

# THE MSC Message



Missionaries  
*of the*  
**Sacred Heart**  
MSC MISSIONS



Helping survivors of  
Typhoon Odette in  
the Philippines

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## Summer 2022

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## From the Director



Dear Friends,

It is with great joy and gratitude that I welcome you to the Summer 2022 edition of the *MSC Message* - my first time greeting you in this capacity since I took over the role of MSC Missions Office Director from Fr Michael at the beginning of the year. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to take the Director's seat, and pick up the reins as we continue on our shared missionary journey, embodying the love of the Sacred Heart in our world.

As you will see in the following pages, this year has already been a busy one for our MSC communities at home and abroad. One highlight has been a visit from our MSC Superior General, Fr Absalón Alvarado, who spent three weeks travelling around the Irish Province. He even found time to celebrate Mass with us here in Cork, and you are welcome to watch a recording of the ceremony on our website [www.mscomissions.ie](http://www.mscomissions.ie).

Meanwhile, this edition of our newsletter will show you how our MSCs are helping survivors of a devastating typhoon in the Philippines; share news of our outreach work alongside our OLSH Sisters; celebrate members of our Irish Province in the Venezuelan Region; and bring you updates from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, South Sudan, the Pacific Islands, and beyond.

It can't be denied that the state of our world is a worrying one, from the atrocities of war to the ongoing COVID pandemic. The friendship and support that I have seen from our community of mission friends, even in just a few short months, is a reassuring reminder of the power of faith, kindness, and love in all its forms. Together, we carry on; may God bless and protect you and your loved ones as we look ahead to a bright and joyful summer season.

With warm wishes and every blessing,

*Fr. John Fitzgerald MSC*

Director of the MSC Missions Office

## A letter from the Democratic Rep. of Congo



Bishop Toussaint Iluku Bolumbu MSC writes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where MSCs are working to improve desperately needed educational facilities in the diocese of Bokungu-Ikela.

The diocese is an extremely poor region, where three MSC communities have been ministering to 15 parishes in isolated regions for over 60 years. Thanks to the generosity of our mission friends in the Irish Province, Bishop Toussaint and his team have been able to begin funding the construction of a school building in Yetsi, and subsequently buy essential basic equipment such as benches and tables. Prior to this, many children had spent classes sitting on the floor.

"Greetings from our deepest forest centre, Bokungu," wrote Bishop Toussaint. "We have been collecting local material for the Yetsi school construction, and the boat we have been waiting for, for so long, finally is close to arriving in Bokungu. Cement, sheet metals (plates), and iron bars will finally reach us here. It is my duty to build a good school for our pupils there."

**"Thank you so much for your support and please keep in your prayers an intention for Bokungu-Ikela, a rural diocese full of challenges. May the Lord bless you."**

With the Catholic Church being one of the main sources of hope for struggling families in the region, Bishop Toussaint and our MSCs continue to do their best to lay the groundwork to give local children, and generations to come, vital resources in education, and with it, hope for the future.

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# Superior General visits Irish Province

On Easter Monday, MSC Superior General Fr Absalón Alvarado began a three-week visit to the Irish Province. Prior to this, it had been 14 years since the last visit of our Superior General, then Fr Mark McDonald, in 2008.

Originally from Guatemala, Fr Absalón was elected MSC Superior General in 2017, at the General Chapter in Rome. Fr Absalón held the role of Provincial Leader of the Central American Province prior to his election, and is the first MSC Superior General from the Global South. With a Masters in Theology and a PhD in Psychotherapy, Fr Absalón has also ministered as a Vocations Director and Formator, as well as spending some time working in parishes in Nicaragua.

With an extensive itinerary taking in as many communities and projects as possible, Fr Absalón wanted to get to know the members of the Irish Province on this trip; to understand our reality, listen to our hopes and dreams, share in our struggles and disappointments, and to confirm us in our mission to be God's heart on earth. In essence, he came to listen and walk with us for three weeks, in a wonderful opportunity for our Province to reflect and grow together in faith and understanding.



During his visit, Fr Absalón highlighted his gratitude to our mission friends and benefactors here in the Irish Province. "Each of you has shared and collaborated for many years in the development of this culture of mission around the world," he said. "Through my service as Superior General, I have had the opportunity to visit many projects throughout the world, where you, and the Mission Office of Ireland, have made life possible. All of you have made it possible."



*Our Superior General meets MSC members on the Western Road, Cork.*



*A special celebration of the Eucharist at the Sacred Heart Church in Cork.*



*Fr Absalón spends time with MSC communities in Galway.*

## "May we continue to build hope for today's world."

On Sunday, April 24th, our Superior General concelebrated Mass in the Sacred Heart Church on the Western Road, Cork, along with MSCs Fr John Fitzgerald and Fr John Finn. The Sacred Heart Church was filled with local mission friends and parishioners, while over 700 people tuned in to pray with us via our live stream on the morning of the Mass.

