

Priestly People  
God's Chosen People

# *Celebrating Our Priests*



October 2020

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## PREFACE

We recognize the stewardship of our priests who have dedicated their lives in service to God. Let us get to know them better, understand them and open ourselves to hearing the Word of God through them. The Stewardship and Development Commission embarked on a *'Know Your Priest'* project during the year October 2019 to October 2020 so that parishioners can get a better understanding and appreciation of our priests who were serving in the Diocese of Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, at that time.

## **Msgr. George Bardowell**

Monsignor Ronald George Bardowell, still affectionately known as Father George, was born October 1, 1929 at Jubilee Hospital also known as Victoria Maternity Hospital in Kingston, Jamaica. He was the first born of Anthony Michael Bardowell and Imogene Bardowell nee Erskine of Panama. Four sisters and three brothers followed: Elaine, Pauline, Basil (deceased), Alma, Michael, Andrea and Gladstone. Msgr. George's paternal grandfather was one of three brothers who migrated from Lebanon, and his maternal grandfather was a Panamanian who worked as an engineer on the Panama Canal. His maternal grandmother was half Irish and half Norwegian and his paternal grandmother was Jewish from Martinique.

Msgr. George grew up in Hannah Town in West Kingston. He received his early education at Ms. Baptiste Pre-School, St Ann's Infant School, St Ann's Primary School and St Aloysius Primary School. His secondary education was received at St George's College. He worked at Issa Brothers, a general store located in Kingston, Jamaica, first in the wholesale haberdashery department then in the parts department also known as "motor sales". Msgr. George was also a sportsman. He played table tennis for the St Ann's Catholic Club, football, and cricket for the St George's Old Boys Association, and later, played all three sports at the seminary in England.

The decision to become a priest had its foundation in his early years when an elderly lady in his neighbourhood would gather the children and teach them catechism. He would walk with her to the Cathedral for Mass every morning except on Sundays when he would attend Mass at St Ann's with his father. His attendance at Catholic schools also contributed to his decision to become a priest. Another major influence in that decision came from a close female friend who encouraged him to answer the call to vocation. But perhaps his vocational journey began earlier than that. His mother told him that while pregnant with him, there was a time when she felt ill and supported herself by holding on to a church fence. She promised him to God as a priest if he saved both their lives.

Msgr. George entered minor seminary in 1952. He left after two years to become breadwinner for the family, his duty as the eldest son after his father fell ill. The senior Mr. Bardowell subsequently died on August 3, 1961. Msgr. George went back to work at Issa Brothers and after nine years entered the seminary where he studied philosophy. He was one of three seminarians sent to England to pursue studies in Theology at St. Joseph's College in Lancastershire and was ordained sub-deacon there. The three were recalled to Jamaica by their archbishop who wanted to start a major seminary there. Two returned, but Msgr. George remained in England. He travelled to the United States of America and stayed with relatives for a short while then returned to Jamaica where he was ordained deacon and assigned to Holy Trinity Cathedral. He went to Barbados at the invitation of Bishop Anthony Dickson where



he was ordained priest on October 21, 1971 for the Diocese of Kingston, Jamaica and worked as missionary priest in the diocese of Bridgetown/ Kingstown.

His first assignment was in the Southern Grenadines in 1971, travelling by boat to Mayreau for 9.30 a.m. Mass, after having celebrated 7.00 a.m. Mass in Canouan. His day did not finish there, he also travelled to Union Island the same morning for 11.00 a.m. Mass or 3.00 p.m. depending on the circumstances. After eighteen months he returned to Barbados at the request of Bishop Dickson to take charge of the Cathedral there. He was sent to Mesopotamia in St. Vincent for two years then back to Barbados. In the late 1970's he was afforded the opportunity to travel to Canada where he studied Canon Law at St Paul's University, completed a bachelor's degree and licentiate in Liturgy and Canon Law and a master's degree from Ottawa University in the same subjects. He taught Canon Law for one term in Jamaica and one term in Trinidad and Tobago at different times, our present Bishop Gerard County being one of his students. Upon his return to Barbados, Bishop Dickson appointed him Judicial Vicar for Barbados and St Vincent. He returned to St. Vincent and the Grenadines at the request of Bishop Robert Rivas and was again assigned to the Southern Grenadines. He is full of interesting and funny stories from his time there and in Barbados and remains close with his former parishioners as evidenced by their calls and support when he fell ill in mid 2018. It is common to hear him referred to as "Uncle George" particularly by the people of the Southern Grenadines.

