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Front cover: Photo by Frank O'Neill
It comes as an admonition — mind what you’re saying, where and to whom you’re speaking. Bad language is not acceptable in our house. It shouldn’t be acceptable in church either.

There is bad language in the sense of foul language. But also in the sense of inappropriate language — language that doesn’t communicate, language that’s not understood by the people you’re talking with or writing for. Many legal documents may be written in English but they remain incomprehensible to ordinary people. We’d need a translator.

In language there’s the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the appropriate and the inappropriate. There’s the spoken word and the written word, the technical terms and their everyday equivalents, the transplanted word and the homegrown word.

In church there is public speaking, public praying and personal communion — with varying degrees of formality. But do they sometimes become too formal, even unnatural?

Can you just translate word for word from one language into another? Anyone who has tried to learn a foreign language soon learns that the answer is no. But some people never take No for an answer. So we get Latinized English.

Churchspeak

These and other aspects of language came to mind as I prayed out loud two very different “Collects” at two recent Masses (why have we gone back to a Latin word “Collect” instead of the much more understandable “Opening Prayer”?):

“O God, who enlightened the Slavic peoples through the brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius, grant that our hearts may grasp the words of your teaching, and perfect us as a people of one accord in true faith and right confession.” Who uses the word “perfect” as a verb today?

“O God, who have prepared for those who love you good things which no eye can see, fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love, so that, loving you in all things and above all things, we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire.” Having already said, “Let us pray” before this prayer, why is it necessary to repeat “we pray” in the middle of the prayer — especially when it interrupts the vocal rhythm of a too long one-sentence prayer?

Don’t try to sound profound

First Nations storyteller, Thomas King, remembers some good advice he got: “Words can be dull. Deadly dull — especially religious words ... Tell a story. Don’t preach. Don’t try to sound profound. Don’t show them your mind. Show them your imagination.”

Jesus was a teller of short stories — sometimes one-sentence stories. Is that what made him such a great teacher? He made connections. His “mind’s eye” joined heaven and earth. He brought God down to earth. From the Word made Flesh came words of everyday life.

Belfast born, Brian Moore, recalls his childhood days through the prologue of John’s gospel: “In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was NO. All things came from that beginning. ‘No, don’t do that, Joe,’ Mam said. ‘No, not now,’ Daddy said. ‘No, you can’t go out today. No, God bless us, what’s the matter with you now? No, you can’t have another apple.” The Word recreated a whole family scene.

Our vocabulary of faith — is it inviting or off-putting? Does it bore us or beckon us? Language can do so much good. Language can do so much harm. Sunday worship has been described as “An hour-long barrage of heavyweight theological terminology. The language of a land with no known inhabitants.”

Keep it simple

Contrast that with a radio short story limited to fifty words spoken by two voices:

“Welcome home, son!”
“Hello, father.”
“It’s so good to see you. It’s been a long time.”
“Yes, father, a very long time. It was hard. Hard as nails. Hard as wood.”
“I know. Which was the hardest?”
“The kiss, father. The kiss.”
“Yes. Come here and let me hold you.”

Five two-syllable words. Forty-five one syllable words. Keep it simple. Use words of everyday life. Take for a motto the end of the Pentecost story: “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” in language we can understand — not in heavyweight theological terminology, but “in our own tongues.”
For two weeks this past summer we had the most enriching and enlightening experience — the final event in two years of preparation! We travelled from Canada to Portugal and Spain with 12 members of the Youth Mission from St Theresa Shrine of the Little Flower Parish in Scarborough, Ontario. We went with young people who were in high school, university and college. In addition, our group was supported by the CEO of a telecommunications company, a high school principal, and a priest.

World Youth Day (WYD) wasn’t just being in a strange country or in Europe for the first time. It wasn’t just seeing the Pope. It became a profession of our own faith and our personal convictions. We became empowered to open ourselves up to others and their faith.

Fatima
Before we went to Madrid we spent some days in Portugal. Our time at Fatima was in itself a neat thing, but the truly amazing part was the Mass that Father Obinna had with us about 15 metres from the bush where Mary on the 13th May 1917 visited the three children — Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta. It made the Fatima story our story.

We also saw some of the castles where Crusaders would stop and rest on their journey through Europe. Kind of like us.

He talked to us like real people
While in Madrid, we attended catechism sessions pretty much daily. Every speaker had interesting and important things to say, but it was Archbishop (now Cardinal) Dolan, from New York City, who stole the show on the last day. He talked to us like real people and told very relevant stories that made us think and also made us laugh. He was awesome and inspiring.

During the trip we met huge numbers of Catholics from Europe, South Africa, USA and Asia. In them, as well as in the members of our own parish, we encountered people experiencing their joy and passion in the Catholic faith. It seems that the real purpose of World Youth Days is to spread our faith as we experience it and to embody that same faith in our own lives.

Why not these young people in our churches?
The animated mood in Madrid, the dry sun, the sometimes challenging encounters, seeing the faith and strength of all these young people made us wonder why we don’t find all these young people in our churches on Sunday. Something must be wrong somewhere, either from us young people or from the hierarchies of the church. Hope we figure it out sooner rather than later.

During the campout at the air base for the vigil Mass, with lightning all around us, tents flying and horizontal rain, Pope Benedict never left his flock. It was fun watching bishops, priests, nuns and the laity as one happy family not minding the rain. Together we waited out the storm. Seeing how strong and courageous all the young people were, the Pope thanked everyone in these words: “Thank you young people, you rejuvenate the Pope, inspire the Church, and refresh a world thirsty for hope and courage.”

Positives … and negatives
Our group was lucky. Father Obinna not only gave every one of us a great perspective throughout our trip and said daily Mass for us — he was a lot of fun too. He encouraged us to see the storm not as rain, but as God blessing us and sprinkling us with holy water.

Of course, it would not be hard to find some negatives about this year’s WYD in Madrid. It was hot, crowded and most of the Spanish people did not understand anything you said. And toilets were few and far between. But that’s only if you think that way.
Two million people make for some big crowds, but most of those people were there for the same reason and were a pleasure to meet and talk to, even if it was only for a minute or two. As for the language barrier, we breached it by using sign language, gesturing and pointing.

**Proud to say “I am a Catholic”**
It was a true pilgrimage: physically very hard at times, but the spirit of the event, the people that came with us and those we met, the incredible feeling of being surrounded by and part of a group that was proud to say “I am a Catholic” will remain forever in our memory. We are thankful for this incredible experience because, although it was not always easy or fun, we were always surrounded by people of a like mind and heart.

We cannot remember the name of the school we slept in or that Spanish phrase that everyone yelled over and over again, but we will remember the bond we formed within our group, as well as with those we met on this faith journey. While it started with our preparation in Scarborough, it truly became a magical gift because of everyone who spoke with us and touched us during the World Youth Day experience.

Our hope is that we will be able to give back, both now and in the future, a little bit of what we have learned. To all the young people who came and to those who couldn’t make it, we leave you with the words of Pope Benedict: “The Pope thanks you for your affection and sends you out as ambassadors of the joy that our world needs.”

