University of Fondwa
A Diamond in the Rough
The Media and the Message

“Today, the press, film, radio and television are the most urgent, rapid and effective ways of communicating all that is good, all that is true, all that is useful.”

Blessed James Alberione

As I sit in the office of Spiritan magazine, I never cease to be amazed how the development of media has greatly increased our knowledge and awareness of the world in which we live. Newsletters, emails, fax messages, magazines, reports and letters arrive at the office from all quarters of the Spiritan world. Spiritan websites, of which our own www.spiritans.com is an excellent example, provide us with not only our history, but up-to-date news of our current initiatives and developments. Our central administration in Rome passes on to us Spiritan news from around the world. Our various congregational departments, dealing with everything from justice and peace issues to financial affairs, produce regular reports in print and on the web. I am more in contact with the personnel and works of the Spiritans, from Algeria, Angola and Australia to Zambia and Zimbabwe, than at any other time in my life.

The contribution which our Spiritans in Canada make to this flow of information includes both this magazine and our website. Members of our group also publish books about the Spiritan story, Spiritan spiritual life and Spiritan biography. No less than three such publications have appeared in the past twelve months. Also representatives of our group have attended Spiritan gatherings in the U.S.A, Ireland and Rome in recent months, sharing news and ideas.

All this communication within the Spiritan family and with our friends and benefactors is necessary because the world is changing at an ever-faster rate, and with it the Spiritan missionary movement. Three facts are driving these changes. Firstly, as the number of vocations in the first-world countries diminishes, Spiritan seminaries in what were once seen as “mission territories” are bursting at the seams. This provides the Spiritans with a great financial challenge of meeting the expenses of an ever-increasing number of old retired priests in Europe and North America and the mounting expense of educating our seminarians and young priests in Africa, Haiti and South America. The centre of gravity of our group is switching from the northern to the southern hemisphere; white is no longer our prevalent skin colour.

Secondly, the number of lay Spiritans and associates working in Spiritan projects overseas, side by side with our missionary priests, is growing steadily so that we no longer are a strictly clerical organization.

And the third fact driving the changes is a consequence of the first two. Spiritans no longer work in national teams as they did until recent times. Now our missionary groups are international, composed of persons of different countries of origin, different languages and cultures, men and women. This fact provides new challenges but also new opportunities.

Within the past twenty years, Spiritan missionaries have started missions in fifteen regions where we have not served before. These international teams work with people who have never been previously evangelized. The foundation of a new church in such conditions presents great challenges. A new language must be learned, a new culture understood and appreciated. All financial support must be raised elsewhere. No baptisms, no Christian weddings, no Eucharistic community; just year after year of presence, of service. The seed is being sown. Others will see shoots spring up and grow. Later still others will work when the harvest is ripe. New challenges, new opportunities. Our use of the media helps it happen. The stories of these fragile little churches are being told, their needs are being expressed.

Today Spiritans serve in more countries than at any other time in our 300 plus year history. These are challenging times for us, they are exciting times. Spiritan tries to catch the vitality, the diversity, the philosophy of this rainbow coalition.

Gerry FitzGerald, CSSp
More than two decades ago, Spiritual Vincent Donovan wrote a book entitled Christianity Rediscovered which has become something of a timely classic for those interested in the Church’s missionary work in Africa.

There is something about the wisdom of Father Donovan that draws me back to reread this book every few years. I’ve never been to Africa. My missionary work has unfolded in the context of Northern Canada and most recently, within a major urban high school.

I am a high school chaplain with responsibility for nurturing our students in the Catholic faith and for making Christ present in our school community. At first, I thought to myself that this would be a relatively smooth task since we are a Catholic school and we have a well-articulated mission statement that is rooted in the Gospel and the teachings of Christ. Surely, everyone who comes to a Catholic school must recognize and accept our mission. I’ve since discovered that high school chaplaincy is probably more difficult than teaching a core subject like math or science.

How credible is Christianity?

Given the influences of living in a highly technological and changing world — the fact that our students and staff are pulled toward a message that is preached at them constantly by the media and by the gurus of technology — it is getting more and more difficult to convince people that Christianity has a credible and relevant message for today.

I only have to walk the halls of our school in between classes to see that a cell phone is glued to the ear of many students; an earplug is connected to almost everyone so they can listen to their music on an MP3 and it is getting more and more a struggle to find a DVD that can be used in the classroom to supplement a lesson. I have found that the majority of students respond only to videos or movies that are full of fast action and “cool” images, regardless of the fact that such videos may have no direct link to the content we are pursuing in the classroom. Given such an environment, how can we speak the message of Christ?

Live among, listen to, wait for

I recently had the opportunity to read for the sixth time, Vincent Donovan’s book Christianity Rediscovered. He develops a mission-mindset that is radically different from that which we have seen in the past. Without tying Christianity to the traditional methods that were used in promoting the message of our faith, Donovan simply lived among the Maasai of Tanzania adapting to their nomadic lifestyle, listening to them, and waiting for them to invite him into their confidence and trust. He did not go among them by building a mission school, a health-care centre or an agricultural project under the name of Christianity. His approach was simply one of being present among the Maasai with no strings attached and taking small moments (teachable moments) to speak about Christ. Sounds very similar to the experience of first-century Christians who expressed what they had found and experienced by becoming disciples of Christ, not through gimmicks, but through simple words and by being present to one another.

The power of personal stories

In the classroom, I have found that my teaching has to take the same direction. I use stories to speak about my relationship with Christ, making a link between my life and how it has unfolded and what the message of Christ has to say to me in the process. I have tried to model a reflective and critical attitude and practice so that my students are inspired to go beyond what they see and search out the meaning of their lives at a deeper, more profound level. For example, we took upon ourselves an Advent project that would raise money and provide hampers for low-income families in our city. This could have simply become another “do-good” fund-raising effort. However, alongside the fund-raising I tried to get students to understand their role in continuing the mission of justice initiated...
The message is already present

All the same, Donovan’s book spoke about the essential message of Christianity as already present and at work in a culture. That message is at the heart of all persons. We all search for liberation from those things that hold us down. We all search for meaningful connection with one another, based upon forgiveness and right action. We all search for a way to make our mark on the lives of others so that we contribute to building better persons (including ourselves) and a better world. We all search for a more meaningful way of responding to our life source and nurturer, our Creator God.

My reflections as a chaplain remind me of the essence of our Christian faith: we are a people of hope, drawn to light by our own experience of the Cross. We are indeed at a time in history reminiscent of first-century Christianity. History does have a way of repeating itself. With hindsight we are able to see that it is not “gimmicks” that we need to convince others of the validity and credibility of the Christian message. We need individuals who are prepared to speak about what they have found in trying to live as disciples of Christ. This is precisely what drew me and inspired me to want to name myself as “Christian” so many years ago. This is what will convince others to search for their experience of Christ and to name themselves Christian as well. The message is simple and it is for all. It is not tied to the institutions of Catholic education or health care as the route for revealing Christ. Disciples will reveal their Master in the wisdom they share, in the actions they practice, and in the traits and values they recognize and assume as their own.

