

# Spiritan Magazine

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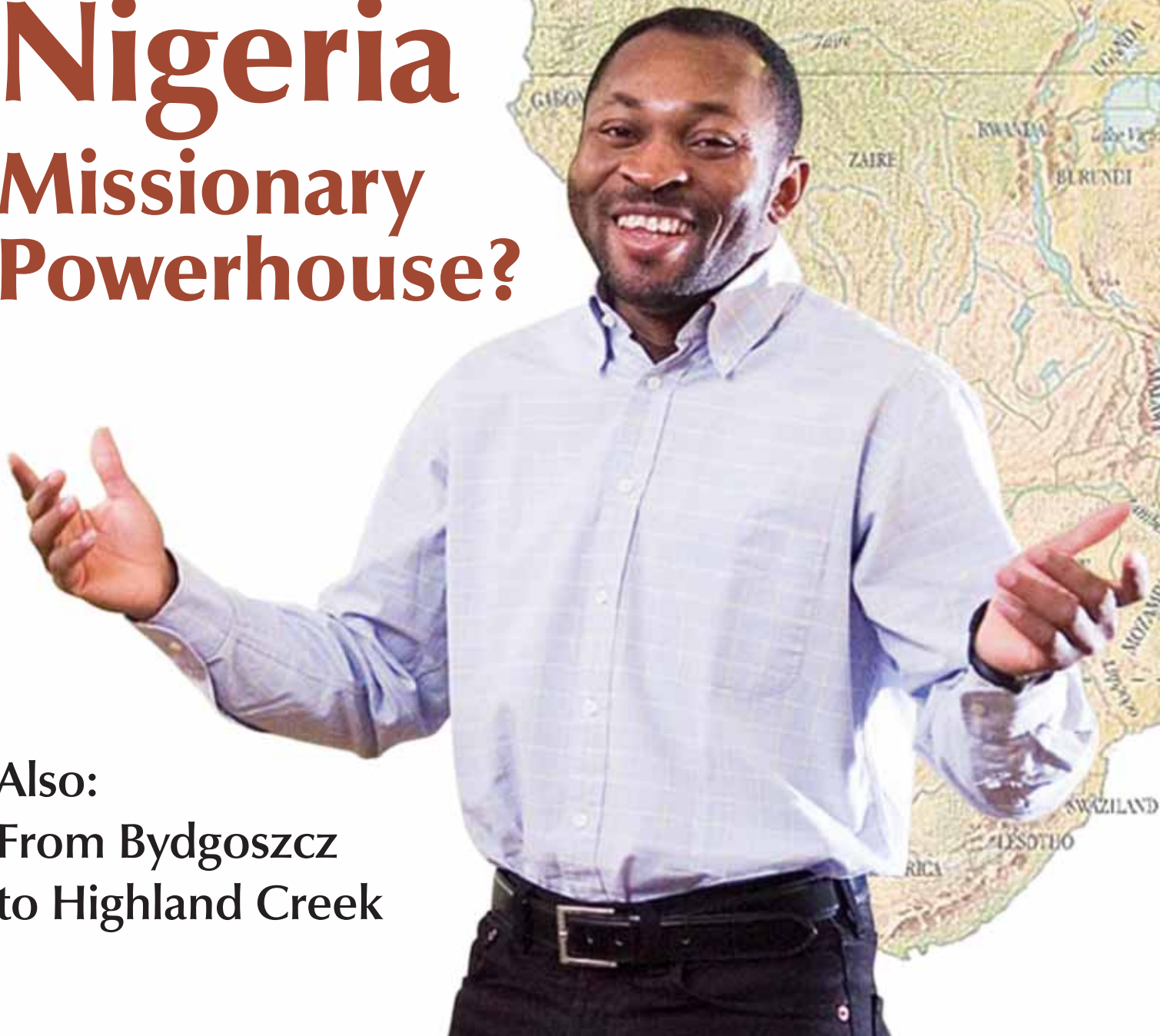
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# Spirititan



## Nigeria Missionary Powerhouse?

Also:  
From Bydgoszcz  
to Highland Creek



# Reverse Mission

Part of the missionary endeavor is to enable different cultures, different people, different religions and different backgrounds to come into contact with each other. The hope is that such contact will be mutually enriching.

God taught St. Peter that lesson in Jaffa when two experiences intermingled: Peter's vision of the clean and unclean creatures that he was invited to have for lunch followed by the invitation to come to a centurion's house in Caesarea and heal that Roman officer's servant. He accepted the invitation and ate with Cornelius. "God has taught me that I must not call anyone profane or unclean... I now really understand that God has no favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." The vision and the visit enabled Peter to break through the boundaries that his culture and religion had placed on him.

St. Paul and his traveling companions carried the gospel message from the Middle East to Europe. Many Europeans took to heart the good news they carried. But these newcomers came from different backgrounds, spoke different languages, and had different customs. How much of traditional Judaism had they to buy into if they wanted to become followers of the Way? A formal debate ensued in Jerusalem and a compromise was reached: no more than what was necessary for mutual respect was to be imposed on the new believers.