Rio de Janeiro 2013 – See you there!

“Thank you young people, you rejuvenate the Pope, inspire the Church, and refresh a world thirsty for hope and courage.”
— Pope Benedict XVI
Most scholars, educators, writers, religious clerics and those involved in one way or another with faith promotion among youth have observed that there has been a sharp decline of interest in organised religion among them, whereas their interest in spirituality is on the rise. Reginald W. Bibby and Donald C. Posterski noted in their book: Teen Trends: a Nation in Motion, that significant change is occurring in five major areas: 1. Relationships 2. Values 3. Marriage and Parenthood 4. Sexuality and 5. Religion. “The majority of young people in Canada are sending a sobering message to those who value organised religion. Attendance continues to decline and participation in youth groups is low. Relatively few teenagers place much value on religious involvement. In the minds of the vast majority of young people, religion is something that is marginal to everyday life. Still holding on to their religious legacy, however, young people expect to use the services of the country’s religious institutions for ceremonial purposes — marriages, births, and deaths.”

Amongst young Christians, their sense of belonging is marked by a lack of commitment. While they may identify themselves as Christians, engagement with the activities of their religion is only marginal. It is, perhaps, worthwhile to point out that many identify themselves as Christians when they come seeking letters of recommendation for a job in a Catholic school or hospital.

As someone involved in youth ministry, I pay attention to diverse viewpoints regarding the causes of this decline in religious involvement. One viewpoint maintains that the social media is responsible for the decline of youth interest in face-to-face encounters where people come together to share their faith. They prefer to socialize in virtual groups with others. It is claimed that this pattern is symptomatic of an overly individualistic generation. The “me-oriented generation” considers the role of organised religions as outdated.
Hopeful moments
While it is true that the breath-taking changes of communications technology have affected young people, it is relevant to note that these young people, while not necessarily as religious as their parents’ generation, are still very deeply spiritual. Working with them, I notice that they believe very strongly in the idea of a God behind all there is, that life has a purpose, that being compassionate, just, and true to one’s inner self are worthwhile goals to pursue. Youth, like all people, operate in keeping with the zeitgeist. They are not from another planet, but they have that perennial hunger for what is greater and higher than them.

Non-practising parents
Another viewpoint attributes the decline to the religious laxity of their parents. Children being raised by non-practicing Catholics, for instance, are unlikely to be committed to the faith. As a matter of interest, even committed Christians have difficulty finding time to nurture their kids in a religious environment because they have to put food on the table and pay the bills. In order to make ends meet, some parents have to do two or three jobs most days of the week, including Sundays.

“... attend Mass is when we celebrate here at school.”

One of my students told me this: “My parents do two to three jobs. While Mom works on Sundays, Dad makes Sunday sleep/rest day for the family. The only opportunity I have to attend Mass is when we celebrate here at school.” The challenge of coping with the financial pressures of providing for one’s children is obviously taking a toll on the family’s role in helping to nurture the faith of their children. To make any significant headway with young people, the Church has to re-examine the role of parents and family as partners and helpers in the cultivation and nurturing of religious faith.

Religion at odds with young people’s values
Some faith promotion programmes portray youth as a generation that sees the core moral teachings of religion at odds with the values many young people live by. Implicitly, religious institutions will have to change their moral doctrines and values if they want to attract youth.

Andy Blanks, a blogger and the co-founder of youth ministry360, asserts that “The tide of culture is not changing ... it has changed. And if we are not actively and intentionally structuring our programming and philosophy to meet it, we will increasingly find ourselves and our ministries irrelevant.”

I asked my students why they themselves seem non-chalant about organised religions. Some of the answers I got from them include: approving premarital sex, being more accepting of parenthood outside marriage, divorce, abortion, and homosexuality. Quoting an old axiom, one of them said, “Father, guns don’t kill people — religion kills people. Check the history of the wars fought and still being fought.” In order to avoid the “rigid” requirements demanded from them by organised religion, most young people prefer to distance themselves from religion, consequently describing themselves as spiritual as opposed to religious.

I am a hopeful Catholic
So, what is my opinion on all of this? Much as I give credit to some of these faith formation organisations for the useful and insightful issues they raise, I refuse to embrace their pessimistic take on the attitude of youth toward religion today. I am a hopeful Catholic, and my experience of youth in the last World Youth Days (WYD) in Madrid has solidified my stance that a lot of young people are both spiritual and religious. Madrid 2011 was my first WYD experience. It was thanks to the Youth Mission from St Theresa Shrine of the Little Flower Parish in Scarborough, Ontario, that I got the opportunity of attending the event.

Prior to my experience in Madrid, I had always assumed that WYD, apart from the Masses celebrated, was another kind of social picnic for youth, deficient in strong spiritual and catechetical depth. Was I wrong? Yes, I was indeed!

I experienced a group of boys and girls (approximately 1.5 million) standing up to defend and express their faith in the midst of an ever-hostile attack from the secular world.

I experienced a Catholic gathering with strong catechetical and spiritual programs designed to uplift and strengthen the faith of youth.

I experienced young boys and girls, who in normal circumstances (as I thought), give up and go home at any inconvenience to their comfort, keen to walk in groups for miles and miles to attend all the religious activities and gatherings arranged for them. Even when I felt tired of walking, the palpable faith, spirit and strength of the young revitalized my will. I kept walking.

Several moments in Madrid continue to keep me hopeful about the religious disposition and commitment of young people toward the Church. One of those moments was the
courage, civility and devotion with which, in spite of the treacherous August heat, they stood to counter the anti-Papal protest organised by the train workers. I also found it nourishing, enriching and edifying to see young people in their hundreds of thousands from different continents, countries, races, and ethnicities united in their Catholic faith, holding hands, praying the rosary and singing religious songs in defence of their faith against the organised protest in Madrid.

Comfortable to wear his faith on his sleeve
I asked one of the United States participants that I met at a restaurant his opinion of the whole WYD experience. He revealed that for once, he felt comfortable to wear his faith on his sleeve without apologies to anyone as opposed to the situation in the United States where the prevailing culture of political correctness makes it appear inappropriate for people to publicly express their faith. According to him, “to be seen as religious by some of your peers is tantamount to being seen as abnormal. But here we all share and profess proudly the same faith without being judged or considered exclusionists.”

Another faith-enriching moment for me was when I watched millions of young boys and girls with the Pope and the hierarchy of the Church stand resolute, prayerfully, joyfully and faithfully worshipping their God in spite of the torrential rainfall that poured down on the Day of Adoration.

A meaningful youth forum every year?
Given that WYD comes around every two or three years, we need to ask ourselves what are we doing as a Church to sustain the high level of enthusiasm young people brought and experienced in Madrid? Should we always wait for two to three years to gather the youth or should our parishes and dioceses be encouraged to organise a meaningful youth forum every year that will climax with WYD? What of the involvement of youth in parishes and Church committees where they feel their voice is heard and respected?

