

With this issue we began a new series by **Helen Fallon**, Deputy Librarian at Maynooth University. In it she speaks to African people living in Ireland. Through sharing stories we can reach a better understanding of each other and our hopes and dreams.

Sharing Our Stories

From Kano to Kimmage: Fr Samuel Terwase Udogbo CSSp reflects on his journey to ministry.

Early Days

I belong to the Tiv ethnic group. We number over four million and live in Central Nigeria, generally called the Middle Belt. I think we are the fourth largest ethnic group after Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. Estimates of the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria vary, with some sources suggesting over three hundred and fifty. I was born in Kano in the North, where my father was serving as a policeman. I was the third of seven children. My mother Ester (now deceased) came with him to Kano and she worked as a trader. She cooked and sold local food – pounded yam (fufu), rice and beans. We children all helped with cooking, going to market and preparing and selling food under her direction. We started selling very early in the morning and finished at one or two. After she counted the takings, I was sent to the bank to deposit whatever profit there was, after she counted out enough to replenish our food supplies and buy coal for cooking. This was how she made the money to pay our school fees, as education in Nigeria has to be paid for. She had not gone to school herself and was determined that all her children would be educated.

I attended government nursery and primary school in Kano, and went to Benue State (7 hours drive from Kano) for secondary school. I was a day student living in a rented apartment just 20 minutes walk to school. My parents decided on this so that I could learn about the Tiv language and culture. In Kano, where my father was stationed, we spoke Hausa and a smattering of English.

Parish Activities

The school in Benue was a government comprehensive secondary school. It was outside of school that most activities connected with my Catholic faith took place. We went to church most evenings for what is now termed religious education and also to prepare for First Communion and Confirmation. I was in the church choir and was also a lay reader. There was a youth club, a football club, dancing, drama and other activities associated with the parish. It was through parish activities that I encountered missionaries.

The Holy Ghost Fathers, the congregation I would join, had arrived in East Nigeria in 1885. Colonial Legacy Nigeria was a British colony until 1st October 1960. The colonisers had tended to favour the north of the country. There was a well-established system of

chiefs there with a locally structured judicial system, making it easy to rule from there. Thus the Hausa/Fulani people learned leadership skills, while the rest of the country was largely ignored in terms of skill development. Missionaries in the South West and the South East established schools and hospitals. After Independence (1960), missionary congregations expanded to the north, focusing on education and health.

Priesthood

When I encountered Irish missionaries in our parish activities, I was struck by their generosity. I would say the missionaries didn't give us fish, rather they taught us how to fish. We admired the missionaries – they were models for us. We talked about their way of life and wanted to be like them. Four of my class entered religious life. One became a Jesuit, another a Redemptorist, a third a diocesan priest and myself a Spiritan or Holy Ghost Father. All my post-secondary school education and my formation has been in Ireland and Ghana. My degree in Theology is from the Milltown Institute, where I studied from 2005 to 2008. I was ordained a deacon in Ireland in early 2008 and a priest in Nigeria in July 2008.

Parish Work

After my ordination I worked in two parishes in Nigeria, one in Kafanchan Diocese, Kaduna State in the North and the other in Jalingo Diocese, Taraba State, North East. Both parishes had outreach stations – one had 33, the other over 100, located in villages. It was through working with these groups that I really got involved in community development, in addition to saying Mass and doing some school teaching. The communities depended on subsistence agriculture. People grew yams, cassava, guinea corn, rice, sesame and maize and kept hens and a few livestock such as goats, pigs and sheep. I was involved with water projects, school building, getting sewing machines and helping people set up small business like soap making. After two years of this work, in 2010, I was appointed Provincial Bursar of the Province of Nigeria North East for the Holy Ghost Fathers. In that role, I was involved in sourcing funds, managing the personnel and the goods of the province and managing projects.

Development Studies

My interest in development work grew. I had no formal



Fr Samuel Terwase Udogbo CSSp speaking at the Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Seminar.

training but was quite active in the area. Hence, my superior recommended I do further studies in Ireland to better understand the theory of development and how to apply this in practical situations. The Irish Provincial of the Holy Ghost congregation agreed, provided I worked for two years initially as a chaplain in Rockwell College, which is run by the congregation, in return for sponsorship for a Masters and PhD. My time in Tipperary was interesting and challenging, working with youth in a school. After Rockwell I went to the School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin (UCD) and completed a one-year Masters in International Development. Discovering Ken Saro-Wiwa connections while at UCD, I began looking at PhD programmes. I was pleased to find that Dr Laurence Cox, an associate professor in Sociology at Maynooth, had written about Ken Saro-Wiwa and the issue of the activities of Shell and the Nigerian government in oil rich Ogoni. When I actually took up a place on a PhD programme, under the supervision of Dr Cox, I found that Maynooth Library was in possession of a major archive – the death row correspondence of Ken Saro-Wiwa to Sister Majella McCarron OLA – and this added to the richness of my research, which is on the Ogoni people.

We were quite uninformed about Ogoni back home in Nigeria. In fact, I was never in Ogoni until I commenced my PhD at Maynooth University. At secondary school in Nigeria, I had heard about the execution of Saro-Wiwa and his eight

colleagues (The Ogoni Nine). We were used to very negative propaganda about Ogoni from the Nigerian government and in some ways we were used to government brutality, but still we were shocked to hear about the executions. It highlighted the government's complicity with Shell in the environmental destruction of Ogoni. While my primary sense of identity is very much with my ethnic group, the Tiv, I also have a strong sense of identity as a Nigerian. While there has been a strong North/South division since independence, we are all fellow Nigerians.

Research on Ogoni

I'm in my fourth and hopefully final year of my PhD. My topic is "Non-violent Youth Activism in the Niger Delta", with a specific focus on Ogoni. The term Ogoni Youth is a bit of a misnomer, as youth can range from 20 to 50. I am exploring non-violent youth mobilisation and encouraging the Ogoni people to seek justice using peaceful methods. This includes writing – and Ken Saro-Wiwa is a good example of the power of writing – and peaceful protest. I went to Ogoni to carry out a two-month pilot study in 2017.

While doing my research in Ogoni I managed to interview some women. This was quite difficult to do because of the culture, which doesn't encourage women to articulate their views and desires. There is little emphasis on education for girls in Ogoni. They are prepared for marriage and childbearing from an early age. Issues such as early marriage, female education and violence against women are pertinent to all African cultures. Giving a voice to women is important.

Now I live in Kimmage Manor (the biggest Spiritan residence in Dublin) and very much enjoy being part of the community. While most of my current reading relates to my studies, I return to reading Chinua Achebe from time to time. I see him as one of our most objective and powerful post-colonial writers. The language of oppression resonates with all of us from minority groups. In the same way I was very taken with the film *The Wind that shakes the Barley*. I can see a lot of commonality between the Irish and the Nigerian experience of colonialism.

In the future I would like to see Nigeria raise itself up to being a good manager of its people. For sure, it is the responsibility of every Nigerian. Let's try to build our society for the next generation. We have the resources and we have the people. Let's get to work! ■

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