After Christianity had taken root in mainland Europe it sent its missionaries to the western islands of Great Britain and Ireland. The Celtic people of Ireland took to St. Patrick's good news in large numbers, and with Patrick's encouragement organized churches according to their local government way of life. Its contributions included private confession to a 'soul friend', local churches gathered around monasteries under the leadership of the abbot rather than a bishop appointed by Rome, local rites and customs in worship, a different day for celebrating Easter. Within a few generations reverse mission took place as these western outposts exported their Christianity to Scotland, England and back to the European mainland. It escaped the clutches of Rome for a few centuries until Rome opted for uniformity over plurality at the Synod of Whitby in 664 and Roman Catholicism became the established religion.

"The wind blows where it pleases: you can hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Jesus said these words to Nicodemus, a religious leader who came to him by night. Can we harness the power of this spirit/wind as a source of energy? Can we construct windmills to face and catch the changeable wind? The Spirit drove Claude des Places' early missionaries from Paris to the French countryside and overseas to the French colonies and Canada. The Spirit drove Francis Libermann's early followers to West Africa, the Indian Ocean and Haiti. Later that same Spirit carried Spiritans to many European countries and from there to the English, French, Portuguese, Dutch and German overseas territories.

Today the Spirit/wind is driving many African Spiritans across their own continent and to many parts of the world. Europe and North America are no longer mission-sending continents. They stand in need of outside help. But one-time receiving countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Cameroon and Congo have become mission-sending countries. Tide out here, tide in there — the ebb and flow continues its never ending movement.

This issue of *Spiritans* includes several stories from Nigerian-born missionaries who, having left their homeland for mission elsewhere, bring with them an infusion of young life, new vision and joy. Along with their fellow African Spiritans they are most responsible for the current vitality of our Congregation. Their stories also underline how windmill driven Spiritans realize that the Spirit fills the whole world and is already present wherever they go. When host and visitor interact both are enriched.

*Pat Fitzpatrick, CSSp*

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**Front cover:** Emeka Nzeadibe, CSSp, Germany

**Back cover:** Photo by Lars Lentz, iStockphoto

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# Teen Religion

## Young people crave genuine dialogue

Kathy Murtha

I am standing before a group of forty teenagers. Their pants are hanging down way below the level I consider normal, revealing a variety of painful looking piercings and tattoos. Their heads seem to be permanently attached to various cords and gadgets. And upon those heads rests some peculiar looking headgear. One head is proudly decorated in upright purple hair. Most striking is the rainbow of skin color. Every human shade under the universe is present. I am virtually the only one in the room representing the Anglo-Saxon hue and culture.

### Scarboro Mission — then and now

These are Catholic school students gathered for a day retreat exploring the Golden Rule as common ground between the world's religions and its potential as a vehicle for peace and justice. We are gathered in what might be seen as the most unlikely of places — Scarboro Mission. Scarboro Mission is a Catholic society which was founded nearly a hundred years ago for the training of young Canadian men as missionaries to China. It was built by the good Catholics of Toronto whose compassion and generosity were expressed at that time in an eagerness to save the souls of the poor Chinese babies.

I can't help but think how surprised they would be to see the present gathering. I keep thinking how would I ever assure them that this is indeed the blessed fruit of their labor and generosity? A hundred years ago, Toronto was dubbed the "Belfast of North America." Today Toronto is living up to its native name of "Meeting Place," for it has truly become one of the greatest meeting places of the world's cultures

and religions. This is the multicultural, multi-religious home inhabited by our young people who are attuned to its present unprecedented Spirit-filled possibilities.

### Ryan

A few months ago a young person came knocking on the door of Scarboro Missions. He came "trailing clouds of glory" and the decent scent of hair gel. He was concerned about the state of the world and the state of his hair. His name was Ryan. Ryan grew up surrounded by people of different cultures and religions. At an early age he bugged the Hindu woman next door to teach him Hindi so he could converse with her children. In elementary school his playmates taught him Punjabi and Arabic. The tragedy of September 11, 2001 sparked a desire in him to study the Qur'an and a deeper commitment to the interfaith movement. "Everyone has a calling in their life. I remain inspired to build bridges between diverse communities... This is my passion." There is no doubt that Ryan is an exceptional young person. But I do not believe he is an exception. He gives clear expression of the work of the Spirit in our time among the young in general. This unmistakable movement of the Spirit has been greatly enflamed by countless brave teachers who have foraged ahead into uncharted territory with much opposition in order to prepare the young for God's future.

I grew up in a small town in southern Ontario where the railway tracks divided the Protestants from the Catholics. I had

virtually no contact with the people on the other side. I just recall feeling pity for them that they didn't have as many holidays as we did. In terms of cultural diversity the most exotic strangers I encountered were the Italian family who ran the vegetable store and even they belonged to the same church as I did.

