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## A New World, A New People

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“We visit parishioners at their homes or farms as they struggle to make ends meet. This kind of visitation means a lot to them.” — Chika Kamalu, CSSp

# A New World, A New People

## ZAMBIA

**L**ocation 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. Ifeanyichukuru. 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 Tokaleya 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 Sitokaleya. 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 multi-lingual 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!