One story evokes another

Ah, Christianity Rediscovered in high school chaplaincy is very simple! Be who you are and what you are, as you have experienced the permeation of Christ. The message will speak loud and clear on its own merit. What others see as the genuine good that lives within you will prompt them to ask where you got it from, and then you have an opportunity to share your story. This is Donovan’s approach applied to a culture we are all familiar with: the high school-youth culture. The great part about this process is that one’s story will evoke connections to another’s story. Before long we discover that we are speaking the same language and story together.

I decided this year that I would not put on elaborate liturgies at the school, complete with decorations and visual distractions that would only have to be undone at the following liturgy in order to keep the attention of those attending. I decided that I would not buy into gimmicks to attract my students to religious events. I did decide however, to speak honestly about my own journey of faith: the ups and downs, the joys and the hopes, as well as the questions I had. I didn’t witness great strides. However, throughout the year I heard from students and colleagues alike that the message of Christ was evident in what we were doing and in how we were doing it. Some of my students stated to me in their own personal reflections that the message of Christ was much simpler than they imagined or expected. This reminded me of the context and times spoken about in the Acts of the Apostles — a period of history marking the evolution of Christian faith, evolving from the experience of a few.

Students’ story in light of the Christ-story

We are “the few” today, who must tell this great story so that others make it their own by linking it to their experience. It was a privileged moment when I was able to walk with students through difficult personal family times such as death or crisis, and assist them in articulating how they might understand their story in light of the Christ-story. Sometimes tears, anger, a sense of not knowing what to do, could be transformed to occasions of grace.

I recall a student who spoke of the illness and suffering of an aunt and felt futility in dealing with it. All I could offer the student were prayers that spoke to the heart of her suffering and allowed her to feel connected to the Lord, no strings attached, no theological lecture or clichés. She left my office with a greater sense of hope and trust that her aunt was being well looked after by the Lord. She even came to see me a few days later and asked if she might be able to read one of the morning prayers since she could see more value in prayer after our prayers together for her aunt.

That is Christianity Rediscovered, for the life of Christ is already here, and it only needs someone to give it a language within its cultural context, whether that is in Tanzania, Canada’s north, or in the high school. Vincent Donovan has an important message to share with all those who are involved in the Church’s missionary work. We’re all about sharing Good News with others who have yet to hear it. Evangelization will only take place when we have experienced that same Good News within ourselves and are prepared to let go of our own agenda so it can be shared with others.

Kevyn Ernest is a high school teacher/chaplain at Archbishop O’Leary High School in Edmonton, Alberta.
Sigillate Sand*
*Adulteress in John *:*1-11

Thundercloud sandals
shuffle in dust.
Fists
clutch rocks, ready
to pelt them.

Woman at the wall:
She stirs and cowers,
curve of her spine
drawing head to heart.

Around her
gathers darkness?

half ring of thighs, jeers,
ape-knuckle fists, thick
and taut, press forward. She
shields her eyes.
Waits for the crush.
Waits for stone-blow to her temple.

Anahata,
burning within her.

Open;
she turns,
salt in her eyes,
beyond the crowd
alone
she sees
one man kneeling in the light.
No stone in hand.

Who?

What is he thinking
as he traces
in the sand? What
are these spiral symbols,
invocations,
ancient pictographs
*angel writings?

how can one fingerpath in the earth
quiet a mob of flint faces
and flexed muscles?

This
this is how rocks drop to earth.

— Katie Marshall Haherty
Up River in French Guiana

Edward Okorie, CSSp has returned to French Guiana after a two-year sabbatical in Toronto

How did you come to be a missionary in French Guiana?

I studied theology in France and learned to speak French, so when the first Nigerian Spiritans were being sent as missionaries to South America I found myself posted to the only French-speaking country on that continent. In France they talked about Guyane as another region of France, which just happened to be 8000kms away. So I thought of going on mission as somewhat similar to going from Paris to Bordeaux. How wrong I was.

Yes, Guyane is a region or département of France. But it is totally outside the European mindset. If you speak French, you will get by in most parts of the country, you will be able to deal with businesses and buy things in the stores. But in the markets and villages if you want to get to know the people, you need one of the local languages, especially Creole. Apart from a few early Jesuits and some 18th century French Spiritans, overseas missionaries have never really succeeded in mastering these languages. Today, however, a number of the young African missionaries are doing their best to become more fluent in them.

What adaptations did you have to make in your early years there?

As a newcomer I had to tell myself that this was not France overseas. The French Spiritans had made that mistake: “We speak French and anyone who wants to speak with us should learn to speak French, comme tout le monde, like everybody.” They stayed in their houses and welcomed the people who came to them. They saw their ministry as directed to the French-speaking population. They became chaplains to the staff at the big prisons or ministered to the government functionaries. They presumed that they were going primarily to people of French origin. They were surprised when the Nigerian Spiritans arrived and started visiting the people in their own homes and villages. “Why are you going to those people?” was a common question. There are accounts of earlier Spiritans...
accompanying explorers into the interior of the country and baptizing people. But their permanent residence was in the main centres of French language and culture. They seldom ventured up river.

**Describe some of your journeys up the Maroni River.**

Because we knew that a large proportion of the population lived up river, the Nigerian Spiritans set out to survey this area and report on what was needed. Over the years we developed in Apatou something resembling a contemporary parish — an "outpost" from which to travel up and down the river establishing other communities. In the interior of French Guiana travel is always by river. In the beginning we had to rely on the services of local boatmen. Only gradually did we learn to paddle our own pirogues.

I remember one particular Easter in Apatou. A young boatman was to take us from the Easter Vigil ceremony in one village to another village for Easter Sunday Mass. Both he and his family were active members of the local Christian community. Early Easter Sunday morning we came to his house at the appointed hour. We waited and waited and waited while he slept on and on and on. He had been at the Vigil ceremonies and had joined in the village celebrations that followed. On Easter morning there was no sign that he would either awake from his slumber or arise from his sleep. Maybe he had celebrated a bit too much. All around us in fact there was a calm silence as the whole village slept in.

I remember saying to myself, “Easter Sunday morning and no one is awake. No, it’s not possible on a morning like this.” I was imagining the hustle and bustle, the laughter and noise, the streams of people going to Mass in Nigeria, the merrymaking. Here everyone was asleep. “What’s going on? Why bother? No one’s interested. No one’s even awake. We’ve had our Easter Vigil, let’s go back to the house and celebrate a quiet Easter Sunday Mass.”

