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Mary Rieke Murphy

Marino came to Ireland on November 29, 2005, his first time in Europe. From December to March he travelled in and out to Harcourt Street, a valiant feat when you contrast an African climate with Dublin’s winter months, taking English classes at the International Study Centre.

“I knew how to introduce myself in English but could not express myself or speak English fluently the way it is spoken in Ireland. I was also taking guitar lessons and starting to learn how to drive. Fr. Austin Healy CSSp made me feel at home and welcome and really helped me. In the beginning he took me out and around and was always there for me.”

Although by no means his first choice, Marino was chosen by the Spiritan Central Africa Province to come to Ireland just 5 months after ordination to priesthood on July 9, 2005 in Cameroon. His three expressed preferences for first appointment did not include Europe, though he was “open to being sent anywhere as a missionary must be, and I said that I would be interested in working in a non-French culture.”

“From reports to do with community life and relating to people during my nine years’ study, my Superior told me I had the kind of profile to go to Ireland, that it would be easy for me to adapt. And so I am here, on loan to the Irish Province.”

At Milltown — a good place to study

Five months later in April 2006 Marino started going on weekends to minister in Bawnogue Parish, Clondalkin, Dublin. On June 2 he moved there, joining Spiritan Joe Beere while also studying a full-time course in Pastoral Studies at Milltown Institute.

“Milltown is a very good place. If you are open you can meet people from many different places, with different beliefs or religions. Talking with them can add to or change your own perspective; you hear what someone from another background or...
culture thinks, you begin to understand their views on things. In my class for example, there are lay people, a priest from China, religious Sisters and a Presbyterian.”

As Marino lists the subjects on the diploma course, it is easy to see why he believes it is a heavy course to pack into one year. Any one of the subjects could be a full-time course in itself and they are delivered through lecture and in some subjects, placements.

One of Marino’s placements was Mount Carmel Hospital. He visited patients regularly and his visits were followed up with pastoral supervision where time was spent with a course supervisor reflecting constructively on how Marino managed the experience. Course evaluation also required a number of written essays.

Free and welcome to visit

Marino is now completing the course and settling into his first year in Bawnogue.

“I am feeling almost at home.” His eyes light up to match his delightful smile while he speaks “Parishioners are very welcoming. The parish is like a big, wide family. I am from a large family so that feels good. People are really involved in church ministry in Bawnogue. They will pop in here to the house too and do something like bring a piece of cake — ‘We had a birthday, or some celebration, yesterday and kept this for you.’ They invite me to outings or to stop by for a cup of tea. I feel free and welcome to go visit the families in their homes.”

As Marino describes it, there is plenty to be involved in with this vibrant parish. There is a new pastoral council with 12 members. Fundraising is ongoing with regular envelopes and special events, as well as the usual groups, activities and services that make a parish a life-giving force in a community. It is all there in Bawnogue including three choirs.

“Sometimes when I am not on the altar, I sing with the choir. There is a group that is asked to sing for weddings. I have sung with them.”

International living

Marino looks ahead. When he has completed his studies in Milltown, he will have time and become more fully involved in the parish. Before coming to Ireland he learned what international living requires. He studied philosophy in Gabon, did his novitiate in Cameroon, was in Congo Brazzaville for his pastoral program and back to Cameroon for theology in Ngoya in the oxymoron suburbs of Yaoundé. Ngoya is a consortium for all religious orders with approximately 260 students, 54 of them Spiritans, when Marino was there. He was ordained deacon with 20 Spiritans, 3 of them Cameroonians. This international experience during training and study would be typical for a Spiritan belonging to the Central African Province, composed as it is of five countries: Gabon, Congo, Central Africa Republic, Cameroon and very recently Equatorial Guinea.

“It is mainly up to me to meet people. I went out to people and someone told me people appreciate me doing that because Irish people are shy and won’t take the first step. I will always take the first step.

“I have friends. There are people who have come from Cameroon to live in Ireland. I meet them sometimes and have been invited to attend weddings, funerals and other celebrations. During Mission Week last October I was in the group that planned the liturgy for Mass broadcast live from RTE studio. They have asked me to be involved again next October. In Bawnogue there are friends and families so when I feel lonely, I have a place I can go, have a laugh and a sing song. If I am at home here it is because of Fr. Joe Beere. He is like a Dad for me.

“When I go home to Cameroon this summer, it will not be difficult to come back to Ireland. I am happy here.”

Working with young people

Marino’s seminary Overseas Training Programme (OTP) was in Congo Brazzaville working in a parish where he led the vocational group, and organized retreats and after-school study for young people. He also taught religion in the school. He likes working with young people.

“It is uplifting. Joy comes from young people. They are open and curious; they want to know and all the time want to know more.

“We had a youth campaign for HIV, a drama and singing. Young people are very concerned. We discussed human development, psychology and sexuality. I am open to discuss issues of sex with youth as they are open and confident as they ask me questions in this area. I would go out with them, just to be together, not to judge their behaviour but to understand them and bring them around.

“In any group you will find 3, 4 or 5 who are leaders so I wasn’t the only one doing and giving things. The parish priest was a reserved and quiet man, but also open minded and helpful. My office was usually filled with young people and noise and he would come in to be with us.”

Marino was in Congo for one year only but seven years later he still stays in contact with some of the young people he met there. He is going home to Cameroon this summer for his holidays and plans to spend a week in Congo in the parish where he did his OTP.

Internationality — a way of life

While Congo was new to Marino, living and thinking internationally was not. Once he decided to become a Spiritan, internationality became a way of life, even though his upbringing was rooted in a large family of 3 sisters and 4 brothers in Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon (population 1,100,000). And too, coming from West Cameroon, gives Marino other roots as a member of the Bamiléké tribe. Cameroon is a country that enjoys peace except for a minor upheaval in 1982, ten days of violence in the capital when a new head of state was elected and the incumbent was reluctant to relinquish office. Marino, a young boy, clearly remembers seeing soldiers and shooting in the streets.

The Ngeukams belonged to the French Spiritan Parish 100 metres from their home and Marino went to its Catholic primary school. Secondary was public. He belonged to the parish vocational group where people who feel a call from God, not necessarily to the religious life as a vocation but in the broad sense of the term, meet once or twice a week. There were about 25 who also planned liturgies and took on the responsibility of visiting people who were sick or elderly and other parish social works.

Marino’s experience in Ireland is but another step in Spiritan formation which prepares missionaries to be “paratus ad omnia”, prepared for everything.

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