

MY FIRST VISIT TO IRELAND – GLADYS

It all started with the invitation to attend the EGC meetings in March 2023 that were to take place in Ballyvallo in Ireland. The visa applications were not so difficult, only that more than what I was used to, was required. I did not check the length of my visa until an officer called my attention to it at Entebbe International Airport. To cut a long story short, I was given a one day visa. Our sisters Helen and Mona that had good connections with the Irish Embassy both in Ireland and Uganda were very helpful. I was given a new and valid visa the following day.

I had eight hours to wait in Dubai. I spent most of the time walking around the airport, looking at different shops. The airport is very busy with too many people. At gate 20, I met a Ugandan lady who was also going to Dublin for a workshop. It was not her first visit to Ireland. We talked so much about Uganda and Ireland until it was boarding time. It was a very long but comfortable flight to Dublin. On

arrival, the airport was calm, with very few and friendly immigration officers. I was out in a few minutes. At the exit, I spotted Mary Doyle. I only knew her through zoom. She welcomed me warmly and told me that Agnes Charles had also arrived half an hour earlier from Brussels. She was sitting somewhere at the arrivals waiting. Catherine Calvey was also around. The four of us loaded the car and headed to Tallaght community. Different people have told stories about winter, spring and summer. On pictures and movies, I have ever seen trees with no leaves that looked dead. That was the first thing that attracted my attention as we drove from the airport. On the road, it was calm. No loud music from some cars, no hooting and no bus conductors shouting for more passengers. There was nothing like sitting for hours behind heavy traffic. The other thing that caught my attention was that everyone on the road drives a simple and modest car. Every road sign is very much respected. The homestead set up looked different from what I was used to. All houses looked similar. One could hardly tell what belongs to a poor or rich family. Everyone seems to live under the same mode of housing. A lot of Daffodils were blooming along the road and in gardens.





At Tallagh, the house was full. Sisters Margaret Mary Fox, Bernadette and Joan who was making dinner were there. Pascazia and Grace who had also joined the community for few days were present. It was exciting to be in Tallaght for the first time and for meeting some of the sisters for the first time. We had a lovely dinner and started our journey to Ballyvallo soon after that.

Agnes Charles and I went with Catherine Calvey. I was humbled when Agnes Charles insisted that I take the front seat so that I can have a good view of the place, since it was my first visit to Ireland. In the other car that Joan drove, were Grace and Pascazia. We went in convoy. On the road to Ballyvallo, I saw a lot of lovely farmlands. Cattle and sheep were out grazing. We arrived around 6pm joining the sisters who were already there for the GFC meetings. Standing outside the house was the coldest I have ever felt. The weather didn't bother me because I naturally prefer the coldness to the heat. I was also too excited to concentrate on the weather. The meetings started with two days of input by Jessie Rogers, a professor of Theology at St. Patrick's University, Maynooth. ***"The Dance of Discernment: Valuing the past and inviting the future was the theme."*** On the third day, we started the EGC meetings. Discussions and reports during the meetings were very helpful. They helped me to have a deeper and clearer knowledge about the other Regions. Meeting and getting to know some sisters from other regions was another great opportunity.



On the off day, some of us visited the famine ship in New Ross. It was a great experience but sad to listen to. Joan drove us to the place and back. It was a sunny day and so we were able to move around the town after the ship. We stopped in Wexford for few minutes, on our way back to have the sense of a different town.



The day we left Ballyvallo on 10th March, some of us were to proceed to Knock Marian Shrine. Hedwig, who is familiar with the place, accompanied us. At the train station, we met Catherine Calvey who was also heading to Knock. We all travelled by the same train. On the way to Knock, both sides of the railway were covered with snow. The hills were all white. I enjoyed looking out at the snow. When we arrived, it was freezing cold. We were given good accommodation at St. Mary's hotel opposite the Shrine. We moved around that evening but it was raining heavily. The following morning, I



I opened the curtains and saw that it was snowing. I spent time watching that through the window. Around 10am, it stopped snowing and the rain started. We went to the adoration chapel, the Basillica and other surrounding spots in the rain. It is a very beautiful place to visit. Prayers were said specifically for our Congregation. This trip was arranged and funded by the CLT. We left around 6pm for the train station. During the journey, we met some good and friendly people who wanted to know where we came from and why we were in Ireland. Some of us stopped in Newbridge, where Maureen was waiting. It had just stopped raining and was very cold. She drove us to the house, where we spent a night. The following day, we went to Newbridge Parish for Mass. It was a Sunday. We had lunch with Maureen and later that day, she drove us to Tallaght. That was Louise, Olivia and myself. We were in Tallaght for three days. One of those days, before Louise left, Margaret Mary took us out for shopping and coffee, a special treat that was arranged by the sisters in Tallaght community, Mary Dolyle and Catherine Calvey. Every morning we attended mass at the Dominican Monastery. During those days, we also visited the Misesan Cara offices in Dublin with Joan and Hedwig. The two men we met at the office were very friendly. They were happy that we visited. They were able to answer all the questions we had about projects. We were encouraged to send in more projects. That same day, we walked around the city for window shopping. At one stage we went into Veritas when it was shining. When we came out after some minutes, it was pouring rain. I noticed that it is difficult to tell when it will rain, in Ireland. It is different from Africa where you look at the sky and know that it will rain or not.

At the end of our visit in Tallaght, we went to Betty's town through Iona road. Joan drove us to Iona road, where Helen and Marie Claire picked us up. Again, I was happy to meet the sisters in that house. I have been hearing names but now I know faces as well. Bridget Stokes spoke her Runyankole all the time and talked about her experience in Uganda. She remembers most of the people she met in Ibanda, my hometown. We had a cup of tea with the sisters in Iona road

and started our journey to Betty's town. On our way, we paid a visit to our sister Liz who is in the nursing home. She was very happy and had all the interesting stories.

It was raining heavily when we left Liz's place. We got to Helen's residence in Betty's town in the evening. A beautiful name for a beautiful town! The place was all green and neat. It was wet but I could not keep my eyes away from the backyard. The house was homely until we left.

The following day, we went to Drogheda, It is another lovely town with many Churches, historical sites and interesting shops. Grace joined us the following day, which was St. Patrick's Day. I was very curious about how this day is celebrated in Ireland.

Unfortunately, it was raining and so we couldn't see what was going on outside. We had a lovely celebration in the house. We had the best Irish breakfast that Helen prepared when we



were still in bed. That morning, we went to Sacred Heart Church, Laytown for mass. The Church was full and some people were in green. The Shamrock was shared after mass. This Church is by the sea shore. I enjoyed looking at the water when we were at mass.

After mass, Helen prepared lunch. The five of us enjoyed that afternoon which will be good memories for some of us. That day, Grace, Olivia and I were getting ready to leave the following day for Uganda. Helen brought us to the shop for

some shopping to bring home. The following day, Joan, Catherine Clancy and Catherine Calvey joined us in Betty's town. They were to have their regional team meeting with Marie Claire. We had lunch with them, after which we left for the airport. The house was homely until we left. Not forgetting Helen's tremendous hospitality. I enjoyed every minute in Betty's town.

In life, we all love good memories. Our first visits to places, whether they come with good or bad experiences will always mean a lot to us. My first visit to Europe is dear to my heart. I can write a very long text about it but this is enough for now. Many thanks to the Sisters in Africa that trusted me to represent them at EGC 2023. I thank the Irish Region for the warm welcome, the love and openness. I finally thank the CLT for making everything possible last March 2023.

May God bless us all and may He continue to make us Instruments of Mercy in His hand. Amen