

Capuchin Overseas Missions

SOUTH AFRICAN MISSION

**Brother Sean Cahill
OFM Cap**

Three Irish Capuchins arrived in Cape Town in October 1929 at the invitation of Bishop Bernard O'Riley. They began their pastoral work on the so-called 'Cape Flats', a vast area of sand and bush stretching out from Table Mountain and home to mostly very poor people. The three missionaries were later joined by more of their Irish confreres. They extended their pastoral presence to ten vibrant parish communities in what later became the Archdiocese of Cape Town.

In February 1974 the Capuchins began accepting local vocations. About this time the Capuchins moved into the KwaZuluNatal Province. In 1997 the Vice-Province took over two parishes in Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) and in 2000 opened a retreat/spirituality centre in Pretoria. In 2010 the Vice-Province was entrusted with a large pastoral area known as Siyabuswa in the northern Limpopo Province. Our presence was further extended to two parishes near the city of Durban in 2016.

We cannot speak about South Africa without mentioning the long years of Apartheid endured by the black majority. The 1950's saw the start of the implementation of the apartheid policy. Segregation became the law and created great problems for the Church. The friars together with the people experienced the pain of those dark years. As Franciscans we believed that our presence could, in some little way at least, bring about the reconciliation and peace most people prayed for. April 1994 saw the sun rising over the 'New South Africa' with its first fully democratic elections.

The covid-19 pandemic, with its first lockdown beginning March 2020, has only compounded the many other political, economic and social challenges facing South Africa today.

We Capuchins follow the rule of St Francis and live in fraternity with our brothers. Today our Vice-Province is comprised of South African, Indian, Tanzanian and Irish friars: a multi-cultural community in a country of many diverse cultures.



Celebrating 90 years in South Africa with the Archbishop of Cape Town, his grace, Stephen Brislin.

On a personal note, the past 48 years living as a Capuchin Franciscan in South Africa have been years of great joy and happiness. No one, of course, is exempt from the crosses and challenges of life. But through them all the promise God made in the prophet Nehemiah (8: 10), the "joy of the Lord is your strength" has been fulfilled.

FRIARS OF SOUTH KOREA

**Brother Pat Keller
OFM Cap**

The Church in Korea was founded by lay people. In 1783 a young Korean scholar, Yi Seung-hun, spent a couple of months in Beijing as a member of a diplomatic mission to the Chinese Imperial Court. During his stay he met Jesuit missionaries and obtained catechisms and devotional books from them. He smuggled the texts into Korea and began to study them with a trusted group of fellow scholars. The following year he managed to get to Beijing again. He received baptism taking the name Peter and on his return to Seoul he baptized his study group members. The Church began to grow. Eventually they were discovered by the civil authorities and were branded as dangerous subversives. An attempt was made to exterminate them but the blood of martyrs became the seed of Christians. Over the next 90 years the Catholic faithful endured wave after wave of persecution. It is estimated that over ten thousand lay men and women were martyred.

In July 1986 four Irish Capuchins arrived in Seoul. The local Church was bask-



Korean friars celebrating the feast of St Francis, October 4th.

ing in the afterglow of the canonizations of the Korean martyrs. The seminaries were full, there were thousands of people preparing for baptism. We were warmly greeted by Cardinal Kim who confessed a soft spot for the Capuchins from his days as a poor clerical student in Germany in the mid 50's. The local friars had insisted that he take lunch with them every day.

Thirty-five years have elapsed. Some 40% of the 20 to 35 age group are electing not to marry or have children. They want to spend their hard-earned salaries on themselves. Korea has the lowest birth-rate in the world. Covid 19 has devastated small businesses and the tourist industry.

Church life has been severely curtailed for almost two years. When restrictions were eased a little in early summer it was remarkable that many of the daily Mass attendees did not turn up. If things ever get back to normal it will be interesting to see how much has changed. Over the past five years vocation numbers have plummeted. Currently there are 20 Capuchins in Korea. Our main ministry is Sacramental Confession service but that has fallen victim to social distancing regulations. Some friars volunteer with Church and Local Government social services. We continue to be optimistic and to proclaim the Word of God through our daily contacts with the people.

CAPUCHIN MISSION TO ZAMBIA - BEGINNINGS



Foundations for Church at Chavuma Mission.

**Brother Noel Brennan
OFM Cap**

In his message for Mission Sunday 2021, Pope Francis says this is an opportunity to "recall with gratitude all those men and women who by their testimony of life help us to renew our baptismal commitment to be generous and joyful apostles of the Gospel. Let us remember especially all those who resolutely set out, leaving home and family behind, to bring the Gospel to all those places and people athirst for its saving message."

This year, 2021, is a special one for the Capuchins of the Irish Province. It marks the 90th anniversary of the arrival in Livingstone, Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) of the first group of friars who

"to bring the gospel" to the western part of Zambia.

They established their residence in the town of Livingstone and their area of work was one and a half times the size of Ireland. In 1950 Timothy Phelim O'Shea was appointed bishop of the Diocese of Livingstone.

From that core group in 1931 to the present day, a total of one hundred friars of the Irish province heard the call to mission and gave of their time and energy in the work of building the Church. Many ended their days and were buried in Zambia, from the young Gerard Joyce (from Urlingford, Co. Kilkenny) who died in 1944 at the age of 38, to the more senior in age, Donatus McNamara (from Glin, Co. Limerick), who died in July this year at the age of 90. The latter spent the last ten years of his life in the

vital ministry of religious formation, at the Capuchin Novitiate on the outskirts of the capital, Lusaka.

In November this year the Capuchin friars of Zambia will hold their 3-yearly Chapter in Lusaka. They will give thanks for the blessings of the past ninety years. They will elect a new leadership team and plan together for their life and ministries in the years to come. As many as forty finally professed Zambian friars will be in attendance, an indication of the growth that has taken place in the Capuchin Order in Zambia. On Mission Sunday our prayer should be that the Zambian Church, in its turn, will hear the call "to bring the Gospel to all those places and people athirst for its saving message" (Pope Francis).