He was assigned to the Cathedral when Fr. Michael Stewart was preparing to go to Rome to pursue a Doctorate in Scripture. He became Monsignor sometime soon after the turn of the millennium. Msgr. George assisted in every parish and community during his various stints in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and in Barbados.

Included in his major achievements are founder of the Antilles Canon Law Society and one of three founders of the Castries Province Priests and Deacons Association. He and Charles Best accompanied teams to Grenada and St Lucia to establish the Cursillo movement in both countries.

He was one of two priests in a special ministry, the other being Fr. Cyril Ross (deceased), who assisted other priests who were facing challenges.

Monsignor George continues to celebrate Mass and hear confessions. He was chief celebrant at Mass for his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday on October 1, 2019 and hosted an intimate lunch gathering with present and former parishioners, priests, deacons, religious sisters, staff of the Pastoral Centre and Cathedral office. This was followed by Mass and social evening on Friday, October 4<sup>th</sup> to which everyone was invited. He has seen eight papacies and now resides at the Pastoral Centre in Edinboro having given his entire adult life to God in His earthly kingdom.

## **Msgr. Michael Stewart**

Monsignor Claudius St. Michael Stewart, still referred to as Fr. Mike, was born April 13, 1954 in Kingstown, St Vincent. He was the firstborn of Calvin and Eugenia Stewart of Sion Hill and was followed by Amos, Joel, Dallis, Raphael, Petrona, Michelle and Indra. Two other sisters (not his mother's) were born before the marriage: Mrs. Louvena Davis (deceased) and Mrs. Princess Hamilton who resides in the US.

Sion Hill was, and still is, a close-knit village community where Fr. Mike enjoyed his childhood and youth. He got involved in all community activities at the proper time. He played cricket, football and engaged in kite flying with his buddies in the neighbourhood. Later, as young men, they formed themselves into a village group participating in fun activities such as home parties, cooks, and fishing in Sion Hill Bay, Cane Garden Point and Great Head Bay. This group of young men were founding members of the Sion Hill United Sports Organisation.

Fr. Mike attended the St Mary's Roman Catholic School from 1959 to 1966, the St. Martin's Secondary School from 1966 to 1970 then two years from 1970 to 1972 in the 6<sup>th</sup> form at the St Vincent Grammar School. Upon leaving school, he worked at the Government's Audit Department for three months then taught for one year at St. Martin's Secondary School. In 1973 he began work at the Customs and Excise Department until 1979 when he entered seminary. Fr. Mike wanted to study medicine and his dream was to offer free medical attention, but life took a different path. During his years at the Grammar School, a teacher asked him what would he do if he does not become a doctor, his answer was that if he did not become a doctor of the body, he would become a doctor of the soul. That was the path he would later follow.

The decision to become a priest was influenced by early childhood and youth experiences. Fr. Mike's maternal grandmother, who was Methodist, encouraged her grandchildren to pray and read the bible thus he grew up knowing about prayer and scripture. He remembers memorizing Psalm 19 and remembers her introducing him to Romans 8, the last verse of which is on his ordination card. His attendance at Catholic schools was also a major influence on his journey to the priesthood, particularly the influence of Sr. Catherine Montelle, SJC, at St. Mary's, the Scarboro Foreign Mission Fathers of Canada, and the La Salle Brothers, also of Canada, at the St. Martin's Secondary School.

Fr. Mike's father had been Anglican and converted to Catholicism in 1964. He and his wife ensured that their children attended Mass regularly. Walking from Sion Hill to the Cathedral in Kingstown was a walk in the park. Fr. Mike was a member of the CYO and CYM, Cathedral youth groups in his day. He was also involved in a vocations committee between the ages of 16 and 18 years and it was while he was in this circle that the idea of the priesthood was broached. He attributes this inspiration

to Sr. Sylvia Toulon and Mrs Vernalyn Blencowe. Work at the Customs and Excise Department likewise contributed likewise to the pondering of the idea and that period became a bridge in the transition between the thought and the reality. In 1979, Fr. Mike left the Customs and Excise Department (like Matthew, the tax-collector) as Junior Officer in charge of the Queen's Warehouse #2 to join the Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs.