Eventually — it seemed like hours — our boatman rose up, we got to our village, prepared everything, assembled the people, and celebrated Easter with them. Nothing splendid, very ordinary in fact, but that’s where they were that year and we joined them. It had its own joy, much less exuberant than we would have liked.

**So the ability to “go with the flow” is important for a missionary?**

Yes. What happens in a big way in other places may happen in a very low key up river. We have to walk at their pace and not immediately push them beyond where they are. We must live in their world and join them where they are. In the mission you slow down to be with people, you don’t walk too fast, too far ahead of them.

**What would you consider to be three or four important approaches for a missionary?**

You arrive, put down your luggage and your baggage — the theological theories you carry with you. You go out to meet the people where they are, you learn their language, you mix with them. They will teach you many things.

The word you are going to proclaim is already there waiting for you: the word of love, of sharing life together, the word of mutual respect. With their help and your respect for their way of doing things, you discover that word and continue to share it with them. You allow yourself to be adopted by them; you are born anew among them. You find the sacraments among them too — in a different format. As you celebrate the liturgy with them you shake off certain foreign rituals and language. You try to adapt to the local situation.
What attracts the people in French Guiana to Christianity?

Jesus, above all else. But that depends on how we present this man Jesus. Among them, the love that Jesus came to preach is already present.

They have a great sense of solidarity, of helping one another. They need each other as they go about everyday living. When there is no public transportation system you get a ride in whatever vehicle comes along. You ask if you can join whatever person or group is going your way.

As Spiritans we come and live together, share life and mix with them in humility, and at times in humiliation as we display our ignorance of their language or customs.

Sometimes I hear myself saying, “There’s nothing really that they haven’t got, nothing that we bring to them.” Yes, we bring them church and that’s important, but the essence, the essentials are already there. Take their funerals, for example. In our western world someone dies and is buried within four or five days and almost forgotten except by their immediate family or friends. Among them the whole village mourns. There is a series of ceremonies and the loosing of bonds — all the things we rarely reach. For them resurrection means going to live with their ancestors. Even when a great person dies — the chief of a clan or a good living local person — the people give them all they need to live in the land of the dead: clothes, tent, and utensils. Not all funerals of Christians are church funerals, only those for people who want to be buried in that way. They need a positive sign that the person died normally and was a good person. If not, they throw him or her into the forest without burial. The church never agrees with that. We also need to study the meaning of some of their funeral practices — the ritualistic dancing around the corpse, for instance: what does it really mean? We have put together a ritual that combines local and traditional church rites.

You go out to meet the people, you learn their language, mix with them. They will teach you many things.

Do many of them become Catholic?

The church there is at least 300 years old, from about 100 years after Columbus came to that part of the world. So you find well-established parishes especially along the coast. In the interior you have a situation of first evangelization among people who have hardly heard the gospel.

We have inherited the problem of oversacralization — block administration of the sacraments with rigid rules. Polygamy is very prevalent among them in their matriarchal family setup. A woman seeks out a man whom she might marry. He then comes to live with her and her existing family. They may live together for a long time without any marriage ceremony that the church would recognize. In Suriname the Catholic missionaries have a more open attitude to this issue.

You are a Nigerian missionary. How does that strike you?

As Nigerian Spiritans we have discovered that we are missionaries who have to go outside our own country. When I was four or five I knew many priests who were my father’s friends. I remember asking one of them, “What you have come to do in Nigeria, is it possible for me to do that too in some other places?” “Yes, sure you could do that,” he replied. “Why not?” That was one of the roots of my vocation. Several Nigerian Spiritans would tell you the same story: “You have come to us. Is it possible for us to go to others? Can we join you?”

The missionary venture is a two way one, but the pace at which Spiritans in Nigeria multiply and then go elsewhere is somewhat spectacular. It had to happen.

Are you looking forward to going back to French Guiana?

I have spent all my missionary life there. I’m glad they’ve called me to come back. I left part of my heart with those people who welcomed me so warmly. I needed a break from my role as leader of the Spiritan group there and I am deeply grateful to the Province of TransCanada for allowing me to spend my sabbatical leave among them. At Regis College I found myself in a theological laboratory where I came to know what is possible in the pews. In Guiana the bishop is planning a new missionary team for the river ministry. As part of that team I hope to put into practice some of what I have learned.

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**Spiritans in French Guiana**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>First Spiritans arrive to work among the American Indian people and the African slaves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1790s</td>
<td>French Revolution’s oath of submission divides Spiritan priests, some of whom were exiled.</td>
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<td>1807</td>
<td>Napoleon suppressed the Spiritans in France and overseas French territory.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>Spiritans return to Guiana, reopen Indian missions and found new parishes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>First of Father Libermann’s Spiritans arrive. They were accused of being too much in favour of the Blacks and too liberal in admitting them to the Eucharist and marriage. Their work took them to the Indian missions, the leprosaria, the centres for liberated slaves, and the gold miners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>French government secularized schools. Spiritans opened parochial schools. Local governor expelled the Spiritans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Vatican names a Spiritan as Prefect of Guiana. On his arrival he found only five active priests and two Catholic schools. Formal separation of church and state in France prevented any more expulsions of Spiritans.</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Eighteen Spiritan priests who operate nine parishes in the populated coastal area as well as two mission stations in the interior of the country.</td>
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I was in prison and you visited me

Dons Onyeke, CSSp

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

I celebrate two Masses every Sunday in Beon prison, Madang, Papua New Guinea. The first Mass in the dilapidated prison chapel used by other denominations is for the prisoners in the minimum security prison, the prison wardens and their families and people from the neighbouring villages. After that I move over to the maximum security prisons for the high risk criminals and remandees. I always regard my Sunday Mass as my Good Friday.

When I arrive here the first gate is opened to let me into a small security corridor and is locked immediately again from the inside. Then the second gate is opened. It eventually lets me into the maximum security compound to the echoes of “Moning Pater!” (Good Morning Father!) coming from some of the half-naked inmates close by. My ministry begins from here as some take the split-second opportunity to ask for one help or the other, or to slip a note or a letter into my hand or pocket. I will only know the content when I get home. Shaking hands with as many inmates as possible I make my way to the place where we celebrate Mass.

The Mass begins with all of them sitting half-naked on the concrete floor, their bodies and faces disfigured by scabies, grille, ringworm and dark spots from the bites of bed-bugs. Somebody gets up to do the reading but struggles to stand erect because of hunger. Besides, he is aligning the book in so many positions close to his eyes to be able to read and repeating each word several times. The reason? He can’t see well. Because of acute malnutrition, the majority of them have eye problems.

