



Happy 90th Birthday

Tribute to

Brother Francis Thomas McCrea

From The Alumni of Saint Joseph's College, Ondo, Ondo State. Nigeria

Introduction

Omotayo (Cornelius) Fakinlede [SJC 518 (1966-71)]

“To touch the hearts of your students and to inspire them with the Christian spirit is the greatest miracle you could perform, and the one that God asks of you, since this is the purpose of your work.” Jean-Baptiste de La Salle

Francis Thomas McCrea, born in Canada March 1, 1932, a La Salle Brother, came to Nigeria in 1960. He obtained a bachelor’s degree from University of Windsor and Masters’ from Columbia University. He worked at St Joseph’s College, Ondo and St Peters College, Akure. He was here till early 1980s having served for more than 20 years in Nigeria. Back to Canada, he became the Brother Superior – Heading the organization that sent him to Nigeria in the first place. At the age of 90 years, he lives in a commune condo in Toronto, Canada. He has not stopped working. He still drives needy people – especially aged, to get critical services.



Brother Thomas with some Old Students, Washington D.C., 1974

His landmark achievement, in the opinion of many of us, was his exemplary leadership as our teacher and principal. Many of us have gone ahead and were successful in competing with people that are supposed to have attended better schools. Somehow, we were usually ahead! The answer to that puzzle may lie in the caliber of the self-effacing corps that trained us in Ondo. Did we really know whom we were dealing with? How many of us knew that late Brother Earnest Romuald, when he was with us, was not merely a teacher as he appeared to us, but the leader of the entire group. That he had degrees from world-renowned universities such as McGill and Toronto? That late Brother Bernard Broderick, for example, was essentially from a similar background. We owe it to late Taoheed Ajao (Senior Taoheed to me) that late Brother Alphonse Druin, “Baba Leture”, was a super missionary who walked from our compound, twice a week to visit and pray for the sick at the Ondo General Hospital, shadowed by young children shouting “Oyinbo”, “Oyinbo”. That he was coming from the war zone of Vietnam to another war zone of the Nigerian Civil war? That teaching us Bible Knowledge, which he did with distinction, was not the reason why he was in Nigeria. Once here, he did not hesitate to do what was needed. That Brother Alphonse Druin invented PowerPoint many years ago when Bill Gates was still in Primary school? Do you remember the number of tabloids with Maps that he used to teach us? Handwriting and Bible? Of the “Reverend Brothers” that worked in our school, three remain alive: Thomas, Mel, and John Vella who also turns 80 in 2022. This book is solely on Brother Thomas for his 90th Birthday.

Overview

Google doc was sent to all the Nobles of SJC that were personally acquainted with Brother Thomas, to write short notes and anecdotes that can be remembered to tickle his brain. To achieve this goal, the next two months were spent collecting these, getting them printed in a book, and sending him a copy. If our work is of sufficiently high quality, we may even publish it on Amazon because “Great men do not need to be known to us; It is us that need to know them.”



001 Letting Us Have Our Fun

Omotayo (Cornelius) Fakinlede (SJC 518: 1966-71)

Professor, University of Lagos

It was late in the year 1970. The prefects for the next year had been appointed. This included several of our classmates such as Segun Filani - Senior Prefect, Juwon Awosika, etc. It was only five students that were normally exempted from regular housework which included cutting grass, compound cleaning, etc. A number of us, some of whom felt bad that we were not so appointed, refused to do housework and obey our classmates that had just been given power. We constituted ourselves into what we called "The Supremes of SJC". We even went to the usual classroom front and took a group photograph and we made ourselves a rival power block. The new prefects could not control us and, I believe, they must have gone to report the matter to the Principal, Brother Thomas.

He came to hostels one afternoon and rounded all of us up; he had bought brand new cutlasses for each of us. He came fully dressed in his own Khaki on Khaki. Seeing our principal in his Khaki uniform defeated our ability to refuse to be so dressed. And he marched us towards the piggery and asked us to start cutting the trees for the firewood needed to make our meals in the school kitchen, himself leading the way! We did that, with him, every afternoon from 4:00 pm until the end of the year. That ended our rebellion.



Brother Thomas with Omotayo Fakinlede near City Hall, Toronto. June 2018

One late afternoon, as we were walking towards the piggery, Brother Thomas in front, the rest of us, no exceptions, followed to the usual workplace. I took my cutlass, pretending I wanted to cut off his head! The remaining pupils burst into uproarious laughter. I enjoyed it so much that I did it repeatedly, and we laughed. Brother Thomas looked back and asked: “Why are you laughing?” We all pretended there was nothing causing the laughter. He just went with us, made us cut the trees as we were supposed to do. And that was it. I needed to grow up many years later to realize that Brother Thomas was fully aware of my buffoonery; He was simply allowing us to have our fun. That was what we thought we were: The Supremes of SJC just because we reached the end of the year in form four!

NB. I have not been able to locate the photo we took at that time. It had the caption “The Supremes of SJC. Please if anyone can find it, it will be a good picture to post here.

002 A Ride of My Life

Olurinde Ebenezer Lafe [SJC315 (1965-69)]

Chairman, The MIDATCO Group, Bentleyville, Ohio, USA

Former Director, Center for Renewable Energy Technology and Professor, School of Engineering & Engineering Technology, Federal University of Technology, Akure.

The Ride

The year was 1966. I was in my second year at St Joseph’s College (SJC). It was during one of the holidays. I was leisurely strolling on the road in front of our family home in Igunrin Street, Ondo. An old VW car drove by. The driver and I made full eye contact. It was Brother Thomas! He recognized me. He reversed to where I was. We chatted for a few seconds. He then asked if I would like to go for a ride. I enthusiastically responded, “Yes!”

I hopped into the car and had a ride of my life with Brother Thomas. We drove to Ile-Oluji. We talked about so many subjects under the sun. The 15-year-old me had tons of questions. For example, I asked him why our school uniform wasn’t the traditional Yoruba outfit. He calmly explained to me that our school uniform, as designed, was best suited for all the academic and vigorous extracurricular activities we engaged in as students. I was thrilled. I was on the proverbial Cloud 9!

The Snakes

A constant and perpetual wonder for SJC students was the boldness and dexterity with which Brother Thomas handled snakes. An open discussion came up in our class one day. Many of us believed Brother Thomas must possess some magical powers to pick up snakes without any fear. Our classroom teacher decided to chime in. He told us Brother Thomas had the same issues we had with snakes when he first arrived in our neck of the woods. Brother Thomas went back to North America and took it upon himself to read books on snakes. He educated himself and developed the uncanny knowledge to decipher between venomous and non-venomous snakes. The discussion opened my young teenage mind. Just like Brother Thomas was able to overcome the conventional fear by acquiring knowledge on the crawling, elongated, limbless, carnivorous reptiles, I too can develop mastery of obstacles by studying to unravel the mystery surrounding what we fear.

The Waiver

I was a day student in my last 3 years at SJC. Around the time of our WASC exams in 1969, a nighttime fire incident in my house had burnt the majority of my personal belongings including books and clothes. My school uniforms had also gone up in smoke. Some of my native “Ankara” native clothing escaped the fire. Undeterred, I put on a set of the Ankara “Buba and şokoto” that survived the fire and decided to go to school. I went straight to Brother Thomas to recount the story of the fire and why I was in traditional attire. He sympathized with me. He then chose to give me an unconventional waiver from the requirement to wear the school uniform. I enjoyed that waiver until the end of our school term.

The Affirmation

About a year after leaving SJC, a close senior relative and I traveled to Ondo from Lagos. We made a quick stop at SJC to check on his son who was a new student at SJC. Brother Thomas was on the school grounds. My relative shared with me later the private chat with Brother Thomas during the visit when my name came up. Brother Thomas told him, “He is a gentleman.” My senior relative was so impressed by that brief comment made by Brother Thomas. He repeated that story for years to scores of our family members. Learning about the opinion of Brother Thomas, my Secondary School Principal, about me was a major morale booster while embarking on my undergraduate studies in engineering at the University of Lagos.

The Lessons of Life

I recall Brother Thomas, with his long flashlight, going from dormitory to dormitory early in the mornings and late at night. He was dutifully checking that all was well with us. I marveled at his skill and fearlessness in handling those snakes we saw regularly in SJC. His selflessness, devotion, and dedication gave us a solid foundation and valuable lessons during our beginning years. I was

highly privileged and enormously blessed to have been trained, mentored, and influenced by Brother Francis Thomas McCrea. Happy 90th Birthday, Brother Thomas!



Olurinde Lafe, Ohio, USA 2021

003 Be Prepared and Obey the Law

A practical lesson taught by Brother Francis Thomas McCrea

Debo Awosika-Olumo (Aka Bobo) -1970-74 set

President GHMIGROUP INC. Fellow of American College of Epidemiology and Professor of Public Health Administration University of Maryland Global Campus

There are many lessons of “be prepared” taught by Brother Thomas, during my memorable time at Saint Joseph’s College Ondo.

While in form 1, one of our new entrants, Mr. Henry Fasedemi (Jaguar), brought boxing gloves to the school. This experience made many of us venture into boxing as one of the recreation sports in the school. Brother Thomas got interested in this sport and bought more gloves, and also gave the rule that no one should hit anyone in the abdomen (tummy) during weight classified bouts. There was this particular day, I was wearing a top over my navy-blue shorts instead of the khaki shorts after classes. Brother Thomas gave a go-ahead to the person I was fighting with to hit me in the stomach. This individual hit me in the tummy as instructed by a wink from Brother Thomas. I was expecting brother Thomas to discipline the guy that flouted the rule, instead, he told me to go and change and wear the correct dress code for the period. Hence, the joke was on me. The next “be prepared” lesson was when some of the new entrants brought different musical instruments to the school. We started a ragtag musical group. Brother Thomas got interested

and decided to make the group more formal with the acquisition of more sophisticated musical instruments. He decided to go to Ibadan with some students to buy the new musical instruments. Fortunately, some of us were just strolling around. Of the four-six of us strolling around, only two students were wearing the correct dress code. He stopped and told dress code folks to go and change to their colors and accompanied him to Ibadan. These two experiences taught me the lesson, to always be prepared and obey the constituted laws of any community of residency.



Debo Awosika-Olumo (Bobo), 2020

I am grateful to God that I have the opportunity to share these two experiences on how God used a man early in my life to teach me this important lesson of life.

Happy Birthday and Many Happy Returns of the Day in perfect health Brother Francis Thomas McCrea

Bobo, this is an interesting story. We just saw the musical instruments arrive with Shakila, Aloro Hammer, etc. as instrumentalists while Jimi and others were doing vocals!
And, Bobo, don't tell me you forgot your school number! Another blow to your stomach may be on the way!

004 Putting Hands on the Plow

Stephen S. Nwabuzor (SJC 192) 1961-1965 Retired Professor of Engineering Hydrology Pioneer Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria.

It is indeed a pleasure to write this short piece on Brother Francis Thomas McCrea. In 1961, when I gained admission to Saint Joseph's College (SJC), Brother Thomas was merely a twenty-eight (28) year old man, and I was eleven.

SJC was populated by what we then termed Canadian Brothers with Brother Bernard Broderick as the Principal. Along with other sanguine Revd. Brothers, the students of those days worked hard to build a school from the forest that housed SJC. The attributes of a boarding school with discipline and moral instruction were not in short supply and were a beauty to behold.

Brother Thomas was pivotal in ensuring that sporting activities were alive. I vividly recall the removal of the stones on the basketball court and installation of the hoops, which he supervised. He also ensured that baseball became an integral part of the sporting activities by improvising used car tires as base stations.

Part of his lasting impact on my impressionable mind was walking "Bingo", a communal dog owned by the Revd. Brothers, to the dormitories. "Bingo" always gave Brother Thomas away in his daily rounds, especially to my irrepressible and restive spirit. The latter ensured my name in the weekly roll of honor dubbed "Disobedient Twenty." I topped the list for two years. Up till today, I remain fond of dogs, and one of them is named Bingo, a nostalgic memento to Brother Thomas.

Brother Thomas, to me, was the solo secret police of the then-staff at SJC. His countenance betrayed his emotions towards me revealing whenever I ran afoul of school rules, and punishment wasn't far away.



Steve Nwabuzor, 2011

Brother Thomas, I sincerely thank you for the spirit of sacrifice, discipline, and doggedness which you and your confreres instilled into our lives. I am sure you would love to know that I triumphed against all odds and proceeded to obtain a Ph.D. degree in Civil Engineering from the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London, UK; became Professor of Engineering Hydrology and pioneer Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at a Federal University in Nigeria. May God continue to bless you and extend your years.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR 90th BIRTHDAY ANNIVERSARY!