The year 1979 was an eventful year in St Vincent and the Grenadines. The volcano erupted (Fr. Mike's birthday!), there was an uprising in the Union Island, the state gained independence, and the church convened Assembly 79 in the October of that same year. Nonetheless Fr. Mike joined the Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Ugandan Martyrs in Trinidad along with nine other young men, the biggest group then. He enjoyed his five years there in the companionship of fellow seminarians some of whom would become prominent names later, Bishop Malzaire of Dominica and President of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC), Fr John Persaud - former AEC secretary, Fr. Stephen Geofroy, former formator and lecturer at the Regional Seminary. Fr Cyril Ross (deceased), the Rector when Fr. Mike and companions entered the Seminary, led the men through the a few months of their first year before he fell ill. Fr Henry Charles (now deceased) became Rector and guided six of these young men to ordination.

The Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Ugandan Martyrs is located close to the Benedictine monastery and Fr. Mike became acquainted with the monks, some of whom he had known since 1976, his first visit to Trinidad and Tobago and having had the opportunity then to spend a few days within the monastic enclave. In fact, Br. Paschal Jordon, OSB, became his spiritual director. During his seminary years, he made good use of the library at the monastery and it became his sanctuary while he worked on his thesis in the peace and quiet it offered.

Pastoral work as a seminarian took him to the parish of St. John the Baptist which was close to the Seminary and cared for by the Benedictine priests. Br. Mike, then, spent four years of ministry in this parish where Christine Walcott was a member of the Junior St. Vincent de Paul.

During his final year at the Seminary, he assisted in the parish of St. Michael's, Maracas Valley. Like other seminarians, he got involved in COR, Charismatic Prayer Groups, and the Cursillo Movement. Other activities such as ordinations, religious professions and visits to various convents made for contact with persons who would become friends and acquaintances. Among them is Sr Ivy Pacheco, SJC, former principal of St. Mary's R C School, Kingstown.

The Seminarians, as part of the Theological Faculty of the University of the West Indies (UWI), St Augustine Campus, developed a close relationship with the other

students, so much so that they stood in solidarity with the students during protest action on campus. This was a time when the seminarians were very socially conscious and some even became involved in the Grenada revolution in 1982. So, life for Fr. Mike was interesting. He remarked that the times challenged the social conscience of the seminarians. It even affected their meals. They dispensed with the three-course meal and settled for two. No more first-course soup came to the table.

Fr. Mike holds a BA (Hons) in Theology from UWI, a license in Theology from Leuven in Belgium, a license in Biblical Theology from Rome and a Doctorate in Biblical Theology from Rome. During the years 1987 to 1991 he was associate pastor at the Cathedral of the Assumption when Fr. Renison Howell was administrator. When Fr. Renison became ill in 1989/1990 and had to leave the diocese for medical attention, Fr. Mike assisted with preparations for the ordination of the first bishop of Kingstown, Robert Rivas (now Archbishop Rivas). Later he was made vicar general and spent the years 1991 to 1998 as pastor of St. John's Parish, Mesopotamia, where he introduced the local conference of St Vincent de Paul Society in April 1992. He returned to the Cathedral as administrator in 1998 and at the turn of the millennium in the year 2000 he became Monsignor Michael Stewart. In the year 2002, he left for Rome where he furthered his studies. On the completion of his studies in 2008, he became Rector of the Regional Seminary of St. John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs from 2008 to 2010 where he was once a student. When the Seminary was closed in 2010, Fr. Mike became parish priest of Our Lady of Fatima in Curepe with further responsibility for the care of Fr. Alando Williams and Fr. Cleophas Joseph who were still seminarians.

Fr. Mike returned to the Cathedral of the Assumption in St Vincent and the Grenadines in 2011 as administrator and vicar general where he remains at present.

During Fr. Mike's pastorship, he assisted in other parishes when there was no priest available.

Though he would have had contact with all the parishes, most of his pastoring was at the Cathedral of the Assumption. Along with a United Kingdom Methodist agency based in Barbados, he was instrumental in founding Marion House to respond to local community needs, he initiated the radio programme Catholic Forum, was spiritual director for the Cursillo and Charismatic Renewal movements and, along with Sr. Maureen, Fr. Callistus and Sr. Ivy created the local Choice retreat which yielded well molded young adults who can make mature decisions. He was also involved in the Christian Council since the 1970's even before he started serving on that body. He remains a serving member at present.