After mass comes “asking time” — when I am surrounded by up to 30 or 40 prisoners at the same time all asking for one thing or the other ranging from the ordinary to the extraordinary. The majority ask for medicines, soap, reading glasses, exercise books and pens, clothes, bibles and rosaries. Others will give letters for posting or for hand delivery, phone numbers to call, specific messages to be delivered to the National and Supreme Courts or to family members, addresses of people to go and see, requests for recommendation letters to the Parole Board, requests for food (for those who don’t get visitors), requests for help in paying court fines or for bail fees. The list is endless.

With such an avalanche of requests what can one do? I cannot say yes to all. On the other hand, how can I say no, knowing full well that for so many of them I am perhaps their only hope?

I opt for something simple. With the collaboration of a very close friend, who also helps with some of the medicines, we bake a small cake which I take with me to Sunday Mass for the thirty or more who come. This I give to one of them to share after Mass. Each gets a piece no bigger than an index finger. More prisoners are now coming for Mass and even those who don’t come simply jump in when the cake is being shared, often creating a chaotic and frightening situation as everybody fights to get a piece. Where do I go from here?

Last September there was a jail break in the maximum security which resulted in sixteen hard core inmates escaping. One of them was a guitarist at the Sunday liturgy. A warden later remarked to me “Pater, ol I giyanaim yu wantaim lotu tasol” — “Father, they are just using coming to Mass as a cover up.”

Notwithstanding all the utter meaninglessness, all the confusion, all the inadequacies that I face, I have surprised myself by falling in “love” with them. We all look forward to seeing each other and I must confess that for now I can’t wish for anything else.
There's Just Something about Fondwa

Brian McElroy

University of Fondwa's (UNIF) twenty students have come back from their semester-long internship, and they're back with a vengeance! After spending four months in their hometowns...
or another rural community, they are excited to be back with their classmates. They continue to amaze me in any number of ways.

We have one house each for our ten male and ten female students, all meals are taken together, and there is one "cyber café" of three computers for all students and professors. Given these conditions, I can hardly believe how cordial the students are with each other. Don’t you remember fighting with siblings about what T.V. program to watch? It’s not paradise, but the students are determined to make the best of the opportunity they have been given.

Sure, we eat spaghetti three times a week for breakfast and no, three hours a day of electricity isn’t always enough and yes, getting water to bathe is sometimes a problem, but isn’t there a greater reason for our presence here? Things at UNIF aren’t easy, but no one ever thought creating Haiti’s first rural university would be a breeze. Making UNIF work is going to take sacrifice and determination, but it means too much to the young people of this country for it not to succeed.

If Dengue can’t stop you...

For two weeks, photographer Becca Sherman visited Haiti to document the work of the Peasant Association of Fondwa and the University. I met Becca during a human rights program last summer, and somehow managed to convince her that I was competent enough to guide her through the Western hemisphere’s poorest country. She put together great material for Fondwa’s websites, for promotions, a documentary video, and fundraising. In fact, everything went perfectly. Until, that is, she went home and was diagnosed with the first case of Dengue fever her doctor had ever seen. Still, the day after she was told she had acquired a tropical illness during her time in Haiti, she wrote me to say that... she wants to come back! “There’s just something about Fondwa,” she said. It’s like a diamond in the rough.”

A people of courage, a place of inspiration

I take Becca’s experience as further proof that I am not crazy to enjoy living in Haiti. There is something about this country, especially the community of Fondwa that touches people’s hearts and changes the way they look at the world. For me, living in a place where people walk two to four hours to collect water and toil in their mountainous fields day after day to feed their families has been a lesson in courage and a source of inspiration. I have also found that, as much as I may stick out as a foreigner, there is a place for me in Fondwa.

Haiti’s economic and social foundation has been so devastated that the country cannot make it on its own, it requires help to meet the basic needs of its citizens. That’s not to say that any kind of help will do. Fondwa has developed a system for incorporating international aid into a model for sustainable development that accounts for the specific needs of rural Haiti. The university has had professors from the United States, France and Cuba, but the language of instruction is Haitian Creole, the native language of every Haitian. The idea is not to create dependency, but rather to promote long-lasting partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Brian McElroy is a volunteer and a recent graduate of Notre Dame University. Courtesy USA East and West Spiritan Newsletter.
I arrived in Malawi in mid April, 2005. It took me a few months to become acclimatized to the ever-changing weather between cold this hour and warm or hot the next. I was always reminded to carry a coat while going out as the weather might change.

I had brought with me a missionary stomach, yet I needed some time to get used to the Malawi dishes, which, though almost the same food as in West Africa, was prepared differently. It was clear to me that I would never eat Nigerian pounded yam and bush meat for the next three years. In particular I did not enjoy the cabbage sauce or relish with nsima, prepared from maize flour. Malawi has a lot of potatoes called ‘Mbatata’, known in Nigeria as ‘Irish potatoes’. Don’t ask me why the name ‘Irish potatoes’. As is the distance from Nigeria to Malawi, so is the difference in the preparation of the local dishes. My stomach took some time to adjust.

Ndirande Parish

Holy Ghost Parish, Ndirande has a big number of practicing Catholics who are aggressively religious and churchy — the kind of attitude one finds back home in Nigeria. On my first Sunday I was impressed with the attendance at the

“Dom, don’t feel shy to speak. Formulate your own Chichewa and speak it. People will learn to understand you.”

6:00 a.m. Mass. The church was filled and even then some stood outside. More impressive was the number of children. Ndirande is blessed with many hundreds of young Catholics between the ages of 6 and 20. And they never fail to attend Mass. We have four Masses every Sunday to accommodate about 16,000 Catholics. The parish
land is a playground for most of our children. After school, they come to play football and volleyball. They make many small pitches to accommodate their several teams. My hope was to chat and joke with the children as I always did at home. But that language barrier!

Learning Chichewa

Malawi is officially English-speaking, but the local language Chichewa is most commonly used. And without it, I'm afraid one has little or nothing to offer to the Malawi Church. In fact, a confrere, attempting to encourage me to learn the local language, told me that the use of English in the Church had been banned in Malawi. I had no reason to doubt him since even the National Anthem was sung in Chichewa. But later I realized that at least two out of the thirty-seven parishes in the Archdiocese of Blantyre have Mass in English on Sundays.

My teachers

Some teachers at Blantyre secondary school began giving me language lessons to enable me to start reading the Mass. After their introduction, reading gave me few problems. But speaking was a hard nut to crack. When Fr. Eugene Oguamanam, CSSp, one of the lecturers at the Balaka Intercongregational Seminary visited Ndirande for a weekend, he gave me an insight: "Don't feel shy to speak. Formulate your own Chichewa and speak it. People will learn to understand you. That's what I did while learning Zulu in South Africa."

