



SELL CONNECT

Sharing Education & Learning for Life

A Peacebuilding Programme for Young Adults

SELL- An Initiative of St. Patricks Missionary Society
December 2022

A Christmas Note from Fr. Leo

This year I write my Christmas message in a 'confused' state. I am struggling to hold various thoughts and emotions together. I find myself angry these days, the war in Ukraine is affecting me deeply. Bombing energy plants to freeze people to death, the most vulnerable will perish, the old and the sick. It is diabolical.

I find myself desiring to lash out, and I have done so with my tongue. I think Irish people know this dilemma well. Following Jesus in times of oppression and how to hold a line and channelling the anger against injustice and oppression. I want to hear of the Russians being 'pushed back' but that means killed and this conflicts me - for that's some mother's son. How do I hold these emotions and reactions along side 'Love your neighbour' and 'Father forgive them'. It's so hard.

As the writer Solzhenitsyn said. 'The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts.' Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956*
I will go on with my struggle bringing it into my prayer, seeking a resolution, a way forward. There will be no easy answers. One day I can be an advocate of non violence, another I'm a fighter, a revolutionary. Have a look at the film *The Mission* for your Christmas viewing and discuss with which priest would you stand.

I thank God I've never been put in a situation of a country at war. The cruel insanity of war. So that's how I find myself as this Christmas comes and I write this annual note. I can preach God's love to my congregation this Christmas in peaceful Malawi but how does my brother priest in Ukraine go about his preaching! We just have to keep doing our best seeking after good and right and life. Be glad that you are celebrating your Christmas where it is peaceful. We pray peace on Earth for 2023.

Fr. Leo.

SELL West Africa at An Tairseach Ecology Programme in Wicklow

In line with our organisational vision, 4 members of SELL West Africa (Robert and Mary from Nigeria, Hagar and Francis from Ghana) participated in a 10-week Ecology Programme starting in Sept2022) at the Dominican Ecology Centre in Wicklow, Ireland, with 13 other participants from across the globe. The Programme aimed to explore spirituality in the context of an evolving universe, an endangered earth...

Elements of the Programme included: Ecological footprint, Theology and Ecology, Living Laudato Si, Evolution and Faith and Celtic Spirituality. The Programme was enlightening, thought-provoking, life-giving, and transformational.

Humans have played a critical role in the earth we are experiencing now. As such, the ecological'conversion' of humans is an essential step towards restoring the earth. Being deeply aware of this urgency, the SELL Africa Network continues to explore approaches by which we can invite individuals, communities and duty-bearers to genuine ecological conversion.

We hope to use the learnings and insights from the ecology programme to develop a manual and an integrated ecological strategy that will deepen our work, in care for the earth, raise more awareness among young people and invite them to lead positive change. 10-year-old Ghanaian Climate Activist Nakeeyat, at COP27 asserting the urgency of the climate crisis, called on duty-bearers to "Have a heart, do the maths. It is an emergency". We in SELL are ready to play our part in dealing with the emergency.

Hagar- SELL Ghana



Photo by Shane Rounce on Unsplash

AN Tairseach PROGRAMME: A CALL FOR EVOLUTIONARY CONCIOSNESS An evolving universe

In the An Tearsh Expedition, we explored our evolution over 14 million years as discovered by contemporary science, exploring its implications for understanding our place in the universe, reflected on the themes from Celtic tradition, critiquing our present world order and exploring possibilities for a sustainable life. The question, "What does threshold mean to us?" guided our learnings. Reflecting on Threshold, we defined it as, work place, stages of life, and of the geographical location of our residence.

Each of us reflected upon the feeling that one associates with threshold. As we explored and connected our relationship with every stage of our lives, we realised that we have no control over our lives. The universe determines every stage of our existence. Similarly, when humans were created they were not given a divine right for existence, every creature has the right to exist. The cultural historian Thomas Berry said, "the universe is the primary sacred reality" Therefore, we are called to re-examine who we are as humans and to hunger not just for wellbeing, but being the eyes and protector of the universe.

This approach has developed a critical consciousness in me to re-examine my space in the universe whilst working to reduce my own carbon footprint, combat climate change, and help preserve the eco system. **Mary-James – SELL Nigeria**

AN TAIRSEACH Ecology Centre, Wicklow

A new consciousness evolved for me as a result of my exploration of spirituality in the context of an expanding universe, a threatened earth, and the Christian heritage.

We live on Earth – Earth is our home, our source of food, our teacher, our healer, and our fulfilment; we must not harm Earth and we need to take action now to protect our source of everything. Even our spirituality comes from the Earth.

We visited St Patricks Missionary Society, (SPMS), at Kiltegan.

The main goal of our visit was to explore the energy-saving biomass project the Kiltegan Fathers have undertaken in response to Pope Francis's; call to "care for our common home" in his encyclical, Laudato Si.

We were shown around acres of willow plantation, wind turbines, solar panels, and geothermal heating systems used to generate alternative energy.

At the willow plantation site, Fr Seamus O'Neill explained the procedure for growing willow as a biomass crop to produce wood chips as a carbon-neutral source of energy for central heating.

To commemorate our visit, we planted oak trees. As I planted a tree, it acted as a call to me to grow with nature again. **FRANCIS (SELL GHANA)**

My experience in An Tairseach Ecology Wicklow Ireland

I joined An Tairseach Ecology centre to do a sabbatical course on spirituality and Ecology. I learnt that Care of the Earth involves conservation of natural resources so that all living things can benefit from them now and in the future.