005. Inclusive Education

Dr. Rafiu Ajao (1965-69)

St Joseph's was remarkable for admitting pupils from diverse backgrounds if they had requisite qualifications which essentially was to do well at the entrance examination. While many schools tested a pupil's knowledge, St Joseph's concentrated on the pupil's ability to think outside the box. But for that policy, a Muslim student like me would probably have had no chance in the Catholic school. Perhaps this laid the foundation for one of the major points that stood St Joseph's apart from other schools around: consistently high scores at School Cert, the almighty certification that determined the fate of many pupils in those days. But then St Joseph's other remarkable attribute was in allowing us spiritual freedom. Muslim students were allowed to go to the mosque on Fridays while Anglican students could attend service in their own church on Sundays.

I always wondered why, but I lacked the courage to approach the principal at the time. Then Brother Thomas took over. The hallmark of his style was to ensure that every pupil had easy access to him, and he would listen to everyone, regardless of class or position. And so, we gathered around him one day as he fielded questions from us. Some students suggested that opening the school's admission process to pupils from places far from Ondo would increase competition, and invariably boost the School Cert scores further. Brother Thomas listened to our suggestions. Then he told us that the primary reason the school was sited in Ondo was to teach Ondo pupils and that even though good grades were desirable, they were secondary. The admission policy remained. Ordinary as it seemed, that encounter made a lasting impression on my mind of a principal who took pains to explain the policy to his students. It was quintessential Brother Thomas.

Another incident involved our new Physics teacher. This teacher came with the attitude (often referred to as British) of giving students tough questions and then bragging about the low scores. That was his style until Brother Thomas asked him about it. The Physics teacher boasted that his marks did not come easy. But Brother Thomas pointedly told him, "If you teach them the tough topics and questions, they will do better." As he narrated the encounter later, our teacher admitted that he had not looked at the issue from that perspective. Unknown to us, we had just heard of a way that our teacher was evaluated, and he went on to give us better service thereafter.

I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity of passing through Brother Thomas. So, as you celebrate your 90th birthday dear Brother, I pray that the Lord continue to bless you.

006: You are Admitted!

Victor Olusegun Asekunowo (1967-1969 Juniorate; 1970-1971 SJC 898) Professor of Economics, Department of Entrepreneurship Technology & Innovation, The Federal University of Technology, Akure.

Prior to 1970, Brother Thomas McCrea to me was just one of those Canadian De La Salle Reverend Brothers carrying out their missionary duties in the big old compound of Saint Joseph's College (SJC), Ondo. This was because the first three years of my secondary school education were spent in the Juniorate. Since I was a non-Junior, Brother Romuald allowed me to transfer to SJC in January 1970.

So, the first close interaction I had with Brother Thomas was when Brother Romuald sent me to him with my Form 3 results in hand, to deliver the coded message "I am from Brother Romuald". He immediately admitted me into the Form 4 class of 1970, and I became the 898th student of SJC.

While in SJC, my memory of him was that of a school Principal who was usually dressed in light blue shorts and white T-shirts with backless sandals or mule shoes. If not dressed this way, he would appear in white cassocks. Sometimes, a 2 or 3-foot black plastic pipe would dangle from his right hand. I never saw him in a pair of trousers! Boy, I detested his call for morning masses. His "to" trip from Xavier 1(my dormitory) to Xavier 4 can be uneventful, but the "fro" trip from Xavier 4 to Xavier 1 can be quite eventful as any student caught still slumbering would be at the receiving end of his black rubber pipe. As a person who had been in that position a couple of times, let me tell you that it was a nasty experience, especially during the Harmattan period.

Another memory of his that I have was the time he substituted for Mr. Aliba (who resigned his appointment) as our English Literature Tutor. His manner of teaching was such that a student cannot doze off. You just cannot because his voice would not allow you to. I missed that voice when another very competent Tutor, Mr. Awonogun took over when Brother Thomas went on leave to his native Canada.

I am sure there are many more anecdotes about Brother Thomas that I can relate to only if father time can just be a bit memory friendly. I would just conclude this short piece by saying that I sincerely appreciate the sacrifices that the likes of Brothers Thomas, Romuald, Bernard, Mel, Alphonsus, John, and many others have made towards the intellectual and spiritual development of young Africans when they were here.

I heard that Brother Thomas has clocked or is about to clock 90 years of age. I wish him many more healthy years here on planet earth.

007: Climbing the Ladder

Dr. Kayode J Fakinlede (1962 - 1966; SJC 258) CEO - ALA LABORATORIES, AKURE

It was a nice thrill. All we had to do was climb the ladder to the first floor of the yet-to-be-completed Novitiate building and jump down to the ground. There were about seven or eight of us. We really did not have to land on the ground. There was a mound of soil on which we landed and rolled to the ground.

I did it once but was too scared to do it again. John, having done this more than once and thoroughly enjoying it, encouraged me to try again but I would not budge.

Afar off, close to the lavatory, and coming in our direction, was Brother Thomas. I guess he must have looked around in the assembly and noticed quite a few of us missing. By the time we saw the white gown from the first floor of the building, it was too late for us to come down the ladder. The ladder was facing the direction from where Brother Thomas was coming. About four or five of us, courageous enough to jump down from the opposite side, did so and hightailed it to the bush. I, and about three chicken-livered students, were stuck. We could not come down. We, therefore, pinned ourselves to the floor of the deck, praying that he would not climb the ladder.

For some reason, Brother Thomas did not climb the ladder. Rather, he kept on calling on us to come down and threatening that he would climb the ladder if we did not. We did not. And he did not climb the ladder! I guess he thought that if he did, we might be forced to jump and injure ourselves.

After a few minutes, he decided to leave us alone. We were watching him till he got to the lavatory again, hanging the sweater of one of us he had picked up, on a tree. We quickly came down the ladder and headed to the assembly.

I said to myself. What if he had decided to climb the ladder? I probably would have ended up with a broken arm.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR 90th BIRTHDAY!

008 The Caged Python

Dr. Kayode J Fakinlede (1962 - 1966; SJC 258) CEO - ALA LABORATORIES, AKURE

I did not have an outstanding talent of any sort. I just happened to be the first second-year student Brother Thomas and the Biology Lab keeper came across while looking for someone to help in cleaning the biology laboratory. And so it was that for the next two years plus, I was in charge of taking care of the lab.

Our biology lab was an interesting place. We had animals of all kinds including snakes, captured on our school ground and even elsewhere. We even had a tank with a small alligator in it. Another one had a small python, captured by Mr. Beatty and Brother Thomas while they were on their way to the Eastern part of our country.

For quite some time, the python would not eat. We even had a chicken placed in its cage, hoping that it would strangle and eat it. But nothing.

We also used the biology lab as an entrance examination center for incoming students.

On this day, while the place was packed with prospective students. Brother Thomas was the supervisor, and I was in there to just wait around for the exam to end so I could start cleaning later. Brother Thomas opened the python's cage and began to caress its uplifted head. Nothing happened.

This gave me the impetus to stick my own hand into the python's cage, a thing I would not ordinarily do. And for whatever reason, the snake seemed to differentiate my hand from that of Brother Thomas – and struck.

I screamed. Some of the students taking the exam looked back to see what the commotion was.

Brother Thomas laughed!! I thought he was crazy. He asked to see the finger where the snake was supposed to have bitten me. I showed him a red mark which, at first glance, I had thought were made by the fangs of the snake. It turned out that it was really a mark made previously by a red ballpoint pen

Brother Thomas then told me that that snake did not actually bite me but only struck. Its fangs, he explained to me were curved inwards and were incapable of biting its prey but were used only to hold its prey as it was being swallowed. A lesson I will never forget.

009 “Bookworm”

Dr. Ajibike Olukunle Akinkoye

(1962 - 1966; SJC 255)

Author, Editor, Publisher, Retired Professor & Pastor.

It is difficult not to repeat some of the things other old students have written. They are inspiring and enjoyable to read. However, there is at least one experience that was probably unique to me.

Before I was admitted to SJC, I used to read all the newspapers and magazines to which my father subscribed at the time, and all the books he brought into the house. My father was a teacher at Ondo Boys’ High School (now Ondo High School).

After I entered St. Joseph’s College, my appetite for reading only grew. By the end of my third year, I had read all the novels in the school library. My elder brother, Dr. Olugbemi Akinkoye, who was then working in Lagos, would buy up most of the novels on annual sale at Kingsway Stores in Lagos and send them to me. I just loved reading. However, I did not always read at the authorized hours. Late at night, I would pull my bedsheets and cover cloth down the sides of my bed (to block out the light of the torch I was using) and lie down under the bed to read until the wee hours of the morning. One day, Brother Thomas caught me reading at an “unholy hour” and pulled me out from under the bed. He led me out to the corridor of the dormitory. I thought bleakly that my days at St. Joseph’s were over.

Instead of the tongue-lashing and punishment I had expected, Brother Thomas simply admonished me not to stay up so late at night because it was not good for my health and my growth. Then, later that day, when he learned that I had read all the novels in the school library, he brought me some books from the private library of the Reverend Brothers! He gave me the nickname “Bookworm” and only cautioned me to “get enough sleep” each night. I think I also read all the books in the Brothers’ private library.

It was fun to later read and study great writings from around the world until I obtained my first degree (First Class Honors, University of Ibadan), as well as my Master’s and Doctoral degrees (French and English) from the University of Bordeaux, France. I have written a few books myself, and I have edited and published over thirty books for others. The seed was planted by many people in my early years and thoroughly watered by Brother Thomas. I cannot forget.

Merci beaucoup, Brother Thomas. Blessings on your 90th birthday!



Ajibike Akinkoye, 2019

010 Swimming in Ose River

Oladiran AYODEJI (1965-1969).

OBSTETRICIAN-GYNECOLOGIST, SENIOR LECTURER AT UNIVERSITY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES LAJE ROAD ONDO. PASTOR.

What a pleasure to write a few words on Brother Thomas McCrae. A no-nonsense, no-frills, teacher and mentor. Of course, I remember him in shorts, walking around, appearing like a 'ghost' when you least expected to see him. I remember his long flashlight. I remember his morning ritual of always coming to wake us up. Sometimes, he poured water on our sleepy heads so we could wake quickly and get ready for mass.

But what remains indelible to me was when he appeared one afternoon at my father's cocoa depot close to our house. I was working with my siblings on cocoa beans, with our father making sure we put in a diligent effort. My father was totally taken aback to find a white man asking for his son. The impression my dad had was that his son had misbehaved so badly the school principal had come to make a report! Fear turned to joy when I learned Brother Thomas

had come to invite me for a picnic trip to IFON after OWO. My father now had a picture of pride that his boy was going to be in the company of this foreign principal for a swimming trip to IFON. We headed to IFON, picking up a few other students who lived close to me. How Brother Thomas knew our different home addresses was to me more than a mystery!

The trip was most enjoyable. We bought some fruits on the way and got to IFON in the Peugeot station wagon that Brother Thomas brought. At IFON, we headed to a small river where Brother Thomas changed to his swimming trunks and enjoyed himself in the small river. All we did was watch in awe beholding our principal swimming like a kid. All of these were alien to my way of enjoyment and relaxation. To Brother Thomas, it appeared we made his day! It was such a great joy to get home, surrounded by many people in my house asking what I did with the OYINBO. I never had the opportunity to thank Brother Thomas for taking me on his picnic. That single outing changed my 'status' at home and especially with my parents! Thank you, Brother Thomas.

We celebrate you on this occasion of your 90th birthday. You have been greatly used by God to bless our lives. I pray that grace and peace continue to multiply for you. We love you.



011 Promotion, Training, and other Surprises

Professor Matt IVBIJARO (1962-65)

I salute you, Rev Brother Thomas McCrea, an astute student administrator, a builder of youths, a distinguished teacher of the English language.

I am Matt IVBIJARO, SJC, 1962-1965, fondly known as Lobito; a retired Professor of Agricultural Entomology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria; an Environment consultant and author of books on the Nigeria environment.



Matt Ivbijaro, 2021

When I came to SJC, Ondo in 1962, Rev Brother Thomas was the Vice-Principal. Towards the end of my first term in 1962, Brother Thomas informed me that SJC had decided to promote me to form 2 in the second term. He asked me what the reaction of my friends would be. I told him I would be glad to accept the promotion. At the end of 1962, Brother Thomas informed me that I

had been offered the Western Region Scholarship for being the best candidate at the entrance examination to SJC.

In my form 3, 1963, Brother Thomas requested if I would be willing to be appointed the laboratory assistant in charge of the Biology, Chemistry, and Physics laboratories. I gladly accepted. I was responsible to Mr. Ian Beatty, our Chemistry teacher though a geology graduate. Beatty taught me how to catch snakes *alive*. We both began to catch snakes for the biology lab. He even brought a live python. We also caught a chameleon.

In the same form 3, Brother Thomas assigned a mower to me for cutting the track and field in front of the college whenever there would be an athletic event.

