

THE MSC Message



Missionaries
of the
Sacred Heart
MSC MISSIONS



**MSCs reaching out:
Fr Michael visits
Venezuela**

Read more on pages 4 & 5

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Summer 2019

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From the Director



Dear Friends,

Summer blessings! I hope you are enjoying the bright, beautiful days of early summer. It is always wonderful to welcome the return of the light at this time of year.

I began this year with a visit to our MSC parishes in Venezuela. Four Irish MSCs began our first mission project in Venezuela over 50 years ago, and today, we are still working to help local communities who are living in terrible conditions brought about by the current climate of social and political unrest.

I visited Venezuela at the same time last year, and upon my return, it struck me how much these difficult living conditions are taking their toll on local families. People were queuing up to receive a bar of soap from the supplies I had brought, because they can't afford to buy it. Food is scarce, daily essentials are massively overpriced, water is limited, and electricity outages are common. Unrest, fear, and violence prevail.

Our MSCs are doing all they can to help, and despite hardship, poverty, and hunger, our parishioners are very generous, giving back what they can. We have even had extremely poor people bringing gifts of food to one of our MSCs who was ill – a true lesson in compassion and in loving one's neighbour.

You can read more about my trip on pages 4 and 5, and you can see for yourself just how much the support of our mission friends means. I often say that we are a family of faith, and to see God's love in action through the unity of that family is a truly humbling and inspiring thing. You have my heartfelt thanks for your friendship, as always, and I wish you a peaceful and prayerful summer season in the light of the Lord.

With every grace and blessing,

Fr. Michael O'Connell MSC

Director of the MSC Missions Office

MSC Pilgrimage to Lourdes



MSCs Fr Tim Gleeson, Fr Charles Sweeney, Fr Eugene Clarkson, Fr Joe McGee, and Fr Michael O'Connell joined our pilgrims on our 2018 trip to Lourdes.

From the joyful opening ceremony, which saw 80 pilgrims join together in prayer and song, to a beautiful Mass at the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, our 2018 trip was a delightful one.

A very special stop on our pilgrimage journey was Mass at Sheepfold Chapel. This rustic chapel dates back to the 1800s, when St Bernadette is said to have sheltered her sheep under its thatched roof. With a great sense of peace and serenity, Mass was an especially memorable occasion for our pilgrims, and prayers were offered for our mission friends at home.

Many thanks to all involved in making our 2018 pilgrimage such a rewarding one, where many happy memories were made, new friendships blossomed, and old acquaintances were fondly renewed.

Our 2019 pilgrimage to Lourdes will take place this year from September 14th to 19th (5 nights full board). For further information, please contact Joe Walsh Tours on +353 (0) 1 2410803.



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Thank you from Kerala, India

In 2018, we reached out to our mission friends to support our MSCs in Kerala, India, where the worst flooding in almost a century caused untold devastation.

In August 2018, the state of Kerala was submerged following the highest recorded rainfall in almost 100 years. Heavy rain wreaked havoc across the state; hundreds of people were killed, millions were forced to flee from their homes, and buildings, cars, and livestock were all washed away in the deluge. The MSC Sacred Heart Seminary, located on the bank of the River Periyar, also suffered from severe water damage.

"The house was in a terrible state," says Fr Syam Kumar MSC, Indian Union Secretary. "Even after the water had receded, there was a serious danger from snakes and poisonous insects hiding in the house. The damage caused by the flood was colossal."

Fr Richard Suresh MSC has now written from Kerala to update us on



the ongoing repair work in the Sacred Heart Seminary. "Painting work, roofing work, and pathway repair has been going on," he writes. "It is very difficult to get workers in Kerala, as there are many, many houses that need workers to carry out repairs. We have not yet been able to finish the repairs as we had planned, but we are still working on it."

"This experience came as a reminder that the difficulties we face don't come to destroy us, but difficult times come to make us durable and tough."

At the seminary, MSC students journey together on the path to priesthood, and the house serves as a local foundation for parish outreach and ministry. The repair work is essential to ensure the



safety and security of the MSC community in Kerala, allowing them to continue their vital work in aiding local families who have suffered terrible losses in the floods.

"We really admire the dedication of our men in fighting the odds posed by the flood," says Fr Syam. "This experience came as a reminder that the difficulties we face don't come to destroy us, but difficult times come to make us durable and tough. As the old saying goes: 'Tough times don't last but tough people do.'"

"Thank you for all your support, concern, and love towards our Indian MSC community," writes Fr Richard. "Please keep us in your prayers, and we assure you that you are in our prayers also."

Ring in the good news in Russia

Bishop Clemens Pickel writes from Saratov, Russia, where the Irish Province of the MSC provided funding for the repair and transport of a local church organ.

At the end of 2018, the church of Christ the King celebrated the 25th anniversary of the church's consecration, along with the blessing of the newly repaired organ.