Our Catechist helps translate a short sermon for me every Sunday. And I make sure I read it as faithfully as possible. Sometimes people get disappointed as my sermons finish just when they are about to get a point or two. But some have come to love them very much. They say, "Fr. Dominic's Masses are brief and nice." At first I used to feel sad when I discovered that I had failed to pronounce a certain word correctly. But now I am growing a thick skin. I don't worry. I console myself with the thought that even the English language has varieties of pronunciation. Someday people will say, "This is Fr. Dominic's Chichewa."

On October 19 last, a dozen Iranians who fled the totalitarian regime in their country and who had lived without documents for several years in Belgium, together with another 110 people without documents from more than twenty countries, occupied the Saint Boniface Church in Ixelles, Brussels. The priest in charge, Spiritan Norbert Maréchal, with the support of the local bishop and the parish council gave them a warm welcome.

In a letter to the Belgium Foreign Minister, Norbert explained his reason for receiving the asylum seekers:

"I allowed the asylum seekers to stay in the church because of their increasing anxiety: the police had been invading the centres where they stayed and they were being expelled before a decision on their status had been handed down by the State Council...

Let me assure you that I take no pleasure in being "invaded" but is the only solution to close the door?....

Having lived myself for many years in another country (even though with the necessary documents), I know how this experience of not being recognized or accepted is painful. This is even worse when you are not legally recognized.

It is for this reason that I respect them and the demands they make. Some have been here between one and twelve years and they have been waiting so long...

Evidently my perspective here is a human one. However one principle is central for me: "law has been made for people, not people for law". This is evident in the gospels, but isn't it also a sound human principle? After three months should they not be listened to and treated humanely?"

Eventually on March 16, after five months' occupation of the church and twenty days into a hunger strike, the asylum seekers were granted permission to stay in Belgium for a year by the Foreign Ministry while their requests for asylum are being re-examined case by case.
A New World, A New People

ZAMBIA

Location is everything. Relocation is a different story.

Nigerian Spiritans Ifeanyichukuru Inoadumba and Chika Kamalu were appointed to mission in Zambia. No big deal? From one African country to another. Canadians are accustomed to a change of residence from one city to another, from one province to another, even from Canada to the United States. Europeans have become more adaptable with the European Union interchange of workers. But to move from one African country to another remains a major move. “Everything was different from Nigeria — the language, the food, the climate, the people, their customs and traditions,” says Fr. Ifenayichukuru. My people have a saying, “A chicken in a strange place moves with one leg raised up and the other down.” This was not the time to rush into anything, so with one leg raised up and the other down, I began as a spectator.”

Learning a new language

Fr. Chika remembers leaving Nigeria as a newly ordained priest to travel to Zambia at the height of the rainy season. “I was in a new world with a new people. Its geography reflected the traditional ‘mission lands’ with impossible bush roads and few modern facilities. More than a change of country, it meant a change of culture. It took a while to get to know their language and culture.” He lives and works with the Silozi — one of the major groups that make up the seventy-three tribes in Zambia. Even among them he found a modern tower of Babel. While the official language is Silozi, his parish catered to the Tokaule people. “During the liturgical celebrations we use that official language, but not many understand it.

“Because of HIV/AIDS many priests in Zambia are more conversant with the funeral rites than with any other sacrament.”

Outside church they go back to their native language, one we barely understand. You greet them in Silozi and they reply in Sitokeleya. And then in the outstations they speak yet another local language.

Fr. Ifeanyichukuru works in Monze Diocese in southern Zambia among the Batonga tribe. “They speak a Bantu language, so different from my own native Igbo tongue,” he says. “At the end of three months I could understand simple sentences, but could not speak the language.

Today I can make myself understood in Tonga, but I still use an interpreter during Sunday homilies.” How is it possible to become all things to all people in the multilingual world of Africa?

Droughts and famine

Beyond the language issue lie the economic conditions of life in rural Zambia. Life is difficult for the Tongas. “They are gentle and respectful,” says Ifeanyichukuru. “Some other tribes look down on them. They are farmers and their major food supply is nshima from ground maize. They have a saying, ‘No nshima, no food.’ Since I came to Zambia two droughts have occurred in 2003 and 2004. The resulting famine led to deaths and many illnesses.” Chika agrees: “Many people come to our parish begging for food. Many of them have barely one good meal a day. Some go totally hungry for days or survive on wild fruits. People die in large numbers, not necessarily because of sickness, but out of poor diet and unaffordable Medicare. How do you afford a fulfilling smile when you see your parishioners being afflicted by hunger, sickness, and eventually death in quick succession?”

Missionary work

Questions and challenges arise about what constitutes missionary work in such a context. “You are here to help us,” said one
elderly man in the course of a group discussion. He saw the priest as a source of money and food, an ecclesiastical NGO officer. “Hardly anyone comes to you for spiritual guidance or sacramental service, only for material assistance,” says Chika. “It is almost an offence to say ‘no’ to any of their numerous requests.” Ifeanyichukuru agrees: “Missionary work is sometimes frustrating. What do you do when you see your parishioners in real need of food and education but you cannot help? We live on our Mass stipends, donations from well wishers, and grants from Spiritan headquarters in Rome. Through such help we support scores of orphans in each parish, paying their school fees and other personal expenses.”

Then there is the HIV/AIDS pandemic resulting in a growing number of orphans and widows. “Many priests in Zambia are more conversant with the funeral rites than with any other sacrament besides the Eucharist,” says Chika. “One is either infected or affected. As church we must step out to claim the children forced into the streets by this ugly situation. Don’t ask where the African extended family system is. Grandparents have gone back to rearing children left by their dead children.” Both Spiritans also find themselves counseling the victims of AIDS/HIV.

Of course, ongoing sacramental ministry forms part of both their lives. Chika recalls this aspect of their work. “We often drive to far away outstations only to find a few Christians who sometimes are not ready for our coming. We seize feasts like Christmas and Easter as opportune times to celebrate First Communion and Marriage. We take our time to teach and rehearse each celebration. We have trained a team of catechists to do follow-up teaching. Despite the ups and downs, patience and a good smile are what a missionary here must never lack.”

Hope and meaning

Notwithstanding their difficulties there is joy and a sense of purpose in the lives of these two young missionaries. Ifeanyichukuru finds his youth work challenging, disturbing and transforming. “Most of the youths we work with are orphans, non-school-going youths or school drop-outs and pregnant young girls. To work with these young people, all with touching stories, in their quest for vision and knowledge gives me the assurance of being in the mission that Fr. Claude des Places began for youth over 300 years ago.”

Both priests are part of an international team of fourteen Spiritans from four countries — Nigeria, Tanzania, Congo-Brazzaville and Ireland — spread out in five communities. “Our communities are our strength and fuel tank,” says Chika. “We benefit from our rich cultural diversity and our uniform purpose. Our shared jokes and common activities enable us to keep the faith in a very demanding mission. The missionary is challenged to give hope and meaning to his people.” Ifeanyichukuru remarks, “We learn from each other, get to know ourselves and see our weak and strong points revealed to us through our confreres. Together we reflect and share what it means to be a Spiritan. Mission becomes an adventure calling for discovery of oneself, of others, and of God. It offers two gifts: conversion and transformation. It invites us to humble service. By the grace of God, I think I have helped spread the Good News in bad times in Zambia.”