During the long vacation in form 4, 1964, I received a letter from the office of the Principal, Rev Brother Bernard to attend a 2-week Citizenship and Leadership Training Course at the Man O War Bay, Shasha close to Omo Forest Reserve. Along with me was a classmate whose name I cannot recall now. Brother Thomas gave us a pep talk before our departure. It was a highly demanding course physically and mentally.

I graduated from SJC in December 1965. In 1966, Rev Brother Bernard offered me a teaching appointment with my West African School Certificate. It was an incredible offer.

Brother Thomas welcomed me warmly to join the teaching staff. I was determined to make good of this opportunity and prepare for the Common Entrance Examination to the University of Ibadan.

Brother Thomas and late Rev Brother Bernard gave students responsibilities to prove and develop themselves.

You may wish to know, dear Brother Thomas, that a good number of SJC students who passed through the crucible of human development by you and Rev Brother Bernard are now at the helm of affairs in their various professions.

We celebrate you, Brother Thomas, and send our 90 hearty cheers to a quintessential visionary on his 90th birthday 🎂 anniversary, March 2, 2022.

012 The “Omnipresent” Thomas!

Isaac Akinboyewa (SJC 531: 1966-1970)

Texas - USA



Isaac Akinboyewa, 2022

It is with great respect and from the deepness of a sincere heart that I wish Reverend Brother Thomas a successful celebration as he turns 90 this year 2022. Brother Thomas was the Principal of Saint Joseph’s College in Ondo, Ondo State of Nigeria (SJC) while I was a student in the Secondary School from 1966 till my graduating year in 1970. He was also the English Teacher in my last year.

Bro Thomas belongs to a group of the admirable set of characters that can be described as totally committed to love, caring, nurturing, and development, a group of people that are driven by God-given pursuit of quality and devotion to sincere development of the young generation to which I am personally blessed to have tremendously benefited from. I would personally describe the set

as the nicest and the finest examples of honest, humble, and dedicated teachers in our world today. The list of this set of schoolteachers in our youths cannot be complete without mentioning other school leaders like Rev Brother Bernard, Rev Brother Alphonsus, and Mr. Ola. A set of honest disciplinarians and devoted persons, detailed in their dealings, devoted to their course, and purposeful in their plan, they find enthusiasm and fulfillment in their calling. Brother Thomas belongs to that set.

As students we were young and always behaved like youths. However, the strong but gentle and firm guidance of Brother Thomas saw us through those developmental ages. We hardly realized it then as we do today. SJC was a comparatively large school, on a large expanse of land with 2 soccer fields, with several student resident dormitories and a very large number of students, yet Brother Thomas knew almost everyone by name and could identify almost everybody by face. He was always around us. I remember he would take part with us on the Sports Field to play, in the Chapel to pray, work through the dormitories at siesta to see whose beds were vacant and going through all the classrooms at evening study sessions to identify those who were not in class. So close was he to everyone and everywhere that he would be privy to everything and anything amiss? Sincerely as youths then, we hated the closeness and the serious scrutiny at that time because like youths we wanted our own freedom and there was always something to hide no matter how trivial, but later realized how great a commitment and how industrious that was as we finished in SJC and moved on to greater experiences of life. Brother Thomas was always there, surprisingly unexpectedly several times, all to keep us in good check. Thank God I had a First-Class Hon. degree in Computer Sciences (University of Ibadan) and I am now a Computer Database Administrator in America but I can never forget the impact Brother Thomas had in my personal foundational and fundamental development. I will be forever grateful to him.

To the Almighty God be the Glory for his exemplary integrity and exquisite qualities. May the Almighty God continue to sustain and strengthen our own dear Principal (Reverend Brother Thomas) for longer life still, in good health and blessed peace, now and forevermore in Jesus Mighty Name Amen.

The “Indefatigable” Thomas

The good words to describe Reverend Brother Thomas and his lessons seem unlimited. I have earlier written Article 012 on my personal gratitude and prayers for him. I am submitting a second Article to describe two or three of my personal experiences with him to corroborate what others have presented. Is there anyone that had worked across the path of Reverend Brother Thomas that has not had a personal experience with him in a way that will impact life? I bet none. Everyone has had that personal experience and I do too and in fact a number of times. Here I am presenting two or three of them.

1st Incident - The “Unbeatable” Thomas

1970 was our final year, the senior year, which craves into our heads that we could do anything and get away with it. After all, no other senior class was above us to put us in check and no exams were in sight to cow us down. Moreover, the only people we feared were the Teachers and the Principal. Luckily the Teachers were not always there. We were in the boarding school and no Teacher stayed after school hours but guess who was there to be afraid of. And he was always there, O Yes, morning, afternoon, evening, and night. Well, we could at least gamble for the night because you wonder if Brother Thomas ever slept in those days. Okay, so far so good, we had a chance because this incident was in the night, a late night.

We had earlier heard that a new Hot and Deadly Chinese Movie had just arrived to be shown in a town called **Coon Ka Coon** interpreted as **Blood for Blood** where they would fight, kill and die. It was to be shown in the only Public Theater, the Rex Cinema, in the distant town center about five miles away from school. No cars, no bikes, and no mobility of any sort, but for us, that distance was only a dash to trek, especially when we had an event of great interest.

Hmmm, youths as we were, we really loved to watch those. And while school was in session, only Brother Thomas could stop us. O Lord! we yearned, “Let Brother Thomas have asleep, at least tonight”.

Everyone who dared decided to go to the movie and so we encouraged each other. The deal was to get every junior student warned to keep his mouth shut if the principal ever asked. I was afraid too because my uncle would be terribly mad to hear and my mom would cry her eyes out. But how can one miss such an interesting movie? I yearned and mumbled that prayer one more time for reassurance as we summoned great courage – A man does not die twice, aha! The die was cast (positive). I followed the multitude. Almost half of the senior class left that night to watch the movie showing from about 7.30 pm till about 9.30 pm. We moved into multiple groups.

We walked briskly and ran fast. Oh, we must have walked those five miles in five minutes. The Theater was packed full. It looked like every youth from every secondary school and all interested adults in town were present to watch the deadly movie. Getting a ticket at the entrance was like dew falling from the skies, hot, humid, sweaty, and noisy amongst long disorganized queues. However, with some patience and struggling we all seem to have gone in through that one major entrance, though with many inside standing having no more empty seats to sit. But Thank God we must have sighed that Brother Thomas was not there and no junior student had the gut to tell. Unfortunately, as youths, we had not thought through and we had forgotten that our empty beds were enough to betray us. Surely Brother Thomas could never have missed that.

Truly it was a very interesting movie. It was action-packed at every moment even though we did not follow or understand the story. A beating or a drawn sword drew great applause even before the actual strike. There was blood everywhere in the movie and the audience followed with a show of fists in support especially when the Bad Guys showed up. Everyone shouted, howled, yelled, screamed, and giggled. The concentration was superb. So, we successfully watched the movie to the end, and it was definitely interesting to us all. However, what really happened after was unexpected and very disruptive. Right at the entrance, everyone was struggling to get out of the main exit door and that was expected for the multitude. However, are we hearing Rev Brother Thomas was at the entrance? What? How did he get there? So many questions were running down our mouths and minds. Was he there before the movie ended or was, he just arriving? How did he know we were at the movie? How come he did not come into the theater? Could we disguise or how do we disguise? Were there any teachers along with him? Nobody could tell but ... Look, that is not important now. The only thing that is most important is to see how to fly back to school and lay in bed. Hey, what were we going to do? The school was a good five miles away on the outskirts of town with only one terminal road eventually leading there. The whole place was in confusion as everyone tried to smuggle themselves out and disguise themselves within the huge crowd. Heeey the "Omnipresent" Brother Thomas only needed to sight your face at a distance, and he knows you by name. You had to stoop down amongst the crowd, NO that is not enough, you must run, I mean you have to fly over the buildings, over the roads, through the bushes, and by whatever means just get back to the hostel and be on your bed, pretending. It was a "scatter- scatter - get your ass out of the way if you could not fly enough". That was a long night, and the Indefatigable Thomas was equal to the task.

He had caught a few students and arrested them in his car. For some of us yet physically uncaught, it was like animals running for dear life at the sight of a hungry lion. We ran like never before. About 3 miles away at a narrow river Bridge called Lisaluwa, there we sighted the strong light from a car. We knew it was Brother Thomas. Heeeey into the thick bush along the dangerous riversides, many of us dived. At least if you were not caught in the act, you could have a chance to deny it. We knew Brother Thomas must have seen us through those powerful headlamps but surprisingly he did not stop as we expected. He just sped past like he never saw us. Then we knew we were in big trouble. We knew he was speeding to dash through those hostels and dormitories. He knew us vividly, not only facially and nominally, but he also knew details of who sleeps in which dormitory and on which bed. Well, we knew him too, our invincible unbeatable insurmountable indefatigable Principal. We knew he was racing to go check who was missing on his bed at the hostel and we were sure there was no more hiding place for us. Yes, we knew him, we knew his way, we knew his methods and we knew his expectations of us. Just that we hated being so closely monitored, not knowing that those were wrong approaches to a successful life.

So he took his census and went home to rest, I guess he applied the Words of the Lord - Tomorrow would take care of itself ... **Mathew 6:34 - ... for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof**

Did I not say it was a very long night? Oh, we thought, we wished Tomorrow would not come. Let the day not break yet. Finally, the next day was judgment day. Everyone he caught and he caught every one of us, either physically or missing from your bed last night. Everyone had to defend themselves. The tricky and smart always had something to say. Like a defensive Attorney and a Balanced Judge, if your defense is reasonable, coherent, and cannot be otherwise proved wrong, you go scuff-free. The weak, the inconsistent, and the defenseless must be disciplined. You need only a few to be seriously punished to serve as an example and deterrent to a whole city, not the whole city. That is the way of Reverend Brother Thomas. In the end, I was lucky to get a "Two Week suspension." And I would never do that again.

2nd Incident - The Eagle Eye

I thought I said I would never do that again. Yes, but this is a different circumstance, it's not a movie. Moreover, this one happened before the first in chronological order. In both cases, there are lessons to learn from our tireless passionate Principal.

This occurred while I was in Year 2 (1967), already a beginning senior who should know better than nothing escapes the eyes of Brother Thomas. He seemed to have an eagle or perhaps a third eye, I am serious. That day was a Saturday. One of the upper seniors had asked me to go fetch a pail of water for him in the morning. While completing the task, the bell rang to gather every student at the assembly, so I had no time to wash or take my bath, well so I thought. And who cared anyways about always bathing. We were all Boys in the school, no girls to show off to and no fashion to display. The only occasion that thrilled us to be properly and perfectly dressed up then was any visit to Saint Louis College, our Sister Catholic School. Oh, we would do anything to look our best, perhaps even borrowing some perfumes from friends for a superlative display of sight and sound. But this day was none of those, hence I did not care to even brush my teeth, after all, time was against me. So, I dressed up in a hurry to meet up with other students as they walked down to the assembly. Brushed no teeth, took no bath but wearing a well-ironed dress for the Teachers would notice that outwardly. However, and worst of all I wore no underwear pants (briefs).

Hey, who would even dare look back when Brother Thomas is walking behind us? He was coming behind and urging several dozens of students to double up to the assembly, yet he did notice it. "Why did he suddenly single me out to follow?" I started wondering. O Lord, what have I done? Well, perhaps I needed to walk faster so I doubled my pace. He moved faster and closer and closer. The faster I moved, the more he did to close up. Close enough, he gave me the First slap

with an open fist in my buttocks. I am like “Oh! what did I do?” No questions so I moved faster still. He moved swiftly again and gave me a Second slap, harder than the First. Now I knew I was definitely in trouble but what was my problem? I tried running, thinking I was not fast enough. Then he ran quickly and pinched my bottom through my body and bones. Huh that hurts!

So now I had to stop to look at my Judge, standing in front of him with a guilty appeal for mercy, though I was yet to understand what was my sin? Then he simply looked at me eye to eye, then looked at my Bottom. He did that a couple of times like 3-4 times, and I got the message - **It was not proper to wear no underwear briefs whilst in public.** Sincerely I got the message and my head hung down in shame. The great Teacher, Brother Thomas never said a word then nor thereafter, but the lesson has been learned. Please don't ask me if I ever did that again.