There are two scriptural passages that underpinned my understanding of ecology. In Genesis 1:1 we are told that 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth. In Psalms 24 the writer says 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. From these short verses one can deduce that the Earth does not belong to us but it belongs to God. It is a gift that we share with the rest of creation. However with this free gift comes immense responsibility.

There is a call to care for earth and do something quickly. Time is not on our side. The phrase 'reduce, reuse and recycle', which essentially means to cut down what we throw away might be helpful. If we follow the three Rs it will orient us to consume less natural resources.

The idea of shopping wisely entails buying less plastic and buy reusable products. We are also invited to use long-lasting light bulbs that are efficient in energy saving, also it is crucial to switch off the lights. Plant more trees to clean up the air and support more bio-diversity. We might also need to choose non-toxic chemicals in our homes, farms and work places.

As stewards on God's farm, we are called to treat his property with care and respect.

Fr Robert Psinon. SELL Nigeria, SPMS

Message to SELL supporters

As I write this article COP27 is moving into the last couple of days of its deliberations. One of the phrases that is being heard a lot over these past few days is :“we have got to walk the walk”. The time for words is long over. Now is the time for action. It was good to hear some of the world leaders making big promises.

At the General Chapter, which took place in May 2022, St Patrick’s Missionary Society took a bold step when it stated that work for the protection of the environment is a form of “primary evangelisation”. This is radically new thinking. But the Chapter did not remain just at the level of words or pious aspiration. It went on to make a strong commitment to make resources available to address the effects of climate change and to protect the environment. The Society was putting its “money where its mouth is”.

It is very heartening to see how the SELL Programme is giving more and more emphasis to working for the protection of the environment over the years. It is helping to educate young people on the centrality of the struggle to save Planet Earth. I was very pleased to see four members of the SELL Team taking part recently in the Ten Week Residential Sabbatical Programme at An Tairseach Ecology Centre, Wicklow.

It was very gratifying to welcome the members of the SELL Team on the Programme to our compound. No doubt the experience of the Programme at An Tairseach has enriched them personally and has inspired them to work with even greater commitment to protect our beautiful but fragile home.

I thank every member of the SELL Family for their dedication and commitment throughout 2022 and I wish them every blessing for Christmas and for 2023. **Fr Tomas O’Connor SPMS**

Solidarity in Sharm El Sheikh

Recently, the world population topped 8 billion, having prevailed despite the covid 19 pandemic speaks of the remarkable resilience of the human race. But what kind of world are these new-borns inheriting? Ongoing crises related to climate, war, mass migration, biodiversity loss, and political uncertainty have led to global societal frailty.

Rising inflation and a political impasse impacting healthcare and services draw our focus to the local and immediate and understandably leads to empathy fatigue for issues further from our doorstep. But, like the butterfly effect, these crises are all related and are beginning to impact our daily lives.

The 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP27, was held from 6 November until 18 November 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. While the overall

commitment from developed countries was underwhelming, the solidarity pact with developing countries gives a chink of hope. Described as historic, this support for vulnerable populations already experiencing devastating weather extremes is the solidarity needed to build global resilience and tackle effectively the global challenge of climate change. **Orla McCullagh**



SELL Malawi

A note from Isaac- SELL Malawi

I joined the resource team in September. In the early days I had the chance to participate in workshops in some communities. Associating with my fellow youths and sharing our experiences made me realise that youths have the same rights to culture as adults, but our circumstances create challenges that can only be met with determination, creativity and integrity.

The joy of working with young people is always different. Each young person is unique, they bring their own life experience, needs and expectations. They bring their belief that anything is possible. Each young person is on their own individual journey and where it will take them can't be predicted.

Mary is now part of the Team. As they say 'Partner experience drives partner engagement. The better the experience, the better the engagement.

We are now ready to drive on with SELL in Malawi helping young people to realise their potential and become leaders in their communities.

Already we have achieved some great things;

- The building project for the resource centre was completed.
- Issac and Mary joined Fr. Leo and Fr Tommy, to be part of the Malawi Resource Team.
- A community outreach programme was developed to select capable trainees at least two (male and female) from each community.
- Our first training was conducted with forty-four people in attendance.
- The resource team mentored trainees in the field as they facilitated their first workshops. To date our SELL Programme has reached at least fourteen communities.



Fr. Tommy, Isaac, Mary and Fr, Leo



First training participants pose for a photo with Frs. Leo and Tommy.

SELL Team visited Ballygawley and Kildare

Hagar, Fr Robert, Francis and Mary visited Ballygawley and Kildare in Oct 2022, a pilgrimage to the inception of the SELL Programme given that the founders of SELL emerged from these places.



Francis, Hagar, Fr. Robert and Mary

It is interesting that SELL has a big focus on 'care for the earth', and here we were in the middle of the most wonderful countryside, great land being cared for by local farmers.

We visited different churches and schools in these communities where we got the opportunity to promote SELL and share success stories of the SELL Programme. It was a great pleasure to connect with Leo's and Tommy's families as well as SELL donors who made us feel at home. They have been supporting the SELL Programme from the beginning. People were delighted with the success of SELL which is like a seed planted,

germinated and yielding different fruits of inter-communal living, peace building, justice for all creatures and human development in Nigeria, Ghana and Malawi.

Note from the Editors

Once again thanks to the many people who are supporting us financially. The response to our request for contributions paid by Standing Order, has been great. If you would like to help us, please contact one of the people listed below. We are grateful to St. Patricks Missionary Society (SPMS) for their support of Fathers Leo and Tommy.

If you would like to get more information about SELL, make a contribution, or if you would like to receive our newsletter by email, please contact:

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