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## From Ballyshannon to Cork - sound familiar? Fr Brian rocks on in a very different way

**TOP LEFT,** Fr Brian Holmes accept a cheque for €11,000 donated through the parishioners of Kilbaron, Ballyshannon to his Mozambique church building fund. making the presentation on behalf of the parish council pictured with Fr Cathal O Fearraí is Harry Lloyd. See story on page 47;

**TOP RIGHT,** Fr Holmes called into the convent and had a great chat with the sisters, here he's having a word

with Sr Raphael; **BOTTOM RIGHT,** Fr Holmes pictured here outside early Sunday Mass with members of the congregation (Celine O'Donnell, PJ O'Connell, Tessie Cleary, Dee O'Connell, Breege Scott, Michael Donagher and Jim Kilgannon who listened enthralled as he told them of his work in Brazil and more recently Mozambique. Fr Holmes finished Mass with the Hail Mary, which he spoke in Bantu, to give those who were there

a flavour of the language used where he now looks after thousands of people.

**BOTTOM LEFT,** Tessie Cleary from Bishop Street with Fr Holmes.

On page 47 Matt Britton has a story about the money contributed locally (€11,000) to help build a church in Mozambique and he tells us more about this Ballyshannon man who also went to Cork and beyond!





# Against all the odds

How Ballyshannon generosity plays its part in building a new church in Mozambique

## COMMUNITY

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Last weekend a man who has faced many challenges in his life paid a visit to the town that he was born in 71 years ago speaking of his experience as a priest in some of the more remote parts of the world.

Fr. Brian Holmes was the son of a bank manager and born above the old National Bank in the centre of Ballyshannon in October 1944. He spent his early years in the Erneside town and last weekend he met up with one of the nuns from the Convent of Mercy, Sr. Raphael, who remembered him in the school with great fondness.

As was the custom in those days Bank managers had to travel where the work took them and the Holmes family followed the Rory Gallagher route and started their new life in Clonakilty in Cork.

The young Donegal native continued his education in Co. Limerick and later went on to

study with the Redemptorist Order in Esker in Galway and then to UCG in Galway.

As part of his training before ordination he went to Brazil and after ordination in 1970 he remained there where he was to spend most of his priestly life and became Vice Provincial of the order in Fortaleza. Brazil was a place in turmoil in those years - full of injustice and poverty but Fr. Holmes was never afraid to take it on, highlighting the corruption and many of the social injustices that were prevalent in the area.

He came to the attention of the media back here at home when he featured on the television programme "Radical Missionaries"

Fr. Cathal O'Fearraigh PP at St. Patrick's in Ballyshannon commented, "Fr. Brian was known to be a man to speak his mind - he is a courageous man."

When many would have been thinking of retiring Fr. Holmes took on one of the biggest challenges of his life when he was posted to war torn Mozambique in 2012.

As parish priest in Furancongo he administered over a parish which was twice the size of Donegal and one that had no

priest for 18 years.

He recalled that the most amazing thing about his new parish was that his parishioners retained the most fervent Christian faith in spite of the country being embroiled in war.

He said, "They were an amazing spiritual people - they had no money but at the same time they wanted for nothing. The land was beautiful and provided them with everything they could want in terms of food. The roads were all dirt tracks, villages were 80K apart; there was no post, no electricity, no telephones - the people went barefoot to sell their produce in the 'big town'. One thing they had was a sense of contentment and happiness."

"In reality all these gentle people wanted was a place to practice their religion - for many years they had said Mass in secluded places in the open air like the Irish of many years ago. They set about backing bricks for the walls of the church and succeeded in producing 140,000 bricks."

"Today the brick-layers are nearly finalising the main walls of the Parish Church. The people's hopes are becoming a reality. For years they had to survive on their own as a Christian Community through war,



On his recent visit to his native town Fr. Holmes talks of old days at the Convent of Mercy and his present days and challenges in Mozambique. INDD-0709 Priest 7 FL.JPG (Main photo shows the church building in progress).

poverty, and difficulties of various kinds.

"We were invited to come and live in this rural region, to be a presence among the people, where we try and learn their language, understand their customs, way of life, and journey with them as best we can."

"Over the last number of years we heard clearly and repeatedly their hopes to build their own church. They started themselves. They made and

fired 140,000 bricks and they contributed generously from their very limited financial resources. Two months ago they began dig the foundations of their parish church. And now it is ready to be roofed."

Fr. Cathal O'Fearraigh told the Democrat, "Without a doubt Fr. Brian and his community have overcome all the obstacles."

"Here in Ballyshannon we have raised €11,000 for Fr. Brian - funds are still urgently

needed for some of the more expensive items which are not readily available to the community - cement, timber, iron - these are the type of materials that are now needed."

"We would ask anybody who might be inspired by this truly inspirational project to drop into the parochial house in Ballyshannon."

"These are people who looked on their problems as challenges and overcame them - they deserve our help."