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Chapter 12

Gifts Differing: Lay Spiritan Associates Give Fresh Expression to the Spiritan Charism

Introduction

We describe and celebrate how “Lay Spiritan Associates” (LSAs) creatively and faithfully participate within the United States Province in the spirituality and charism of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, and how they are enriched in vocation and, in turn, enrich the life of the province. A short introduction to the lay associate movement and its particular development among the Spiritans is followed by an overview of the categories of LSAs (Lay Spiritans and Spiritan Friends) currently active in the United States Province. We highlight some distinctive characteristics of Lay Spiritans and register the voices of some Lay Spiritans and Spiritan Friends who illuminate key themes in their self-understanding as co-participants in Spiritan mission. We conclude with observations from Spiritan leaders on the manifold contributions of LSAs to the US Province.

Lay Associates and their Growth in the Spiritan Congregation and the US Province

In the years following the Second Vatican Council, significant growth occurred in the number of lay associate movements and their membership, as “lay people who affiliate with a religious institute and commit to living the mission and charism of the religious institute within their independent, lay lifestyle.”¹ Many such groups have never been presented for canonical approval, but rather have

1. Deborah Cerullo, SSND, “Associates and their Relationship to Religious Institutes: Gifts and Challenges,” *Resource Center for Religious Institutes Bulletin* 12 (Fall 2014) 1–11, here 1.

developed organically. As time passes and associate groups mature, however, greater formalization, recognition, and celebration of them have often occurred.

Henry Koren, CSSp, noted that laity have shared in the Spiritan mission since its charism first emerged. When Spiritans' overseas missions began to take shape, laymen as well as priests participated in these activities. The 1895 Constitutions established a formal associate status for married laymen, with particular applicability to catechists and other indigenous collaborators in mission territories.² Koren, during presentations in 1982, credited married lay people in Canada with raising his awareness as they asked pointed questions about why the Congregation was not promoting lay association more actively. Koren concluded:

If we recall that the Spiritan driving force is evangelical availability in obedience to the Spirit speaking to us through the concrete situation of life, we can see that we do not have to change one iota in our spirit to take care of such new forms of membership and association. We merely have to apply to today's situation that which was already implicit in it.³

Today, associates are found in many parts of the world, and each circumscription is responsible to establish guidelines for organizing these movements in ways appropriate to their context.⁴

Laypeople began to participate in overseas mission work with vowed US Spiritans in ad hoc ways after Vatican II. At the same time, some US Spiritans were laying the formal groundwork for a lay associate overseas mission program. One of them was William Headley, CSSp. In reflecting on his first experience in mission with laypeople, Headley highlighted how "It was their unqualified fire to serve abroad in a Spiritan context that had a powerfully persuasive influence on me" (personal communication, August 2021).

"At the end of 1981 under the direction of Fr. Christopher Promis and a new Spiritan, Fr. Donald McEachin, the Associates met to draft a proposal for the USA East Province. This was the critical push that the province needed in its consideration for a formal program."⁵ After the Lay Spiritan Associates program was approved by

2. Henry J. Koren, *Essays on the Spiritan Charism and on Spiritan History* (Bethel Park, PA: Spiritus Press, 1990) 91–92.

3. *Ibid.*, 94.

4. Casa Generalizia, *Guide for Lay Spiritan Associates* (Rome: Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 2016) 5.

5. John C. Hansen, *History of the Spiritan Associates Program, 1965–1984* (unpublished; completed April 1992, edited September 2016) 7.

the US Eastern Province in 1982, the married couple, John Hansen and Anne Marie Witchger Hansen, with their children served for three years in Tanzania as the first formally appointed participants. In subsequent years, they were instrumental in the further development of LSA in the United States. During the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, these developments increasingly focused on the participation of lay people in Spiritan mission efforts within the US provinces, rather than overseas.