Confirmation is done in Grade 7/8 and the next sacrament is Marriage, which often happens after college/university — so, what happens sacramentally from high school to college/university? Do we not think it is time for the Church to have a serious and meaningful dialogue with youth in our parishes and dioceses?

Perhaps we need to seek new ways of making the Mass livelier and engaging, more attractive for young people who, for the most part, perceive it as “boring and exclusive”. From my experience as a youth minister, many think the Mass is centred on the priest, keeping the congregation aloof. We need to give them more avenues for participating in the liturgy. One of my students once said, “It seems priests enjoy celebrating Mass for themselves instead of for the people.”

Challenged by this perception, I had to find ways to make the Mass more engaging, participatory and lively for them while stressing its sacredness. Having used that approach on several occasions, I observed that it improved their interest and participation in the Mass. Tailoring the liturgy to capture the interest of young people is an unavoidable task the Church must accomplish. In this connection, it is worthwhile to commend the Vatican for publishing the new Youth Catechism (YouCat) “written in language suitable for young people.”

While we wait for better and new ideas that are youth-oriented, it is vital for the church to acknowledge the importance of the youth entrusted to her care and to review carefully her responsibility to nurture their spiritual growth. Let us remember what Pope Benedict said: “The youth of today are not as superficial as some think.”
In June 2011 the first Father Michael Troy Bursary was awarded to Neil McNeil graduate, Damiano Dekaj. This young man met the following criteria:
1. Has lived up to the school motto — Fidelitas in Arduis
2. Has overcome a significant challenge in successfully completing his studies
3. Has made a positive contribution to the school, his community, his parish and his family.

For 2011 the inaugural year of the Bursary was $1000. It is hoped that in future the scholarship will be $1500 - $2,000. This will depend on Alumni contributions and investment returns. The Alumni aim to reach a minimum of $50,000 within the next couple of years via investments and donations.

After a lapse of several years the Annual Neil McNeil Alumni Drop-In was revived on November 4, 2011. It was a great success. Almost two hundred former teachers and students showed up representing almost every decade since the school opened in 1958. Contacts were made, friendships renewed — and the food was good too. Former VP Anne Gottfried won the 50/50 draw. Another big hit were the many pictures collected over 50 years and posted in the gym. “Boy, some of these guys have really aged!” was a comment overheard more than once.

In attendance were Spiritan Fathers Geary, Doyle, Fitzpatrick, Graham (since died), Kelly and McAuley. Former teachers Dan Dooley, Russ Stachiw and Ted Schmidt were there too and enjoyed kibitzing with their former students. Other notable past students present were former MP Derek Lee (Liberal) and newly elected MP Andrew Cash (NDP).

The Neil McNeil Alumni worked hard to put together this evening. They thank Mike Wallace, Principal, for his cooperation, the Neil students and staff for their help during the evening and their cleaning up afterwards, and Mrs Malcolm, the caterer, and her staff.

Mark your calendar for the following events:
• May 4, 2012: Beer and Barbecue
• November 2, 2012: Annual Drop-In

Online donation to the Spiritans for the Fr. Troy Scholarship Fund:
1. Go to the online donation website Canada Helps www.canadahelps.org
2. Type in Spiritans in Search Bar on Canada Helps
3. Click on Donate
4. Scroll down to Fr Troy Scholarship Fund

Alternatively, tax deductible donations can be made to the Spiritan Fathers. In the memo field on your cheque write: The Father Michael J. Troy Bursary.

Neil McNeil Alumni award this annual Bursary to a graduating student who will pursue post-secondary education after leaving Neil. The fund is entrusted to the care of the TransCanada Province of the Spiritan Congregation. They present an annual financial report showing donations, expenditures, disbursements, investments and investment dividends to the Alumni by September 30 each year. The fund is administered by the Toronto Spiritan Office and two past students appointed by the Neil McNeil Alumni. Spiritans and Alumni are equal partners in the administration of the fund. Should the Spiritans cease to operate in the Toronto Archdiocese then all monies remaining in the fund will be turned over to the Neil McNeil Alumni as its sole administrator.

All applications will be reviewed by an adjudicating committee of two alumni, a representative appointed by the Spiritans, and a Neil McNeil staff member appointed by the teachers.
In the summer of 1841 after twenty-one days of excruciating travel on board La Tanjora, you became the first Spiritan missionary Francis Libermann sent from your native Normandy to Mauritius. In your heart was a deep love for Jesus and an incredible zeal to liberate the black slaves of the colony — among whom were my ancestors. You came to know them as your “poor Blacks.”

Your missionary zeal, the sanctity of your life and your genuine eagerness to win as many as you possibly could for Jesus Christ won you the title Apostle of Mauritius and led the Church to beatify you in 1979.

Creole Reality

The constitution of Mauritius formally recognizes three groups: Indian Hindus, Muslim and Chinese. The Creole are classified as “General Population.” They parallel the situation of the “80,000 forsaken Blacks” to whom you dedicated your missionary work from 1841-1864. Among them we find the highest number of drug addicts, prostitutes, academic failures, HIV/AIDS, jailed men and women, squatters and street children.

Most Catholics in Mauritius are Creoles — something that has not changed since your time. But very few Catholic Creoles have access to Catholic schools. Most of them fail their basic primary exams — which explains the high rate of illiteracy within the Creole community.

Feeling abandoned

I am sure that from your personal experience with the forsaken Blacks you will understand why the Catholic Creole community feels abandoned by politicians and government, by the Catholic Church — the majority of which are themselves Creoles — by the private sector which for economic or political reasons prefers to support the Hindu community, and by their own fellow middle-class Creoles who have chosen to emigrate.

I left Mauritius in 1989 to embark on a missionary adventure in Papua New Guinea for nearly seven years. There I ministered to tribal people and learned the art of communicating the word of God in simple, colorful language in order to make it come alive for them.

You had set the tone with your creation of a little Catechism in the Creole language that your “poor Blacks” could easily understand. But the Roman Catholic Church in Mauritius has opted for French instead of Creole as its vernacular.

Go and proclaim the good news

In 1996, after my return from Papua New Guinea, I started an evangelization program, Session Gregoire, as a three-phased journey towards a greater knowledge, appreciation and intimacy with the Blessed Trinity, the Catholic Church and the world.

To the Creole people the good news is that they are children of God, no longer in the grip of sorcerers, charms, hexes, curses, witchcraft, and other spiritual bondages. They encounter the author of their liberation — Jesus Christ.

Through storytelling, Scripture reading, sermons and homilies I teach them that God is a God of love, who sent his only Son Jesus to redeem us and give us new life in the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus we have the power to conquer our fears.

The next phase encourages them to become witnesses to their newfound life and renewed faith. They are not afraid to talk to members of their family, their colleagues and their friends. Nor are they afraid to go public in the media about their relationship with Jesus and the Church. They also convince those involved in occult practices to reconvert their life to Jesus Christ. Their eyes are open to issues of social justice and the need for Christians to opt for the poor in their society.