Our Superior General gave his thanks for our MSC members across the Irish Province, who have worked and continue to work at home and abroad in our shared mission of making the Sacred Heart of Jesus known and loved everywhere. "I thank God for those who are here in this community of Cork," Fr Absalón reflected. "They are living missionary witnesses who have spent their lives for the good of so many human beings, in Ireland, in England, in South Africa, in Texas, in Russia, and in Venezuela. Thank you very much, my confrères, for your ministry, and for your testimony of missionary life."

As he concluded his sermon, Fr Absalón reiterated his appreciation to the friends and benefactors that make our work possible. "I say it again – thank you for your generosity. We have been praying for all of you. Let's continue praying for our mission. We pray for you, and you pray for us, for all the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart throughout the world. Thank you so much for being with us, for being part of our history, for being part of our lives. You are the reason for us to be MSC, you give sense to our consecration as Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Thank you so much for that."

A recording of the Mass celebrated by our MSC Superior General is now available to watch on our website [www.mscmissions.ie](http://www.mscmissions.ie)

## Promoting education in South Sudan

In November 2020, Fr Alan Neville MSC bid farewell to the Irish Province, to minister with the Loreto Rumbek community in Maker Kuei, South Sudan.

“In addition to the work in Loreto College, I have been drafted by the Diocese of Rumbek to help run the local Catholic University. It may sound a grand affair, but it is certainly a lot more simple than you’d imagine. We have a roof, but no ceiling; windows, but no glass; and a floor with no tiles. The less said about the two pit toilets that serve the campus the better. In February, we had the cleaner in to take care of the bat infestation in the library, that also serves as the office.

At the moment, we have a sum total of 59 women and men studying here. All are committed and enthusiastic about their third-level studies. We are also seeing an exciting new development. In traditional culture here, once a woman has her first baby, she leaves formal education to focus full-time on child-rearing and subsistence farming. However, so far, I have met a number of young mothers who are coming back to study, with their newborn under their arm. It is unprecedented and we are looking at ways of supporting them and their young families.

For me, the main reason the university is so important is that we are the newest country in the world and we need to develop the local economy. It has to be stimulated by well-trained, committed teachers and hardworking, innovative business people. Charity is excellent for crisis situations. It’s an act of solidarity and compassion for someone you will never meet, but who you are ready to call brother or sister. However, charity is not a long-term strategy and instead we need to increasingly invest in people on the ground to effect their own change, not just raising up themselves and their families, but entire communities as well.”



*God bless,  
or, as they say here,  
Bi Nhialic arrer kek yin,  
Fr Alan*

## COVID aid continues in the Pacific Islands

Fr Martin Everi MSC shares photos of MSC relief aid for families in lockdown in Kiribati, as COVID-19 cases soared in the Pacific Islands earlier this year.

An island country in the central Pacific Ocean, Kiribati did not mark its first positive case of COVID-19 until May 2021; the island nation closed its borders in March 2020 and remained almost entirely COVID-free as a result. The first international commercial flight in almost two years landed in Kiribati in mid-January 2022, with 36 of the 54 passengers testing positive for the coronavirus upon arrival. The government imposed a nationwide curfew on January 19th, and the country went into lockdown shortly afterwards, on January 22nd, with a state of emergency then extended further due to a sharp rise in cases.

At the end of January, shortly after lockdown was imposed, St Joseph’s Parish in Bikenibeu brought essential emergency aid to families in Buota who were severely affected by the restrictions. Fr Martin Everi MSC, who organised the outreach drive, posted on his Facebook page thanking those involved: “From your generous gifts, we were able to deliver 3 loaded trucks of goods to our brothers and sisters in Buota during these challenging times. Your kind donations will be given to families that are most affected due to this lockdown. May God reward your acts of kindness.”



# Typhoon Odette hits the Philippines

Typhoon Odette struck the Philippines on December 16th, 2021, killing over 400 people, injuring over 500 more, and leaving hundreds of thousands displaced. MSCs in the region are providing ongoing support for survivors, including the repair and construction of over 330 homes in Surigao City.

The MSC Mission Office in the Philippines launched an immediate emergency response programme in the wake of the typhoon, providing relief packs including food, water, and essential supplies to survivors.

Our MSC Centre for the Poor, located in Butuan, has been carrying out ongoing relief efforts headed by community leader Fr Richie Gomez MSC. Writing from an evacuation centre on Christmas Eve, where he and a group of volunteers were handing out meals to the indigenous Badjao community, who had been “washed out” of their homes on the shoreline, Fr Richie told Irish Provincial Superior Fr Carl Tranter MSC how grateful he was for the “overwhelming support” that our Filipino MSC brothers have received from the Irish Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.



*“I would like to thank you for your untiring support to the Philippine Province. We are your extended arms, feet, mind, and heart in reaching the poor, and now with our typhoon survivors.”*

*~ Fr Richie Gomez MSC  
Community Leader at the MSC Centre for the Poor*



Recalling the impact of Typhoon Odette, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart – Social Initiative and Collaborative Action Project said, “When it made landfall, winds of up to 210 km per hour were uprooting coconut trees, ripping down electricity poles, and hurling slabs of corrugated tin and wood through the air.”

