

ASC Returns to Liberia to Minister and Reconnect with the People

Story and photos by LIZ QUIRIN, editor

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A series of events propelled one Adorer of the Blood of Christ (ASC) from the U.S. Region to return to Liberia, West Africa on January 24, 2010, where five Adorers were killed in October of 1992.

Sister Raphael Ann Drone, 68, who had ministered in Liberia from 1971-1988 left for Liberia as a member of the SMA (Society for African Missions) Lay Missioners Association for a two-year volunteer commitment.

Saying she was excited about returning hardly describes her demeanor as she spoke to elementary school students at SS. Peter and Paul School in Collinsville, Ill. She took a number of photos with her to show the students as she explained what she would be doing in Liberia.



"I have been assigned to serve in the Bomi Hills area, in Klay and Tubmanburg," she said, where "I will be working with religious education and training new catechists and teachers."

An educator for decades, most recently at Althoff High School, Belleville, IL, Sister Raphael Ann will minister in some of the same locations ASCs have served in earlier years but not the same location where she served when she last lived in Liberia.

The return to a country where five sisters died was prompted when a new ASC leadership team was installed in October 2006. In 2007, the ASCs marked the fifteenth anniversary of the five sisters' deaths.

The five, ministering in Liberia were killed during the country's bloody 11-year civil war between government forces and rebel leader Charles Taylor who is now being tried at the International Court of Justice at the Hague in the Netherlands for multiple crimes in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

When the sisters were killed, the ASC leadership at the time did not speak about sisters returning to Liberia with conditions still unsettled, but they remained in contact with the Congregation's 60 Associates.

In 2007, the present leadership team asked the question: "Is our work finished in Liberia?" In June 2008 Sisters Raphael Ann, Elizabeth Kolmer and Mary Evelyn Nagle returned to Liberia for a three-week visit to see if the ASCs could still be of service there. All of them had previous ties to the country.

In addition to ministering in Liberia, Sister Raphael Ann is a cousin to Sister Kathleen McGuire, one of the five killed. Sister Elizabeth is a sister to Sister Shirley Kolmer and a cousin to Sister Mary Joel Kolmer, both also killed in Liberia. Sister Mary Evelyn was among the first ASCs to minister in the country, beginning in 1971.

"We went back to reconnect with the people and the local church to see if we could still be of service," Sister Raphael Ann said, and to "reconnect with our associates. For me the most powerful is the reconciliation with the people and the country."

The people blamed themselves for the sisters' deaths, Sister Raphael Ann said, "for not taking care of the sisters."

The reunion of the three sisters with the Liberians was overwhelming, Sister Raphael Ann said.

Not only did the sisters visit the places where the five ASCs were killed but they also met with Liberia's president, Dr. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

The people expressed their love for the sisters, both living and dead. One man told the sisters: "You sisters can never leave us because your sisters' blood is in our ground; you can't take that back. So this will always be your home."

The parallel to the ASCs shedding their blood and Christ's blood was not lost on Sister Raphael Ann. When the sisters returned to the States in early July 2008, Sister Raphael Ann went on retreat to "talk to God" to see what she was being called to do.

During the retreat, she said, the answer became quite clear as the retreatants sang "Hosea." Lyrics to the song include: "Come back to me with all your heart. Don't let fear keep us apart. Long have I waited for your coming home to me and living deeply our new life."

She had her answer, and with that answer came an urgency to find a way to go back to Liberia. "It was God calling the ASCs," she said.

In August the three sisters made their report to the leadership team, and Sister Raphael Ann spoke to them about what she felt called to do.

She reconnected with the SMAs with whom the ASCs had worked in Liberia and joined them as a lay missionary.

Commissioned in Tacoma Park, MD, in December 2009, her journey back began in earnest. Sister Jan Renz, ASC U.S. Region Leader attended Sister Raphael Ann's commissioning "as a member and missionary of the SMA Association of the Faithful."

Sister Raphael Ann will serve a two-year commitment in Liberia which "renews and reinforces a relationship that dates back to 1971, when they first asked the Adorers to join them there," Sister Jan said. "This is an exciting time for both organizations."

Sister Raphael Ann's return "also affords us an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with the Liberian people and in particular to the scores of ASC associates there who have remained faithful to the sisters and the spirituality of the Precious Blood throughout the years since Adorers last lived among them," Sister Jan said.

While she will minister in a new place with people whose second language is English, Sister Raphael Ann does not fear for her safety.

"The country is at peace under the leadership of Dr. Johnson Sirleaf," she said. "It's gradually developing into the Liberia it can become."

For Sister Raphael Ann, the return holds many memories of her ministry there and the tumultuous time when the sisters were killed.

Clinics and schools have been named in their honor, and the places where they were killed have been memorialized, and now an Adorer will again be in Liberia to minister, to be present to the people and to continue to live her vocation.

Her attitude, she said, goes back to the way she has lived her life: "If I can do it and the need is there, I'll do it. Jesus is always putting me in jobs where I can talk about him. I'm most looking forward to that."

For more information on the ASCs, their mission and their martyrs, please go to www.adorers.org.