The use of Creole enables them to understand better the practice of their Catholic faith. Many lapsed Catholics return to the Church through participation in the sessions. As churches became overcrowded we have moved outside or utilized stadiums to accommodate the crowds. I will not be surprised to learn that from where you are you somehow have a hand in all this.

I have written hymns in Creole based on biblical passages and psalms and have recorded and produced more than one hundred thirty songs to be used in the celebration of the liturgy and as media for catechism and evangelization. Creole
Catholics can now sing, worship, pray and enter into intimacy with God in a language, music and culture they know and are at ease with.

Cardinal Jean Margeot’s words were publicly reassuring: “Jocelyn, you have succeeded where for thirty some years we older priests have tried hard but have failed. Through your songs, you have put the Bible in Creole and placed the Creoles into the Bible.”

**A cry for more social justice**

Our sessions brought me to a front row encounter with poverty as lived by so many Creole families in areas infested by drugs, prostitution, academic failure, sexual abuse, economic and social deprivation.

God who “observed the misery of his people in Egypt and heard their cry on account of their taskmasters” (Exodus 3,7) called Moses to set his people free. God observed the misery and heard the cry of my poor Creole ancestors on account of their slave masters, and sent you, Jacques Laval, to be an instrument of their deliverance. Today in Mauritius, God hears the cry of the same Creole people.

As the divide between the haves and the have-nots becomes more and more abysmal in Mauritius, I have no other choice than to push myself, in the name of Jesus, to take a stand for more social justice in favour of the poorest and most vulnerable. You did that for 80,000 poor Blacks despite the virulent opposition you had to face from the white colonists and clergy.

**Grassroots advocate for the Creole people**

In September 2007 I initiated the emergence of the Federation of Mauritian Creoles (FCM) as a political voice and grassroots advocate for the Creole community. The FCM has four primary goals: a) to assist Creoles to take responsibility for their own advancement b) to restore pride in the Creole contribution to Mauritius c) to work alongside other ethnic groups d) to advocate for a constitutional change recognizing the Creole community as a national ethnic group.

My own vocation as a missionary priest, intertwined with my resolute choice to heed the commission of Jesus to take a preferential option for the poor, drives me to ask:

- Why is it that after 40 years of independence, the present state of the Creole community is so gloomy?
- Why so few employment opportunities for Creoles in the public sector?
- Why is there a perceived institutional discrimination against Creoles when it comes to government promotions?
- Why are Creoles denied official recognition as a racial and ethnic group like the Hindus, Muslims and Chinese?

The dreadful bruises of slavery continue to throb in the Creole community. Education is the key for our future. We are ready to work with others to develop various adult education programs.

We are also seeking to develop better housing for the poor squatters, shelter for the street children, and training and formation programs for Creole men and women in the various parts and slums of the island.

**Conclusion**

Dear confrere, Jacques Laval, the moment you set foot on the island of Mauritius more than 150 years ago you were moved, against all odds, to establish the Mission for the Blacks. Your courage and perseverance, above all your uncompromising belief that these “poor and dear children” of yours had an absolute right to encounter Jesus, who loved them and died for them, prompted you to row against the social, political and church tides of your day.

Your memory is still alive in the collective consciousness of the Mauritian people. Day by day, hundreds of people visit your shrine in St Croix seeking physical or spiritual comfort, healing, reassurance or even a miracle. They believe their fervent prayers will be heard through your intercession.

However, the missionary momentum that you set in process with the Mission for the Blacks, along with its catechists and lay collaborators that were the backbone of your pastoral success, has been allowed to die. But the Creole language is painfully edging its way into the official liturgical celebrations and translations of our missals, rituals and scripture.

Your poor children still need you. The Creoles in Mauritius still need you and I definitely need you. Thank you for praying for us.

In Jesus and Mary,
Your brother, Jocelyn Gregoire CSSp

Used with permission from Spiritan Horizons, Duquesne University.
Killed for their faith

Roland Rivard CSSp

Fifty years ago, on January 1, 1962 twenty Spiritans — nineteen Belgians, and one Dutch — were massacred in Kongolo, Democratic Republic of Congo. They were killed not because of their nationality but because of their faith. Only the arrival of a senior officer prevented a second slaughter of two other priests, some sisters and junior seminarians, all of them Africans who had witnessed the killings and were due to be killed that same afternoon.

Two Quebec Spiritans, Fathers Antoine Mercier and Roland Rivard, volunteered to replace their martyred confreres. Roland spent more than sixteen years in Congo-Kinshasa. He recalls the massacre and its follow-up.

Why this massacre?
The Democratic Republic of Congo, the former Belgian Congo, gained its independence on June 30, 1960. The West was in a Cold War with Russia; the Congolese officers in charge of the executions had been trained in Russia. In addition, the political separation of mineral-rich Katanga Province from the rest of the Congo, financed by external sources and led by Moise Tshombe, was under way. The Kongolo Spiritans were caught between two fires: the town was just north of Katanga Province and the advancing Congolese soldiers came through it on their journey south to retake Katanga.

In the most difficult of times they unanimously chose to stay with the people who had welcomed them.

Our confreres could have left, like most of the colonialists. The letters they wrote at that time show how aware they were of what it might mean for them to stay put. Fr Jean-Marie Godefroid wrote: “Our people are hungry and afraid because we border on rebel territory. We live the spirit of Advent: hungry and destitute we have only the Lord to hope in. Jesus alone saves …. Next week we begin exams — at least the seminarians do. As to the Final Exam before our Saviour, we don’t know whether it will come soon or later. May the Prince of Peace come quickly to change people’s hearts.”

An opportunity to escape across the Congo river with the Katanga soldiers and almost the whole population came on December 30 1961. But the Spiritans chose to remain to assist people from other tribes, who couldn’t flee and who had to take refuge where they were. In the most difficult of times they unanimously chose to stay with the people who had welcomed them. That choice cost them their lives. They were stabbed to death.

Along with them remained two Congolese priests — one of them Msgr Kabwe, the Vicar General — thirty religious sisters, sixty seminarians, old people, mothers and young children, a French doctor and an old Belgian trader married to a Congolese woman. The Spiritans knew the danger they were in, but they were unwilling to abandon all these people.

Fr Jules Darmont, the only survivor of the massacre, wrote: “We entrusted ourselves to Providence, asking to be saved or to be given the strength to die as priests. Each one of us had a ritual and the Holy Oils. Some priests consumed the Holy Communion hosts from the different tabernacles so as to empty them.”

Soldiers arrive
On December 31 the Congolese soldiers entered the deserted village of Kongolo. In the afternoon they went to the diocesan offices where our confreres had gathered along with those who were unable to escape. After verifying each person’s identity and making sure that there were neither arms nor Katangan soldiers there, they assured them that nothing would happen to them. But they didn’t count on a small group of soldiers who wanted at all costs to kill both missionaries and foreigners.