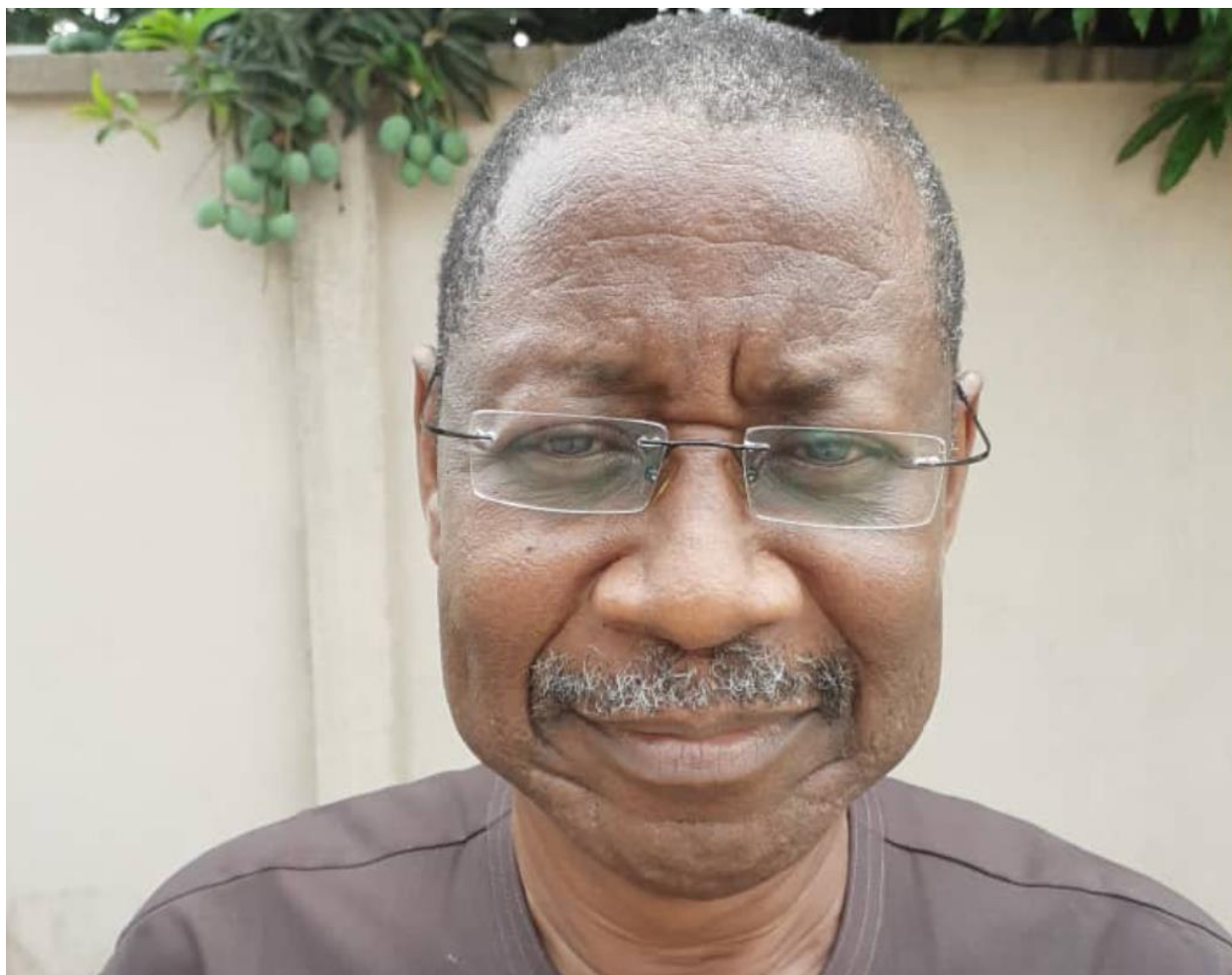
013 Exceptional Motivator

Managing Geoscience Consultant, Geospectra Nig Ltd. Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria.

Olumuyiwa (aka Kido Boy) Anthony Olawoki, PhD (SJC 5371966 - 1971)

Bro Thomas is well-noted and respected for the early morning dormitory rounds to wake students up for morning Mass in the Chapel. Can you recollect that black water hose pipe? Carefully tucked into the long sleeve of his cassock. One friendly spank of the pipe will wake you up and get you into the open bathrooms within a minute. In Austin (Augustine) House, our senior Supo Omo"awo" had plenty of such spanking, because he will sleep sound and deep until Bro Thomas will arrive to wake him up!





Muyiwa Olawoki, 2022

I came to closer contact with Bro Thomas when I had a fracture on my left arm during a football match. Himself and Baba Bro Aphonsos "Leturee, God bless you"...our local Medical Director got me to the General Hospital as possible as they can. A Plaster Of Paris (POP) cast was fixed within 2 days, for the next three months for the bones to heal after the fractured bones were set to touch each other. Every level and form of comfort were provided by our caring Bro Thomas and Baba Leturee.

Bro Thomas and our dear Late Mr. J.R. Ola (Geography Teacher) worked with my parents to make sure that I did not continue my education in Form 3 with weak grades and low scores. So I enjoyed the rare privilege of being promoted from Form 3B to 3A in the following year, belonging to two sets...the College Entry 1966 set, and College Graduation 1971 set (guess I am still correct with the dates!!! 😊 😊 😊 🤔 😊). Bro Thomas was always around my classroom to check my academic performance...and made sure I was not having USAID milk and gari in my knicker pocket during Prep.

Who can recollect the SJC football match at Akure in 1970? I think we played against the Teacher Training College. Correct? Bro Thomas got me to play the "Left In" position for a part of the football game. How I earned the position, I don't know. Stature-wise, I was small compared to the others. The singular opportunity implanted in me the "You too can do it" spirit and eventually has become my driving force. It was a great motivation. Occasionally, I joked with my children that I played a football game for my school as if it was not just for about 30 minutes only during the entire Secondary School days.

During the WAEC period in 1971, an issue occurred. The WAEC representative, Mr. Gbago from the Lagos office suddenly showed up in the Examination Hall, and on a random search, a textbook related to the examination in progress was found in my locker to the surprise of all of us, and the School Authorities. How the textbook got there I don't know, and I'm still wondering till now when I remember the issue. Bro Thomas carefully informed my parents of the incident and began to work the issue with WAEC that I will be the last person to cheat in the examination. He forwarded my school results for Forms 3A-5 to WAEC to support the school's case and position. The Late Mr. J. O. Ola also engaged my parents, reassuring them that the issue will be resolved. Fast forward, WAEC did not release my results and that of another student with a textbook in his locker. Bro Thomas helped to gain admission to Aquinas College Akure for HSC using my GCE London results. THANK YOU, BRO THOMAS, FOR THE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT DURING THE TRYING TIMES IN THE 1971-72 PERIOD.

Happy 90th Birthday anniversary celebrations. Many glorious returns of the blessed day. LONG LIVE BRO THOMAS, LONG LIVE ST JOSEPH COLLEGE (SJC)

014 Ode to that great man

Francis Kehinde Awosika. SJC 461 (1965-1969) Senior Prefect 1969.

Nurse Practitioner Director and CEO Kenvic Healthcare PLC (Home Visiting Physicians), Eastpointe, Michigan, USA.

Brother Francis Thomas McCrea, yours is a life that excellently reflects a commendable service to humanity in the course of your long stewardship at my Alma mater, St Joseph's College, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria. As a young man, you turned your eyes away from the glamor of the Canadian social life with all the accompanying youthful attractions. You chose instead, to come to the comparatively rural Ondo town (now a city) in dedication to, and in absolute



Francis & Victoria Awosika, 2021

submission to the will of God. Consequent upon your humble spirit, and in total disregard for your own comfort, you worked tirelessly and selflessly, and you successfully nurtured hundreds of Nigerian adolescents to attain lives of fulfillment in their adult years. I vividly remember how, in your signature short pants, you would parade the school campus day and night to ensure an enduring peaceful learning environment. I can never forget your expertise in catching snakes which to a large extent, helped to get rid of dangerous snakes that would otherwise have constituted hazards to resident students. The opportunity for me to acquire secondary education, despite my humble background, was resultant of your magnanimity. This early benefit paved the way for my life success and eventual relocation to a better life in the USA with my wife and children 22 years ago. A true man of God you will forever remain, Brother Thomas. I salute and celebrate you on your 90th birthday anniversary. I wish you many more years of glorious and healthful existence. May the peace of God almighty continue to abide in you.

Oh, Salient One...

These Lines salute you not because thou art a
great ruler of people but it sings your praise
because thou art a Great Leader of People...
As Our Comrades would put it "Whom the Cap Fits"...

Like Da Vinci, Like Hippocrates...
To You do we etch these Salient Lines...
Lines that Honor men that dance to the drumbeat
of the Spirits...
Men that see above the Alps, To Men That See
Through do we Chant these Odes...
We Lift up Voices We Lift up our Waists...
My Good Friends do come and dance to the Health
of this Great Man...*Anthony Edmond John*

015 The Fortune of a Family Tree

Ebunlade Oladele Betiku, (SJC 332, 1963 - 67). Chartered Civil Engineer, with over 49years of postgraduate experience in both field and design office practice and still working as an Individual Road Infrastructure & Contract Management Consultant.



Ebunlade Betiku, Form two pupil, SJC 1964

Rev Brother Bernard and Rev Brother Thomas worked, hand in hand to bless me and the Betiku lineage in a way that changed the lives of the entire family for good.

Having noticed that I was gifted but not from a rich family, they invited my father, GF Betiku, and Rev Brother Thomas took a personal interest in overseeing his training to become first an

Accounts Officer and later the school Bursar. They also assisted my father by paying about 50% of my school fees. They continued paying my bursary even through my Higher School Certificate course at the Comprehensive High School, Aiyetoro.

With the Government taking over of Mission schools, my father was absorbed into the Western State Civil Service. He was later transferred to other schools including Gboluji Grammar School, CAC Grammar School, and even Institutions in the present Ekiti State. He became empowered and could train not only me but my other siblings who would have probably dropped out of school or been forced to learn some trades.

My success in the WASC at St Joseph with nine A's (11 indices) which was the best in Ondo and environ that year (1967) inspired many of my siblings (I am from a polygamous family and have over twenty siblings) to not only attend St Joseph but to also choose Engineering as their career.



Civil Engineer Betiku: Press Interview 2012

One of the experiences I remember with excitement was the time our Class captain (3rd year or so) wanted to scapegoat me by ordering me to report myself to the principal for noise making. There was strict discipline, so I had to obey even though I was not the only one talking.

Sensing some bad belle in the matter, both Rev Bernard and his Vice, Rev Thomas told me to come with them on a weekend excursion to Benin city. We stopped by the popular natural stream at Ifon for a refreshing swim and had a wonderful time that weekend. I can never forget the

affection my family and I enjoyed from Rev Brother Thomas and the love showered on me by my schoolmates at our distinguished Institution, St Joseph's College, Ondo.

I am eternally grateful.

God Bless you all and God Bless our mentor Rev Brother Thomas.



GF Betiku 1922-2010 SJC Bursar

016 The Profile of a Blessed Man: Brother Thomas McCrea

Bimbola Oladapo (SJC 1961-1966) Senior Prefect, 1966

Writing a Tribute to someone of Brother Thomas' status, who I hold in high esteem, has posed a great challenge to me. This is more so as one is forced to recall memories of more than 50 years ago. These were indeed our formative years when our bones were not calcified. Brother Thomas came to our lives as a mentor, teacher, playmate, comic star, and above all like a father who took good care of his numerous children. Indeed, He came, He saw, and He conquered: this latter saying summarizes his sojourn in St Joseph's College, Ondo.



Bimbi Oladapo, 2021

It's impossible not to remember the numerous youthful pranks we all indulged in and how he thwarted most of our escapades and pranks. Brother Thomas was also part and parcel of every recreational game and had beaten us in most of the games. We owe our success first to God, but Brother Thomas played a significant part in molding our lives. He is indeed an enigma, who poured all his God-given energy/endowment into all of us at St Joseph's College, Ondo. He indeed channeled our lives to a successful path.

May God bless you abundantly. Let me end by leaving you with Psalm 37: 37..."Mark the perfect man and observe the Righteous, the end of that man is peace." This is indeed your profile as a man of God.

Please join me in wishing our indefatigable mentor, Brother Thomas, happy 90th birthday celebrations. Happy birthday Sir and blessings galore!

017 The LaSalle Legacy

Francis Ojo (1967-71)

Brother Thomas, all these years have refused to fade away from memory. How can any of us write our memoir without a mention of him, Brother Bernard, Alphonsus, or Mel? His long white catholic robes, signposting his mission in Africa and by extension, on earth, his rustic black locally made rubber sandals, signifying simplicity and humility, his early morning herding of our youthful rebellious members to the Chapel. And oh, that funny 'judicial intervention in the Zorro versus School case to prevent the rustication of 'Zoro' Akinbulumo. It was not until later years, further recollection and reflection that one began to understand, appreciate and marvel at the purpose of the De La Salle order, and the implementation of their mission to rescue minds and morals.

Today, as we celebrate the gift that Brother Thomas meant and still means to us, it is apposite to send the De La Salle a strong message of gratitude. Brother Thomas and the order achieved their purpose and though I do not fully know the mission statement, I am convinced that they achieved their aim substantially. They converted many souls to Christianity, developed minds intellectually and morally, left an indelible legacy in lessons of humility and sacrifice in service

I am convinced he is, today, a very happy man. I hope he finds us part of the source of his fulfillment as he was foundational to the successes we have recorded. I hope we can further his happiness by extending our own personal opportunity to others the way he did his.