Nothing in my life prepared me for Ryan and for what I have now come to perceive as the great spiritual adventure of our time — the awakening of people to the realization we are one family in spite of all our differences, the fulfillment of Jesus' dream, "May they all be one."

### Dialogue of religions

As Catholics we are strongly urged to enter into dialogue with people of other religions. This encounter is unavoidable in our increasingly pluralistic society. As a retreat director I find myself frequently thrown into the fray of this dialogue. Several times during the course of a retreat when guests from other religions share their insights and experience of the Sacred, they have turned to me inquiring what is special and sacred about Christianity. What does the Christian tradition bring to the contemporary dialogue of religions? With all eyes



upon me, I find myself wondering where is the Baltimore Catechism when you really need it. Without the security of handy pat answers I am forced to dig deep within myself and beyond into the rich Catholic record of encounter with the Holy.

I open my mouth and out blurts the Christmas story. I tell the story of a God who loved us so much that He emptied Himself of His divinity and became one with us fragile, struggling human beings. I have heard the story many times, but sud-

## “Is it true, Miss? Did God really come tumbling head first bare naked onto this earth as a little baby — like we did?”

denly in the context of this interreligious intergenerational dialogue it begins to take on a clarity and poignancy that is totally fresh and makes the skin of my spirit all tingly. In the retelling of the Christmas story it begins to dawn on me that this beautiful story of God’s love and longing to be close to us, His intricate and irrevocable entangling of the human and the divine, belongs to everyone. It is the gift we bring to the banquet table of the human family.

“Is it true, Miss? Did God really come tumbling head first bare naked onto this earth as a little baby — like we did?”

“Yes, Jason, it’s true. And not only did God do that, but he calls each one of us to do likewise — to empty ourselves to be able to walk in solidarity with all of creation. This is the way, the only way, as Jesus taught us.”

### Nodding in agreement

I gasp in horror. Did I actually just say “*This is the way, the only way*” in a multi-religious gathering? I didn’t mean it in an exclusive way. I was speaking from deep

within my own tradition seeking to touch upon the universal. I fear that I have just stepped into a minefield and am about to take everyone with me. I look out upon the sea of faces before me and I am surprised to see people of other religions nodding in agreement. Perhaps I didn’t stray into a minefield, but managed to stumble upon common ground. Is it possible that we might share the insight that self-emptying is a critical step on the spiritual journey? How exciting! The common ground begins to expand beneath me and I feel thrilled at the idea of delving into our tradition with new eyes.

This is just a tiny taste of the transformative power of inter-faith dialogue. Mix that together with the purifying potential of intergenerational dialogue and the sparks begin to fly. Time and time again I have experienced the power of Pope John Paul’s conviction that “Respectful dialogue with others enables us to be enriched by their insights and challenged by their questions and impelled to deepen our knowledge of the truth.”

### No exclusive grasp on God

Young people crave genuine dialogue. And honest dialogue demands a self-emptying. While you cannot have a dialogue with someone who has nothing to say, neither is there any chance of dialogue with someone who has all the answers. As I see it, the greatest obstacle to the work of the Spirit in our times is fundamentalism. It is the source of enormous human suf-

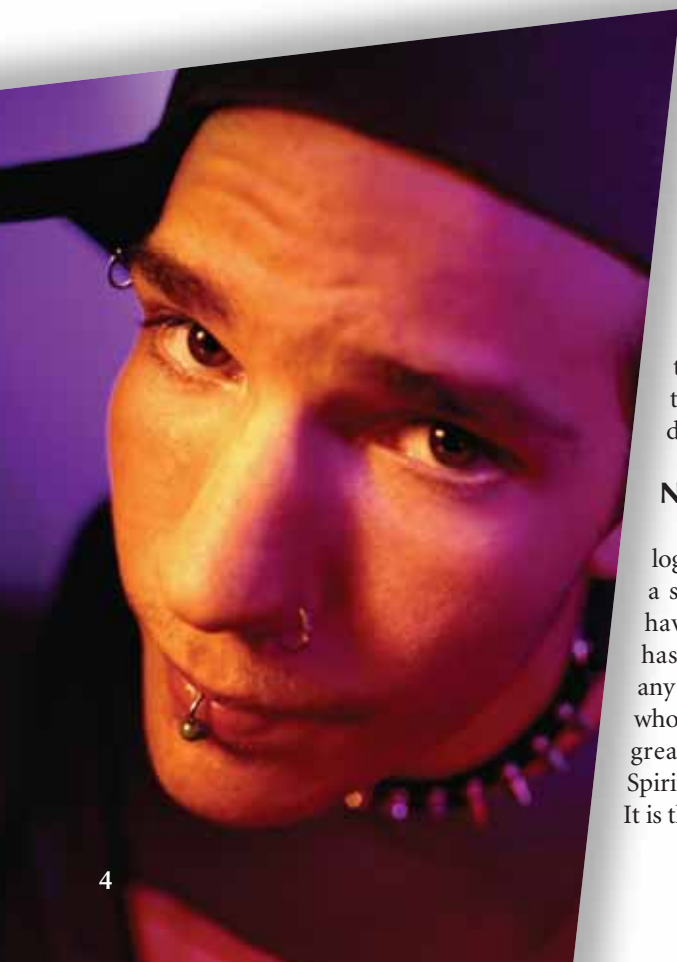
fering and threatens the very life of God’s creation. By fundamentalism, I mean the rampant illusion that some people have an exclusive grasp on God or the truth instead of God/truth possessing them. Fundamentalism is not only a problem with those “Muslim people over there” — we are all tempted to seek refuge in its security. We stubbornly refuse to empty ourselves and surrender to the Mystery that is greater than we humans can imagine.