The Christ the King Church, located in Marx, was the first Catholic church to be built in Russia following the fall of the USSR. Construction began in 1990 and took 3 years to complete, and today, this is a welcoming space for locals to come to pray.

Our Russian mission began in 1995, when 3 MSC priests from the Irish Province travelled to Russia to aid in the re-building of the Catholic Church following the state's anti-religious campaign. They helped to establish the solid foundations of a spiritual community in Russia, and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart now provide support to the current organisations and lay leaders who continue the work begun by our MSCs over 20 years ago.

"We had a beautiful feast in Marx," writes Bishop Pickel, "where we celebrated 25 years since the consecration of the Christ the King Church and the blessing of the organ. Thank you to the Irish Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart!"



Venezuela: A country in crisis

In January 2019, Fr Michael O'Connell MSC spent three weeks in Venezuela, visiting MSC parishes in the cities of Maracaibo and Caracas. Here, he shares his experiences and his thoughts on a country in crisis.

A daily struggle

"The value of the Venezuelan currency, the bolívar, changes daily and fluctuates wildly.

When I arrived in Caracas on January 4th, the average wage of 5,000 bolívares per month was worth USD \$7. Only one week later, on January 11th, the same 5,000-bolívar wage was worth just USD \$2.

When you think that a small loaf of bread costs around 1,200 bolívares, a kilo of cheese costs 3,000 bolívares, 24 eggs cost 6,000 bolívares, and a packet of baby wipes costs 3,900 bolívares, it's a mystery as to how people survive from day to day."



On the road

"There's a severe shortage of parts to repair cars, and people can't afford the cost of parts and repairs. If you can't bend a wire to make it fit, you're in trouble! The mother of one of our students earns a relatively good wage of 240,000 bolívares per year, but recently had to pay 400,000 bolívares just to have her car serviced.

Petrol is cheap here. Before devaluation came in last year, USD \$1 would have filled 31,300 Ford Fiestas. Today, people get the petrol for free, and the only cost is tipping the petrol attendant.

I attended a meeting of around 40 teachers in Maracaibo, and there was only one car in the car park. Trucks are used as buses, or big taxis, so people can get around. After the teachers' meeting, we were driving home in Fr Vincent Screene's car, and a big truck passed. We realised that the people in the truck were waving at Fr Vincent's car – and then we saw it was the teachers, all going home from the meeting together. Even the head teacher doesn't have a car; she walks to school every day."

Food for thought

"The government are supposed to issue food boxes to each household once a month. It doesn't happen every month, and in some areas, the food parcel is a bag, not a box, so it contains a smaller amount. Some areas get nothing at all.

Each box is supposed to contain a good selection of basic food: sugar, black beans, rice, two packets of spaghetti, lentils, two litres of cooking oil, six tins of tuna, and ketchup. If it comes, it makes a great difference to a hungry household.

There is a saying in Venezuela: 'He who divides gets the biggest portion'. Many people get very little, if anything at all.

In Maracaibo, there's a supermarket called the Ritz. Here at home, we associate the Ritz with a luxurious afternoon tea or a glamorous place to stay – in Venezuela, a trip to the Ritz means being able to buy basic groceries for your family."

MSCs reaching out in Venezuela

In the classroom

“The Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School in Maracaibo currently has approximately 850 to 900 students, from infants right up to teenagers. The parental contribution to the school is 100 bolívares, the equivalent of just 3 cents. The head teacher has a university degree and a Masters, and is head of a school of over 850 children and approximately 45 staff. Basic food for a week costs around 6,000 bolívares, and her weekly wages are 2,600 bolívares. She doesn’t have a car; she walks to school.

We recently donated money to the school to help them to build new classrooms, and this contribution also meant that an outdoor corridor has now been walled in, where before there was a steep and dangerous drop.

There are three projects underway in the school at the moment:

1. Collecting toys for the play area in the preschool.
2. A shoe-making project, where shoes are made for the children manually. The children are taught the process so they are equipped to make their own shoes and will perhaps be able to sell them.
3. The provision of breakfast. The government do not supply food boxes here, so this would encourage more children to come to school; when they’re hungry, they stay at home. For this plan to be undertaken successfully, it would require a large investment in essential facilities like utensils and fridges, as well as security to prevent theft.”



MSCs making a difference

“I brought with me a suitcase full of toiletries kindly donated by parishioners of the Sacred Heart Church in Cork, and some were given out after Mass one day, while the rest were kept back for people who called to the door of the MSC house for help. There was a queue for the toiletries we gave out, and people were extremely grateful.

Venezuelan people are very clean and very proud; they shower and wash their clothes a lot. Currently, water is pumped into Maracaibo and Caracas just three or four times a week. Our MSCs know if water hasn’t been sent to the district for a while, as people won’t come to the church if they can’t wash. People often come to the MSC house to shower and wash their clothes.