In the evening two trucks arrived to round up the Spiritans, the doctor, the trader, the sisters and the junior seminarians. They had to repeat slogans such as “Vive Lumumba”, “Lumumba is God”, “Death to Tshombe”. Then each group
was separated into different cells. The Sisters had to endure continuous nightlong harassment and attempted rape. They were especially heroic — ready to die rather than give in.

**Execution**

Next morning the prisoners were subjected to various interrogations. They were scourged with twelve lashes of a chicotte (a leather whip of hippotamus skin made supple with alcohol). Fr Postelmans said to his confreres: “Well, my friends, it’s New Year’s Day … Happy New Year.” About 9:00 a.m. they were brought out once more, lined up one behind the other, and brought towards the river, frequently beaten as they shuffled along. A soldier, who wanted to save at least one priest, threw himself on Fr Jules Darmont and brought him into solitary confinement. The other twenty Spiritans, the doctor and the businessman were all killed.

Witnesses have said that while the soldiers who committed this crime did so because of their hatred of religion, other soldiers tried to prevent this happening.

Msgr Kabwe was forced to take part in a mock trial. When the missionaries went out to be executed, he blessed them as they passed by. He would have wished to follow them to death, but the soldiers prevented him from doing so. Later, he wrote: “If there are moments in life when one is in a state of perfect charity, it was such a moment. That’s what I thought as I observed each one’s attitude: truly lambs among a band of wolves. I pictured them as martyrs to duty, of fidelity to duty. The final blessing I gave them was an au revoir.”

Fr Jules Darmont should have been the first to be executed — he was military chaplain to the Katanga soldiers. But in spite of that he was the first to be saved. From his cell he cried out, “I too want to die.” He finally escaped from Kongolo on January 23. His witness enabled the world to know the full extent of the massacre. This killing resounded across the world. Martyrdom had seemed such a thing of the past. He returned to Kongolo the following August and was responsible for the memorial church to the Kongolo martyrs. I was pastor of that parish from 1976-1979.

**Gentinnes memorial**

A memorial was constructed in Gentinnes, Belgium and solemnly consecrated on May 7, 1967. All the Belgian Spiritan seminarians who were there at the time of the martyrdom eventually left the seminary. The holocaust did not attract any further Spiritan candidates. Several Belgian Spiritans asked to be sent to the Congo “to fill in the gaps” — a very generous gesture, but one that drained the home front. Kongolo itself has undergone many turbulences and life has not yet settled down there.

But things are looking up — a new Spiritan beginning is underway with thirty overseas missionaries and forty young Spiritans in formation. Kongolo itself has a solid African clergy alongside Sisters and some missionaries.

The Gentinnes memorial doesn’t draw crowds, but it remains an inspiration for retreatants and passers-by. Many young people are struck by the open hands of the missionary statue: open hands give and receive, bless and welcome, reconcile and reassure.

“*Missionaries are neither heroes nor adventurers, but quite ordinary people, entrusted with the most splendid, but also perhaps the most demanding assignment.*” — Jean-Marie Godefroid, one of the Twenty.
My trip to Libya from the Sudan was on the back of a Toyota Hilux pick-up stacked with some 40 men and women. The truck crossed the dunes in the desert with no trace of a road. The burning heat of the sun, the waves of hot air from the wind, and the blinding reflexes of the sand, without one single tree in sight, are terrible memories of that trip.

To escape the border-police, our driver avoided the oases until Kufrah. There we were traded to another driver who asked us for more money before taking us to Eji Dabya. Here someone with a scimitar threatened us to pay a ransom of $150 – $200 each, or else we would be taken to the police passport control.

The next leg took us to Benghazi in a Peugeot open in the back. There were eighteen of us, packed together and asked to lie under a covering tarp, tightly secured by ropes so as to look like it was carrying an ordinary load. You can imagine the suffocation, the sweating and the bumping of the car. The same during the last leg of our trip: we were asked to lay flat on the floor of the truck covered with a layer of wooden boards, on top of which a shipment of tomatoes was loaded. After three weeks, at a cost of $1,000, we reached Tripoli.

Eritreans in Libya
The driver dropped us in an area where it was easy to find Eritreans. Lucky us — they took us in, let us have a shower, drink fresh and clean water, allowed us to sleep in their own beds and helped us through the first weeks until some money came from family members in Europe or America.

Life in Libya is hard: street boys threaten you to give them quarters. If you give it to them they ask for more, if you do not give they threaten you with drawn knives. At night policemen regularly raid the area where refugees live. If you can bribe them in time, they let you go; otherwise you are taken to detention centres. Generally, Eritreans just take in all these abuses because they are defenseless, and cannot count on anyone to stand up for them.

There is no document processing system for asylum protection or refugee status. You cannot work without a regular work permit. The only alternative left is to risk crossing the Mediterranean to Europe, which many of us do, well conscious of the dangers.

Getting across the Mediterranean
I myself tried three times to cross that sea. The first time the rubber boat was overloaded and I had to step out. Unfortunately,
half an hour after leaving the shore, the boat drowned because of a strong wind and high waves. There were no survivors. In the boat was a whole family: husband with his brother, wife and their daughter, along with a woman and her five-year-old daughter. The ones piloting the boats are people with no experience, just two or three days training and they are ready to go.

The second time, I had already paid the fare. To be protected from the police raid we were taken to an abandoned old store for three weeks. All of a sudden the police, informed of our plan, came in full strength. The few who could run away were saved; those who were caught were taken to prison.

The third time I tried it with my wife. On our way to the appointment we were stopped by the police and taken to prison. I paid a bribe and was allowed to go, but my wife was kept in jail for one full year and three months. She was there with many other men, women and under age children.

To Canada via Romania
Fortunately, while in detention she had an interview with the UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees), was accepted as a refugee and therefore we were moved to Romania. The Canadian government granted us a Visa, the Spiritans sponsored us — and so here we are.

Being a refugee
Many wonder why some people become uprooted. Why are they refugees? What happened to them? Why are they on the run? Why are they homeless?

Conflict and war continue to play a major role in uprooting people and making them refugees. Both cause tragedy and disaster in the lives of millions of people. As they escape, they struggle to cope with the loss of family, friends, possessions and everything familiar to them. In conflict situations the lives of many people change abruptly. For example, a bomb dropped in one community causes destruction and violence. Depending on the severity of the bombing, it costs the lives of many people.

Finally, those who remain behind are forced to leave their communities as war and conflict become unbearable for them. After a long journey to a safer place, refugees find themselves in the tent cities of Refugee Camps waiting in unbearable conditions and uncertain of what the future will hold for them. They are stuck living in the most appalling conditions, in refugee camps, in isolated areas or a desert place where no one else lives except refugees. While they are refugees, they still hope to find ways to get out of their uncertain situation and continue a normal life. Without a country, stateless, no place to call home — life is far from easy for refugees.

Brottier House
Each year I can’t help but reflect on all that has passed. It seems like only yesterday when we opened our doors to welcome our first guests. A lot has happened in the past three years. Over 60 new comers and claimants from a total of 14 different nations have passed through our doors. People from all walks of life have called Brottier House “home”. The one thing they all share in common is a fear of persecution in their homeland and a need for safe refuge.

