From the Editor and Table of Contents

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When I joined the Spiritans, straight out of High School, I had not the slightest intention of being an educator. After twelve years of sitting on hard benches and having to pass an examination annually in seven or eight subjects, I just wanted to get out into the real world, the man’s world. And I had read enough about the travels of Mungo Park, Richard Burton, David Livingstone and Henry Stanley to know that Africa was where I wanted to be.

In my final year in school, a Spiritan had visited our school looking for candidates for his group. He spoke of Africa, of Bishop Shanahan, of the missionary life which seemed to me to be so glamorous, so exciting and above all, so free. So I signed up to begin my training to be a missionary priest in Africa. Or so I thought.

The thirty other seventeen or eighteen year olds seemed to know each other well the day we assembled that September evening in 1948. I felt very much an outsider. I soon realized most of the young men in the group had been educated in one of the Spiritan schools in Ireland and shared stories of “The Bruce”, “Johnny Player” and “Buckshot.” I at that time had not even known that Spiritans were involved in education. Fr. Bob Hudson, when he visited my high school, had not mentioned the possibility that I might spend my life as a teacher.

When I arrived with my class at the major seminary in Dublin, after a year of initiation in rural Tipperary, I was sent to university to do a degree in Science. Six years later, after getting my degree and teaching in Trinidad, I had still not even started my studies to be a priest! After six further years of study in the areas of philosophy and theology, I finally got my first appointment. I was to teach in Canada, in Neil McNeil High School, Toronto. And I continued to teach in the Catholic school system there until I retired at the mandatory age of sixty five.

So the Spiritans thwarted my missionary vocation! Not really. Early on in my seminary days I learned that from the beginning the Spiritans had always used education as a cornerstone in their effort to bring good news to people. The success of our missions was built on comprehensive systems of education.

This issue of Spiritan and the ones which follow will try to catch the history of Spiritan education in our mission territories as well as its history in the home countries where vocations were fostered by promoting mission awareness in their schools and in the Catholic communities at large.

As a Spiritan who “stayed at home”, I have never felt that my vocation as a missionary had been frustrated. As a member of such a great international team I felt that I was very much a part of its missionary thrust. My contributions in keeping the vision of Des Places and Libermann alive, as well as my support for our overseas missionaries, fulfilled the role to which I was called as a senior in High School many years ago.

In the Spiritan tradition, the pastoral and educational ministries go hand in hand, the home countries and the overseas missions are a vital partnership. The formula has worked for three centuries. May it continue to do so for many years to come.

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