Nothing shuts down communication with the young faster than a monologue spewed forth by one who has all the answers. Their bodies squirm in protest. Youth are not looking for people with all the answers to questions they haven’t asked. They are searching for people who are willing to live with questions that arise from their own lived experience and the hope and struggles of their time. They hunger for people who, in embracing the questions, are willing to walk humbly into the unknown with the confidence that the future is in God’s hands.

### Missionaries and mystics

In assisting the young I have felt particularly drawn to the experience and insights of the missionaries and mystics. Our missionaries have centuries of experience in intercultural/interreligious dialogue. Many have allowed themselves to be purified and transformed by their encounter of the Holy among a foreign people. Their outward journey to a strange land has led them to a realization of the mysterious unity that pervades all of God’s creation. Our mystics, on the other hand, took an inward journey into the human heart. And like many missionaries they too came to discover the all-encompassing communion of all beings. I believe that here lie the precious treasures of our inherited tradition that could prove invaluable for the young living in a pluralistic global community. How fascinating that the division between outer and inner, action and contemplation has proven wholly illusionary and the wall between the two has begun to crumble. It is indeed timely. We are urgently in need of a spirituality that embraces action and contemplation.

The Spirit has been frequently described as a gentle breeze, but I am beginning to perceive the Spirit at work today as a powerful force that causes deep rumblings within the ground under our feet. That ground is indeed shifting. Could this be a fresh unleashing of the Pentecost experience? ■



# Let Loose in the World

Pat Fitzpatrick, CSSp

**W**e know what to do with the forty days of Lent — we accompany Jesus as he sets his face for Jerusalem. But what are we to do with the fifty days of Easter? In my early Catholic education, we did nothing with them. It all ended on Easter Sunday when Jesus rose from the dead and proved himself God.

And those post-Easter stories are so “all over the place.” An empty tomb with the stone rolled away, and nothing but linen cloths inside, is the first clue that something is afoot. Then there are the encounters and appearances: in Jerusalem at the tomb and in the Upper Room; on the road to Emmaus and in Emmaus itself; on the Mount of Olives; appearances back up north in Galilee by the lakeshore, and on the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. He’s the same Jesus they once knew — he calls them by name, he opens their minds to understand the scriptures, he shows them his hands and his side. Yet there’s something different about him — his disciples have difficulty recognizing him, they mistake him for the gardener, or a stranger who joins them for a walk. Thomas wants proof after he missed the first meeting in the Upper Room. Unless he can put his hand into the side of his Lord, he refuses to believe. Later, he and six of the other disciples wonder who is the person on the shore of the Sea of Galilee telling them where to find fish.

## A conversation

In John Masefield’s play, *The Trial of Jesus*, the following conversation takes place after Jesus has been buried:

“Centurion, were you at the killing of that teacher today?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell me about his death...”

“I thought he was dead by noon, and then suddenly he began to sing in a loud voice that he was giving his spirit back to God...”

“Do you think he is dead?”

“No sir, I don’t.”

“Then where is he?”

“Let loose in the world, sir.”

He was not in the tomb — they were not to look for the living among the dead. Where, then, was he? We might reply, in heaven at the right hand of God. Correct, but that makes him distant, far off, remote. So, if he wasn’t just in heaven, where else was he? Still at work in the world, still present to his friends.

He seemed to enjoy turning up in disguise. Mary Magdalene presumed she was talking to the gardener, until that “gardener” called her by name. The Upper Room disbelievers thought they were seeing a ghost until he asked them to give him something to eat. The Galilee Seven didn’t recognize him on the lakeshore.

## A story

I like the following story called *The Trouble with Christ*.

The doorbell rang while I was upstairs marking papers. Susan answered and I could hear their voices:

“Yes, sure, he’s in — doing some marking upstairs. Come in. He’ll be glad of a break.”

Glad of a break! Doesn’t she know it’s Wednesday night and the reports are due tomorrow and there are still those projects to be written up for the staff meeting and that memo from Joe that I promised to have an answer for by... “Yes, dear — coming.”

I wouldn’t have minded if he’d called beforehand and checked to see if it was okay to drop by. Maybe on the weekend you can do his spur-of-the-moment stuff, but on a Wednesday... “Hi, Gerry, welcome. Glad to see you.”

Did he notice it was only my lips that smiled?

