day of dedication and blessings of many things associated with the major project being conducted by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Kenya: “Live with Hope”. The day’s events began with an open air Mass in the grounds of the project “Live with Hope” with a great congregation with those associated with the project over the years along with the employees and very many volunteers. Concelebrating Mass with me was Father Gerry Roche, a Kiltegan Father from the neighbouring parish, who had spent very many years in Kenya and of course having the benefit of being able to speak fluent Swahili.

I myself spoke on the Gospel of the “Growth of the Mustard Seed” – linking it with the growth of Christianity; of Franciscan spirituality; and of the developments within the Franciscans of the Immaculate Conception themselves since their foundation in Scotland some 100 years ago; then their foundations into Nigeria some 60 years ago; followed by their foundations in Kenya some 20 years ago. The growth of “Live with Hope” was part of the development of the growth of the project.

Thirty six people are now employed working on the project with very many volunteers. The USA Government is a major contributor to the salary of the employees with volunteers coming from all over the world including of course many from Scotland. The work of the project is divided up now into four particular departments: Home Based Care for adults and children who are HIV positive; Voluntary Counselling and Testing; Abstinence and Behavioural Care for young people; and an apostolate with orphans and vulnerable children.

During the course of the day I visited and blessed various projects associated with “Live with Hope” including a tour of the centre and meeting staff and clients. Following on the Mass also was a major entertainment in the open air with a succession of speeches on marking the occasion.

In the afternoon I visited and dedicated a field for work with the “Family of God” (street children who are being cared for by the project); and the site for another home for them. I then continued with blessing another facility offering temporary intermediate care for those in any particular type of trouble.

I then made two home visits to particular families – both living in what one might describe as the “slum area” of the large St Mary’s Parish in which the Franciscan Sisters reside – again abject poverty was witnessed in these homes in one of which the mother was fostering three children in addition to her two own; and in another where an eight year old girl had just disappeared!

In the course of the evening the Sisters hosted a reception and meal for some of their very many helpers and friends at which everyone could relax.

THURSDAY 5TH NOVEMBER 2009:

We began our day with home visits to various scattered areas where there were less able children coming under the auspices of the “Orphans and Vulnerable Children’s Group”. This involved quite a lot of travelling in to the distant country where I was always delighted to see schools both primary and secondary with children coming to them from a vast area invariably walking to school and walking home again for some number of miles. It was sad being in the homes of the less able children – although the parents gave them every love and attention. Outside some of the homes was what we would describe as “walking frames” made from rough pieces of wood but smoothed over so that they would not in any way harm the children.

Returning to the centre of the town again we visited the school which the “Family of God” namely the former street boys received some form of education. Basically there were two classes – one from children from primary school age and the other basically for young adults. A number of the boys involved in “the Family of God” also looked after the town toilets – a project in which they were encouraged both by the Live in Hope project and the local authorities. “Testing” the facilities myself I found them among the cleanest I had ever used – and the use of the toilets provided a steady income for many of the activities of the “Family of God”.

A very happy and relaxing lunch was spent with the local Kiltegan Parish Priest, Father Paddy; after which we visited the Agapa Home for children who were HIV positive. About twenty children were housed in the home equally divided between boys and girls who received every care and attention from the project staff.

We then journeyed on to the neighbouring Parish of St Patrick where the Parish Priest Father Gerry Roche made us most welcome for a Mass at 4pm at which I was asked to commission about another ten parish catechists and rededicate those involved in other forms of parish work. It was indeed a most enthusiastic Mass with wonderful parishioners including the local “Chief” forming part of the congregation.

We then returned to the Convent for our last meal together before leaving early the next morning Friday 6th November for Nairobi and again a visit with the Kiltegan Fathers at their headquarters in Nairobi before our flight home to Scotland. Mass was celebrated in the flat in which three Franciscan Sisters resided, preparing for the teaching profession at the local teacher training college, while living in accommodation of the local Consolata Fathers. Following on an evening meal together, we then journeyed to Nairobi Airport and our journey home to Scotland.