Lay Spiritan Associates (LSA) in the United States: “Lay Spiritans” and “Spiritans Friends”

Lay Spiritan Associates answer their baptismal call to be missionary disciples as associates of the wider Spiritan family. They are devoted to the Holy Spirit, united as sisters and brothers in community, and committed to prayer, community, and ministry with those on the margins. Prompted by the generalate’s *Guide for Lay Spiritan Associates* (2016), the recent clarification and distinction between Lay Spiritans and Spiritan Friends marks a major growth point for associates in the United States Province.⁶

Lay Spiritans experience a call to live their whole lives according to the Spiritan charism, making a formal commitment to share in Spiritan mission, prayer, and community life. They are called by the Holy Spirit to

- Live the call of their baptisms as missionary disciples;
- Respond actively to the signs and challenges of the times; and
- Give new, specifically lay, expression to the Spiritan charism.

Currently, the Lay Spiritan community in the US province is centered in Pittsburgh. Five Lay Spiritans have made a lifetime commitment, three have made their second three-year commitment, and four Lay Spiritan candidates will make their first three-year commitment in late 2021.

Spiritans Friends are organized groups of women and men who, in different ways, are called by the Holy Spirit to support and participate in Spiritan mission, spirituality, and community. They are accompanied by either a lay or vowed Spiritan. Spiritan Friends’ formation is much less formal than that of

6. The *Guide* also describes a lay associate category called Spiritan Fraternities. Although found in the French Province, they do not yet exist in the US Province.

Lay Spiritans, and is often organized within a parish or other Spiritan ministry to meet the laity's identified priorities for spiritual development.

Spiritan Friends currently include groups such as the following:

- *Collaborators in Mission.* Spiritan Friends who actively engage in a Spiritan parish, educational institution, or mission project, and embrace ongoing formation adapted to their needs and contexts. Spiritan Friends' groups include those at Duquesne University (Spiritan Friends and Spiritan Pedagogy Group); St. Benedict the Moor Parish in West Dayton, Ohio; and Black Unity and Spiritual Togetherness (BUST), a community founded by the late Al McKnight, CSSp, with members in various US locations.
- *Supporters of Spiritan Mission.* Spiritan Friends who provide spiritual, material, or fundraising support for a Spiritan mission or project. These include St. Basil Coffee Cooperative, Vietnamese and Chinese Education Funds, Spiritan Evangelical and Educational Alumni Associations, and SpiritQuest Missionary Engagement.
- *Spiritan Advocates.* Spiritan Friends who volunteer to help with the promotional group work of the Spiritan Office for Mission Advancement in Houston, Texas.

All of these communities of Lay Spiritan Associates have emerged in grassroots contexts and continue to evolve organically, responding to local needs and the signs of the times.⁷

Distinctive Aspects of Lay Spiritans

Lay Spiritan formation is organized by the Lay Spiritan Leadership Team. Aspiring Lay Spiritans participate in a discernment process, then engage in two years of formation before entering into a written covenant agreement celebrated in a liturgical ritual in the midst of the community of vowed and lay Spiritans. Their formation includes: studying our Spiritan founders, the history of the Congregation, the Spiritan Rule of Life, and the Spiritan charism; experiencing different forms and styles of prayer; listening to Spiritan vocation stories and learning about

7. Richard Gosser and Anne Marie Hansen, "Lay Spiritan Associates in the Province of the United States: Lay Spiritans and Spiritan Friends" (15 August 2021). Unpublished one-page resource document by Anne Marie Hansen and Rich Gosser.

Spiritans ministries in the US and globally; and reading and discussing church documents focusing on key topics for Spiritan mission such as care for creation, missionary discipleship, and racial justice. Lay Spiritan formation also includes developing skills in intercultural living, contemplative dialogue, contemplative prayer, simplified living, and discernment. Lay Spiritans are accompanied by a vowed Spiritan throughout formation and on-going formation. Aspiring and committed Lay Spiritans meet together monthly for formation/on-going formation as a community, focusing on prayer, reflection, and a contemporary application of the Spiritan charism, while sharing the joys and challenges of their ministries.

As part of the US Province, Lay Spiritans serve on provincial committees, may be appointed to governing councils, and join in dialogue with vowed Spiritans at governing chapters and other deliberative assemblies. The appointment of the first Lay Spiritan to the provincial council in 2018 marked a significant milestone for the increased role of Lay Spiritans in the province.

In the following two sections, we will raise the voices of contemporary Lay Spiritans and Spiritan Friends in the US province to offer living examples of this response to God's call.