Susan had already asked him to sit down, so I didn’t have to be a two-time hypocrite.

“Well, how are things?... Raining a bit recently, eh?... Days getting longer though.... What’s new in your life?”

Susan came in with tea and cookies. I didn’t offer him a drink. He’d have been there all night and I had work to do. Must be nice to have just a 9 to 5 day. He and Susan ping-ponged the conversation. The cookies and I got progressively chewed up. I wonder, did he see me steal that glance at my watch as I reached out with my left hand for a cookie I didn’t really want.

He wouldn’t have a second cup. It didn’t taste very good anyway. Finally he got up to leave.

“Well, just passing by and thought I’d say hello.”

“Sure,” I said, “any time, eh?”

So he left.

The trouble with Christ is he always comes at the wrong time.

The Risen One doesn’t make appointments. He makes appearances. Let loose in the world, he’s free to turn up anywhere, anytime. And that brings us to Pentecost.

## The Gospels give way to the Acts of the Apostles

He told his disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They joined in constant prayer and attended to some unfinished business — the election of Matthias in place of Judas. And then Pentecost day came round. On the cross he gave his spirit back to God. Now he gives that same spirit to his disciples.

The sound of a strong, driving wind filled the house. Tongues of fire came to rest on each of their heads. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages. People from all over the known world heard them speaking in their own native tongues about the marvelous deeds of God. So filled with

the Spirit were they that their hearers were amazed and perplexed. Some of them attributed it to the fact that these speakers had been drinking too much new wine.

Ever since Pentecost the risen Christ belongs to the whole world and to every culture. His early Jewish followers had to let him go so that he could find a home and feel at home among the peoples of the world. They needed the outsider Paul to prise him loose from their ownership, to bring him out of his homeland, around the Mediterranean. Century after century the people who welcomed him in turn changed him. He became one of them and they in turn enabled him to transcend his own culture. And so it has continued. We are heralds of his Good News, aware that the people we meet reveal to us aspects of the gospel we carry that we have not fully appreciated.

The hope is that conversion will take place in the meeting: our conversion and the conversion of the people to whom we go. We can all do with a little more conversion, especially those of us in North America and Europe. “The doctrine of the Spirit has gone ‘homeless’ in the West,” wrote Pope Benedict XVI. Maybe that is why God is sending all the nations to us today. Vincent Donovan, CSSp put it this way when he spoke at a Spiritan retreat: “Jesus of Nazareth wasn’t black. He wasn’t white either. He was Jewish, a Middle East man, probably brown, in-between. But there is a Black Christ. There has to be. There’s an Indian Christ, a European Christ, an Irish Christ and an American Christ. Helping him because these Christs is our missionary work.”

### Sierra Leone and Bosnia

The Spirit of God fills the whole world. Some years ago a woman in a camp for people displaced by the civil war in Sierra Leone had lost her husband and her brother and had seen two of her nieces brutally beaten and raped. Asked if she could ever forgive those who committed these crimes, she said, “If I cannot forgive, how can we ever have peace again in this country?” A truly Spirit-filled woman.

Slobodan Milosevic died two months ago. His death, while on trial for war crimes against humanity in the 1990’s, recalls the detention camps, the torture, the ethnic cleansing, the bitter hand-to-hand and street-to-street fighting of a particularly vicious civil war. But out of it came the following event.

Vedran Smailovic was a Bosnian, a professional musician, the principal cellist of the Sarajevo Opera Theatre. One day he saw twenty-two people who had lined up for bread, shelled and killed, down the road from his apartment window. The next day, as the hungry lined up again for their daily bread, Mr. Smailovic got dressed in his black opera suit and tie and went down to meet them carrying his cello and a chair. He sat down in the rubble of the road — fragments of death and despair all around him — and began playing Albinoni’s Adagio. Day after day he came back to the same spot for three weeks with his cello and his chair, and played the same mournful melody. Today on that spot where he sat there is a monument of a man playing a cello. A monument to his refusal to surrender the hope that beauty could



Vedran Smailovic playing in the ruins of the National Library in Sarajevo, 1992.

Photo by Mikhail Evstafiev

be reborn in the midst of a living hell. Here was a Spirit-filled person who dug deep into his soul and found life when all seemed hopeless.

To stop with Easter, or to see it as the event whereby the Living Christ proved himself God, would be to leave it all up to him. It becomes our story when as heralds of hope and messengers of joy we proclaim his ongoing presence in our world. For him and for us, “The tree of our defeat became our tree of victory/ Where life was lost, there life has been restored.”

The centurion was right — on Good Friday, Jesus gave his spirit back to God. But the centurion was only half right — let loose in the world, Jesus gave us his spirit too. Ours now to capture the power of that spirit from whatever direction it blows, to become windmills facing the prevailing wind, which can

change direction from day to day. We don’t capture it so as to keep it to ourselves. We convert it into energy, by becoming a breath of fresh air in the lives of others. ■

## Shades of Easter

Ahh! — the enemy in the washbasin,  
A wee ‘nit,’ seeking breeding place,  
Water attracts — stagnant for a ‘mossie’.  
Wham ... disintegration is sudden.