Brottier House is blessed in the sense that all the claimants that passed through the House have been accepted as Conventional Refugees in the process of becoming Resident Citizens in a very short time. Some of those we sponsored have made great improvements in their new home and country. Some work in various offices in Toronto and Montreal; others have gotten jobs in line with their trade.

Within the past three years, Brottier House has welcomed four “grandchildren”, one born while the mother was still in Brottier House, the others in their new homes. That makes me a “grandfather”.

As I sit in my office feeling the many unshed tears, I also remember the strength and resilience of many newcomers who have passed through our hallways and have successfully settled in Canada.

— Alex Osei CSSp, Director
As a Lay Spiritan I am challenged by the Spiritan Rule of Life to wrestle with the meaning of a “simple style of life”: “The gospel we are preaching … becomes … an invitation to adopt a simple style of life.”

Living in Africa for three years had already opened my eyes to the wastefulness of our affluent First World. My Catholic faith had always proposed temperance, humility and dependence on God as virtues to be pursued. Our planet can no longer support our North American consumer lifestyle. Not only is there an extreme disparity between the consumption in industrialized cultures and agrarian cultures — our overall consumption is beyond the carrying capacity of the planet right now.

When you live in one of the richest countries of the world, surrounded by advertisements urging you to buy “bigger, better, newer” and where wants have been turned into needs, it is difficult to decide on an appropriate standard of living.

**Simplicity circle**

Reflecting together with others and holding each other accountable for our purchases and life style is very helpful. With this in mind, over ten years ago, a small group of friends and I began a Simplicity Circle which meets in each other’s homes every two weeks. We discuss one book per year and share our ups and downs on the path to simplicity — often confessing our failures, laughing at our mistakes and celebrating our small victories.

These might include such things as: washing and reusing plastic bags for food storage; buying and serving Fair Trade coffee; car pooling or taking public transport; making gifts instead of buying at a store; frequenting second-hand stores and charity shops; sharing vegetarian recipes; visiting organic grain mills and stores; buying our vegetables from local farmers; carrying a travel mug so as not to use Styrofoam; using a clothes line rather than an electric dryer; using less water; buying energy-efficient appliances; using compact fluorescent bulbs and non-toxic cleaning materials; organizing a pot-luck wedding.

Small everyday acts can make a difference to the survival of our planet — but only if large numbers of people commit to doing them with persistence and faithful regularity.

**Making a difference**

People argue that such actions are just a drop in the ocean and won’t change the larger systemic problems. The answer is that they are linked in several ways, but foremost through our consumerism. Every plastic bag we use, every car we buy, every new house we build, not only use the earth’s resources, they pollute land, air and water. And, of course, burning fossil fuels is disrupting our climate globally.

But simplicity is central in even more fundamental ways. Voluntary simplicity questions the greed that runs rampant, e.g. companies willing to devastate the environment to make a profit.

Finally, voluntary simplicity questions the way we spend our time. If we rarely have time to feel connected to nature, because we are so busy working to make more money to buy more things, we probably won’t care enough to try to protect nature.

The simple living alternative provides distinct advantages for self-fulfillment, for other people in need, and for an overburdened earth.
The Spiritan Rule of Life goes further: “In a world where the poor are often trampled on by the rich, we want our lived poverty to be a sign of the coming of a new world of sharing and of justice.”

Simplicity of lifestyle at the individual level is not enough. We must also reflect on the impact of our consumer choices on all the members of our planet earth’s community. Working for systemic change through church groups like Development and Peace and KAIROS Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, we have helped organize campaigns on bottled water, climate change, sustainable energy and the negative environmental impact of Canadian mining companies in the global south. I sell Fair Trade coffee at my parish every month and attempt to educate parishioners on the benefits to coffee farmers and their land of buying fair trade, pesticide free products.

Temperance

E. F. Schumacher, in his most influential book, Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered, writes: “Out of the whole Christian tradition, there is perhaps no body of teaching which is more relevant and appropriate to the modern predicament than the marvelously subtle and realistic doctrines of the Four Cardinal virtues, in particular Temperance, that means knowing when ‘enough is enough’.”

“The environment is God’s gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole.”

--- Pope Benedict XVI

The idea of Living Simply in a World with Limits is rooted in the gospel: Don’t worry and don’t keep saying, “What shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear? Your heavenly Father/Mother knows that you need them all. Set your heart on his kingdom and his goodness and all these things will come to you as a matter of course.”

Jesus’ whole life demonstrated that people are more important than possessions, that our riches need to be in relationship with God and with God-made-visible in other people.

What are the challenges?

In my experience simple living is anything but simple. It takes more time and effort to take public transport or walk, to cook from scratch, to look for fair trade products, to recycle, to wash and reuse containers, to check labels, to try to use locally produced and in season food, to give hand-made gifts.

I chose not to pursue a fulltime career, although I worked part time. This meant I could spend more time with my four children and husband. Living on one salary meant that we had less income than many of our peers, but we had a less pressured life and I was able to be active in the peace and social justice movements.

Surrounded by images of material wealth and luxury as the signs of a successful life, you have to have a strong sense of self esteem, know who you are and why you are living this way in order to swim against the stream. Sometimes your friends, children or extended family may not be supportive.

Often the fruits of simple living are not evident in terms of immediate results or effective impact on the ecological crisis. Most of all, you are aware of your inconsistencies and hypocrisies as you compare the privileged conveniences which surround you with the stark struggle for survival of the two-thirds world.

“Each day we are voting for the world we wish … with our purse. With each purchase, we are sending out signals about the kind of world we want to live in.” Pierre Pradervand, The Gentle Art of Blessing.

Next time we go to the store we would do well to remember, above all, that simplifying one’s life is an act of solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the global South, with our planet Earth, and with future generations; and, finally, a very Spiritan source of deep joy as we try to be faithful to the Spiritan Rule of Life in our calling both as professed and Lay Spiritans.

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Walking is amazing. One reads more and more about the health benefits of walking. That is exactly what we did. We walked 788 km from S. Jean Pied de Port, in the French Pyrenees to Santiago de Compostela, in north-western Spain. This walk is known as the Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James). There are many routes or Caminos to Santiago and this particular one is called the Camino Frances. It is probably the oldest route, the most popular and the best serviced.

Santiago or St. James, an apostle of Jesus, supposedly travelled to north-western Spain to preach after the death of Jesus. He made six converts and then returned to Jerusalem where he died under Agrippa I in 44 AD. His body was then “miraculously” carried by a stone boat, without sails, oars or a crew, back to Spain where he was buried by his disciples. Later in 813, his body was discovered by a monk and his bones were authenticated by a local bishop. Thus began the pilgrimages to Santiago.