Mirembe Women, Uganda, 2019

Voices of Lay Spiritans

We solicited responses from Lay Spiritans (Janet Berna, Deacon Thomas J. Berna, PhD, Daneen Gosser, Richard Gosser, PhD, John C. Hansen, EdD, Anne Marie Witchger Hansen, EdD) and Spiritan Friends on their living responses to the Spiritan charism and their perspectives on how association with

the Congregation enlivens their commitment to mission. Lay Spiritans in the US Province serve the Spiritan mission locally and globally through ministries of their choice, “animating the Spiritan charism in a fresh and grassroots way, contributing to a dynamic unfolding of a Spirit-led movement of the laity within the US Province and within the global Spiritan family” (Anne Marie Hansen). Their local ministries include bio-intensive gardening, leadership roles in Spiritan parishes and other Catholic parishes, youth and hospice ministries, and serving the physical and spiritual needs of widows and other neglected members of the community. Globally, these Lay Spiritans are engaged in ministry and development projects, including initiatives with peasants and vowed Spiritans in Haiti, people with disabilities and their families in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana; and schoolchildren and children with disabilities in China. As noted above, a Lay Spiritan also serves in the ministry of leadership within the province.

Lay Spiritan Janet Berna highlights how her global and local commitments are responses to specific needs. “As a Lay Spiritan, I try to be open to the Holy Spirit working in the concrete circumstances of my life. Knowing that a need exists in Uganda (Mirembe) for those who are in extreme poverty is something that I support by prayer and financially. Supporting those in the Global South by selling Fair Trade items is another area where I feel called. I reach out to the homebound in our parish as a member of Ladies of Charity, calling or sending cards.”

Through their ministries, Lay Spiritans promote solidarity with those on the margins, walking with and learning from them, helping people in difficult circumstances, and empowering the wealthy to help those in poverty through generous giving and service. Rich Gosser articulates his approach: “For thirty-four years I have tried to make a difference in Haiti by promoting a culture of solidarity by a more just presence to the people of Haiti. Our non-profit, Rich in Mercy Institute, provides a bridge between the people in the US and the people of Haiti.”

John Hansen finds meaning in preparing youth in a Chinese school for ongoing service to the marginalized. “I am hoping that our students can learn how to reach out and help others who are marginalized because they are disabled, poor and/or outcast in their society.”

Lay Spiritans embody the Spiritan charism with an openness to the Holy Spirit working through their lives, practice evangelical availability, and through participation in their local communities, develop a sense of solidarity and support among those they serve. For example, Tom Berna reflects: “I identify with

the Spiritan Community and with the charism of evangelical availability. First and foremost, I *walk* with people in our neighborhood—I greet them, sit on their porch, shop in their stores. By offering the gift of a helpful, joyful presence, I share God’s love and light, and this same love and light reflects back to me and to other members of the Spiritan Community.” Tom also attends to neighbors’ daily needs in concrete ways, especially through providing food. “The first deacons were commissioned to serve the physical needs of widows and other neglected members of the community (Acts 6). The bread I share, the resources I provide are all donated—my mission is to get them to people who need them—this is very diaconal *and* very Spiritan.”



Deacon Tom Berna on Food Ministry

Lay Spiritans also express the Spiritan charism through spreading God’s love and serving with vowed Spiritans in mission, as well as supporting them in internal congregational matters. “We have found deep satisfaction in spreading God’s love through our work with Haiti and with professed Spiritans who need our help in Haiti, or others we meet in our daily living, from retirement to trials of community living. Thus, I am hopefully fulfilling the Sermon on the Mount to be the love of God in all I do!” (Daneen Gosser).

Lay Spiritans enrich the US Province through their ministry and commitment to living the charism in the context of their lives of faith and outreach, energized by personal and communal prayer, reflection, and on-going formation.

Voices of Spiritan Friends

Spiritans Friends cultivate a sense of being open to the Spirit and new possibilities through *attitudinal availability*. In this section, we explore ways that Spiritan Friends (Karen Bova, John Boyles, Lena Charles, Ryan Garvey, PhD,

Anthony Kane Jr., EdD, Matthew Kostek, PhD, Deborah Kostosky, Ian Nettleship, PhD, Sandra Quiñones, PhD, Adam T. Wasilko, EdD) enrich the US Province through their work or ministry.

