

## Welcome Address, Jubilee Celebration, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2018, Ardfoyle

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Good morning. You are all very welcome. Thank you for coming to join us on this very joyful day. Cead mile failte to Stephanie and Dympna, our two Jubilarians, whose lives we are gathered today to celebrate. We also hold in our heart and prayer Sr Cassie Hurley who is a Golden jubilarian today too and who will be celebrating in Tanzania on Mission Sunday, the 21<sup>st</sup> October.

Failte to Sr Stephanie's family: you have travelled near and far to be here: you are all very welcome to Ardfoyle and to this celebration. After all the difficult moments your family has had to bear recently, it is indeed great to have you here with us today to celebrate this joyous occasion. Sr Dympna's people could not be here with us in body but they are surely united with us in our joy and prayer of thanksgiving. Failte to Fr Colum O'Shea SMA, our chief celebrant today. Failte to all our OLA Sisters, especially you who have come from our other communities to celebrate with us. A special word of welcome to our newly elected Superior General, Mary T Barron; also to Sr Kate Costigan who immediately after lunch today is heading back on mission to Tanzania.

We are here for a Jubilee, to celebrate the anniversary of something significant for which we are all grateful. Today we commemorate and celebrate the fact that Dympna professed her life to God, in the service of God's Kingdom, fifty golden years ago and Stephanie sixty diamond years ago. Sisters Dympna and Stephanie: today, we thank God who called you, and we thank you for your generous response to that call.

The two women we are celebrating today took the same vows in the same congregation. However, their lives have been very varied. Undoubtedly, a book could be written on each one and I hope each one will write her own memoirs. But in brief:

Sr Dympna, is an Ulster woman like myself, born and reared in Castleblaney. Since her profession in 1968, she has travelled quite a bit of the world and had many varied experiences. Qualified as a nurse in Glasgow, a midwife in Drogheda, and then served for twelve good years, from Sept '76 to May '89, providing health care, pastoral care and social care, in different parts of Nigeria, including Ikire in Ibadan, a while in an intercongregational project in Mushin, Lagos, then Ebutte-Meta, Lagos and then up north to the rural mission in Papiri. Then some years between Rome and Dublin and in 1993 on to the Republic of Niger for seven years. Four years back in Ireland and then in 2004 to Algeria for eight years, before returning to Ireland in 2012. Both Niger and Algeria were quite courageous adventures I imagine in that they were not very familiar to the Irish province of the OLA. To go there and find new fields of mission and new ways of doing and being a missionary must have been particularly challenging; I am told you spoke Yoruba, Hausa, Arabic, and of course French, and that is indeed no small feat, trying to be close to the people and walk the journey of life with the people you lived among. Later, you worked a while in Cork with migrants in Cois Tine, in 2015 a few months service in Mwanza, Tanzania, and now for over three years based in Rostrevor. Everywhere you have been Dympna you have been very much appreciated and so too today in Rostrevor; thank you for all you have done and still do and even more importantly, thank you for who you have been and who you still are today. I believe you like to do not for the sake of doing alone, even though you have surely done great things, but for the sake of 'being', being close to nature and in touch with life, being present and being true to self, and I pray we can all learn to do that.

Sr Stephanie, is a Cork woman. Ardfoyle is quite near your home in Blackrock but the journey of life and mission has taken you far. In your sixty years of life and ministry as an OLA you have served so very generously and selflessly in many different places and capacities: here in Ireland for different periods, whether in Cork in the Tidings office or in Rostrevor in the OLA centre there, or in parish work in Dublin including in the Gort Mhuire retreat centre; also teaching and pastoral work in Lagos, Nigeria, in both Ikeja and in Maryland for about twelve years. Serving the OLA congregation in Rome as English Secretary and as General Bursar for a good

sixteen years. I myself was a student in Rome for some of that time and very much appreciated your kindness and thoughtfulness to me while I was there, as I know so many others also did. The Sisters in Holland particularly appreciated your help to them and you still accompany and support them in such very valued ways. You also served in Leigh and in London teaching and in pastoral work for a good ten years: I know you are so fondly remembered there in West Green, and Fr Joe the PP has sent greetings. Now, when a woman your age deserves to take things easy, you are here in Ardfoy still running the Mission Crown office from which you are in regular correspondence with so many good people throughout Ireland who ask for prayers and are so very generous to our missions.

Missionary service in Nigeria, Niger, Algeria, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Rome, Tanzania... and beyond; Serving in schools, hospitals, teacher training colleges, bursars, parishes and dioceses; Service through teaching, nursing, pastoral care, catechetics, accounts, presence... Their stories are varied, but aspects of what we call OLA charism and spirituality abound from the life story of both our Jubilarians: whether it was in Africa, England, Rome or in Ireland, both Dympna and Stephanie worked generously, with audacity, with great love and self-sacrifice in the field to which she was sent. They worked for and in OLA mission, each in a different way, and they continue to do so today through their service, their prayer, their presence, their witness and their person.

Thank you, Sisters, for your commitment to God and to mission. We are happy we have this opportunity to celebrate you and your life today, while you are still very much alive and well. We pray that God may grant each one of you your heart's desire and many more years of health, happiness and inner peace.

Again welcome and may we all enjoy our day!

I now hand you over to Fr Colum to begin our Eucharistic celebration.

*Kathleen McGarvey*  
Provincial Leader