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Our Spritan Vocation

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Our Spiritan Vocation

Dan Sormani
CSSp

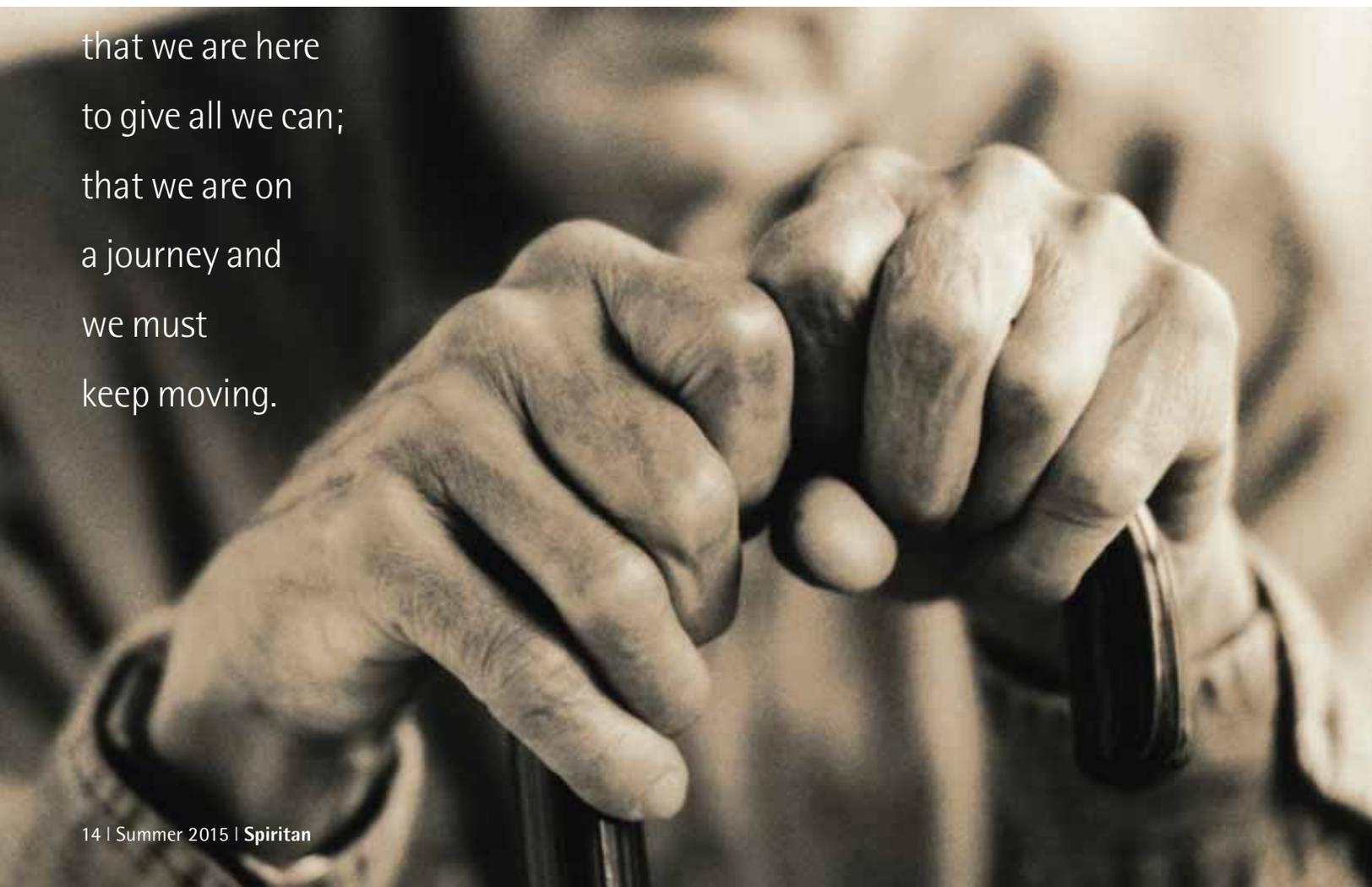
Our Spiritan headquarters here in the U.S. is located right next to our retirement community, so whenever I'm back, I find myself with the elders of our Spiritan family. Over the years I have walked into the chapel or dining room to see men in their 70s, 80s, 90s, a scattering of walkers and wheelchairs often waiting nearby.