Little girls imaging their mom  
Chatter at the well, aware that  
Clear water is precious;  
Attempt to balance buckets on their heads.

In recent years, bottles, pails, containers ...  
Tall, wide, narrow ... lids off,  
Assemble near the altar,  
Threads woven from ancient devotion.

In the fifties, granny drilled us in the practice,  
Go fill carafes, from the barrel with the cross on it.  
Here, that Easter drill is in vogue,  
As an all year round ritual.

Sunday, rag-tag vessels congregate,  
An albed arm stretches over the ‘ones for the journey’.  
Homes are sprinkled, bedridden blessed,  
And ‘ufiti’ — evil spirits — are banished.

The routine finds deeper value,  
In a piety we may have let go of,  
But is here treated as an underpin,  
Connecting with divine protection:  
Casting shades of Easter across the year.

*Locky Flanagan, CSSp*

# From Bydgoszcz to Highland Creek

Spiritan faces and accents in Canada are changing. No longer exclusively Irish, Canadian, Portuguese or Trinidadian, they are becoming Nigerian, West African and Polish. **Fr. Michal Jurkowski**, Associate Pastor, St. Joseph's Parish, Highland Creek, Toronto, plays a key role in this development. In a recent interview he talked with *Spiritan*.

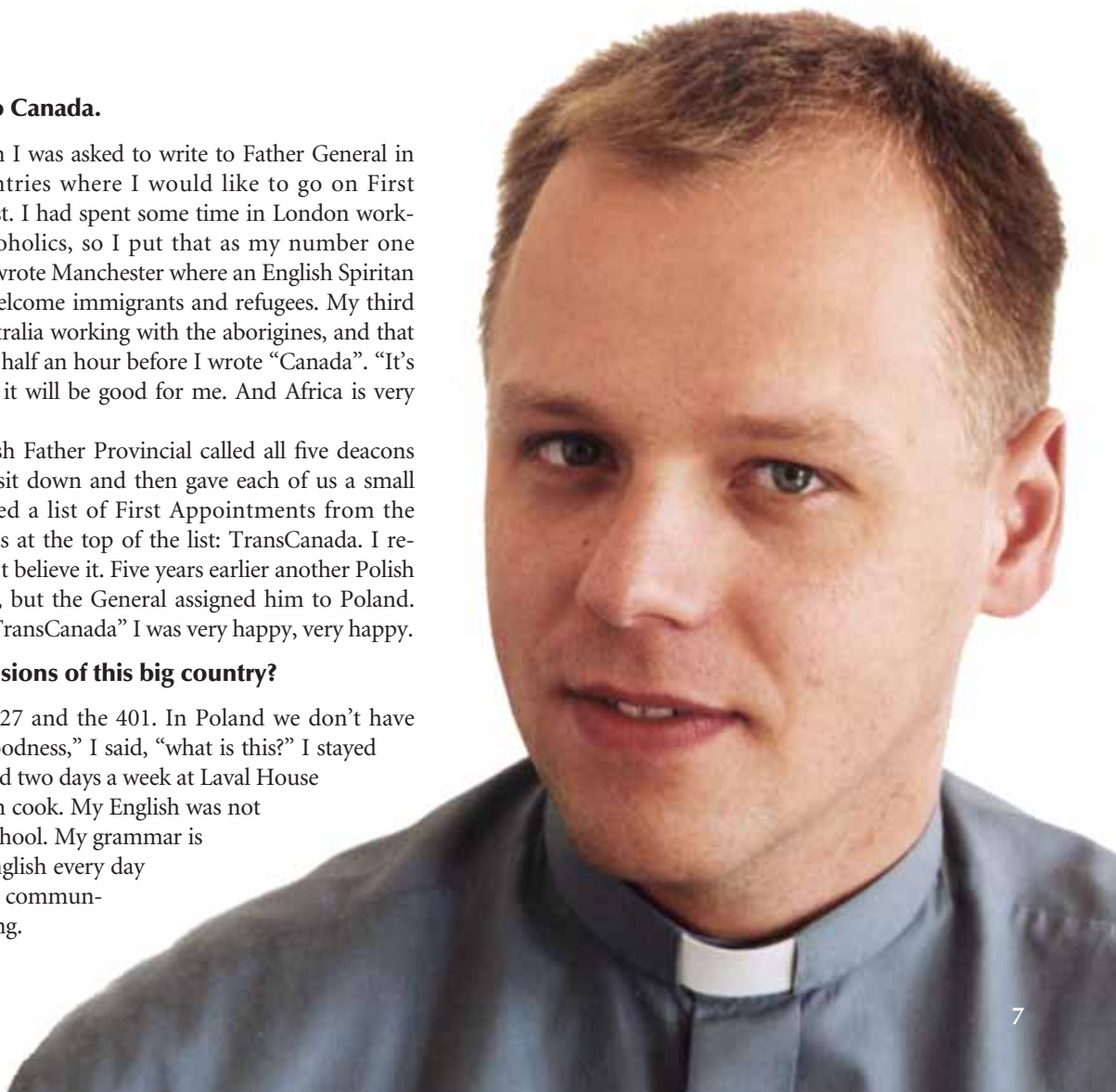
## Talk about how you came to Canada.

