



Rt. Rev. Brian Thomas McGee Bishop of Argyll and the Isles

To be shared with Parishioners on Sunday 19th March – SCIAF Sunday

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I write on this the fourth Sunday of Lent on behalf of the Bishops of Scotland to give thanks for your generosity and prayerful support of SCIAF – the official relief and development agency of the Catholic Church in Scotland – at what is an uncertain and difficult time for many of us.

Despite this, you continue to show compassion for those in need, particularly our sisters and brothers affected by the recent Earthquake in Syria- Türkiye, and those who are suffering because of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Furthermore, during my recent visit to Ethiopia, I saw first-hand how countless lives have been transformed through your generosity.

With your loving support, SCIAF – the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund – continues to work in parts of the world where people are so dreadfully in need, to support people to build brighter futures.

In the Gospels, we hear of many occasions when Jesus heals the sick, reaching out with love and mercy to the most marginalised and the poorest people, both in action and in spirit. As Catholics we are called to follow his example to recognise that we are our sisters or brother's keeper. To reach out to the poorest people with love.

SCIAF is the embodiment of the love of our Church in Scotland, reaching out to our most vulnerable sisters and brothers around the world. It is why, during Lent, we ask you to give generously to SCIAF's WEE BOX appeal to support the vital work SCIAF does on our behalf.

Around the world, 811 million people are facing hunger – and 60% of those living with chronic hunger are women and children. Every day, families wake up hungry, not knowing what they will be forced to do to survive, or how long their children will live.

This year's Lenten appeal focusses on the lives of Ruth, Juliet, Catherine, Savita and their families in Zambia. We hear of how they are living and farming in the harshest of conditions; of the hardships they face when crops fail, and they are left without food.

Ruth was so hungry that she was too tired to work in the fields. Her crops failed and there was no food for her family. She could not afford to send her children to school; they cried for food that she did not have. She feared that the children would become scavengers or turn to prostitution.

Juliet, Ruth's 17-year-old daughter, dreams of being a nurse. Unable to concentrate at school because of hunger, she worried that she would have to leave school, like so many of her friends, and marry as a teenager to ensure her survival.

Hunger forced Catherine to search for mushrooms to feed her grandchildren. She mistakenly poisoned herself and her four grandchildren.

Savita boils roots and weeds to feed her young grandson – it is his only meal of the day. The failed harvests have left nothing for Savita to sell at market, and she cannot afford a school uniform or to send her grandson to school.

However, while hunger is the start of these stories, it does not have to be their end. Together, we can reach out in love and act against hunger.

Your donations make a real difference for so many of the people served by SCIAF and, so, for Ruth, Juliet and Catherine there is now hope. With the love and compassion of Catholic people across Scotland, we have witnessed change for these women and their families that will last a lifetime.

Yet for Savita, and many others, the future is uncertain. I ask you to give generously to support projects like this one in Zambia so that there can be hope, and an end to hunger and poverty.

Your donations will give families the ability to grow their own food by providing the training and tools they need. By ensuring they have the business skills they need to earn an income. And by providing access to women's groups and literacy classes so they can work themselves out of poverty.

When we act together – by giving to today's special Lenten collection and filling up our WEE BOXES – we can reach out in love and act against hunger, supporting women like Savita and their families.

As Lent continues and we look forward to the celebration of Christ's resurrection, I ask you to remember SCIAF and everyone they work with in your prayers.

We thank you for the continued generosity of your donations; know that it goes towards good work and that a just and green world is possible.

May God bless you and your families during the Holy season of Lent and throughout the year,

+ Brian McGee

**Bishop Brian McGee,
Bishop President of SCIAF
On behalf of the Bishop's Conference of Scotland**