Wounds which doctors cannot treat

Marc Tyrant is currently group leader of the Spiritans in Pakistan. Marc is a qualified doctor and following the severe earthquake in the Himalayan region in late 2005 he was invited by Médecins du Monde to offer his services to the many victims. He has written a number of accounts of his experiences in the villages of Balakot and Mansehra attending the homeless and displaced people of the region. The following is an extract from his recent newsletter:

Balakot for me has a face: it is that of an old man which we found busy removing the rubble of his house. He had a serious wound which we disinfected and bandaged. A few moments later, while we were attending other patients, somebody called our attention. The old man had returned to his work effectively spoiling the medical care we had just given him. We tried to explain to him that it was necessary to stop working, otherwise the wound wouldn’t close and in fact it would get much worse. “How can I leave this rubble… The body of my son is underneath it and I need to give him a proper burial!” he commented. There are indeed wounds which doctors cannot treat!
Fols in the Coronation and Browfield communities in the Alberta prairies know how important water is. And they are also extremely generous. So it is no surprise that the community responded with amazing speed and generosity to the request of Willa and Cliff Suntjens for help with a water project in Ethiopia. Cliff is an agricultural specialist and Willa a nursing instructor. Both are V.I.C.S volunteers from Coronation.

Ethiopia

Experienced development aid workers know that you don't simply go to a community and drill a well or repair a spring and expect that it will still be in good repair in a few years time. They know that the only way to make a project of this kind work for the long haul is to start with the grass roots community and get them to "own" the project from the very beginning.

Fortunately, Cliff and Willa work with some amazing and experienced people when it comes to water development. The hospital administrator Sister Elaine has had a passion for water projects in Africa (along with medical work and a host of other initiatives) for thirty years. As well, their Outreach development worker, Endele, is a veteran of many successful projects in the four years he has worked with St. Luke's. So well before we arrived, they had selected a community that needed a water project and was also ready to take responsibility for the project.

In this particular community Muslims and Orthodox Christians live closely together, and have been sharing the same spring for as long as anyone can remember. The spring itself is on Muslim land, but for a long time the Christians have considered it holy water because several people had been healed of ailments through its use. They also use the spring water for their worship at the church. All of this had been accepted as a matter of course, something that became significant as the community grappled with this new development.

Equal representation

Happily for us, a trip to the community was planned during our stay. So we went to the village with Cliff and Endele, the development worker and a driver for a meeting of the elders. At the previous meeting Endele had wisely asked the community to select seven elders to represent the Muslims and seven for the Christians. He told us that if they could not come to an understanding on the project this time, a new community would have to be chosen. We packed up in the morning and stopped at a bakery in town to buy some bread as a gift from the donor community for the meeting and off we went. The ride itself was an adventure and we certainly know why a 4wheel drive is standard gear for development workers!
A s I prepare to move to another parish after 12 years here, I want to offer a special welcome to those who are not in regular attendance at the celebration of the Eucharist. I'm glad you're here ... back home!!!

This is one of those times when what ought to be said is difficult to say. There are a lot of feelings involved and feelings aren't easily captured in words. For instance ... I want to say we missed you. We're sorry for anything we might have done to hurt you. I don't know when it happened, or how it happened, but I know the kinds of hurts that can happen in the Church. You may have felt unwelcome because of separation or divorce. You may have felt angry because of all the changes in the Church, or the way they were implemented. Perhaps you had a bad experience at the time of a baptism, or a wedding, or a funeral. You may have gotten into an argument with a priest over just about anything. Well, whatever the cause, whoever was at fault ... we're sorry. The Lord taught us that we never have to be victims of our past. His gifts of forgiveness and healing set us free — free to be at peace despite bad memories — free to love again — free to laugh.

So far I've been writing mostly about people who have been hurt. There are others, I know, who more or less just drifted away. Welcome back! We hope you find what we've found ... a community whose beliefs, prayers and sacraments give life and death more meaning — not answers for everything just meaning and strength as we journey towards the ultimate answer ... God.

To all who are here, let me admit that this Church of ours is not a perfect Church — it never was — and it never will be. Sometimes people have the impression that we claim perfection or that we come together because we have a better-than-thou attitude. That's not the Church Christ founded. He was accused of eating and drinking with sinners and that was the truth. We come together because we are sinners who need to be forgiven, supported and challenged ... not because we are perfect. We come together precisely because we are not perfect. The first thing we do at Mass — whether you are the Pope or a 3rd grader — is acknowledge our sinfulness. “Kyrie Eleison — Lord have mercy.” In any language it means the same. It means that we are sinners who have come together because we believe in the Lord’s mercy. The prayer we say after the Our Father says it all: “Lord Jesus Christ, You said to Your apostles: I leave you peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us your peace.”

Your return need not be complicated. I'd suggest simply coming to Mass next Sunday and picking it up from there. If there is a problem with marriage outside the Church or divorce, most of these situations can be resolved. Please don't hesitate to talk to a priest. We are here most of all to minister the Lord's love and forgiveness.

Fr. John Newton, Neil McNeil graduate, writing to the parishioners of Blessed Sacrament Parish, Toronto. He is now Pastor at St. John’s Parish.
Modern Conspiracies and

The Da Vinci Code Movie:

Two Thumbs Down

Paul McAuley, CSSp

This past May, the FBI conducted yet another intensive search for Jimmy Hoffa, the former Teamsters boss who suddenly disappeared in 1975. After a couple of weeks of digging all over a Michigan horse farm (ironically called Hidden Dreams Farm) they found absolutely nothing.

In August 1977, Elvis Presley finally "left the building." Yet there are countless thousands who claim he is alive: they have seen him. Some conspiracy theorists have suggested that it is the body of Jimmy Hoffa, not Elvis, in Elvis Presley's grave in Graceland!

While it is beyond a shadow of a doubt that JFK is indeed dead, there is no end to the number of theories as to the motive and identity of the assassin(s) of the U.S. President on that shocking day in Dallas in November 1963.

Hoffa, Elvis, JFK, these are just a few of the favourite ingredients that can be found in the modern conspiracy theory. Why settle for the ordinary when one can have a really good conspiracy? Mystery sells, conspiracy sells and religious conspiracy sells more! So it should come as no surprise that The Da Vinci Code has been so popular. If you have not read the book or seen the movie, you probably are at least familiar with the plot. If you are not familiar with the story line, perhaps you have been on a deep space mission for the past few years?