We flew to Barcelona travelling over the pilgrimage route and took a bus to Pamplona. After missing our train to S. Jean Pied de Port, we found a taxi driver willing to take us there. On the way we learned that he regularly ran with the bulls in Pamplona and thought nothing of it. He drove the same way. Although he was a good driver, it was like being with a grand prix competitor as he negotiated the many twists and turns through the Pyrenees. An hour and half later we were there — a journey that would later take us three days to walk.

Everything slowed down
We mention this common, modern-day way of travelling because with flying one sees nothing of the route below. In a taxi the trees were a blur and the countryside whizzed by. But when we began walking everything slowed down. Walking allowed us the opportunity to notice and appreciate the beauty of the poppies and other wild flowers growing along the side of the road, as well as the pasture lands, the wheat fields and the vineyards.

The first day of the pilgrimage was over the Pyrenees, a walk of 27 km to Roncesvalles. It was a beautiful spring day and as we climbed higher small villages could be seen in the distance...
below. It was hard to believe that two people had died on the same route a year ago because they had ignored the warnings of bad weather.

We averaged approximately 23 km a day, rising at 6:00 a.m., generally on the road by 7:00 and reaching our destination most days between 12:30 and 1:00 p.m. There were usually two rest stops at wonderful small cafes for café con leche and tortilla patata. We slowly became more conditioned to carrying our backpacks and after about one week of walking our minor aches and blisters were a thing of the past.

Daily programme
Each afternoon, upon arriving at our destination, we would sign in at an albergue (what we would call a hostel in North America), have our Camino passport stamped, choose our bunks, shower, do laundry and go for lunch and refreshments. The churches in the many towns and villages were extraordinary in size and ornate in detail. There would often be an evening Mass followed by a pilgrim’s blessing. Many pilgrims attended these services.

People walked for many different reasons, most from religious or spiritual motives, others were working out personal issues, some just for the adventure, while still others were taking a break from stressful jobs and lives.

A night to remember
The small hamlet of Bercianos del Real Camino appeared deserted, with few trees and little vegetation. It had been a hot day with few opportunities to stop for water. The parroquial albergue did not look inviting: its dark brown brick had seen better days. We arrived at noon — it didn’t open its doors until 1:30 p.m.

Normally we had a few choices for the evening meal: either go out to a restaurant or, as we often did, go to a local grocery store, purchase some food and wine and return to the albergue to prepare it. In Bercianos, with one small convenience store and limited supplies, there was only one option: the Pilgrims were invited to have dinner together at the albergue.

Donations from the previous day’s Pilgrims were used to buy food. The priest who ran the parroquial albergue asked for volunteers to cook the evening meal. This was the first time on the Camino we all ate together. With Pilgrims speaking many different languages there was a lot of body language and much laughter at this meal. There was no charge for the meal or the bed, only a request for a donation towards the next evening’s dinner. Before dinner the priest said Mass in a small chapel in the village. He spoke slowly and clearly so that those with minimal Spanish could understand and follow him. After the shared meal those who wished were invited to come together to reflect on their journey and to pray.

During the night, on a trip to the washroom, the priest was found scrubbing the toilets.

The exterior look of the town and the albergue were in direct contrast to the warmth and welcome felt by all who spent a night in Bercianos. In a less-than-perfect situation, this priest and a small group of volunteers went out of their way to accommodate and nourish both body and soul.

Municipal albergues
Unlike some guide books on the Camino, even some written in the last ten years that criticized the municipal albergues, we found them to be inexpensive, well kept, clean, no bed bugs
and very welcoming. No albergue has solved the problem of snoring where two, ten or maybe even twenty people were sleeping in one dormitory-style room. If you did not sleep well one night you sure did the next. For some pilgrims, earplugs were a must.

Considered a safe journey, some men and women choose to walk it alone. Although you are never far from others, people respect your privacy and give you whatever space you need. After the first night we never locked our bags and never thought of it again.

**Entering the present moment**

During the first several days we could tell you where we had stayed, and could describe the accommodations in detail. However, after ten or twelve days it became more difficult remembering where we had been and where we were going. It seems that we entered into the present moment or what some have called the Now. It came down to the simple act of walking, enjoying the moment under a blue sky, passing through farmers’ fields and lush forests, alongside streams and rivers and enjoying the company of others. Yes, the Meseta was long and hot — one guidebook referred to it as “the shadeless treadmill”. However it was awesome to be under that huge blue sky dome, dotted with just a few white clouds. The pace of life had slowed down. We did not fully appreciate this until we came back to Toronto and our hectic lives.

**Journey’s end**

Many people have asked us if you need to register ahead of time for the pilgrimage. No, there is no sign-up sheet and no designated starting point. You start where you want, when you want and finish it in your own time or when your holiday is over. In Santiago de Compostela you present yourself at the Oficina del Peregrine with your Camino passport. The passport is a collection of the all the stamps that you received from each albergue. You receive your compostella, the final proof that you have walked the Camino. Your nationality is recorded and the place of your departure is read out at the next day’s Pilgrim Mass in the cathedral.

To reach Santiago and to attend the noon day Mass at the cathedral was certainly our goal when we started our pilgrimage 37 days before. The cathedral is so massive — it takes a few visits to truly appreciate its beauty, history and craftsmanship. Although the cathedral did not disappoint, it was the journey — the walking and not the destination — that mattered. At the end, the destination seemed only to be the beginning. The Camino offers you much: a simpler way of living, less complicated, cheaper travel, time to reflect and to notice life around you.

So lace up some hiking boots, grab a pack, some hiking poles and give it a try.

*Buen Camino.*
Towered by a strapping young man in blue jeans, a red T-shirt and shiny black shoes whose improbably pointed toes curl up like sabres, a tiny woman cradling a baby girl limps into the consulting room.

The woman’s face is a thousand wrinkles, and white wisps escape from braids woven tightly against her scalp. Her smock and wrap skirt are of a yellow cotton emblazoned with red hands and disembodied fingers, and the hands have eyes in the middle of them. A fuchsia lafaya drapes her shoulders. A brass loop anchors each ear. Her plastic flip-flops are yellow, thin-soled. She wears three silver bangles on her left wrist and around her neck a black and scarlet cord with six orange beads, three cowrie shells, and two toe-sized red leather grisgris.

She settles herself in the consulting room chair, extends a Kanuri greeting and gives her name. She is sick, she says, and the baby needs help.

Asked how old she is, she looks stunned. She smiles. She laughs. A good hearty laugh that might mean “What a peculiar thing to ask?” or “How could I possibly know?”

She pauses, looks around, answers at last, “A lot of years.”

“A lot of years?”

“A lot of years.”

“You think I should write, ‘A lot of years’?”

“That would be fine.”

“But how could I possibly know?”

“A lot of years’ it is.”

“‘Twelve children,’” she says. “No, thirteen. Seven dead, the youngest married with three children of her own.”

She presents her son who stands behind her. A tarnished metal chain arches around his neck and disappears under the collar of his shirt. Dark sunglasses, a small oval label still affixed to a corner of the left lens, sit atop his head.

He speaks in English. “My mother is having an inflammation of the neck.”