Fr Mike has "a passion for the things of God and Catholics who are living their faith." It is distressing to him "especially as a local to see us treat things of the faith so trivially." His desire is for a strong local church where Catholics stand out and share

the treasure of the Catholic faith with other Vincentians. He laments that what we do not know, we cannot appreciate and value. He reminds us that as social issues emerge; we have a body of teachings that speaks to these issues - Catholic Social Teaching. He added that we should be able to share our faith integrally with others. But this would only happen if we believe that we are a church on mission and with a mission – to evangelise, to form disciples and to bear witness - in his words “I would promote mission, evangelization, formation and witness.”



## **Fr. Alando Williams**

Fr. Alando Williams was born on February 16, 1982 to Lucinda Williams and Richard Reed at what was then the Kingstown General Hospital. He is the youngest of 4 siblings, having three older sisters. Fr Alando's mother, Lucinda, migrated to Trinidad and he grew up with his grandmother in Fancy until around the age of twelve years. He then went to live in Stubbs with his cousin Bethel Williams and her husband Julian Pitt to attend secondary school in Kingstown. Shortly thereafter his grandmother died. Throughout his childhood, Fr. Alando's guardians made sure he went to church and learnt to care of himself, cooking, washing, ironing thereby forming the foundation for the man he was to become.

It was while living in Stubbs that he met Rosita Snagg, who was his neighbour and one of the early influences in his life to become a priest. Fr Alando, though not Catholic, occasionally attended Mass in Stubbs. Rosita invited and encouraged him to attend youth group meetings and sometime after he began the Rite of Christian Initiation in Adults (RCIA) and was fully received into the church on August 11, 2005. He immersed himself in the life of the church through various ministries, altar server, choir, Diocesan Youth Council (DYC) and began to hear the call to something bigger. Though heavily involved in church activities, he was a member of the Rotaract Club of Kingstown, holding the position of Director of Community Services from 2004 to 2005. He was also a member of the St Vincent and the Grenadines Red Cross Society, holding the position of Secretary to the Executive and Central Committees from 2003 to 2005. Rosita saw Fr Alando as "brilliant, gifted, full of potential, sent by God."

Fr. Alando responded to God's call to be His servant as priest. Undeterred by the challenges facing the Catholic Church at that time, he entered the Regional Seminary of St John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs in Trinidad in 2006 to 2012. Upon his ordination, Fr. Michael Stewart had this to say "he witnesses as a young person... is a vocations promoter" especially at a time when young people seemed to be searching for meaning in their lives, he added that "he comes to the priesthood when the Church needs credible witnesses." He was heralded as a "sign of hope" by the then Bishop Jason Gordon in an environment where young people were after glamour and popularity. Fr. Vivian Durrant found that he came as a "renewal for the congregations." Others said he was "spiritually driven" and many found that he related well with the youth of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Fr. Alando's early education began at Fancy Government School, followed by the St. Vincent Boys' Grammar School from 1994 to 1999. Later he attended the Community College from 1999 to 2001 and Teachers' College from 2001 to 2003 earning a Certificate in Teachers Education from the Cave Hill School of Education, University of the West Indies (UWI). From 2008 to 2012 he attended UWI St Augustine Campus while at seminary in Trinidad earning himself a Bachelor of Arts in Theology. That

same year he won the CLR James prize for Caribbean Studies paper on African Studies at that same university. He was Chaplain intern at Deaconess Health, in Evansville, Indiana, in the United States of America (USA) in 2013. He earned a Master of Science in Educational Leadership with a concentrate in Catholic Education at the University of Dayton from 2015 to 2017 also in the USA. Fr Alando holds a Certificate in Spiritual Direction from the Mercy Centre in Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA.

A credible Liturgist, as demonstrated by his organizing and overseeing of Diocesan Masses, Fr Alando strives to ensure all aspects of the Liturgy are in sync during Mass, working through the ministry leaders and other. He holds the Chair of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission and is liaison to the DYC in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Kingstown in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Today, Fr Alando's journey is not done. He continues to shepherd his people as parish priest of St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church in Bequia and Mustique, at the same time developing himself and taking on new challenges in the world of study. He is currently pursuing studies in Canon Law at St Paul University in Ottawa, Canada and in his spare time reads a variety of books to widen his horizon and thinking. He is involved in organizing youth events for the church and he enjoys hiking particularly when the trail presents a challenge.