Fr Vincent Screene has given out water cooler boxes to parishioners in Maracaibo, so they can make and sell juice using local fruits, particularly mangoes. These coolers have a tap on them, and they can hold about 44 litres of liquid.

Fr Vincent also provided coffee grinders and vacuum flasks to parishioners, so they can make their own coffee and sell it. All of these things help people to gain back a little bit of independence and self-sufficiency, and help to make life more tolerable for local families.”

Faith and hope in Tsakane, South Africa

A township just outside Johannesburg, the name “Tsakane” translates as “happiness”. As is the case in many parts of South Africa, however, Tsakane struggles with significant social and economic issues, and our MSCs are on hand to provide practical aid and spiritual guidance to local communities.

Looking to the future at Our Lady of Victory



Irish Provincial Leader Fr Carl Tranter MSC received a warm welcome on a recent visit.

Great plans are in place for the community of Our Lady of Victory in Tsakane.

Under the leadership of parish priest Fr Martin Morrissey MSC, the purchase of a new building for the community is in its final stages. This will then be developed into a church for the community, which currently numbers 60 and is growing steadily.

At the moment, parishioners gather together to pray in a small family garage. Space and facilities are very limited, but this doesn't dampen their spirits!

“The people have been coming to pray here in a family garage,” says Fr Martin. “This new church won't be the perfect thing, but it will be something of their own, and that will make all the difference.”

“There's a lot of poverty around,” says Fr Martin, “and we do our best to help wherever we can.” A feeding scheme at St Paul's brings much-needed nourishment to local families, and our MSCs work alongside the Dominican Sisters in the area to bring practical aid and spiritual guidance to vulnerable families who have nowhere else to turn.

New beginnings at St Francis Xavier

A project that began two years ago is now nearing its final stages of completion at the church of St Francis Xavier in Tsakane. Parish priest Fr Martin Morrissey MSC is leading the project, which sees a new church put in place for the growing congregation.

The community are delighted with the development of the new church, having previously gathered to pray in a school classroom.

An altar and sanctuary area have been set up, and the windows have been put in, while a new ceiling still has to be put in place.

Fr Martin and the community are working hard to bring their plans to fruition, although the budget is tight. Fr Martin was able to source benches from another church around 80km away, acquiring 28 church benches for 50,000 South African Rand (approximately €3,500). The same benches would have cost 300,000 Rand, or around €18,500, if they had to be bought new.

The community of St Francis Xavier now numbers over 100 people, and is growing steadily. In October 2018, parishioners enjoyed a day of great celebration when a total of 27 adults celebrated the sacraments of Baptism, Communion, and Confirmation.



The new church will provide a safe and secure space for parishioners to gather and pray.



Celebrating World Youth Day 2019



Fr Alan was up with the lark and ready for the Papal Mass at World Youth Day 2019.



Pilgrims gathered from all over the world to celebrate WYD in Panama.



"An amazing week and a fantastic group": Fr Alan and the MSC team on the road!

Every three years, young Catholics from all over the world gather together to celebrate World Youth Day – and this year, Panama was lit up in the spirit of faith, prayer, and an overwhelming joy.

Fr Alan Neville and the MSC Vocations team travelled to Panama to join this year's celebrations in January, and even the intense heat and early starts couldn't dampen their enthusiasm!

January 22nd marked the official opening of World Youth Day 2019, and what an event it was! Prayer, music, good food, and new friends made for a day to

remember in the Panama sunshine as the MSC team met fellow pilgrims from Venezuela, Poland, Guatemala, and the USA.

Catechesis with Bishop Edward Burns, from Dallas, Texas, proved powerful for our MSC group. "Bishop Ed spoke about the joy he encounters in living his vocation," says Fr Alan as he recalls the bishop's words: "To say 'Yes!' to the Lord is to enter into the mystery of God's love for us."

January 26th saw the MSC team join pilgrims from over 140 countries at the St John Paul II Park for the Vigil Mass, while the following day demanded a 5.00am alarm clock ahead of the Papal Mass at 8.10am.

In a beautiful Mass, Pope Francis spoke of the necessity of building bridges rather than walls, and said that although the celebrations were coming to an end, the fruit of World Youth Day continues in parish and communities around the world as pilgrims make their way home.

"What an amazing week and a fantastic group," said Fr Alan. "Thanks Panama – you were amazing. Roll on World Youth Day in Lisbon 2022!"

If you feel that you might have a calling to religious life, please contact MSC Vocations Director, Fr Alan Neville.

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The money donated is invested, and the interest goes towards the education of our students to the priesthood.

Any donation, large or small, is very much appreciated and is of great help in ensuring that our students are well prepared for the work that lies ahead on the mission fields. You are part of the great work they will do, in future years, in many lands. May God reward you for your kindness.

