

Welcome Address, Jubilee Celebration, 7th September 2019, Ardfoyle

Good morning. You are all very welcome. Thank you for coming to join us on this very joyful day. Cead mile failte to Sisters Henrietta and Grace, our two Jubilarians, whose lives we are gathered today to celebrate. We also hold in our heart and prayer Sr Emmanuella Ohumaegbulem who is a Silver jubilarian today and who celebrated in Nigeria on Tuesday, 4th September, together with five other OLA Sisters of the Nigeria Province.

Failte to Sr Grace's family and friends: you have travelled near and far to be here: you are all very welcome to Ardfoyle and to this celebration as we mark her sixty years of Religious Missionary Life. Failte to Bishop Noel O'Reagan 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 Superior General, Mary T Barron, who is at home on break; also to Sr Kate Costigan who in a few days will head 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 Grace professed her life to God, in the service of God's Kingdom, sixty golden years ago and Henrietta seventy-five years ago.

Sister Grace, today, we thank God who called you, and we thank you for your generous response to that call. Sr Grace, born in Kildare and grown up for the most part in Dublin, entered Ardfoyle at the age of twenty. After first profession in 1959, Grace spent some time 'questing' (going around Ireland asking people to help with the missions – not an easy task!), before training as a nurse and midwife in Manchester. She was then assigned to Abeokuta in the south of Nigeria, to work as a nurse in the busy OLA hospital there. For about twenty years, Grace served as a nurse and tutor in Nigeria, between Abeokuta, Akwanga in the north, Kaduna, Ibadan, and a short while in Benin and Zawan. I know that Grace gave herself with great enthusiasm and commitment to her students and patients wherever she served, and she also found great fulfilment and gave great joy to the prisoners whom she often used to visit. Grace returned to Ireland in Summer 1989, and from then she cared for elderly people first in Lancaster in the Hospice there, then in Blackrock road in the SMA house, then in Leigh in England for six years, and then to Castlemagarret for two and a half years. After this, in 1998, Grace went into an entirely new field, working as OLA Secretary in the Generalate in Rome where she served for five years, before being called back to Ireland to help in the Infirmary here in Ardfoyle. Grace looked after our own infirm Sisters here for three years and then, after some time of sabbatical, moved to Rostrevor. Until March this year when Grace moved back to Ardfoyle, she was part of the Rostrevor community and was very much involved in the parish and appreciated by the people there. And of course, even here, Grace still helps in whatever way she can, especially making

sure the wash-up room is in order and we all enjoy nice clean and dry dish clothes to dry our dishes!

Equally we thank God for this great Wexford woman, Sr Henrietta, who entered Ardfoy way back in 1942, at the age of nineteen. She made her First profession in 1944, seventy-five years ago. In 1948, after acquiring a B.Sc. Degree from U.C.C and a H.Dip in London, she was sent on mission to Nigeria. There, she spent over fifty years, as a teacher, principle, founder, administrator - in St Theresa's College Ibadan for twelve years, in Maria Goretti's Benin for about twenty-two years, and in St Bernadette's Abeokuta for about fifteen years. She also did a short stint of about six months in Ho, Ghana. Although Henrietta returned to Ireland in the year 1999, first to Rostrevor and then here to Ardfoy in 2003, her past pupils continue to visit her, and they remember her with great appreciation and respect. Today, her greatly reduced health limits Henrietta's independence but her quiet peaceful presence, and her beautiful smile, reflect the gentleness and graciousness that have characterized all her days.

Missionary service in Nigeria, Ghana, England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Rome and beyond; Serving in schools, hospitals, clinics, teacher and nurse training colleges, parishes; Service through teaching, nursing, pastoral care, administration, leadership.... Sr Grace and Henrietta are two very different women, with different personalities, talents and gifts; and their life journeys are varied. However, they both share the OLA charism and spirituality: wherever they were, they both worked energetically, 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 life of prayer and of witness. So too, Sr Emmanuella, who celebrates her silver jubilee in Nigeria, shares this charism and mission, and lives it out today in her care for the sick in Tanzania, which is part of the Irish Province.

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. We pray that God may grant each one of you the graces you need. We also pray that young people in Ireland may be inspired by you and may learn to dream generous dreams of giving oneself totally to the service of God and of others through the religious missionary life.

Again welcome and may we all enjoy our day!

I now hand you over to our main celebrant, Bishop Noel, to begin our Eucharistic celebration.

Kathleen McGarvey
Provincial Leader