Before I was ordained a Deacon I was asked to write to Father General in Rome mentioning three countries where I would like to go on First Appointment as a Spiritan priest. I had spent some time in London working with drug addicts and alcoholics, so I put that as my number one choice. For my second choice I wrote Manchester where an English Spiritan works with Lay Associates to welcome immigrants and refugees. My third choice? I was torn between Australia working with the aborigines, and that big country Canada. It took me half an hour before I wrote "Canada". "It's cold there," I thought. "Maybe it will be good for me. And Africa is very hot... I'll write TransCanada."

Some months later the Polish Father Provincial called all five deacons into his office. He asked us to sit down and then gave each of us a small candle. He said he had received a list of First Appointments from the Superior General. My name was at the top of the list: TransCanada. I remember I cried a little. I couldn't believe it. Five years earlier another Polish Spiritan had requested Canada, but the General assigned him to Poland. When the Provincial told me, "TransCanada" I was very happy, very happy.

## What were your first impressions of this big country?

My first big surprise was the 427 and the 401. In Poland we don't have highways like those. "Oh my goodness," I said, "what is this?" I stayed at Des Places apartments, worked two days a week at Laval House and there I met Alina, the Polish cook. My English was not very good. I went to language school. My grammar is still not very good, but I talk English every day and live in an English-speaking community, so little by little it is improving.





I remember when Fr. Mike Doyle went with me to the language school and told me I should take the subway home. After classes I went along the street looking for the Subway... Subway... Subway. "Ah, there it is," I said. I opened the door and found myself in a shop very like McDonald's. I asked them where I could buy a ticket and was told I was in the wrong kind of subway. If only Fr. Mike had told me that what is called the Underground in London is called the Subway in Toronto.

**Here we have everything and I think we must all thank God for the people here and this country. Yes, the culture is different, the mentality is different. But if we are flexible all will work out.**

### **What did you find difficult when you came to Canada?**

The weather. First it was too cold, then too warm. I learned what it means to be hot and humid at the same time. But I think God gave me Canada. God gave me a good Spiritan community, maybe a little old. But if we have good connections it's not very important how old priests are. What matters is that we have the same love.

Being the first and only Polish Spiritan in TransCanada is not always easy. So it would be good to have another Polish Spiritan here with me: someone to talk with when difficulties arise, someone with the same mentality, the same language, the same culture. It would be a comfort to me to have a Polish Spiritan nearby, a friend.

Every day I pray, "Thank you, God, because you give me everything." Michal, my Spiritan friend in Madagascar, doesn't have what I have: electricity, running water, a shower. He has a prison in his parish. Last year forty-eight prisoners died because of no food. So three days a week he cooks rice and brings it to the prisoners. Here we have everything and I think we must all thank God for the people here and this country. Yes, the culture is different, the mentality is different. But if we are flexible all will work out.

### **How did you become a Spiritan?**

My family lived in a Spiritan parish and the schools I went to always had a Spiritan catechist. He was usually a seminarian doing some practice teaching before being or-

ained a Deacon. One catechist was particularly good. He played the guitar; we played basketball with him and prayed with him. So I was close to the Spiritans as I grew up.

I went to a technical high school and then to university for two years to study construction and electrical engineering. This was my father's trade and I intended to follow in his footsteps. We were a very close family, my mother and father and two sisters. My father worked very hard — usually twelve to fourteen hours a day. I remember

every evening we waited for him to come home and then we prayed together as a family. Yes, I know I looked at my watch as the minutes went by, counting them one at a time and waiting for the prayer to end. But looking back now I remember what was going on and how good it was.

After my second year in high school I went on a pilgrimage to Jasna Gora, the famous sanctuary of the Black Madonna. We went as a group of seven. The first time we went — I was sixteen — it took us twelve days to walk the 300 kms from Bydgoszcz to Czestochowa in continuous rain: not bad for a group of teenagers. The following year I thought about it again, I felt I should give twelve days of my two months' summer holidays to God — that wasn't too much to expect.

My friend Michal said to me, "I need to see what people are doing on this pilgrimage." So he joined our next group. He never went to Communion at our Masses, but today he's a Spiritan in Madagascar and I'm a Spiritan in Canada. I still keep in regular contact with him and I try to help him out. His mother died recently. Her name was Eva. My mother's name is Eva, both of them born in the same year. He has two brothers. I have two sisters. We studied together for five years in high school, went to the novitiate together, and spent seven years together in the seminary. Now he's a priest and I'm a priest. We have very good connections.