Suffice to say, the story set out in the fictional The Da Vinci Code is that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, that they had children, that Mary was the real leader of the early Christian community and that the early Church quashed this knowledge and for two thousand years has been engaged in the most fantastic cover-up and conspiracy to hide the "truth."

I am reminded of the tag line THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE from the wildly popular 90s TV show, The X Files. I am also reminded of Pilate's question to Jesus "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Yes, the truth is out there but it can take some work to get at it. We live in an age of instant information and instant misinformation.

The Internet has proven to be the dream tool of conspiracy theorists and their disciples. In other media too, fact is fiction and fiction becomes fact. We live in an age of the "infomercial" and the "mocumentary." Even the staid old "documentary" has become suspect of late as people question the motives and political leanings of the producer. Are truth and objectivity possible?

Our response

So with regards to the world of media, fact and fiction, what is our response as Christians, as Church? We can choose to shun the media and withdraw from the world. Will that accomplish much? Can we continue to be the "leaven in the yeast" if we withdraw? On the other hand, do we embrace the media and modern secular culture so much so that it ends up dictating the Christian agenda? I think there is a middle path — critically engage modern media and culture, dialogue and debate with those who produce, write, create and fashion what we see on TV, at the movies, on our iPods, in our newspapers and magazines and on our computer screens. As Christians, if we desire to be a leaven of positive change in the world, we must become media savvy.

As for The Da Vinci Code, yes, I read the novel and saw the film, as I knew many people to whom I minister would be asking me about it. I enjoyed the novel as I enjoy similar spy thriller fiction. As for the film, well, save your cash! Most of the critics were right; the movie is a bloated, disjointed, poorly edited bore. Even if the truth were out there, one would probably fall asleep before finding it!
On Pentecost weekend 2006, several men and women retreated from the hustle and bustle of Toronto and gathered at Maryholme, the Sisters of Loreto retreat center, on the shores of beautiful Lake Simcoe for the purpose of vocational discernment. The constant rain on Saturday dampened neither the spirits nor the Spirit of the retreat.

The retreatants were joined over the three days by several Spiritan priests, Lay Spiritans and VICS volunteers who shared stories of their journey within the Spiritan family. The Spiritans believe that vocation is not limited to priesthood. Our Spiritan family includes priests, brothers, lay men and women, married and single.

Spiritan Vocations Director, Fr. Mike Doyle welcomed the group on the Friday evening and presented an overview of mission today. On the Saturday morning, Fr. Paul McAuley gave a presentation on the Spiritans. This was followed by a personal sharing from Robert Di Nardo, one of our current Spiritan seminarians studying in Ottawa. Robert also braved the rain to provide the group with a wonderful BBQ lunch. Later in the day, John and Katie Flaherty told the story of their vocational journey that began as VICS volunteers in the Caribbean and has led them presently to commit to the Lay Spiritans. Fr. Obinna Ifeanyi shared his Spiritan story from the point of view of a young Nigerian priest thrust into this strange country, Canada. The weekend was punctuated by laughter, informal sharings, wonderful meals and fellowship, and periods of prayer and quiet reflection.

Sunday after lunch, the group packed up and departed from Maryholme but the retreat was not over. They all drove to Toronto and reassembled at St. Joseph’s Church in West Hill for the annual Spiritan Pentecost Mass. ■
Peter Fleming, CSSp
1930 – 2006
A man who loved people

Michael Doyle, CSSp recalls a lifelong friend

I first met “Pete” when we were both part of a group of potential missionaries called by the Spiritans for an interview to see if we had the right stuff to join the order. In fact we were related in some particularly Irish manner involving several “removes” that only my late grandmother could unravel. Pete was from Dublin and was called a ‘jackeen’ while the rest of us were from the country and were known as “culchies”. The terms were not altogether pejorative but there was an edge to them. Pete was an instant “hit” for, not only did he play the current pop tunes on the piano, he also played a wicked hand of poker which sent many of us home with lighter pockets. Most of us smoked, which was cool in those days even though we smoked only tobacco!

We evidently made the grade and entered the Novitiate of the Spiritans (sort of a spiritual boot camp) a little later. After a year of testing our vocation we went to the seminary in Dublin from which we made our way each day, in the unpredictable weather of Dublin, to the university. Bicycle was our normal mode of transport and, since we were the most recent arrivals, we got the end of the line — rickety machines held together with bits of wire and great ingenuity.

Next came “prefecting” a couple of years spent in practical ministry, usually in one of our schools. We were lucky to be sent to the same institution, Rockwell College, in Tipperary. Then, for Pete, it was back to the seminary in Dublin for the study of Theology where I joined him again a year later.

Pete was ordained in 1948 and sent to Canada. I felt sorry for him. We had spent many years preparing to go to Africa as missionaries and here he was shipped off to Canada. A year later I was ordained and was doomed to the same fate — Canada. (Each of us quickly fell in love with the country.)

Neil McNeil High School
We worked together at Neil McNeil High School for many years and, in the absence of a residence (which the diocese had neglected to provide), we shared cubicles in converted classrooms. Conditions were often difficult but Pete’s musical ability together with his willingness to share his talent led to many a lively party. One of his duties was eliminating, or at least keeping the lid on, student smoking. He didn’t believe much in detentions or other forms of punishment but usually the offender was given a choice of paying a $2 fine. This was before the introduction of the metal “toonie” so Pete’s breast pocket was often stuffed with $2 bills. When a reasonable sum was collected it was sent off to some favourite charity. A week or ten days later a letter would come back thanking Neil students for their generosity and their interest in the particular charity.

St. Joseph’s Parish
When he retired from Neil McNeil Pete accepted, rather hesitantly, the appointment of associate pastor at St. Joseph’s Parish, West Hill. He didn’t think he would be able for it — but of course he was. Sometimes in the evenings we would discuss the parish over a glass of something (not milk). He would often comment that in a parish one was affirmed immediately. The parishioners were quick to show their appreciation, whereas in a school the students were absorbed with their own development problems and weren’t into affirming teachers, much less principals.

Thirty years later they were often fulsome in their praise, but that was a long time to wait.

Pete loved music. He was also keen on golf though it must be said that his note playing was probably more accurate than his putting. Above all, though, he was interested in people. He was amongst them in their joys and sorrows. At a call from the hospital everything was dropped and he was on his way to the sick person. He enjoyed celebrations, but no matter at what hour the festivities finished he was invariably in his place for prayer next morning. He enjoyed and was a successful leader of “pilgrimages” even, as some remarked, to places where no saint had ever trodden!

And so we say a temporary good bye to Fr. Pete, a man who in life loved music and golf but above all people, who believed that true religion was based on relationships rather than abstract principles and put his belief in practice on a daily basis. We can be quite certain that, as his spirit took flight, he heard a voice saying “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord.”
Fr. Philip Forde, CSSp, 1926 – 2006

A priest for 53 years, Fr. Philip Forde served in Africa, the U.S, Canada and the Caribbean. Nearly half his priestly life was spent in Toronto.