St. Joseph alumni have been very successful in leadership and followership positions in Government, Clergy, art, and the professions. Without the early intervention in our lives, one wonders how much of this success we would be discussing today.

On behalf of myself and my other two older brothers, Joseph Ojo, Stephen Ojo and our family, we thank Brother Thomas for his God-ordained service to Africa, we thank God for the gift of long and useful life and wish him many more years of happiness and grace.



Steve Nwabuzor, Mutairu Oyeneyin (Sir Ajiteru) and Bimbi Oladapo, Founder's Day, Ondo, 2016

018 The “Snake Catcher”

Frank James (1962-66)

Managing Director of a Real Estate development company based in Lagos.

I remember Brother Thomas as probably the youngest of our beloved Reverend Brothers who were responsible for administering St Joseph’s College, Ondo. He was of average height and had blue eyes. Brother Thomas was always smiling even when he was in the process of disciplining an erring student. You would therefore be grossly mistaken to take his boyish and friendly look for granted if you ran afoul of school rules. He absolutely hated it when you lied.

I remember Brother Thomas and Brother Bernard (as well) quietly showing up at our dormitory windows in their white cassock after lights out. Many of us used to get caught in the act of not going to bed when we were supposed to. I remember Brother Thomas as the "snake catcher". I used to marvel at his dexterity in capturing live snakes that ended up in the biology laboratory. He absolutely loved digging up snakes.

I once as a lucky member of a group of about four students went on an expedition with Brother Thomas to the Eastern part of Nigeria during the holidays.



Frank Segun James, 2020

We drove in the Brothers' car and stopped at interesting places on our way to Asaba. We swam at a river on our route, sang, ate, and had loads of fun for about a week. Brother Thomas loved nature. He used to take groups of students on nature walks in the forest surrounding the school.

From this brief record of life in St Joseph, Brother Thomas along with the other Reverend Brothers did a good job molding the academic and moral development of all students of SJC. Many of our old students have turned out in various fields of endeavor and attained the peak of their careers. We owe these Reverend gentlemen a lot of gratitude.

Brother Thomas, at 90, I wish you a most wonderful birthday and pray God grants you many more years in good health.

019 Love of Students

Robert Adewole, 1960 to 1965. SJC # 153, Banker, Retired Senior Manager

Brother Thomas McCrea dedicated his time at SJC to students. Even beyond the boundary of the college, he went out of his busy schedule in 1974 to meet with old students in Washington DC. It was a remarkable reunion /meeting in the apartment of Senior Olaseha, where the group picture below was taken.



Brother Thomas with former pupils. Washington D.C., 1974

This attests to his humility and concern for the well being of his students

CONGRATULATIONS AND HAPPY BIRTHDAY 🎂 🎈 🎉 🎁 🎊 TO YOU ON YOUR 90th BIRTHDAY

020 What a School!

Jimi Awosika, (SJC 574 1967-71) Group CEO Troyka

I arrived at St Joseph's College, Ondo early in January 1967 on what was an unusually cold Friday evening filled with trepidation but somewhat sure that I was not going to enjoy my time in the school.

This should be understandable.

I was just six months shy of 12 years, had never been out of home, had lived all my life in Lagos (at a time when Ikorodu Road was in the Western Region), had a somewhat sheltered life up until then, and even though a citizen of Ondo town had before then never spent more than a total of thirty days in the town; and this included the six days when I had to write the entrance examination and the follow-up interview into the school. On all the occasions when I had to be in Ondo except for the aforementioned days that I sat for the entrance examination and the interview for admission into the school, both my parents were around. I was decidedly unhappy.



Jimi Awosika, 2021

In tow, I had an oversized pail (a size 32 as against the prescribed size 28), an oversized cotton mattress (a 4ft 6in by 6ft as against the 3ft 6in prescribed), and an oversized ego to boot! In the course of my stay in school, all three caused me much grief, the first two though not as much as the third which inevitably was the first and only one to be cut to size.

Settling into my assigned room (Austin 3) was easy (I had help from the most unexpected quarters from a senior, Benjamin Ayisire who looked just a little older than me but was in fact a Form 5 student!).

The same, however, could not be said for settling down.

Within forty-eight hours, I had had run-ins with close to a dozen seniors mostly in Forms 2 and 3. The guys gave no quarters and took none! From being asked to kneel down to weeding, cutting grass, and ultimately being 'arraigned' before a tribunal which sat in Aquinas 4 and was headed by a very popular Form 5 student, things were to my young mind getting out of hand. I applied to a boarding school, not a borstal I reasoned!

I had to call for allies.

Senior Patrick Fasusi (A P..a Pele) was about the only one I knew before I got into SJC. Tall, handsome, loved by all mostly on account of his excellent human relations and footballing skills, he was in my view, the perfect person to 'rein in' these guys. I spoke to him and instead of listening so I could understand the set-up of a boarding school, I went around telling anyone who cared to listen... 'Be careful, you'll come to grief if you don't back off; Senior Pele is my college brother!' You can surmise that this did neither Senior Pele nor myself any favors.

Monday morning after breakfast, we were herded to class. I was placed in Form 1B and within the course of the day, had received lectures from Brothers Alphonse, Albert, Mr. Marc, Mr. Akinrolabu and waited for it, Brother Bernard, the principal!

Things were beginning to match my expectations. This was a school after all! There were teachers, they were knowledgeable and very pleasant.

After lunch, we were told that it was time for siesta (what's called that?) not by any teacher but by a senior student who was called the House Prefect. After siesta, we were led out with our Bush Machetes ('Lala') by a student called the Labor Prefect to the lawn in front of the main school building and apportioned spaces to be cleared. Thereafter we were told that it was time for sports, and we saw the Sports Prefect marshaling guys out to the front and backfields. Not to be outdone, the Bellhop (Senior Ebunlade Betiku) kept everyone reminded that there was a

specified time for everything. Dinner, the almighty Chapel, sleep, and waking! In between all of these, I had many infractions, each visited with severe punishments that I thought it necessary to invite the intercession of the principal. Brother Bernard listened attentively, told me he understood my predicament, and in sympathy issued the 'comforting' words.' my boy, obey and then complain later. Did I hear right?

While I clearly understood what he advised, I did not feel obliged to follow the advice and the punishments came in torrents. At the end of the week, I was on the Troublesome 20 list in his office! I had not been told that the gentle giant, the ever-approachable Brother Bernard was not one to be trifled with!

His word was law!

Friendly counsel came from some sympathetic seniors mostly in Form 5; 'be careful boy, you might be on your way out of this school' they admonished.

I realized that I had to see things with the right lenses.

Beautiful the environment, intense the teaching, this was no place to misbehave. It was a colony of laws and though mostly unwritten, they were administered by the leaders of the school including the Form 1 class captains!

I needed no goading, I had to start behaving right.

And I started enjoying my time in school.

Suddenly getting up at 6 am to go to the Chapel was not an effort anymore, the hymns were soul-elevating and Brother Bernard's weekly homily was something I looked forward to.

I started making friends across classes and on outing days went with my friends to their homes in town and enjoyed the hospitality of parents who were more than happy to entertain their sons' friends. Then came March and talk was all over the place about St Joseph's Day, the March 19th fest that then was the most important date in SJC's school calendar. Preparations were afoot and for a week before the day, the school was agog. Some seniors had been dispatched to a farm in Oke Ogun to purchase the cows and save mass on the said day, everything was organized and executed by the students!

It was a real blast. The organization was impeccable; the event lavish. Aside from the delicacies served at lunch (on normal days, each meal at SJC was a cut above the average in most homes then), each student went away with three chunky pieces of delicious fried meat.

With clipped wings and the resultant clear eyes, I was beginning to see the beauty in the school and the good in other students even those I initially had little affinity for. I saw wisdom, intellect, goodness in the most unlikely people, classmates, and seniors. And talent? Profuse and prodigious!

In sports, academics, debating, nurturing, managing, leadership, name it. The school not only had a way of identifying these in prospective students, it deliberately nurtured them when they got into SJC.

1967 was a particularly unique year. The Form 5 students led by their urbane Class Captain Senior Fola Adunola and the Senior Prefect Senior Benson Oruma demonstrated camaraderie and courtly manners. Brilliant individually and as a group, each one bar none was a leader of men. The Olu Akintades, Benjamin Ayisires, Frank Thorpes, Peter Akinjolas, Olusegun Awosikas, Augustine Akinwoler, Yele Akinkuotus, Ebunlade Betikus, Gbenga Ogunniyas, Muiyiwa Johnsons, Benson Akingbojules, Edward Osunsades, Fola Adunolas, Benson Orumas, Gabriel Adegokes, Jide Omiwales, Adebisi Adesidas, Edward Akingohungbes, Olukunle Oyewoles, Olu James, Femi Fowodes, et al were a study in intellect, humaneness, good manners, and good breeding.

Theirs was a class par excellence and they laid the example for the following sets.

In sports, the school excelled in both the Grier Cup and AAA for athletics, but it was in football that SJC truly came into its own as a powerhouse. The football team was captained by the skillful Frank Thorpe at Centre Back and peopled by Muiyiwa Johnson in Goal, Francis Obe (Right Full Back), Gabriel Adegoke (Left Full Back) Augustine Idemudia (Right Half Back), Cornelius Odi (Left Half Back) Dotun Lofinmakin (Outside Right) Olu James (Inside Right) Patrick (Pele) Fasusi (Centre Forward) Benson Oruma (Inside Left) and Jide Omiwale (Outside Left) mowed down every opposition and but for the sanction evicted by the football authorities would definitely have made it to the finals of the Thermogene Cup in Ibadan that year! They played the most entertaining football in that part of the Western Region and had a daunting and rugged mentality.

It was a 12-man wrecker's squad!

The 12th member, Gbenga Ogunniya (Ekpe Rollinco), the self-appointed Team Manager was no less endowed. What he lacked in athletic and footballing skills, he more than made up for in courage, belief and a mordant tongue which in full deployment would make Adolf Hitler and Kwame Nkrumah sound like cubs! Their success and distinguishing style of flowing football built up the attack from the back with pincer movements that choked the opposition defense from the sides allowing the superb dribbling duo of Patrick Fasusi and Jide Omiwale to deliver the goals time and again was applauded by all opponents but Ondo Boys High School.

They had hitherto ruled the roost and were not enamored of some new stars bent on upsetting the status quo.

It was our summer of '67! And did we live it in the sun!

Soon word started filtering out that a certain gentleman, a much-loved Reverend Brother who had been on study leave would soon be returning. Just about every senior boy had something good to say about the gentleman. He was equated to everything that was good. He was said to be highly intelligent, with excellent listening skills, a great mixer, highly perceptive, jovial but firm. We were told that he was much younger than the current Principal but no less passionate about the physical, intellectual, mental, and emotional development of the students. The prospect of having this paragon of humanity join an already outstanding community of the most dedicated, most selfless, most passionate teachers and spiritual leaders led by the highly disciplined but avuncular and indefatigable Brother Bernard created a sizzling atmosphere in the school all through the second term and well into the third. The arrival of a Dean of Discipline (the first in the history of the school) in the person of Mr. Dapo Aliba initially got everyone's back up but soon things returned to normal.

That Brother Thomas would rein him in was a consolation to everyone.

Late in the evening on a particular day, a few weeks into the third term, there was this din around the house grounds...Brother Thomas was back! Some seniors were out on the front field and had seen him coming out of the Chapel and along with Brother Bernard was headed for the Brothers' residence.

The atmosphere was electric, comparable to the anticipated return of a World Cup-winning team. Even though I was impressed with the excellent reports about him, I could not, as my seniors, be overboard in my expectation as I had not had any previous interaction with him.

The next morning, we went to classes, and soon we saw this slightly portly, balding gentleman in cassock walking along the corridor in the company of Brother Mel, the handsome guitar-playing minstrel. He walked with a spring, covering more than anyone with his moderate height would.

Even at that distance, I liked him instantly.

'Wait till you get close to him and you will see what a nice guy he is' said Senior Pele when I saw him later on the house grounds and gushed about seeing Brother Thomas he had spoken so lovingly about.

And Brother Thomas did not disappoint him.

My first interaction with him two days after his arrival told me I was dealing with a man who, as against students, saw us as his wards and was keen on embedding himself in our lives. Earlier in the day, he had visited our class as part of the process of taking over and each one got up to introduce himself...Ransome Ayisire, Francis Ojo, Cornelius Fakinlede, Simeon Fadipe, Adelana Adesida, Yinka Omiwade, the names rang out. Fast forward seven hours later, I was enroute to the Austin House bathroom from the school well when I heard 'Jimi, hurry up. You'll be late for dinner!' What? I thought; that's the new principal! How did he recall my name?