## **Fr. Boniface Ezeokeke**

Father Boniface Ogonna Ezeokeke, known to some as Fr. Bonny was born on September 18, 1978 in Ula- Ekwulobia, Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria. He was 5<sup>th</sup> of nine children born to Mr. Boniface Ezeokeke and Mrs. Monica Ezeokeke, four boys and five girls. He enjoyed the camaraderie of his siblings and friends in the neighbourhood of Ula village in Ekwulobia where he grew up.

His parents were deeply rooted in Christian practices and the Catholic faith, attending Mass frequently with their children. Fr. Boniface more than any of the others, developed and expressed a keen interest in going with them. He was an active participant at Mass, becoming an altar server at the encouragement of the priests and the parish community. His decision to become a priest was a result of these influences in his life, and the encouragement of the young men who had entered seminary before him.

Fr. Boniface received his first formal kindergarten/ Preschool Education through his mother who was the Kindergarten teacher of the village. He had his primary school education at Nwannebo Primary School which was followed by his entrance into St Dominic Savio Seminary, Akpu, where he began his secondary education. He completed his secondary education at St. John Bosco Seminary School, Isuaniocha with a Diploma in Latin. He attended the Bigard Memorial Seminary in Enugu, a city in Nigeria and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts, bachelor's in philosophy and a Degree in Theology. He attended Enugu State University where he gained a High National Diploma (HND) in Mass Communication. Fr. Boniface graduated from the Federal Technical College in Umunze, a city in Nigeria with a Post Graduate Degree (PGD) in Education. He admitted that he enjoyed his school years.

Fr. Boniface was ordained on August 21, 2010 and assigned to St Mary's parish in Oraeri where he spent two years then to St John's parish in Ezinifite for another two years. He moved to St Vincent and the Grenadines on March 7, 2015 and was parish priest in the newly formed Corpus Christi parish alongside fellow Nigerian, Fr. Peter Okonkwo. Though he was unprepared, having left Nigeria with its large Catholic population and different culture, he felt encouraged seeing people who looked like him, that is, people of African descent. That, coupled with the warm welcome he received, gave him a degree of comfort. He found Vincentians to be kind, caring people.

A year of travelling back and forth between the Southern Grenadines and mainland St. Vincent then followed as both priests took turns celebrating Mass in Corpus Christi parish and Holy Family parish in the Southern Grenadines. Finally, on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, Fr. Boniface assumed the responsibility of two of the islands in Holy Family parish, namely Union Island and Mayreau. He has already created an impact with his

passionate homilies, his zeal for Christ and the Christian way of life. People are returning to the church, and he has established an up-and-coming music ministry in that part of the parish.

While in St Vincent and the Grenadines, Fr. Boniface furthered his education, gaining a master's in clinical psychology from the Atlantic International University in the United States of America via a two-year online course.

Fr. Boniface wants us to know there is hope for the Church in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, however, he expressed that the Church needs to make more of an effort at outreach and be more committed to fostering the Christian way of life, taking a stronger stance against immorality and unchristian lifestyles. He is of the opinion that there should be more focus on family, as family is the first and bed rock of the church.

## **Fr. Collin Jackson**

Father Collin Victor Jackson was born to Victor and Indera Jackson on December 29, 1981 and grew up in Sangre Grande, Trinidad. We will follow his journey to the charismatic preacher, teacher, and servant he has become.

The second of five siblings, he was considered a leader even at a young age. His early influence to become involved in service in the church came mainly from the parishioners of Sangre Grande. Though he attended Mass as a young boy, he began to attend more regularly in his mid-teenage and young adult years. His mid-teens to young adulthood were also the period when he became involved in the life of the community, beginning when he joined the confirmation class. He served in his parish as head altar server, youth leader, catechist and member of the parish pastoral council and the liturgy committee.

Growing up, Fr. Collin was exposed to with the Holy Ghost Fathers through the mentorship of Fr. Neil Rodriguez. Additionally, there followed successive appointments of four Spiritans to his parish which created a deep interest in community life. A weekend discernment retreat led to an application to discern Spiritan life, which he experienced during 2002 to 2003.

