Shedding light on the family history of a missionary of Maltese descent beatified by pope

On 8 December, 2018, a group of 19 missionaries, including a nun of Maltese descent, who were killed in Algeria two decades ago, were beatified by Pope Francis.

Sister Angele-Marie Littlejohn was murdered on 3 September 1995 in Algeria, where she was stationed at an orphanage and boarding school for girls which was run by the Sisters. Through means of National and Church archives, the details of Jeanne Littlejohn’s father, William (Guillaume) Littlejohn, who was born in Gharb on 13 August 1900 and his travels to Tunis in 1921 were brought to light.

Yesterday afternoon, at the Malta Emigrants’ Commission, Archpriest of St Bartholomew Parish, Fr Christopher Galea said that through the Parish’s records - they found the baptism records of William (Guillaume) Littlejohn. He said he was extremely happy to have found out that the father of Sister Angele-Marie Littlejohn was born and raised in Gharb.

The parish had found the birth record of William (Guillaume) Littlejohn, who was born on 13 August 1900 and was baptised on 19 August of the same year. The same register also shows that Littlejohn married twice, first in 1924 and then on 22 December 1932 to Marie Viola. A year later on 22 November 1933 Jearme Littlejohn was born in Carthage, Tunis.

Alongside the Church’s records, William Littlejohn’s passport application to travel to Tunisia was found within the National Archives’ vast collection of passport applications. Mr Joe Xerri, the manager of the National Archives of Malta explained that as part of the British Colony from 1850 onwards, Maltese nationals needed a passport to travel. He said William Littlejohn was one of many who travelled to Tunis in the 1920’s.

The application shows that he applied for issuance of Maltese passport on February 5, 1921, and that he migrated to Tunis, that same year. The application also gives light to the recommender who signed Littlejohn’s application, which was the priest of Hamrun, at the time Giuseppe Mamo, as Littlejohn was no longer living in Gharb but in Hamrun. Both documents highlight how such artefacts shed a light on the family history of Sister Angele-Marie and also Maltese migration.

The Non-profit organisation The Aid to the Church in Need was also present at the conference, and the National Director Steven Azzopardi explained the role of the NGO. Aid to the Church in Need is an international pastoral aid organization of the Catholic Church, which offers financial support to more than 5,000 projects worldwide. He said that Sister Yvonne Cera, a Franciscan Missionary of Mary had an interview with CAN (Malta) and said that, “They all worked with people, helping the poor, the sick, the children and, despite the war, they did not leave. They continued taking care of people.”

Bishop Pierre Claverie O.P.: seven Trappist Monks, four White Fathers, one Marist Brother and six Nuns, including Sister Jean Littlejohn of Maltese descent were murdered during the Algerian Civil War between 1994 and 1996. Littlejohn was sent to Algeria in 1999 and was teaching embroidery to young children at the Algiers School of Arts in Belfort. Jeanne Littlejohn was dedicated to her students, to the people of Algeria and their mission. Leaving Marsa on 3rd September 1995, just 100 meters from the House, Sister Littlejohn was killed with Sister Bibiane, her companion.