**Reflection by Elizabeth Smith of the Sierra Leone Ireland Partnership**

**Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin**

**23 September 2017**

How de bodi

I am a member of Sierra Leone Ireland Partnership. I spent 3 very happy years as a teacher in Freetown over 50 years ago and I have always held Salone and its people close to my heart.

I would like to thank Archbishop Jackson for his warm welcome to this beautiful Cathedral and Rev Abigail Sines for her invaluable help organising this event. Thanks to all who have participated in the preparation of today’s service and many many thanks to all of you for joining us today.

I have looked with dismay at the many hardships that have been inflicted on Sierra Leone. Just when I think they are recovering from one disaster there is another about to strike. Who could have foreseen that the rain would fall in such quantities that the very land would be washed away? - the land and all that lived in it. These people had lived through the war and the Ebola epidemic and were just getting back to living a normal life, going to market, sending their children to school when a sea of mud engulfed them. So many lost their lives, more lost their houses, families were torn asunder, children were swept away, parents were buried never to be found. How to continue with no house, no parents - how to find the courage to keep on? Sierra Leoneans have overcome all kinds of unimaginable challenges. They have picked themselves up, they have returned from refugee camps, they have lived through the trauma of seeing their loved ones die but they have survived.

I have here a piece of Gara cloth

You all recognise it. It is a piece of Sierra Leone. This cloth was dyed by Sierra Leoneans, they used the plants to make these colours. These colours echo the colours of the Sierra Leonean landscape - the red of the laterite earth, the green of the bush, the blue of the sky

This cloth has many uses

It lasts a long time

It is created by a Sierra Leonean.

This cloth is a symbol of Sierra Leone, the imagination of the person who chose the pattern and the colours

the person who tie dyed it

the person who wore it

This cloth is 30 years old

It has endured

Like the people who have lived through this disaster

they will endure

their hearts are broken

they grieve for their family, their friends, their neighbours

I invite you at the end of this service to take a small piece of Gara cloth home with you to remember those whose lives have been lost and those whose lives have been shattered

Can we help them?

We have prayed for them this morning, we remember the dead, we pray for consolation for the bereaved, we ask that they be given the courage to endure the heartbreak and the hardship.

They need money to buy food for the orphans, to build houses for the homeless.

Please give what you can - a small sum can go a long way to help families in distress.

Shattered lives can be made whole. Just like Gara cloth shattered lives can be recreated with imagination and perseverance and the work of many hands.