The eldest of eleven children, he attended high school in St. Mary’s College, Port of Spain, and did his seminary training in Holy Ghost Missionary College, Dublin. Ordained in 1953, he was sent to Nigeria the following year where he taught and was principal in Ohokoro. He returned to Trinidad in 1967 and then went to Virginia and Albany prior to coming to Toronto in 1977 to join the staff of St. Joseph’s College. A few years later he became pastor and director of the Caribbean Catholic Secretariat, known today as Our Lady of Good Counsel Caribbean Catholic Church and Centre. Its lengthy title underlines the fact that it was much more than a traditional church. Philip Forde opened offices for immigrant services, counseling, financial services, and adult ESL classes. The Centre came to be a home away from home for many Caribbean immigrants. In September 1985 Fr. Philip retired to Laval House and returned to Trinidad in 1999. But his health took a turn for the better and he spent two and half years of priestly ministry in Delaford, Tobago. Finally he returned to his people of Paramin and Maraval and died peacefully in his own home on May 30, 2006.

Matthew Boah knew Fr. Philip for 24 years. “Everyone that knew him knew that he was a good cook and a great baker. His father was totally against the idea of his eldest son becoming a priest until Fr. Philip read him the story of St. Francis of Assisi stripping himself bare in public as a sign of his total dedication to others. The old Forde gave in and said, “If you are going to be a priest like this man, I will not stop you.” When he was about to leave for Nigeria his mother’s advice to him was, “Be good to those people and treat them well.” Her words stayed with him and later guided his approach to the West Indian people in Toronto. His wish was that the Caribbean Centre would give them a sense of their own dignity and worth as well as an opportunity to worship in their own way. When he returned to Trinidad for the last time it was with the intention of retiring back home. But he found out that the people of Delaford had no priest; no one wanted to go there. So Fr. Philip volunteered to serve them. May God be gracious to him forever.”

Canadian Church Press Awards

_Spiritan_ was awarded four Awards of Merit by the Canadian Church Press at its annual meeting in Winnipeg in June 2006. This brings the number of such awards over the past eleven years to twenty-eight.

Katie Flaherty won first place in poetry for ‘Confessions at a Carnival’. Tim Faller was awarded second place for layout and design. Pat Fitzpatrick’s article on ‘Real Presence’ was third in the theological reflection category. Also, _Spiritan_ magazine received the third place award for general excellence. Considering the large number of entries and the high quality of so many religious publications, these awards, and especially the one for general excellence, were most gratifying.
Luke 24: 13-17, Images of two slightly mystified and down-in-mind disciples plodding along, homebound to their village on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Jesus, the Teacher, joins Cleopas and his companion and patiently takes the time to clear their minds and eyes before revealing His Resurrected Self to them. Elated and re-energized, the two disciples run back to Jerusalem to spread the Good News.

History does repeat itself! Almost two millennia later, it was another reawakening of sorts that inspired a group of Catholics to embark on their own spiritual journey of self-discovery, renewal and service.

It all started in the fall of 1999 with a pastoral visit of the Bishop of Port Louis, Mauritius, to the expatriate community in Toronto. Despite the brevity of his stay among them, Bishop Piat’s down-to-earth spirituality touched all who congregated at his Eucharistic celebrations, retreats and formal and informal gatherings. The community’s thirst for the spiritual, clearly palpable, was temporarily satisfied in the joyful celebrations of the moment, enhanced, no doubt, by the colourful and happy resonance of a shared “lingua franca”. The yearning for more had been rekindled, though. At Bishop Piat’s gentle urging, a small group volunteered to continue the work he had started.

In January 2000, a first plenary meeting of the EMMAUS, a lay Catholic group, was born. Its audience is mainly, but not exclusively, the Mauritian community in Canada; its mission, a fairly succinct one;

In response to the call received at baptism and reaffirmed at confirmation, we pledge to:
• Deepen and nurture our faith,
• Live and share the Good News with Mauritian families in Canada and the communities in which we live.

Affiliation of the group with the Archdiocese of Toronto quickly followed. In those early days, practical realities and constraints were swept aside by the group’s contagious enthusiasm, and it probably took on too much too fast. Some six years later, a wee bit wiser (and greyer) and armed with a clearer perspective, EMMAUS has developed a more eclectic approach, focusing on some well-established and much-anticipated annual ministries and celebrations.

Two parallel but inter-related paths

Individual companions have progressed in their spiritual journey, in their own unique ways and at their own pace. A happy corollary of that individual growth is the increased involvement and integration of EMMAUS members in their own communities and local parishes. At the same time, we have also reached out to the community. One of our signature events is the annual small faith-sharing sessions that we hold in five different regions of the Greater Toronto Area throughout the Lenten season.

In early fall, the Messe du Père Laval brings together Mauritians and friends from all corners of the metropolitan area to celebrate l’Apotre de l’Ile Maurice.

The younger (of age and of heart) have not been forgotten along the way. Their enthusiastic involvement has been a key element in the success of our participation in Out-of-the-Cold programs. And who can forget 2002? The North American Mauritian community came together under the umbrella of EMMAUS in an unprecedented spirit of goodwill and generosity to sponsor and host 27 World Youth Day pilgrims from Mauritius and Reunion.

Six years and a small first circle were symbolically completed with the recent visit of Port Louis Vicar-General Gerard Sullivan. One simple and profound lesson learnt: We continue in the deeply-held belief that the Lord’s mission is not an overnight project and small or even tiny steps add up to real progress over time.

Following the departure of Father Justin Desroches, our first Spiritual Director, Spiritan Father Paul McAuley has patiently and enthusiastically journeyed with us, ever ready to dispense much-needed guidance and counsel while tending to our spiritual needs.

Our theme song is “Companions on the Journey”. Like the disciples in Luke’s Gospel, the EMMAUS companions are “on a journey of faith, breaking bread and sharing life.” So, join us and “Stay with us”.
Prayer for the Journey

Jesus, our brother, you were once a migrant too. You were also on the journey. Guide us along safe paths, protect us from evil and free us from all fear. SHOW US THE WAY.

Teach us to welcome the strangers among us—immigrants, migrants, refugees, people on the move—all our sisters and brothers on the journey. SHOW US THE WAY.

Help us to seek justice for the oppressed, to bring comfort to the afflicted, and to offer hope and healing to all those we meet on the journey. SHOW US THE WAY.

Help us to recognize that the only path is the way of justice. Strengthen us to make straight the path before our God. SHOW US THE WAY.

Open our hearts and minds to the suffering of victims of human trafficking, children held in detention, and other vulnerable persons in need of our hope and help in their time of struggle. AMEN.