I was not 'My boy' I was Jimi.

I mattered!

Then started a close relationship that I just like every other student, had with Brother Thomas and over time came to take for granted. He was everywhere on the compound, house grounds, school compound, sports fields, dining hall. Either in cassock and leather sandals, short-sleeved white shirt on Khaki shorts and leather sandals or vest and shorts and flip flops, he was the ubiquitous one and the constant all through the five years I was in school. Aside from the dog who sometimes accompanied him on his evening rounds, his other two companions especially post-school hours were the black rubber pipe conveniently tucked inside the arm of his cassock ready to be deployed to deal two sharp whips on the errant student and his massive torchlight!

He rendered the Bellhop jobless as promptly at 6 am, starting from either Austin or Claver House when the only noise around was the sound of the crickets, the familiar voice would ring out 'rising time, o ya o, everybody, wake up!'. Thirty minutes later, starting from Aquinas House, he would be going from room to room rousing the late risers and herding everyone to the Chapel.

There was no escaping him!

For those suspended, there was no hiding place. Not a few of the daring ones who broke bounds and headed for town, most times to Rex Cinema have tales to tell of Brother Thomas emerging from nowhere either at the cinema or on the road. By the end of 1967, he moved the Principal's office to the former Aquinas House behind the Basketball court and the whole building became the administrative hub of the school housing along with his office, Brother Alphonse's dispensary, and the Staffroom. From his office, he had a full and direct view of the school building, the laboratories, the Chapel, and the dining hall.

It was clear that the second phase of the development of the school and its transformation into a premium, integrated human capital development, and center of learning where leadership and cultural development were critical pillars, was afoot. The school's reputation as a leading performer in the West African School Certificate Examination was now established. This was

helped by the stellar performances of '64, '65, and '66 ('65 being a stand-out year with one of its students Mutairu Oyeneyin aka Ajiteru scoring 7 indices). Thereafter, it was taken for granted that at least one-third of any set would end up with Grade 1 in the School Certificate exams.

It was a season of 'teacher don't teach me nonsense.

The students were as expected of good teaching as the teachers were capable and demanding of the highest level of performance from the students. While this might appear to most as expected, it was the consequence of thorough and long-range planning by the La Salle Brothers who saw the intellectual, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of their wards as their prime responsibility and gave all to the mission. For them, it was not a job, it was a calling, it was life. Somehow, they were able to infect all the teachers and non-teaching staff with this higher-order value.

Looking back now, while we did not have too many teachers with anything but a first degree, we had the most dedicated and somehow the standard of pedagogy was extremely high. Whether it was Brothers Romwauld, Bernard, Thomas, Alphonse, Albert, Mel, John or Messrs Ola, Marc, Akinyosoye, Edema, Akinkuolie, Jegede all of whom then had first and second degrees or Messrs Ogundele, Aworinde, Amadasun, Ojo, Adegbulugbe, Ademulegun, Akinrolabu, Akinkoye, Ivbijaro, Adare, James who then had NCE certification or were aspiring university students, the students got quality teaching and sometimes personal coaching as required.

It is important to point out that at the material time being reported, the last nine of this most distinguished cohort (Kenneth Amadasun, Valentine Ojo, Johnson Adegbulugbe, John Ademulegun, Olu Akinrolabu, Ajibike Akinkoye, Mathew Ivbijaro, Thomas Adare, and Frank James) were outstanding past students who had either just finished their A levels or were about to go to university! The program of bringing back brilliant old students as teachers helped mentorship and built aspiration in the students. I can report that I not only was inspired by these old students, but I also developed a lifelong relationship with some of them.

It was however not only about studies and sports. Being a Catholic school, we were subjected to religious instruction both as a course of study at school and daily practice in the Chapel. Whatever topping was needed was provided by Brother Alphonse who took any opportunity through his actions and homilies to rear us right. In my view, if ever there was a candidate for sainthood, my lot will be cast for Brother Alphonse.

As against what now prevails in our national life, choice of religion was free and the school even promoted it.

Moslems were encouraged to go for Jumat prayers on Fridays and Christians of other faiths were free to attend service in the churches in town on Sundays but daily prayers in the chapel were mandatory for all students. And did we enjoy mass and the choral classes provided by the handsome and debonair Brother Mel! Advent was bliss in school, what with the beautiful Christmas carols that belted from happy students singing in the school chapel.

Not one to encourage in-breeding, Brother Thomas opened up the school to local cultural influences. Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola, and other top drama acts of the day staged performances in the school. Saturday nights were for entertainment and when not provided by a professional actor, the students staged drama and dance shows most times with music and equipment supplied by Baba Frank Awosika (the No 1 DJ in Ondo in those days) and not being a co-ed school, we danced 'bone-to-bone'.

Here I will have to relate how the school band that was initially christened The Phagocytes but later became The Psychedelics came to be.

It was late 1969, Gbenga Akinribido (Siphan Salah) had just been named Senior Prefect and my main man Funwa Ogunniya (God bless his great soul) became the school's first Social Prefect. This fine Saturday evening, Funwa, Kofo Fashina and I were miming Eddie Floyd's Knock On Wood and other Soul songs that were being played on the Rediffusion box in what was then known as 'Palaver Square' next to the dining hall. It was the heydays of Soul music and WNBS had an hour every Saturday evening dedicated to playing Soul songs. It happened that Brother Thomas was walking past and he stopped by to watch the 'performance' we were obviously putting up. He called Funwa and me aside and asked if we thought we could start a school band. It initially sounded like a joke and I remember Funwa telling him just that. Undaunted Brother Thomas repeated the question (it actually sounded more like an offer) and seeing that he was serious, we answered in the affirmative.

Fast forward some two months, Brother Thomas invited us to his office, and out from a bag came a brand new acoustic guitar (for those reading this some 53 years after in a relatively more prosperous world, this would seem a simple thing to do but I am talking of 1969 when acoustic guitars cost about fifteen pounds and tuition plus boarding fees for a year was fifty-five pounds)! Expectedly, we were shocked but delighted. We knew Brother Thomas took every word of his seriously but we never expected this to come to be so soon.

Now the joke was on us. We had to put together a school band! The only decent guitar player in the school was Diran Akindeji (Alan Steel) but he was not an all-around guitarist as he was more comfortable with bass chords. What we had was an acoustic guitar with a different scale length and the musical role and needed a different technical and conceptual approach. Make do we had to, so we started rehearsals initially in the dining hall and soon we had a huge crop of fans led by

Brother Thomas himself who would later metamorphose into our band and booking manager. What we lacked in personnel we more than made up for with creative improvisation.

In reality, what we had was an Acappella group with a guitar backing. To aid our singing, Brother Thomas got someone to bring in a microphone, a portable amplifier, and a loudspeaker from Ibadan. While the performances especially the singing improved, the guitar got drowned by the amplified singing and it became apparent that we had to resolve this problem. Off we went to Brother Thomas. He thought about the challenge and came to the conclusion that we needed a pickup mic for the guitar. This he promptly got us.

We had come a long way but we were still far from where we wanted to be as a band. We sounded very much like a country music band than the soul/pop band we wanted to be. Our de facto leader and the one who as the Social Prefect gave credibility and legitimacy to the band, Funwa Ogunniya was now in his final year and though still very enthusiastic about the project, had his attention divided. The lot fell on me to make a representation to Brother Thomas for additional equipment. This was in 1970 and we had been joined by two highly skilled multi-instrumentalists Soji Fajemirokun and Femi Fasehun, both of whom were in Form 1.

The addition of these talented boys sort of made the pitch easier but I never expected a positive response from the principal. If I at any time in my life ever felt like an Oliver Twist, it was at that meeting with Brother Thomas.

He listened attentively, said nothing all through my long winding 'speech', and when he felt I was done, looked up and said 'Jimi, go back to your studies'.

That's it, boy, you've burnt your bridge, I thought.

For the next few days, I was really down and avoided the band and anything that had to do with it. Funwa's consolation and that of Victor Asekunowo (Dr. No) another great friend of mine did nothing to lift the pall of despondence I felt.

About three weeks later, Baba Agbebaaku, the school clerk told me that Brother Thomas wanted to see me. I had since the last meeting in his office avoided him and this time around did not look forward to being in his presence. As I walked into his office, he looked up and said, 'Jimi, tomorrow you and I will be going to Ibadan to buy the new equipment for the band, so prepare for the trip. We will leave after breakfast.

How I made it to my room and through the night I still do not know. My joy was not really because we were going to buy the music equipment after all; it was the fact that contrary to what I

thought, Brother Thomas was not upset about my outlandish request for expensive new equipment for the band.

As arranged, the next day, a Saturday, we left for Ibadan after breakfast in his Peugeot 404 station wagon, and after a three-hour journey that seemed like 30 minutes, we were at Kingsway Stores in Dugbe where we bought an electric bass guitar and a full drum kit. We then headed for Rational Bookshop in Oke Bola where we got an electric rhythm guitar, a power amplifier, a new microphone and stand as well as a loudspeaker. We then headed for the Cocoa Dome at Cocoa House for lunch before driving back to school.

The Psychedelics had arrived!

In 1970, the band was led by Funwa Ogunniya (and later me) with Diran Akindeji (Alan Steel) on bass guitar, Femi Fasehun on guitar, and backing vocals, Soji Fajemirokun on drums and backing vocals, Adelana Adesida on maracas and vocals, and I the lead vocals. It was a very tight band, and I can say without any intention of being self-deprecating, that I was the least talented of the lot and only owed my membership and later leadership of the band to the fact that I knew most of the songs and possibly my earlier exertions on behalf of the band.

The Psychedelics became the toast of the town with concerts played at St Monica's Grammar School, St Helen's College, Adeyemi College of Education, St Louis Girls College, and Aquinas College Akure. Even though Aquinas College had a more mature and sophisticated band, they no doubt acknowledged and commended our musicianship and the quality of the sound. And all of this, just because one man Brother Thomas believed in us and committed the resources needed for the band come to life!

You will have to forgive me if I give the impression that 1970 and the following year 1971 was just about studies, cultural and musical exploits. The '69 football team led by Dosu Doherty and the '70 team that had Ebenezer Adenusi (Jackson) as its attacking arrowhead were simply a marvel to watch and but for the fearsome Ondo Boys High School team of 1970, that year's SJC team would have gone down in history as second only to the '67 team to have gone through a whole's year's campaign without any defeat.

Early 1970 saw the arrival of a young, tall, ebullient, and intelligent agricultural science graduate from the University of Ibadan as a Biology teacher. He knew and could teach Biology alright but the young man, Mr. Kokumo Akinkuolie, a former student of the school, was more interested in getting us to see agriculture in a new light.

With the encouragement of Brother Thomas, he set up the Young Farmers' Club and proceeded to set up a school farm and a piggery. Soon, enlistment was more than expected and every

evening you would see the 'young farmers' either headed for the cassava farm or the piggery for work. He brought in about a dozen piglets mostly sows from UI and before you knew it, we had a thriving piggery. The pigs were fed with the cassava we harvested from the farm as well as leftovers from the dining hall and right before our very eyes became full-grown. I had never seen pigs that massive in my life!

All this was well before the Government poisoned the well by taking over the administration of schools, they neither founded nor had the capacity to manage.

Well before our many years of the locust as a nation.

Well before the need was replaced by greed and service to man was replaced by service to self.

Even after all these buffetings, the school on the hill that the La Salle brothers built and the students they nurtured still stand as both a testament and tribute to the highest of values, Service. These were men who gave up the comfort of Canada, one of the most advanced countries of the world and still today, one of the best places to live on earth to serve the less privileged.

As wards of these great men, the least we can do is to emulate them in all we do, if only from now on!

Happy birthday, our very dear Brother Thomas and thank you as well as all the other La Salle Brothers for your love and service.

Long may you live in comfort, good health, happiness and contentment.

021 Three Soccer Players

DR FRANK THORPE: (SJC SET 1963—67). Retired medical director, GAVI consultant NPI, Secretary-General Paralympic Committee Nigeria.

I am honored to be an old boy of SJC, our great Alma Mater. It is noteworthy that most students that passed through SJC have done extremely well in their various fields of endeavors. We have engineers, medical doctors, teachers, professors, CEOs of companies, PhD holders in various disciplines and professions.



Frank Thorpe @ 70, 2019

Thanks to the De La Salle Brothers that made these achievements possible.

There is no doubt that Brother Thomas played a significant role that contributed to the success story of SJC. He made sure the school rules and regulations were strictly adhered to.

My family the Thorpes – Walter, Ernest, and myself Frank - owe the school a lot of gratitude for the quality education and training that contributed to our achievements as medical doctors.

The SJC brought out our abilities in sports, especially soccer to the extent that the three of us played for the school and Western Nigeria Academicals.