For John Boyles, openness to the Spirit involves “offering no resistance to where the Spirit’s breath may carry us.” Sandra Quiñones invites her students “to cultivate an open heart” when engaging texts “to simultaneously *invoke* and *provoke* openness to Spirit” through inviting “students to pause, pay attention, and listen to the mind, heart, and hands when engaging with course readings.”

Spiritans Friends also exercise a *practical spirituality* by seeking to serve God through serving others, offering distinctive interpretations of Libermann’s “practical union.” For example, Deborah Kostosky says, “I have my own version of Fr. Libermann’s concept of practical union in that I believe that the most practical way to love God is to love your neighbor.” Ian Nettleship similarly states, “This is how my commitment to the Spiritan charism becomes manifest. . . . While I make myself available to God in daily prayer, I make myself available to [others] through this work.” For Lena Charles, the Black Unity and Spiritual Togetherness (BUST) movement is reflective of “the spirituality of Libermann” and the Afrocentric Spiritual Experience (ASE) reminds individuals that “growth in self-consciousness” comes “through the practice of silence and non-judgment. To change the world, I must first change myself.” Founded by the late Al McKnight, CSSp, the spiritual dispositions of BUST and ASE echo Libermann’s recommendation, “Let your interior be in silence before him, the Spirit cannot be heard when we are in interior commotion.”⁸ This contemplative consciousness also flows forth in mission commitments, as BUST works to support local people in need as well as addressing global concerns, such as fundraising for Spiritan mission work in rural Haiti.

Spiritans Friends strive to cultivate a sense of shared journey and acceptance of others through *relational mutuality*. Karen Bova describes such mutuality in her work as an academic advisor: “I meet students where they are and we travel and learn together. In this process we open ourselves up to discover how to know each other and to care for one another and to do the same within our shared community and our larger world.” For Matthew Kostek, this practice ultimately extends the mission into the lives and careers of his students:

8. *Lettres Spirituels*, 1.294; Sept 1837, to M. Gamon, seminary director. Cited by Francis Malinowski, “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann,” *Spiritans Horizons* 10 (Fall, 2015) 7–18, here 14.

The idea of meeting people where they are and walking with them I see as an intersection with, or perhaps an extension of the Spiritan mission. The “walking” . . . models something of the Spiritan mission and directly and/or indirectly becomes part of the student’s journey, not just at Duquesne, but likely throughout their career.

Spiritan Friends also show a kind of *marginal partiality*, expressed in a preference for the poor and marginalized in their work or ministries. Anthony Kane Jr. demonstrates this concern when he says,

When I think of our founders and the Spiritan mission, I think of working with individuals on the margins in a manner that is selfless and welcoming. Being Director of Diversity and Inclusion means working with historically marginalized students and families to make their transition to the university through graduation efficient and welcoming.

Adam Wasilko focuses on “new students who are not connecting, not succeeding, or not finding fulfillment in their current path. I believe the Spiritan charism calls me to walk with those students and help navigate this difficult point in their life.” Ryan Garvey dedicates himself to university students who sacrifice to pay for their education, saying, “It is important to me to try and do what I can (outside of my routine classroom teaching) to help make this [financial] sacrifice/investment pay off for people.” As founder and advisor to the Duquesne University Financial Management Association Student Chapter, Ryan seeks to “provide students with career development and networking opportunities so that they will be successful in their chosen field of study upon leaving the University.”

Ian Nettleship is Vice President of Ceramic Water Filter Solutions, a Pittsburgh-based NGO dedicated to sustainable manufacture of low cost ceramic water filters in marginalized communities. He is also an engineering instructor and incorporates his global development work into his teaching. He comments that “This work is part of my wider effort to call young professionals, especially engineers, to what I consider to be missionary discipleship (without mentioning those words) by serving the poor.” John Boyles also helps those in poverty through an entrepreneurial approach, supporting Spiritan mission projects through proceeds from Saint Basil Coffee, which he co-founded.