It was not all smooth sailing for Fr Collin. Of course, in life, nothing ever is. He attended the Guaico Presbyterian School, the Sangre Grande Junior Secondary, and North Eastern College in that order, then studied for the NCC's International Diploma in Computer Studies as well as an advanced Certificate in Human Resource Management. During this time, he was accepted at Regional Seminary but did not take up that acceptance. Four months later in August 2002 he joined the Holy Ghost Fathers as a postulant.

Having gone into religious life straight out of school, he began to yearn to experience a different kind of life. A life where he had a regular job and could just be a regular guy. So, he took some leave during which he worked at various jobs. Teaching was one of them. Thus, began his teaching career. While he was experiencing the so-called normal life, the call to religious life came to his ears once more and he did not ignore it. He returned to the Holy Ghost Fathers, having been accepted again in August 2009.

Fr. Collin graduated the Regional Seminary of St John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs with a BA in Theology from the University of the West Indies in 2013. In August of that same year, he entered the novitiate and made his first profession a year later, on September 6, 2014 at the Holy Trinity R. C. Church. He was appointed to the Fatima College community where he taught Religious Education and on weekends, understudied Fr. Gregory Mc Lawrence in the parish of Carenage in Trinidad. The



following year in September 2015, Fr Collin began a year-long appointment in the parish of Our Lady Help of Christians Beaulieu, Grenada, under the supervision of Fr Sean Doggett. During this time, he assisted with the Legion of Mary, Youth Ministry and catechetics. On his return to Trinidad in September 2016, he was assigned to the parish of the Holy Trinity in Arouca. He was instituted as lector on May 14 2017 and acolyte on September 10, 2017. In May 2018, after eight years of indecision, it was time to leave them and follow another path.

After consultations with his family and Spiritual Director, he moved to St. Vincent and the Grenadines on January 2, 2019. He returned to Trinidad later that year to be ordained deacon on December 28, 2019. As a deacon, he assisted at Masses, preached homilies, and conducted services in the Catholic parishes throughout St Vincent and the Grenadines. He maintains his career as a teacher at the St Martins Secondary school, the country's Catholic secondary school for boys. He teaches Religious Studies, Health and Family Life and History. He is also a member of the Diocesan Mission Team being responsible for Formation and Catechetics.

Collin's status changed from deacon to priest on August 6, 2020 when he was ordained alongside his fellow teacher and missionary, brother Peter Emmanuel, who was ordained deacon. Originally attached to the Cathedral parish, Fr Collin is soon to be assigned to St John's parish alongside Msgr. Michael Stewart and Rev. Peter Emmanuel, where he will continue his stirring, relevant and thought-provoking homilies.

The many sacrifices in Fr. Collin's journey is an example of stewardship his answering the call to service in his parish, to religious life and finally to mission and priesthood.

## **Fr. Kevin Murray**

Father Kevin Ryan Murray was born in Baltimore, Maryland, USA on November 27, 1956 to George T. Murray and Katherine G. Murray. He has two siblings, an older brother Michael and a younger sister, Katherine “Kaycee” McKenna.

Growing up in Odenton, Maryland, a rural, family-oriented neighbourhood twenty miles from Baltimore, there was room to roam, swim, play ball and bike the numerous trails available. The Murrays, Fr. Kevin’s parents, were spiritual people, good Christian witnesses who cared for others and brought up their children to attend Mass regularly, pray the Rosary, and be active participants in the frequent prayer times at home. Their faith was his inspiration to eventually become more involved in religious life.

Fr. Kevin attended public primary school and a Catholic secondary school. He enrolled at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) where he spent three semesters before leaving to join St. Alphonsus Seminary in Suffield, Connecticut in 1977 as an undergraduate. The years 1979 to 1980 were spent as a Redemptorist novice in Wisconsin, following which he returned to Connecticut to finish his studies in Philosophy. He then attended Mt. St. Alphonsus Seminary in upstate New York from 1982 to 1985 for graduate studies in Theology. When that institution closed, he completed his final year, 1985 to 1986, at Washington Theological Union in Washington DC, receiving a Masters of Divinity. Fr Kevin was ordained a priest on May 24, 1986.

The years at seminary were a positive experience for this priest from Maryland. He described that period as positive, filled with good spiritual and human development, a time of bonding with his confreres, solid education and spiritual formation and good foundation for mission.