Brother Thomas, I wish you a happy birthday and many happy returns of the day. May the Lord grant you more years in good health and peace of mind.

022 In a Time of Bereavement

Adewale Adesulure (a.k.a Ade Barna) (S.J.C 582) 1967 – 1971 Retired Tutor General/Permanent Secretary,Ondo State.

Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it”



Adewale Adesulure, 2010

Brother Francis Thomas McCrea successfully played the role of a father who took good care of his numerous children by molding our lives in preparation for adulthood.

My first close interaction with him was in my first year at St. Joseph’s College (SJC) precisely sometimes in April 1967 (my first term in form one)

On this day, the Principal of Ondo Boys’ High School who was my uncle then (Late Rev. Canon J.A. Iluyomade) arrived at the office of our Principal (Bro. Thomas) to inform him about the demise of my father whom I had visited at the University College Hospital (U.C.H) Ibadan few weeks earlier during our midterm break.

Bro. Thomas sent for me from the classroom and on getting to his office he handed me over to his colleague i.e., my uncle (Principal O.B.H.S). The sad news was broken to me and my elder sister (a form 3 student then at St. Monica's Girls Grammar School, Ondo) at the Principal's residence in Ondo Boys High School.

023 Thank You, Brother Thomas

Taiye (aka Tayita) Akinnawo (1966-70)

I was in St Joseph's College Ondo to know you as and simply call you Brother Thomas with no surname affixed to it. It was when I left school that I got to know your full name to be Francis Thomas McCrea. I thank God for your life on achieving the age of 90 years. Surely, God has been very merciful and faithful to you during these 90 years because you live a life of service to humanity. You live your life with lots of love, care, courage and perseverance. You were able to cope with the harsh environment in which you worked as a Principal in St Joseph's College Ondo, Nigeria. There was no light, no water and all that were needed to give you a minimum comfort, but you persevered to ensure you gave us good education. I sincerely believe that God in His infinite mercies have considered all this to bless you with long life in good health.

Nobilitas and of course the Ondo Community appreciate you. Your footmarks at St Joseph's College Ondo remain indelible. We cannot talk about St Joseph's today without a mention of your name and your good works. We cannot forget how you cared for us as children, ensuring that we woke up early to assemble at the Chapel for morning devotion. We cannot forget how you were going round the dormitories at night, even at risk, to ensure we were on our beds. We cannot also forget how you chased us to classes and preps so that the purpose of sending us to school by our parents was not defeated. In short, you are a cherished and unforgettable Principal. You were not just interested in the students' academic pursuit, you promoted sports development in St Joseph's. In fact, your contributions to sports development and active participation in all competitions were unparalleled. That was the period we defeated Ondo Boys High School in Ondo Stadium. Also, in Athletics. Table Tennis. Volleyball and Basketball, you were no doubt a sports enthusiast par excellence pursuing all round sports development in the school.



Taiye Akinnawo, 2019

On the occasion of your 90th birthday, I heartily congratulate and rejoice with our only Brother Thomas and join other enthusiastic admirers in wishing you a Happy 90th Birthday. I pray that the Almighty God's presence will continue to abide with you. I also pray that God will continue to show you His marvelous loving kindness and hide you under the shadow of His wings. The Good Lord will continue to bless and protect you as you journey along the remaining years of your life in Jesus name. Many happy returns and many more years of excellent health and service to mankind.

And at 90 years, I say Congratulations and Many Happy Returns. Amen!

024. Rising and Shining

Taiwo Akinkuolie (SJC 482: 1966-1970)

My name is Taiwo Akinkuolie. I was a student at St Joseph's College from 1966 to 1970. My student's admission number was 482. I was also a junior teacher in the school from January to September 1973, when Brother Thomas spent his last days as Principal of that great School.

My experiences as a student in the H. Sc. program in a neighboring School (Gboluji Grammar School, Ile-Oluji) from 1971 to 1972, and as a member of the Board of Governors of St Joseph's after the exit of Brother Thomas all gave me the unique opportunity of appreciating the outstanding qualities and style of management of the enigma in the approximately seven years, he was Principal of the school.

Brother Thomas was a man of love. It takes one who has love for his students to, without being compelled, go round all the dormitories every early morning to wake students up, prepare us for chapel, motivate us with those encouraging exhortations and then release us to go for our breakfast where he was also present to ensure that we were served quality meals in the right quantity. I can never forget those morning 'Rise and Shine' and 'Oya o, o ya, ya ya' that were designed to wake us from sleep

He was a good listener. It was only after I left St Joseph's and was a student under another Principal that I appreciated those moments when as students, we would freely canvas our usually pedestrian positions on issues with Brother Thomas and get away with them without being punished. Rather, he would bend over backwards to accommodate those laughable positions we took on matters of discipline and general administration. This experience till this day, has shaped my relationship with those under me, it has also helped me to advance my positions on issues before my superiors.



Taiwo Akinkolie, 2017

Brother Thomas was firm in his handling of student matters. He ensured that his instructions were carried out to the letter. Where there was the need for flexibility, he allowed for it. Little wonder then that there was not a single student unrest during his tenure. But for his liberal but firm approach to disciplinary matters As, some erring student would have been expelled from school for bad conduct and would possibly have ruined their destinies permanently. As a junior teacher under him, all the teachers worked with a common purpose. At our staff meetings, he allowed members to participate freely in all deliberations with some members making some undoubtedly frivolous suggestions, a practice that yielded quality decision on matters under discourse.

He showed total commitment in every department of the lives of students- in the field of sports, in the dining Hall, in the classrooms, in the laboratory, in the library, in the kitchen, in the evening preparatory classes- most times folding his hands behind his back and walking smartly and briskly and wearing a warm and friendly smile as he walked along. It would be interesting to see how Baba 90 now carries himself.

One of the enduring lessons of the limit of liberty that I learnt under his tutelage is that in exercising your own freedom to do a thing, recognize that another person's right must be respected. He used to say "You have the freedom to swing your hands anyhow and in any direct

that pleases you, but in doing so, the moment you begin to hit another person beside you, you no longer have that right ".

He was accommodating of our youthful exuberances almost to a fault and respected our culture and traditions to the point that he even tolerated some students who took advantage of this disposition to lie to justify their improper conduct.

Brother Thomas desired a great future for all the students. Apart from his usual exhortation along this line, he demonstrated this practically. I can never forget one morning when he saw Rahman Mimiko, Tomide Oyebola and myself playing near the school chapel and he invited us to go out with him in his car. We ended up at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). After driving round the school campus, he asked us if we liked all that we saw. We answered in the affirmative. He then said, 'My boys, if you like what you have seen, work hard so that you can come here'. To the glory of God, both Mimiko and Oyebola ended up as students of the institution.

On another occasion, he took me along on a journey to the Central Schools Board, then in Ibadan. After completing his assignments, he headed for the campus of the University of Ibadan. After driving round, he asked me which of the two universities I liked better. I told him I preferred Ibadan. He said, 'Work hard if you wish to be here'. Those words of encouragement fired me up. Again, to the glory of God, I ended up as a student at the University of Ibadan.

One of the excuses present day governments have against the return of schools to their original owners is that such Proprietors will impose their religion on all students in the institutions. It is on record that Bro Thomas and the two Principals before him respected the rights of every student to practice their religion unhindered. The Anglican students were allowed to go to the Cathedral in town on Sundays just as the Moslems among us were released to go to the Central Mosque every Friday. This liberal attitude to worship even encouraged some smart students to go to town on Fridays and Sundays, while also avoiding the daily early morning worship in the school chapel.

Among other things, Brother Thomas was friendly, warm and caring towards all his wards. In our occasional clash with students from other sister institutions in town and around, he always defended his students.

His selfless service at St Joseph's is unparalleled and will continue to ring bells in the heart of all of us who were privileged to study and work under him. You have left an indelible footprint in the sands of time at St Joseph's.

Here is wishing you sir a memorable celebration at 90, in good health and sound mind. For all you have done at St Joseph's, May the heavens reward you, B Thom in Jesus name. Have a wonderful celebration Sir.

To Prof Fakinlede, the wonderful Initiator and Editor.

From Professor Matt IVBIJARO, SJC, 1962-1965.

Need to commence fine-tuning the Tributes.

I commend Professor Fakinlede for initiating the voluntary writing of Tributes to celebrate the impact of Rev Brother Thomas on the lives of SJC, Ondo students whom he superintended decades ago.

For the Tributes to reach Brother Thomas before March 2, I suggest that Prof Fakinlede should begin to fine-tune the Introduction to this remarkable work now if he has not commenced.

My warm special regards,

Matt F.A. IVBIJARO, SJC, 1962-1965.

Hello Professor Ivbijaro,

Thanks for your kind comments. It's been a long time and I think you taught us in 1966 and 67. I came in in 1966 but failed that year and repeated so I was also part of the 1967 set. Very grateful that you collaborated with us through your illuminating input. We are on the way to edit and get a final product. Dr Debo Awosika-Olumo is in charge of that. I will ask him to commence work early in the new week as he has to get hard copies to Brother Thomas. He is in the US and can easily send the stuff by courier to Brother Thomas.

Very grateful again sir for your encouragement and commitment.

OA Fakinlede

Unilag

025 Seeking Multi-Talented Individuals

Ebenezer Adenusi aka Jackson

Brother Thomas for short as being called in those days remains a rare mentor. He knew everyone by first name. Honestly, I don't know what would have been my status in life, if Brother Tom had

not been there for me. He knew my multi-talent nature. But for only God knew then, he couldn't push some of us to stardom. To God be the glory that I was privileged to be one of those who passed through his tutelage. I am what I am today having passed through this great citadel of knowledge under Brother Thomas.

Happy Birthday and Many Happy Returns

026. An unforgettable ride with Brother Thomas

Folageshin Iluyemi Akinawo (SJC 449 1965-69) Folageshin Akinawo & Co. (Chartered Accountants & Financial Consultants) Bobagunwa of Ondo Kingdom.

My Reminiscences of Rev. Brother Thomas Macrea, a man full of compassion and Godliness.

One bright early morning in April 1968, during the first term holiday, Brother Thomas came calling at our residence at Barrack's Road, Ondo and asked if I would like to join him for a ride out of town. Of course, I gladly accepted the offer and hopped inside the front seat of the car. Shortly after entering, he handed over to me a note showing the description of where we were headed -some unknown, odd village on the way to Agbabu, where one of the school's washermen, Mr. Akinbisehin had a farm and was spending the holiday.

After passing through Ore, we drove straight along the Agbabu Road trying to locate the village. We lost our way a few times until we eventually, with the help of a good Samaritan, got to the village which must have been about five kilometers from the main road. We asked for our host and was told to seat under a tree while someone went to fetch him from his farm.

To say the least the entire village was agog with excitement upon seeing a white man come to visit one of their own. No doubt Brother Thomas himself was excited seeing an African village setting with mud houses and thatched roofs at such a close range. He got up a few times to ask some of the villagers a few questions mainly about their welfare and how well they are adjusting to the harsh environment. Eventually, Mr. Akinbisehin, our host arrived with great excitement and asked us to come with him inside one of the mud houses. Shortly he left us for a while and came back with two bottles of beer and a bottle of coke. However, Brother Thomas decided against taking beer, rather he opted for coke. We chatted with him for a while and later decided to take our leave. On our way back to school, to my utter surprise, Brother Thomas told me that actually he would have loved to take beer but felt our host was too poor to afford it, hence his decision to take coke.

What a considerate and caring soul!



Folageshin Akinnawo, 2019

027. A Lesson in Selflessness and Compassion.

Folageshin Akinnawo

One day at about 5pm, I was watching a football match in the school 's front football pitch, when Brother Thomas, driving into the school premises, suddenly started calling me. Getting to his car he said I should quickly run to the main road and call a woman carrying two bunches of bananas.

Shortly after he walked up to us and asked me to request for the price of the bunches of the bananas, she was carrying on her head. Obviously, part of my duty was to negotiate with the woman. Interestingly, the woman seeing a white man decided to go for a kill. She asked for seven shillings, and I told Brother Thomas that it was too expensive and will not cost more than two shillings in the market. However, seeing that he was really interested in the bananas I asked the woman to take five shillings which she happily accepted. In line with Yoruba bargaining culture, I now asked the woman if she would take three shillings. From her body language and facial

expression, I knew she would accept this but to my surprise before she could say 'yes' Brother Thomas had already brought out five shillings which he handed over to the woman. On our way back, Brother Thomas thought me a great lesson in compassion and selflessness. He said the bargain we had with the woman was a good one. According to him, a good bargain is one in which both parties are happy. The woman was happy because she knew she had cheated us, and he also was happy because the bunch of bananas in his country would cost him at least three dollars (about two pounds in Nigeria then). So, they were both happy. What a lesson in selflessness and compassion.

