

## AFRICA- A PERSONAL MEMOIR

I was born in Malta in June 1938. - my parents lived as my father's ship was based there, he was a marine engineer in the Royal Navy. The war begun in 1939 but Malta did not come under heavy until July 1940 all families including my mother and I were taken by ship in convoy heavily escorted by many navy battleships including the one on which my father was serving, to safety in Alexandria, Egypt. So I first came to Africa as a one year old refugee we remained until being evacuated to the UK later that year.

I was back in Egypt at Port Said 10 years later when my Father was en-route to India as he had been seconded to the Indian Navy where we lived for just over 2 years before returning to the UK. I was educated by the De La Salle brothers who gave us an excellent start to the future. I nearly too up a missionary career after I was taken by the White Fathers and their missionary work in Africa – an Old-boy of the college was ordained a bishop in the college chapel. However, the Almighty had a different future for me - a vocation as a doctor and a specialist in the care of mothers.

I then met Susan and the Almighty intervened again, abortion in the UK got in our way and so we became ethical refugees, and left for Canada in 1973 and a University appointment in Newfoundland. In 1975 the world's attention was turned to the enormous tragedy of maternal mortality and morbidity when the first Safe Motherhood project was held in Nairobi. In 1976 professional interests turned to further obtaining a Masters degree in International and maternal health. I was soon involved with Newfoundland bishops and the Canadian Conference of Bishops as a consultant and in 1981 was invited to attend a meeting of "Cor Unum" in the Vatican.

Then my life and Africa came together in an extraordinary way. In 1981 I was invited to the Diocese of Ikot Ekpene in South Eastern Nigeria first West African Cardinal H. E. Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, Nigeria and spent the year with the Medical Missionaries of Mary in a missionary hospital gaining first hand experience with maternal deaths as well as obstetric fistulae, birth injuries to the bladder, rectum or both due to lack of access to c/section. Over the next 10 years there were a number of projects in Ikot Ekpene diocese and the next door Uyo diocese in the new Akwa Ibom State and I began developing the concept of comprehensive rural maternity care, linking existing rural maternity clinics, with two way radios right to St Luke's hospital, equipped an emergency obstetrical transport and began training all traditional birth attendants to identify and refer high risk mothers early to the hospital. In the early 1990's security became a problem in South East Nigeria.

So in the early 1990s, at the invitation of the Bishop James Owusu I was invited to the Diocese of Sunyani, Ghana where over the next 5 years the model for providing rural obstetrics was modified in the catchment area of St Theresa's hospital within a different environment and cultural traditions. Bishop Owusu came to a founding meeting in Rome in 1985 which led to the eventual foundation of MCI. To me, he became a mentor and encouraged the formation of MCI but sadly soon after his retirement he was killed in a road accident. At the same time funds were donated by an elderly Catholic gentleman in Canada for the building of a small specialised facility, for mothers with obstetric fistulae, for their treatment, rehabilitation and for the training of doctors and nurses in their care. The bishops of Ghana decided it should be located in another Archdiocese but sadly these funds were never used for that purpose.

In 2003, MCI was contacted by the Rt Rev Luigi Locati, having located us on the internet presumably because MCI is an experienced Catholic organisation The bishop asked for help in saving the lives and improving the health of mothers in the Apostolic Vicariate of Isiolo whose health care had been sadly neglected for many years.. Project Isiolo was suggested to the bishop as a demonstration showing that maternal lives maybe save and health improved by spreading the "balm of Mercy" through comprehensive maternal health care made available to all mothers even in rural areas. Project Isiolo continues development to this day but is not there to provide general health care services which is the responsibility of the governments at each level

During the fifteen years I served as a consultor for the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care (1985-2002) I spoke regularly at plenary meetings about the tragedy of maternal mortality in sub-Saharan African countries; at the UN as part of the Side Events organised by the Permanent Representative of the Holy See; to the African sub-committee of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives ; and to politicians at the EU, in Canada, the UK

I am deeply concerned about the Attack on Africa by the Reproductive Health policies of white imperialist western countries and rich philanthropists, especially in Canada the UK, the USA and the EU. With huge amounts of funding they destroy the unborn, motherhood, marriage, families and impose contraception, abortion. As a Catholic professional organisation MCI remains committed to its original mission to provide a specialised Catholic voice for the Church; to develop a portfolio of accomplishments and to supporting the goals for Integral Human Development of the East Africans Bishops (AMACEA) agreed at their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting in Addis Ababa and released July 24<sup>th</sup> 2018 ;

(i). The equal dignity of all people, regardless of ethnic background the need for integral human development, which “cannot be limited to mere economic growth alone” but must “focus on the human person, should be holistic and cover all aspects of life of the human person and geared towards the common good.”

(ii) “We uphold and endeavour to promote the Church’s basic peace building plan which has four principles: recognition and defense of equal dignity of all members of the human family, promotion of integral human development, support for international institutions

(iv) “These peace building blocks are the basis for enhancement of human dignity that must be enjoyed by every human being through respect of human rights.”

My contact with Africa began 80 years ago and it has been I a privilege to serve mothers in so many African countries for nearly 40 years. I am now happy to pass this part of MCI’s work onto a younger generation.

**Dr R. L.Walley**