Fr. Kevin’s ministry has taken him many places over the years. He spent seven wonderful years in Brooklyn, New York, three years in Enfield, Connecticut, and fifteen years in Philadelphia. During his time in Philadelphia, he helped to found a ministry of the Redemptorists with youth and young adults, having particular outreach to persons who are poor and abandoned. He is the founding director of Blessed Sarnelli Community in Philadelphia, which was created to house young adult volunteers ministering with Redemptorists through prayer, hospitality, and service among persons in need as well as accompaniment on mission. These ministries formed the basis of his social justice stance through which he encouraged young people to grow in that area of their lives. The social justice mission included trips to many parts of the USA and the Caribbean. He has led groups on preaching missions and service trips to St. Lucia, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Croix and Grenada.

From Philadelphia, Father Kevin moved to Vieux Fort, St. Lucia where he served as parish priest for eight years. He was then welcomed in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in November of 2019, as parish priest in St Benedict's parish Georgetown. He shepherds the flock in the areas surrounding Bellevue, Georgetown, Sandy Bay and beyond, all the way to Fancy.

Together with Brother Gerard St Hilaire, who came with him from St Lucia, Fr. Kevin is beginning to establish the presence of the Redemptorists. This is his vocation, and he is happy to be a member of the Redemptorist congregation, serving the poor, placing emphasis on prayer and service.

## **Fr. Niño Mirandilla**

Father Niño Mirandilla was born on March 2, 1976 in Naga City, Philippines. His parents Bernardo and Nilda Mirandilla had five other children, two more boys and three girls.

Fr. Niño grew up in Naga in a religious family with almost all the family being active in Church. As a child, he was a member of the choir, and at age fifteen became a member of parish youth ministry. He became leader of the youth group at age seventeen. Fr. Niño was never interested in secular activity and refused to go partying with his friends, preferring activities in the Church. For him it was home, school, Church. His life centred around family and God.

Education for Fr. Niño began at Concepcion Pequena Elementary School, followed by Concepcion Pequena National High School. He attended the Mariners Polytechnic Colleges for almost three years from 1994 to 1997 but did not complete his studies there. In 1999 he entered Holy Rosary Seminary in Naga City to study Philosophy and Theology.

Upon his ordination on June 11, 2009, he was assigned to St. Anthony of Padua parish in Siruma Camarines Sur from 2009 to 2011. He spent a year at Holy Cross parish in Nabua, Camarines Sur from 2011 to 2012 followed by two years in St. Anthony of Padua parish in Camalijan, Camarines Sur from 2012 to 2014. This was followed by a year in St. Theres of the Child Jesus in Pili, Camarines Sur from 2014 to 2015, and almost three years in St. Anthony of Abbott in Tapayas, Balatan, Camarines Sur from 2015 to 2018. That same year on August 15, 2018, he came to St Vincent and the Grenadines from the Archdiocese of Caceres, Philipines and became parish priest in Canouan, part of the Holy Family parish of Southern Grenadines.

Coming from the Philippines with an over 80% Catholic population to St. Vincent and the Grenadines with a small Catholic population, he found it incredibly challenging to introduce programmes in Church here because of the differences in culture, but maintained that “so far, so good.” He hopes for a time when all Vincentian Catholics will fully embrace true Christian values.

At the time of writing, Fr. Niño’s stint in St. Vincent and the Grenadines was nearing the end. He will soon return to the Philippines and learn where he will be sent next to spread the Gospel. In the meantime, he is assigned to the Cathedral of the Assumption in Kingstown, on mainland St Vincent.

His time and his stewardship in this country were much appreciated and his strong Christian values serve as an example to those whom he shepherded.

## **Fr. Peter Okonkwo**

Father Peter Okonkwo was born in the Nigerian city of Onitsha on July 10, 1977 of Bartholomew and Maria Okonkwo. He was one of nine children, Mike, Anthony, Paul (Fr. Peter's twin), Charles, Matthew (deceased), James and John (twins), and Emmanuel. He grew in a Christian family-oriented home and neighbourhood in the city where family members were very committed to each other.

Fr. Peter attended the Holy Trinity Primary School, a co-ed school in the city. He went on to attend the St. Dominic Savio Junior Seminary in 1991, which was equivalent to an all-boys Catholic secondary school.

