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## VICS: Volutneer with VICS and make a difference

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# Volunteer with VICS — and make a difference!

Daniel Abba CSSp

Click VICS on Google and you're immediately challenged: ***Volunteer with VICS — and make a difference!***

Since its beginnings in the early 1970s VICS has made a huge difference — to its own members and to thousands of people across the world. It has enticed many young adults, women and men, to join its ranks, to learn something of its way of life and then to go and be of help to others. Through personal contact, the VICS staff is aware of the needs and hopes of people across the globe. It is seldom the case that a new arrival is turned away because the right pairing can't be found.

First time volunteers are inclined to come with the idea, "I'll be able to help others and I'd like to do that." True — and that indeed does happen. What also happens is that the volunteer gains as much as those to whom he or she is sent. He teaches them; they teach him. She nurses them; they nurse her. Together they make a difference in each other's life.

So the VICS invitation on Google continues:

*Change your life TRAVEL    Change your life TEACH    Change your life LEARN    Change your life LIVE*

**Fr Daniel Abba** is the fourth Spiritan priest to be named Director of VICS. He succeeds Frs Desmond McGoldrick, Dermot Doran and Bob Colburn. Two Irish-born, one Canadian-born and now one Nigerian-born.

**B**orn in the North Central Nigerian state of Kogi, I joined the Spiritans after my Secondary School education in 1984. I made my first profession in November of 1986 and proceeded to study Philosophy at the Spiritan School of Philosophy near Nsukka. I then attended the Spiritan International School of Theology from 1990 to 1994. On completion of those theological studies, I was ordained to the priesthood on the 9th July, 1994.

Having been appointed to serve in South Africa after my priestly ordination, I had to learn to speak Zulu before taking up that Parish appointment. At the end of that 'adult education', I was assigned to St. Peter's Parish in Harrismith, a medium sized conservative town in the "Orange Vrystaat".

This Parish, like every community in South Africa then, was divided across racial lines. So was the South African Church. But then an election led to a multiracial parliament.

A new South Africa emerged from apartheid. "Building a new community" became the language. But it was a difficult language to learn. I saw myself with a mission to lead a Church that was Catholic and integrated. No assignment has been more challenging. But the goodness of people showed how quickly we got the job done. I am glad to know that our

community continues to be a stellar example for communities in that part of South Africa.

I went on to spend a total of thirteen years in South Africa, serving in two other parishes with pride and dedication. One does not count achievements, but I am glad when I go back to those places now and people report that what we did continues to bear fruit even today. In all of these, I give glory to God.

## Meeting VICS for the first time

During those years in South Africa, I came across Robert Colburn who was director of Volunteer International Christian Service (VICS). It was a meeting that was to change my mission and my life. Bob invited me to visit Canada in 2005. It was clear that he was trying to entice me to join the Spiritan province of TransCanada, and in particular, to become involved with VICS. During that time in South Africa, I was already beginning to be part of VICS in small ways.

I was planning to go on sabbatical in 2007, and because of the relationship that had developed between Bob, VICS and me, it was normal that I would come to Canada to gradually get involved in that part of Spiritan mission. It was a beautiful idea — even though not all of the plans came to be.

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If I was going to be in charge of VICS it was important for me to know my host community. What better way than to work directly with the people. I was assigned to St. Thomas More Parish on the South side of Edmonton where I served for two years as associate pastor. There I experienced the beauty, warmth and friendliness of Canadian people. There I learned to be Canadian – be friendly, go out to dinner, eat lots of dessert because ... life is too short. Even though I continue to enjoy the friendship and generosity of the people of that community, I have a new mission. I came to work with VICS. That is my new direction in life.

VICS is an organization founded to give lay professional people of whatever faith an opportunity to share in the Spiritan mission to the developing world. It is a mission that has

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been in my heart as a Spiritan, but has taken on an even deeper commitment as I relate with those men and women who give up years of their lives to “go out into the whole world and proclaim the good news”. This new mission enables me to go and see what we are able to do for those at the margins of society. There are lots of people out there who need to be listened to, to be given a direction for their future. That is what VICS is about, bringing that long awaited good news and much needed help to people in need.

### **Getting to know the Volunteers**

In the short time that I have served as director of VICS, I have been able to make a visit to South Africa, The Gambia and Cameroon. Those visits were meant to get me acquainted with the works of VICS volunteers. They have strengthened my belief that a lot of people are being left behind in this world as we race towards the end of the line of development and comfort. As long as the poor and the needy continue to be part of our world, there will continue to be the need to reach out to them. It is a mission that I am proud to be part of.

As director of VICS, I am responsible for recruiting volunteers to go out to the developing world to make a contribution. We recruit anyone who has anything to contribute to the people in need of development: teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, agricultural experts, physiotherapists, librarians, social and community development workers, carpenters, mechanics, pilots, and so on.

Another important aspect of my work is fundraising. The volunteers are not paid salaries, but they need to be sent to the mission and brought back home to Canada at the end of their

missions, they need to live in order to be able to make useful contributions, they need to be covered in case of illness. A major part of my work, therefore, is to find the funds for that here in Canada. So, I ask everyone who cares for the cause that we try to address to be part of our VICS family by making donations to VICS.

I am happy to be where I am today and to be able to do what I am doing. My mission as a Spiritan is to those who are in need, and if I am able to do that through VICS, as I think I can, then glory be to God. ■