Rev Brother Thomas McCrea, I am joining the multitude of your admirers in wishing you a happy and joyous 90th birthday celebrations. You have devoted your entire life in the service of God and humanity. May the good Lord grant you the grace to witness many more anniversaries in divine health and sound mind. CONGRATULATIONS!!!

028. SJC By Choice

Rahman Olusegun Mimiko. School Number 524 (1966-1970)

Medical Practitioner, Politician and Former Governor of Ondo State (2009--2017)

I became a student at St Joseph's College by choice. Apart from being the best school in town at the time of my admission, I had two cousins, the Ajao brothers, (Taoheed and Rafiu) who were already students of the institution and who regaled me with tales of the near-paradise lifestyles of boarding students in the school managed by a group of De La Salle Brothers from Canada. Moreover, my late father had the strong belief that you either went to St Joseph's or you go and learn a trade.

So, even before I got to the school, I had heard of two of these wonderful Brothers: Brother Bernard Broderick and Brother Thomas McCrea.

On resumption in the school and almost daily, I encountered Brother Thomas. Early every morning, he went round all the dormitories twice to wake us from sleep with his famous refrains -'Rise and Shine ' and O ya o, o ya ya ya o..He was with us in the school chapel, in the classrooms, in the dining hall, in the kitchen, on the football pitch, with the cooks and the laundry men. You would also see him go round late in the night after the lights out, to ensure that we were safe. In short, he was everywhere.



In later years, I concluded that Brother Thomas was only demonstrating that he was (and I am still sure he is) a true driven by agape love to have make these enormous sacrifices for his wards at St Joseph's.

He operated a style of administration that aimed to convince you to see how right or wrong or even foolish your actions or inactions are. As Principal, he never harassed, bullied or coerced his students.

He was a great democrat, allowing students to freely express their views on various issues. He taught us to be bold before anyone, including himself and encouraged us to make our positions known on any matter affecting us as students and the school as an entity. The culture of democracy at St Joseph's fired some of us to become politicians later in life.

An incident that continues to linger in my memory is when a local menu (Eko agidi and efo riro) was introduced into the school's elitist menu by the Food Master who incidentally was an old boy of the school. The students rejected the menu and Brother Thomas ordered a reversal to the old order, saying it was legitimate to protest against what you do not want or like. I also remember some of his encounters with some students on matters of discipline. Even when they were wrong, these students would insist on the excuses for their bad behavior and still get off the hook with Brother Thomas. In retrospect, it is only in St Joseph's of those days and under

Brother Thomas that some of those students could have completed their secondary education. Elsewhere, they would have been thrown out of school.

Even in his simplicity, Brother Thomas was very firm on many issues. When I experienced a brutal attack from some of my classmates following my movement from the 'B' arm to the 'A' arm in our class 4 in 1969, Brother Thomas who initiated the movement refused to return me to the 'B' arm.

Brother Thomas was a great motivator and encourager. On one of his trips out of town, he took me, Tomide Oyebola and Taiwo Akinkuolie along with him to the campus of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). After driving round, the beautiful campus, he asked if we liked all that we had seen. He encouraged us to work hard if we aspired to become students in the institution. As it turned out, two of us later made it to Ife while the third person ended up at University of Ibadan, where, incidentally, Brother Thomas had taken him to on one of his trips to Ibadan.

As you turn 90 Brother, I wish you long life in good health and a sound mind. May the peace and joy of the Lord be your portion in the remaining days of your life.

029. Tribute to a Life of Service

Peter Akinjiola (SJC 1963-67)

I met Brother Thomas (Francis) McCrae, 1962, when I was about 11 years old during the sleepover, which was then a part of the entrance interview at Saint Joseph's Secondary School (SJC). He was a young man of about 30 years old. Brother Bernard was our principal, while Brother Thomas was his able deputy. With his physically dominating presence, Brother Bernard



brought out the best behavior in every student whenever he was around, at a hearing distance or when there were rumors he was around the corner. He was mostly around the school premises and rarely in the dormitory area.

In contrast, Brother Thomas was everywhere. He would catch you just when you had assured yourself that you are safe and have escaped with breaking the school law. No hideout was secure enough. He knew every nooks and crannies of the campus, and those

of the bushes around the school. The element of surprise and guilty conscience overwhelms when you are caught. Brother Thomas uttered no harsh words of admonition. He would let you know that your little game was up, and he encouraged you to abide by the law. Some of those pranks included missing classes, missing masses, missing prep, unauthorized trip outside the campus, etc. He was the silent and efficient operator.

Residing in Canada and the USA increased my appreciation for the sacrifices of Brothers Thomas, Bernard and the other La Salle Brothers. These God-fearing men gave up themselves, family, money and other career choices and the comfortable living conditions in Canada/USA to develop the school and the young men of SJC. Ondo in 1959 was under-developed even by the town's standards today. The town has grown over 20 times over the years. There was no pipe born water, electricity or telephone in the town. St Joseph's was just the fourth secondary school in Ondo after Ondo Boys High school, St Louis and St Monica's.

Unlike other schools in town, the SJC financially supported a good proportion of the students. The school did not send out any student because of their inability to pay fees. The school was very creative in customizing scholarships or financial assistances to every student with needs. So many indigent students like me could not have been able to attend a secondary school without SJC and the reverend Brothers.

In addition, SJC taught the students how to study. The Brothers taught any subject as needed by the school. Brother Thomas taught Biology, Chemistry, English, etc. We were regularly tested during the school year and there was no end-of-the year or end-of-term examination pressures. No cramming and students learnt to understand and appreciated the essence of every subject. This SJC learning legacy was invaluable in my journey through Higher School Certificate, undergraduate and graduate schools.

I re-established my contact with Brother Thomas a few years ago; about sixty years after the first encounter. His indelible sacrifices were still fresh on my mind and I did not hesitate to let him know my willingness to contribute to his retirement and his organization. He replied he was well taken care of and his La Salle organization was doing fine financially. I was humbled. Here is a guy that took the vow of poverty, obedience, celibacy and service ... etc. in his twenties. In his eighties he is satisfied and lacks nothing!

Brother Francis, your life and those of the members of your organization are living treasures for humanity and your journey through life is worth our emulation. As St James (2:18) wrote: "... I will demonstrate my faith from my works". We have seen your faith through your works. May God bless you.

Epilogue- Brother Thomas: A Hard Act to Follow

OA Fakinlede

We, the Alumni of St Joseph's College, Ondo at different times and from different locations in Nigeria, ending up – largely at the upper echelons in our society and in Diaspora, have testified, in this document, how effective Brother Thomas and the Lasallian Brothers' fruitfulness have been in our lives.

As a lecturer, I use the experience of St Joseph's, and how ignorant I was despite ability to see the efforts of the Brothers in helping us to get on in life. When my students do not appreciate the efforts I am putting in to make a difference in their lives, I reason that it took me close to forty years to appreciate that for Brother Thomas to come to our dormitory at six o'clock in the morning, he must first wake up, probably have a small fellowship with other Brothers and walk through the unlit campus with his long touch light to reach our sleepy heads saying things like "Rise and shine", "Oya, oya, o..." etc. while encouraging us to wake and begin the day. I am humbled by how little I have done compared to this supererogation!

There is more to say on this. Nigeria of today is a challenging place to live in. I do not begrudge my colleagues, who, for several reasons give up and leave. I know (at least from the example of family members that have done so) that many of them remain a mighty resource in the way the rest of the family survives in Nigeria. As a person, I have a problem. I studied Mechanical Engineering at Lagos and in Canada to PhD level. If I run away from Nigeria, and met Brother Thomas in Toronto, and he asked me what caused me to flee, I imagine this conversation taking place:

Thomas: Hello Fakinlede, I heard you have now come to live in Canada.

Fakinlede: Yes, brother. Nigeria has now become an impossible place to live in. There is no water, no reliable electricity, the educational system is a shadow of itself. I need something better for my family.

Thomas: That is interesting. You said you had no water supply from the Water Board? Did you not see the cistern we dug in our time that supplied water for our use? We even created another one near the swimming pool for you pupils. In addition to these there were various wells on the compound to get water from.

Fakinlede: Yes sir, I remember that! Did you say you dug them?

Thomas. Not really, we employed local labor and masonry to do all that.

Fakinlede. But how did you pump the water. These days, NEPA or its descendants will roast your pump!

Thomas: We used manual pumps for all our needs, and we never had an occasion to use buckets to carry water! We paid 12–15-year-old lads that were all too glad to gain a little pocket money and they lifted the water to our overhead tanks.

Fakinlede: But how did you iron your clothes? The epileptic power supply makes that such a big problem. And my freezer was out of commission for several months because of low current!

Thomas: In our days, we supplied you with electricity from 6-10pm. It was ONLY at that time that we too had electric power! Is it not arguable that you may have more clothes than you need?

Fakinlede: You made a good point there, Brother; but remember, I am not a monk!

Thomas: Ok, Fakinlede, I know I have taken extra orders and that was my choice. But tell me again, what did you say you studied in the University?

Fakinlede: (Now blushing) bachelor's in mechanical engineering at University of Lagos, and PhD at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. I know how to model extremely complex systems such as Nuclear Power plants and heavy manufacturing that Nigeria does not have. That is one of my frustrations! And that is why I am in Toronto, looking for a job now!

Thomas: But is engineering not designed to help you orchestrate life at its present state, while you build up to the future?

Fakinlede: I am finding this conversation heavy going Brother. I probably need to do some more thinking....

We can end it there. I remember that travelling from Ondo to Lagos as recently as 1971, there were no bridges where two vehicles could meet mid-stream. What we had was a situation on those big rivers where oncoming traffic had to wait their turn to use the single lanes that existed!

When you add that to a war situation, we begin to understand two things: The brothers were far smarter than they appeared to us! They may not be registered engineers, but they supplied water, electricity, basic infrastructure, and the necessities that made our school superior to most schools in the environ; And they did not need the millions or billions for a plot in Banana Island to be comfortable!

I come from Akure. I remember when the Roman Catholic Bishop's compound – 2 km from my house was purchased. They simply planted trees and arranged things around the square –

classroom-looking block for the bishop's residence. Yet go and look at it now, the natural ambience and superior environment makes us seem like cave dwellers within two kilometers of the same building!

I conclude that I write here only about my personal feelings. I am not qualified to judge others as I have, on several occasions, taken the easy road. All I want to say is this: Thank you Brother Thomas. But you are a hard act to follow! Happy birthday!

A Note of Acknowledgements

Nearly 30 former pupils of St Joseph's College responded to my call to do this document. My thanks go to all the individuals that, despite their schedules, considered it worthwhile to let Brother Thomas know that we value and appreciate his contribution to our lives. Each of us was able to speak from the heart and there was minimal interference with content. Brother Thomas can therefore see for himself what our hearts confess. I thank you all.

I want to especially thank the seniors (to a 1966 class one pupil) that participated. My thanks to those of you I did not meet in school and were very enthusiastic to join this effort. Nob. Steve Nwabuzor comes up for a special mention for tirelessly organizing the seniors that are not known to me. I especially wanted to see Nob. Bimbola Oladapo made contribution. He was Senior Prefect in 1966. Thanks Steve, for getting us Senior Bimbi and several others.

The sets from 1965-69 to 1967-71 are especially dear. I call the first the "365 days is not a joke" set. These are the likes of Nobs Francis Awosika, Ebenezer Lafe, Diran Ayodeji, Folageshin Akinnawo and others. They know what they said to us in 1966 when we came into St Josephs. Again, old friends and seniors, many thanks to you for the fellowship of celebrating together, our great mentor and inspiration.

At the end of 1966, I was the only person that failed and repeated form one; a feat that Kido Boy (Muyiwa Olawoki) needed another 365 days to achieve! Francis Ojo - remember that you were too brilliant to get into that joy! That granted us the privilege of belonging to two sets! What a blessing! I have enjoyed all of you. Despite all the trouble I was to both sets, the love and friendship that I have enjoyed makes this collaboration just another chapter in our long-time association.

I end this note with a mention of two people: Nobs Ebunlade Betiku and Jimi Awosika. I slept next to Ebunlade in 1966 in Xavier 3 when Senior Ikusika was the "demigod" at the other end of the room! That was my first time of sleeping anywhere other than my mother's room. Let us not even begin talking about bed-wetting! Ebunlade, you were a wonderful senior. There were three years

between us, and I was not a model student by any means. You were so focused on your studies that nothing else mattered? You did not even remember, for once, to punish this pest of a boy! Thanks for what you have been and for giving us your wonderful insight in this book of memories and tributes.

And Jimi, we have come a long way! We have stories to share that go far beyond what we can write here. Together we shared that last year of expulsion from school and, as teenagers, navigated the world of adults and survived to eke out a WAEC certificate meeting again at the University of Lagos and are brothers for life. Your memory of the fine details of what I have completely forgotten makes me think I sleepwalked through our school. And as a busy CEO, I know how important this is to you to have spent time to respond so comprehensively.