Coming from a Christian home meant praying and going to Mass often, which was an early influence in Fr. Peter's decision to become a priest later in life. At the Cathedral where he worshipped, the parish priest was a family friend who encouraged vocation and that priest's pastoral influence also factored in Fr. Peter's decision. Additionally, First Communion and Confirmation candidates in the city would go home after school, refresh themselves then return to school for catechism which would end at 6.00 p.m. Following they would return home to take part in the block rosary. Each block in the city had a block rosary centre where Catholic children would gather to pray the rosary and share the Word of God from 6.00 p.m. each evening.

In 2000 Fr. Peter entered the Pope John Paul II Major Seminary in Awka the state capital where he pursued a degree in Philosophy. He was among the first batch of students who were pioneers at this provincial seminary. He studied there until 2004. At the end of each year the students each worked within a parish for six weeks, took vacation, then returned to seminary. Fr. Peter found seminary challenging at first but settled down as time passed and overcame the challenges. Fr. Peter was a member of the Pro-life Movement, the Justice and Peace Association, the charismatic group, and Legion of Mary.

After 2004, he did one-year pastoral work experience in the accounting department of a diocesan hospital.

From 2005 and 2009 Fr. Peter attended Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary in Onitsha and graduated in July 2009 with a Bachelors in Theology. He was a member of the charismatic group and the pro-life movement. A month later, in August 2009 Fr. Peter was ordained and began his priesthood at the Immaculate Heart parish in the town of Ekwulobia assisting the parish priest. He stayed for two years and was deanery chaplain of the charismatic group and of the youth, he was also chaplain of a secondary school within the area.



Fr. Peter was assigned to St Francis of Assisi parish during the years 2011 to 2013 where he was assistant to the parish priest. He was also the deanery chaplain and chaplain of the charismatic renewal movement and the parish youth. Fr. Peter continued his priestly journey in St Paul's parish in Obeledu from 2013 to 2014. He was the assistant to the parish priest, chaplain of the charismatic renewal group, deanery chaplain and youth chaplain. While posted there, he simultaneously pursued a post graduate diploma in education in the State University.

Fr. Peter arrived in St. Vincent and the Grenadines on March 8, 2015 along with longtime colleague, Fr Boniface. Both were placed in the most recently established parish of Corpus Christi along the Southern coast of mainland St Vincent. They shared pastorship of the three communities, Corpus Christi Community in Villa, St. Martin De Porres in Stubbs, and Our Lady of Lourdes in Argyle. They subsequently shared pastorship of Holy Family parish in the Southern Grenadines and Corpus Christi parish simultaneously, alternating between mainland St Vincent and the Grenadine Islands of Union, Canouan and Mayreau. Fr. Peter eventually remained sole pastor of Corpus Christi when his Nigerian brother in the faith was posted to Southern Grenadines. He has celebrated Mass in all the churches in the parishes throughout St Vincent and the Grenadines except Mustique.

Being a priest is not without its challenges, but Fr. Peter continues to face the challenge of pioneering a new parish and unifying the three communities of Corpus Christi with enthusiasm. He is striving hard to have the three communities work together and to erect a building in which the Villa community can worship. He provides excellent pastoring and spiritual mentoring not only within his parish but also at the Cathedral. He works with the National Service Team as chaplain and is also chaplain of the Catholic schools – St. Mary's R. C., St. Martin's Secondary School for boys, St. Joseph's Convent Kingstown, an all-girl Catholic secondary school, and St. Joseph's Convent Marriaqua, a co-ed secondary school. He was also teacher of Religious Education at St Martin's Secondary School for one year.

## **Other Priests**

Other priests serving at the time of writing, October 2019 to October 2020, were, Fr. Mark de Silva and Fr. Richard Paynter. Fr. Andrew Callistus Roach, though not an active priest during this time is still a priest of the Diocese of Kingstown.

Fr. Mark shepherded the flock of Our Lady Queen of the Universe parish which comprised Sacred Heart in Rillan, Our Lady Queen of the Universe in Layou, and St. Martin de Porres in Rose Bank.

Fr. Richard was the parish priest of St. John's parish comprising St. John's, Mesopotamia, St. Theresa's in Gomea and Our Lady of Fatima in Lowmans Leeward.

Fr. Andrew was assigned to St. Joseph's in Union Island and Immaculate Conception in Mayreau, both part of Holy Family parish in the Southern Grenadines, when he became ill in April 2018. Since then he has received treatment in Grenada and is convalescing at the Pastoral Centre in Edinboro.

