

Home away from Home: My Experience in Ireland

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Thrills of Arriving Home / Studying in Conventional Universities

Home is where one starts from. It feels good to leave home and even better to come back. I first arrived in Ireland back in 2005, to study at Milltown Institute. I was ordained a deacon in Kimmage in 2008. Later in Nigeria, I was ordained a priest. After becoming a priest, I had a brief stint in a parish and was Provincial Bursar of the Nigeria North-East Province. I returned to Ireland for graduate studies from 2015, preceded by a 2-year period as Chaplain in Rockwell College. I returned to West Africa on 2nd January 2021, after completing my PhD degree.



Working with Rockwell students was interesting and challenging for a priest in modern-day Ireland. I completed a Masters' degree in International Development in UCD in 2016. While there, I sought out PhD programmes tailored toward development studies. I discovered the Ogoni non-violent resistance, modelled on Ken Saro-Wiwa's ethical template. I sought and got a placement for a PhD at NUI Maynooth. Dr Laurence Cox, who had written about Saro-Wiwa and the activities of Shell and the Nigerian government in oil-rich Ogoniland, was supervisor of my thesis entitled, "An Exploration of the Ogoni People's Resistance in Nigeria: A Participatory Action Research Approach."

As a priest studying in conventional universities, in the classroom with lay people, it was a strange but fulfilling experience. Milltown Institute, which was also open to lay people, had been a useful preparation. While at NUIM, I also taught undergraduate students. Teaching *Modern Irish Society*, discussing contemporary society with young Irish people, was a quite remarkable experience.

Pastoral Ministry and Relationship with Confrères

I served full-time on the Kimmage weekend pastoral ministry rota, celebrating baptisms there while a deacon but never as a priest. It wasn't always easy combining full-time studies with ministry, but with great understanding among confrères, I could strike a balance. Sadly, some of the confrères I encountered have gone back to God, and the warmth of their friendship is sorely missed. May they share in Christ's victory over death and resurrection to eternal life in paradise! I was also a committed member and President of the Association of African Priests and Religious in Ireland (AAPRI).

Cultural Identity and Social Interactions

While my primary sense of cultural identity is very much with my ethnic Tiv group, I also have a strong sense of identity as a Nigerian and an African. In Ireland north and south. I became friends with individuals and families, a number of whom graciously offered me moral or financial support. My success is a product of their collective goodwill and prayers, and I am truly grateful to them all.

Pandemic and Closing Thoughts

As I approached the last phase of my research leading to my *Viva Voce* examination, the world was ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing countries including Ireland into lockdown. For nine months, I worked from home, fearful of contracting the disease and developing heightened anxiety. Looking back now, I am filled with gratitude that, through God's sustaining grace, I succeeded*.

Already I miss Kimmage confrères and staff – and the food! The most precious and lasting gift that I got from Ireland is HUMANITY; the Irish Province armed me with all the tools to *Go ye Afar, Go Teach all Nations!* For me, Ireland remains a home where love resides, memories were created, enduring friendship developed, and where laughter shared will never end. *Mile buíochas!*

* I successfully defended my thesis on 16th February from my new base in The Gambia where I have been appointed Director of Development.