Ah, inflammation of the neck. The old woman explains where it hurts. She rubs the back of her neck with her right hand, makes a circling motion with her head. She reaches around to her back, rubs her hand down her spine, up to her shoulders, down to her elbows, chest, hips, knees.

The woman explains that the baby is not hers — all her own babies, she asserts, came out years ago. She found the child in a Diamor box outside the door of her hut that morning. She does not know who put the baby there or who her mother is.

She explains that the baby’s earlobes had been pierced and stung with twine, but the twine seemed unsanitary so she cut it and inserted plastic thread instead, and she cleaned the cord stump with salt water and Vaseline.

“The baby is well,” the old woman is fairly sure, “not sick. But she is hungry and she needs milk … and I have,” she says, fiddling the sagging flaps that are her breasts, “no milk.”

The child does look healthy. Good tone, polished chestnut skin, bright eyes. With what combination of love and distress did the young mother — for one supposes the mother is young, unmarried, without support — pierce the ears of her perfect daughter, deposit her in a cardboard box at the doorstep of this old woman … and then run away?

“Will you keep her now?”

She draws a weary breath and raises a hand to straighten her hair. She looks down at the girl, studies her face as if seeing it for the first time.

“God set this child before me. As long as I am able, I will take care of her. Of course.”

She collects milk for the baby and pills for her own pains. She listens as a health worker explains how to prepare the formula — clean bottle, boiled water, careful measures. Another health worker weighs the child and administers her first vaccinations.

Then the trio take off down the hill to start the long trek back to their village, leaving us to reflect that it is a worthy mission for anyone — to take care, as long as we are able, of those God sets before us.
Two-thirds of the Catholics in the world live in the southern hemisphere, a share that will reach three-quarters by mid-century 2050. This shift from north to south is the most dramatic demographic transformation of Catholicism in more than 2,000 years of church history.

John Allen, National Catholic Reporter

Finding an answer to every question is not always as necessary as just being a companion to another as they search and discern: being present — listening, talking, praying or sharing calm quiet with them.

Patricia Datchuck Sanchez, National Catholic Reporter

Those throwing stones or firing rockets were not born doing that, so what made them do it? It was war, suffering and deprivation, and as long as there is occupation and deprivation people go two ways — silence or violence ... I don’t ask a patient, “Why are you a patient?” because that is determined by their environment — their housing, their lifestyle. What we want to change is the environment, the context in which people live.

Dr Izeldin Abulaish, Gaza doctor

Why is it that we lay people so typically shuffle out of Mass with no clear idea of how all that relates to our daily lives? ... Holy Thursday — Good Friday: without the events of Good Friday the sacrament would be meaningless and empty. We need to understand the connection between the ritual, the sacrament, and actual self-sacrifice, actual generosity of spirit.

Sean O’Connell, Doctrine and Life

Wherever there is need, where some one or some group, or some part of the earth is forgotten or neglected and needs to be recognized and respected, there is an invitation to mission.

Sr Frances Brady, Our Lady’s Missionary

Today professional hockey has moved beyond the tolerated violence of other sports; it is the only sport that deliberately sanctions fights by using enforcers. That violates the fifth commandment.

America
I am very fortunate to have regular contact with at least forty-five of my high school classmates from thirty-five years ago. Within hours of receiving the news of Father Graham’s passing, I couldn’t get over the exchange of emails between us relaying our memories of this man.

Father Graham taught us Mathematics in Grades 11 and 12, and Algebra and Calculus in Grade 13. We were the Neil boys, but he always addressed us as “men”. Being a faculty member, he was part of the Neil discipline, but his was never punitive, onerous or intimidating. Without ever using a harsh tone, his form of discipline was expressed in what he expected us to be: gentlemanly, orderly, and of course … mathematical.

He was a smoker back then, and we marvel now that during class he could balance a lit cigarette on the edge of his desk, perched over the wastebasket to catch any fallen ashes. Only infrequently would he pass by his desk after walking about the room, to have a puff. And then, again, perfectly re-balance the cigarette back on the desk. It must have been the math.

He was a fair teacher. Hard, but fair. With his chalk-covered fingers, or chalk dust on his clothing, he often walked around the classroom between our desks as we were completing tests and exams. Some teachers might think he was just supervising a particular exam. However he usually had a bible in his hands during these times. Some said he was praying for us to be honest; others that he was praying for us to pass his exam; still others that he was just praying for the world at large.

Mr. O’Neill, another faculty member, told me that he often had our class after Fr. Graham’s math class. The students would present to his room holding their heads in dread for the 50% they received on an exam. I suggested that their behaviour might have been because their brains had been worked more than usual.

Another of my classmates told me that on parents’ night, Fr. Graham told his parents that he “couldn’t understand why the boys wanted to watch hockey, when they could be doing homework.”

**Weekend preparation**

Fridays in class were memorable. To quote another classmate, “I recall him passing a dish around, constantly collecting coins and sending them to the Holy Ghost Missions abroad.” I believe that his collections were because of his previous seventeen years as a Spiritan missionary in Mauritius. He would remind us, ‘A dime here, is like $10 over there’. He did not just teach us math; he also reminded us of the value and simplicity of charitable works and personal sacrifice.

My own memory of Fridays was Father Graham referring to our girlfriends as “the lovely Belinda”. His advice to us at the end of class would be: “Men, when you take the lovely Belinda out this weekend, remember to leave room for the Holy Spirit.” I remember that with a smile. Even to this day, occasionally, when I greet my high school sweetheart and wife of 30 years, I will call her “the lovely Belinda”.

**Thank you**

Several of us met him over the years since high school. Whether it was at Providence Centre, Neil McNeil, or Laval House, I was always impressed when I listened to us expressing how much gratitude we had for him, how happy we were to have had him as our mathematics teacher and to have the chance now to say thank you.

He continually wanted to know if he had been ‘too hard’ on us!! He was told in response “that because of him, his students were able to excel in life”. One classmate reports that he “was able to breeze through first and second year math at university because he prepared us so well”. From that class of ours came doctors, engineers, physicists, teachers, lawyers, accountants, actuaries, public relations and civil rights leaders, and many successful businessmen. I know that he, in part, was instrumental in that success.

His only request of us was “that we would pray for him”. I am certain that because of his efforts with us, and the respect and honour we gave him in return, that will be done.
Sugaring Off

Peels of papery white 
cling to the birch tree trunks 
as we tamp over frosted moss 
and find the tapped trees 
in the sugar-bush.

It is *sugaring off* time now, 
the March sun stark and bright 
on the lichen rocks 
and traces of snow crust.

The kids scream from the hills 
*this bucket is full again!* 
and *this one already too!*

Their arms ache from bearing heavy tin pails 
and chopping wood for the smoking fire. 
Poppa is stiff and smiling 
from carrying sap buckets in the melting snow 
with arthritic joints, 
never complaining.

Salve of golden 
maple syrup to sweeten the soreness. 
Alchemy of boiled sugar 
bliss. 

— *Kate Marshall Flaherty* 
*Lay Spiritan*