And it is a kaleidoscope of our history – men who shared the Good News of God's love in many countries on different continents, men who wrote books of thought and insight, men who founded parishes and schools and built them from the ground up, men who were truly prophets in their day, defying mayors, governors and bishops in the tumultuous '50s and '60s to integrate schools and parishes to bring unity and dignity to all. In their various missions they were very often larger than life, legends in their own time, giving of all they were and all they had.

And now I see them here: the strong, vibrant heroes and role-models of my young days as a Spiritan now in a new chapter in their lives, in my life. Some are quite warm and welcoming, some can be quick and easily disturbed. Some, though their bodies be a bit worn and tired, are still sharp with an insight or piece of wisdom; some forget where they are.

They remind me
that there are
no monuments
to ourselves;

that we are here
to give all we can;
that we are on
a journey and
we must
keep moving.



“Weren’t you my philosophy professor?”

It is strangely humbling for me to be with them, though just for a short time every few years when I am back. One Father in his late 80s kept looking at me one morning and suddenly blurted out, “Weren’t you my philosophy professor?” He would have done philosophy in the late 1940s, but I guess I look like I age well. I tried to explain again who I was, but I think I only confused him more. A few days later he posed the same question, and I waved a warning finger at him saying, “Ah, and your assignments!! Really!!” He laughed so hard and I suddenly saw him as a 20-year-old with his whole life before him, listening for the daily beckoning of God, wondering if he would indeed become a priest and where he would be assigned. He listened, he heard, and he followed. May we all do the same!

He began to talk about love

At an important meeting of Spiritans from all over the country and even some from abroad, I sat near a confrere in his early 80s who forgot the batteries for his hearing aid and so, unwittingly, shouted all the time, often interrupting proceedings and, as they say, “showing his age”. But when we began to share on what it means to be a Spiritan, he began to talk about love, God’s great love for us which, as St Paul said, impels us to love everyone around us. It is our love that counts, and everything, all the fine works we engage in, must always be filled with love. I knew much of his history in the community, but he never mentioned all the amazing things he had accomplished in his years of ministry. He only talked of God and of love, and that God is love. He ended by quoting John 13:35: “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

After a lifetime of being “the helper”

I am touched and challenged at how these men are called to adapt to a whole new way of life, how they must now live visibly the often repeated phrase that what counts is “who we are, not what we do.” They remind me that there

are no monuments to ourselves; that we are here to give all we can; that we are on a journey and we must keep moving. And as I see these once strong, dynamic missionaries and educators being given their pills and shots by the smiling

members could spend some time with our elders during the year. He thought it would be a good idea and said it would be good for the elders. But actually I was seeing it from a whole other perspective. I keep thinking of how much

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nursing staff, as I watch them help each other with walkers and wheelchairs, as I pray with them in chapel, I wonder how difficult it must be to accept so much help from others after a lifetime of being “the helper”. Being with them reminds me of patience, acceptance, humility, honesty. Moving into this stage of life’s journey is “Let Go and Let God” embodied. It is a special kind of holy ground.

I recently mentioned to a fellow Spiritan that I wished all our younger

we, still young and healthy enough to be quite active, could learn so much from being with them. It is, in fact, a new ministry that the elders may not even realize they have ... to remind the rest of us who we are, why we do what we do, and that in the end, it is only our love that we take with us – and leave behind. ■

Reprinted from *One Heart, One Soul*, newsletter for the Province of the United States, July-August 2015.



Robert di Nardo CSSp

He was on the cover of *Spiritans* Spring 2015. Not Bishop Nguyen – but Fr. Robert di Nardo, newly ordained. Now – Catholic Priest Chaplain at St Michael’s Hospital in downtown Toronto.

Fr. Robert had hoped for such a ministry and a vacancy came at the right time in this “parish within the hospital”: baptisms, anointing of the sick, daily Mass for staff and patients, visiting all the new Catholic patients: introducing himself, telling patients of the services on offer, asking them what they might like from him.

His first impressions: “No two people are quite the same. Taking time to listen – hearing about good and tragic experiences. What a busy place a hospital is, how fast paced. What a wonderful ministry hospital chaplaincy is.”