

Summer 2016

## From the Editor: A Clear Sense of Vocation

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### Recommended Citation

Fitzpatrick, P. (2016). From the Editor: A Clear Sense of Vocation. *Spiritan Magazine*, 40 (3). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc/vol40/iss3/4>

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# A Clear Sense of Vocation

Pat Fitzpatrick CSSp

**Y**ou reach your 80s and you find yourself looking back at the what-has-been, the has-not-been, the might-have-been. In my case it might-have-been Africa east or west, it might have been South America, it might have been Ireland itself. But I was sent from Ireland to Toronto. I landed off the boat in Montreal on my thirtieth birthday. A train brought me to Toronto where I joined the other Spiritans on staff in Neil McNeil High School, teaching French and eventually Religion.

Over the years I have been a high school teacher, an adult religious educator, an occasional retreat animator with different schools and school boards, chaplain to the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association, weekly celebrant of the TV Daily Mass. And – I almost forgot – editor of this *Spiritans* magazine.

## A down-to-earth approach

Co-authors of a recent book about Pope Francis write, “Today, clarity of doctrine is not enough – you have to somehow reach the heart. Our current Pope clearly excels at this.

“He is interested in what our faith really means to people; how they live it (not just do they know the answers to various catechism questions) ... His concern is that our religion really nourishes our hearts and our daily lives: which stories and symbols really communicate the faith to the next generation, which touch people’s hearts and shape them as they grow up.”

Pope Francis himself observes that pastors in the church are: “Sometimes in front of the sheep. Sometimes with the sheep. And sometimes behind the sheep.”

On reading these words, memories of the Mount of Beatitudes come back to mind. I was sitting on the rocks up north in Galilee looking down the hill towards the Sea of Galilee, taking it all in – and there, as if on cue, further down the mount, a flock of sheep, more or less in single line, made their way from east to west. The shepherd walked behind them and his dog moved up and down the line to keep them in their place.

Knowing when to lead, when to be among and when to walk behind is an

**“Today, clarity of doctrine is not enough – you have to somehow reach the heart.”**

insight all shepherds seem to have. And not only shepherds – pastors, leaders, teachers, even gamblers have that instinct.

Kenny Rogers’ gambler advises us: “You’ve got to know when to hold ‘em / Know when to fold ‘em / Know when to walk away / And know when to run.”

## What is it time for?

Jesus found a clear sense of his own vocation in the words of the prophet Isaiah: words he quoted on his return home to the synagogue in Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

## Jesus the Healer

He was a healer of mind, body and spirit, a healer of broken relationships

and broken hearts. He dispelled demons and brought people back to new life. He encouraged people to be healers even if it was on the Sabbath.

## Jesus the Teacher

He taught about how getting to heaven is like “squeezing through the eye of a needle” – that very narrow passageway on one of the streets in Jerusalem. He taught about who were important to God – in particular the Beatitude people. He excluded nobody even if that person had a bad name – like the

tax collector he spotted up a tree in Jericho. He invited himself to that man’s house for dinner.

## Jesus the Life-giver

On Easter Sunday when he saw Mary Magdalene weeping outside the tomb, the Risen Jesus appeared and called her by name, “Mary!” She turned and said to him, “Rabbouni! Teacher!” Then he sent her as his messenger to the apostles. She went and announced to them, “I have seen the Lord.”

Later that day when he caught up with two disciples going home to Emmaus, he slowed down to walk with them. He helped them understand what had gone on in Jerusalem and on Calvary. Then he accepted their invitation to join them for dinner.

What a story the two of them had for the others back in Jerusalem. Out of breath. Almost out of words. But no longer down in the dumps. “Have we got a story for you!” ■

# V I C S olunteer International Christian Service

Joyce de Gooijer → Director, VICS

## Celebrating 45 Years

45 years | 55 countries | 470 volunteers | 1090 volunteer years



Top: Trinidad orientation  
1977

Right: Western reunion  
2016



What amazing statistics. If VICS had sent one volunteer, a year at a time, our first volunteer would have gone out during the Mayan civilization! That said, 45 is just a number. Forty-five years of *service* is a number of significance.

VICS' 45th anniversary has been a year of celebration, recognition, and remembering. Through all the years and all the transitions VICS has always been about people – with a focus on those we serve and how, after our return home, we use what we've learned.

The stories that follow come from early and recent VICS volunteers and are a wonderful testimony of how the VICS experience has influenced their lives. With every unique experience comes a common theme:

we, as volunteers, have been changed.

It's been 12 years since George and Marlene Smadu compiled VICS stories for the book *Believing as Jesus Believed*. The stories, memories, and impact continue. So sit back, read on ... experience volunteering through our eyes – and celebrate our 45 years.