US Spiritan Leaders' Perspectives on LSA Presence

LSAs have participated in the life of the US Province and embodied the Spiritan charism in response to local needs, type of Spiritan presence and support, and each person's and community's particular gifts and vocations. We invited Spiritan leaders (Jeffrey T. Duaime, CSSp, William R. Headley, PhD, CSSp, Donald J. McEachin, CSSp, Christopher P. Promis, CSSp, Francis Tandoh, CSSp) to contribute their views on the presence of LSAs in Spiritan ministries in the US Province.

The outgoing US Provincial, Jeffrey Duaime, CSSp, applauds the presence of LSAs among the Congregation, citing the recent efforts to distinguish between Lay Spiritans and Spiritan Friends as "another major growth point for LSA in the province" (personal communication, May 2021).

Province leaders recognize that LSAs are vital partners in sponsoring the core mission of Spiritan institutions. For example, Francis Tandoh, CSSp, expresses appreciation for the diverse ministries that Spiritan Friends take on in his Day-ton parish, St. Benedict the Moor, to serve those without housing and engage in ministry with immigrants (personal communication, Aug. 2021).

The incoming US Provincial Donald McEachin, CSSp, recently expressed gratitude for the LSA's "evangelical availability and generosity in service to our Spiritan Congregation and for the richness you all bring to us" (personal communication, July 2021).

Lay Spiritan commitments to the US Province have helped to catalyze congregational transformation. For example, Chris Promis, CSSp, comments on how John and Anne Marie Hansen, as the "trial run" for overseas collaboration with laity, "became our family" through their 1980s work in the diocese of Arusha, and enriched the Spiritan community in numerous ways: "Their home became the gathering place for hospitality, sharing prayer, community, fellowship and food. . . . They always worked toward deepening our relationship and sense of community" (personal communication, Aug. 2021). Promis concludes that from those early years into the present time, "We are a more inclusive community because of your influence and the influence of all Lay Spiritans!" (personal communication, Aug. 2021).

Lay Spiritans are assuming increasing responsibility for nurturing the mission participation of other LSAs in the US Province. Duaime lauds their "commitment to lay vocation discernment with members of Spiritan parishes [and] educational ministries to understand and embrace other expressions of lay involvement in the Congregation, particularly Spiritan Friends" (personal communication, May 2021).



Front: Carol Serafin, Anne Marie Hansen, Mercia O’Neal
2nd row: Daneen Gosser, Debbie Zugates, Tom Berna
3rd row: Rich Gosser, John Hansen, Paula Nettleship
4th row: Jeff Duaine, CSSp, Janet Berna, Rose Velgich

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant developments for the LSA movement in the United States to date was the appointment in August 2018, and 2021 reappointment, of Anne Marie Hansen as the first Lay Spiritan to serve on the provincial council. While laypeople are canonically restricted from voting in council decisions, creation of this council seat means that a Lay Spiritan is now actively involved in deliberations affecting the entire province. Following Hansen’s first term, council members and Lay Spiritans alike strongly affirmed how this made it evident that Lay Spiritan representation could substantively enhance the Congregation’s leadership. Council members commented, for example, on how Hansen offered “broader perspective,” “challeng[ed] some of the unknown clerical assumptions,” “[brought] new voices to the table,” and contributed a “feminine” leadership style with emphasis on building relationships and consensus (Province consultation, 2021). As Duaine concluded, “The first Lay Spiritan membership on the provincial council is definitely a high point and significant marker for the role of Lay Spiritans in the province” (personal communication, May 2021).

Conclusion

We have shown how Lay Spiritan Associates seek to follow in the footsteps of our Spiritan ancestors and give new expression to our charism, attentive to how the Holy Spirit acts through the “signs of the times.” Through the collaboration of vowed Spiritans and SLAs, the Creator Spirit is immanent in the constantly re-created universe and throughout the web of life. We look forward to the Spirit’s continuing unfolding of LSA contributions in the United States Province of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

*Drs. Steven Hansen, Maureen O’Brien, and Anne Marie Witchger Hansen
Duquesne University, Pittsburgh*

All I am and all I possess is for God

Lettres Spirituelles, I, 10 (1830)—Venerable Libermann to his brother Samson