The MSC-SICAP group, working in conjunction with the MSC Centre for the Poor, are currently carrying out a strategic disaster response plan, with several recovery stages in place to aid in the restoration of communities across Surigao. In March, MSCs in the Philippines began distribution of housing materials to five communities across Bayagnan Island in Surigao City. The materials provided will allow for the repair and construction of homes for over 330 households, where houses have been severely damaged, often completely destroyed, by the typhoon.



**Relief aid is ongoing, and we ask that you please keep our MSC brothers and the people of the Philippines in your prayers as they continue to navigate this landscape of loss and destruction.**

# OLSH in Brazil & Papua New Guinea

We have received two recent updates from Brazil and Papua New Guinea, where our Sisters in Christ, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, have been able to facilitate two new missionary projects thanks to the generosity of our mission friends here in the Irish Province.

The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Alfenas, Brazil, have been able to renovate a second-hand clothing store, where all proceeds from sales go towards feeding poor and hungry families in the region. Funds raised from the shop buy enough food to make care packages for 65 local families every month, which are made up and distributed by volunteers.



OLSH Sisters in the Hartzler Centre, an aged-care centre in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, have also sent their gratitude for funding provided for a new accessible laundry and extra sinks – facilities which will make life far easier for staff and residents of the centre, as well as affording improved safety in the continuing battle against COVID-19.



*“Your generous donors are remembered in prayer all over the world, with deepest gratitude.”*

*~ Sr Jenny Christie FDNSC  
International Development Officer  
for the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*

# Together in prayer in Mozambique

In March 2018, our MSC Mozambique mission was established in Pemba, a very poor part of Mozambique with little to no church infrastructure or active pastoral ministry.

Since its establishment, the Mozambique mission has gone from strength to strength, growing in faith and prayer even in the face of what have often seemed like insurmountable challenges. Our MSCs were on hand when two cyclones ripped through the region, one after another, just a year after the mission began, leaving over 21,000 people homeless. With the support of our provinces around the world, they have helped local families to rebuild homes, livelihoods, and lives, and today, they continue in their shared journey to make the love of the Sacred Heart known and felt across the district of Pemba.

The MSC Mozambique Facebook page has shared a host of wonderful pictures from recent Masses and celebrations that have taken place across Pemba, from confessions, baptisms, First Holy Communions, and marriages, to recent Easter ceremonies. Many of these celebrations and ceremonies, including weekly Masses, take place outdoors or in family homes, with the bare minimum of facilities in the region.

God’s love is a hugely compelling factor for these families and communities, and they celebrate their faith in every way possible, given the lack of facilities in the area. The strength, resilience, and spirit demonstrated by local communities is an inspiration to behold; please keep our MSCs in Mozambique, and the communities they serve there, in your prayers.



# Celebrations in the Venezuelan Region

The new year brought great joy for MSC communities at home and abroad, with two members of the Irish Province celebrating milestone steps on their missionary journeys in the Venezuelan Region.

## Vow renewal of Miguel Ibarra MSC

Miguel Ibarra MSC, a member of the Irish Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in the Missionary Community of Venezuela, made his First Profession in February 2021 and renewed his temporary vows in Caracas on January 29th, 2022. Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, the celebration was a small, private one, attended by some family members, but nonetheless special for it. A beautiful Mass was celebrated by MSCs Fr Tom O'Brien and Fr John Jennings, while Miguel's vows were received by Fr Yonys Mendoza MSC.

After spending some time at home with his family, Miguel has returned to São Paulo, Brazil, to continue his theology studies in the MSC Scholasticate.



## First Profession of Yordy Blanco MSC

Miguel Ibarra is joined at the MSC Scholasticate in São Paulo by Yordy Blanco, a fellow member of the Irish Province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in the Missionary Community of Venezuela, who took his First Profession vows in Brazil on Wednesday, February 2nd (the Feast of the Presentation and the 2022 World Day of Consecrated Life).

Yordy completed his noviciate year in Itajubá in Brazil, and made his First Profession alongside his fellow novices, Diego Zambrano, Guicheme Bernal, Mateus Borodiak, Pedro Henrique, and Valmir Silva. These six young men are members of the Provinces of Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba and São Paulo, the Section of Ecuador, and the Missionary Community of Venezuela. The Mass was presided by Fr Humberto Henriques MSC, Assistant General, and the vows were received by the Provincials of the three Brazilian Provinces.



If you feel that you might have a calling to religious life, please contact our MSC Vocations Team, Fr Con O'Connell & Fr Tony Nolan, by emailing

[vocations@mscmiissions.ie](mailto:vocations@mscmiissions.ie)

Please cut here

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MSC Missions Office,  
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A Burse is a sum of money which is set up in honour of God, His Blessed Mother, or one of His servants. We have several Burses from which people can choose – a full list is available on request. The most popular Burses in recent years have been the Sacred Heart, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and St Padre Pio.

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.