I first thought of going to the seminary after I had done the Jazna Gora pilgrimage

for the fifth or sixth time. I wanted a missionary seminary so I had to choose between the Spiritans and the Vincentians. I really don't know why I went to the Spiritans. Maybe the Holy Spirit was guiding me.

### **What was seminary life like?**

During our two years of Philosophy it was work-pray, work-pray. I remember those years very well. We had the opportunity to go to France to see where the Spiritan Congregation was born — Paris, where Poullart des Places studied and Saverne, Francis Libermann's home town. I went to London to study English for six weeks and to work with drug addicts and alcoholics. Every three years during Holy Week there was a meeting of Spiritan seminarians studying in Europe. We got to know Spiritans from other countries, speaking different languages: French, Portuguese, Spanish. We also met the African Spiritans studying in Europe and got to know them.

### **You're now in St. Joseph's Parish, Highland Creek. Talk about your life there.**

My introduction to St. Joseph's was during a school break from language classes. Fr. Peter Fleming was pastor then and he phoned Our Lady Queen of Poland Parish in Scarborough so that I could spend one day a week in a Canadian parish where they spoke my language. It was not the same as a parish in Poland. Now I am full time in St. Joseph's as Associate Pastor with Fr. David Okenyi.

I notice some differences. For example, on Holy Thursday in Poland the priests wash the feet of twelve men. In St. Joseph's there are eighteen people, women and men. That came as a big surprise to me. But if that is what is done here, I will gladly do it. Another difference — in Poland the wedding ritual calls for the priest to place a stole over the joined hands of the couple as they exchange their vows. Sometimes I do that at Canadian weddings. A third difference — I found it very strange going to a mausoleum at a funeral and entombing the dead person. In Poland we always bury the dead in a grave.

### **How about your visits to the schools in the parish?**

I visit three of the schools in the parish — St. Jean Brebeuf, St. Brendan and St. Dominic Savio. When I go there I see how Toronto is one of the special places in the



Subway... Subway... Subway. Ah, there it is!

Photo by Paul McAuley, CSSP

world — so many nationalities here. This came as a big surprise to me — but a very happy one.

I'm very happy to celebrate Mass in the schools for the students, teachers and some parents. I don't ever remember that happening in Poland. I love to celebrate with the children. At first I used to prepare a homily and read it. But that's not the same as talking to them and having a connection with them. Now I prepare what I want to say and then go in and talk to them rather than read to them. The children listen and don't just sit there and look at me reading. Afterwards when I see them in church, they come up to me and say, "Hello, Father" and give me fives. I love this.

**St. Joseph's has many parishioners actively involved in parish life and church activities.**

Yes, yes, this is very beautiful. In Poland the priest does everything. But the church

is not only the priest's church. It is the Catholic Church — so if you are a Catholic you help out. We are two priests in St. Joseph's with about 3000 families, maybe more. If we had to do everything we'd be dead after two years. I think it is beautiful to see so many groups doing so many things in the parish. Lay people should be allowed to become more active. Too many churches have become too boring, too boring. Every week is the same; every week only the priest talks. No, we must change this. Here in St. Joseph's I think it is excellent.

**What are your responsibilities as Associate Pastor?**

I go to the three schools and two nursing homes as part of my regular duties in the parish. I am chaplain to the Knights of Columbus and the Legion of Mary. I'm still learning more and more about my new situation. I don't yet know the answers to all

the questions people ask me — it's still new to me.

**Canada is your First Appointment. Do you see yourself going someplace else after that?**

My First Appointment is for six years. But I remember Fr. Michel Jolibois telling us we must not think six years, but give our whole life to the place and people to whom we are sent. A First Appointment may turn out to be a lifelong appointment. The Spiritans in Canada need more hands to work. Theirs is a special situation where the average age is high. So I think we need more new blood. When Robert DiNardo (Spiritan candidate) asked me if I would be moved after six years, I answered, "I will stay longer if the TransCanada Province needs me. I will stay here because this is my home, my family. The Holy Spirit has given me this country and if I am needed here I'll be staying here." ■

# TRACING A NEW PATH

Damasus Okoro, CSSp

In November 2000, the appointments for my seminary class of Nigerian Spiritans due to go on mission service were released. In June 2001, I was ordained and 'empowered' for mission. With due consultation, I was posted to Pakistan. Just the mention of this name raised goose pimples among my family members and friends. This is so because Pakistan is an Islamic State and it had made news headlines due to attacks on churches and church institutions. Also in neighbouring Afghanistan the USA were pounding the Taliban. All these facts painted a picture of insecurity and fear. It took me two years to secure the visa, and so on November 14th, 2003, Brendan Aroh and I set out for Pakistan.

## Initial shocks

Landing in Pakistan we met with inclement weather. It was the peak of winter. We had never experienced such cold weather previously. The language (Urdu),

was strange and reminded me of the apostles when they spoke in tongues. I didn't know any word in Urdu apart from the word "Urdu" itself. This too posed a challenge as Urdu is not written in Roman script. All the Pakistani food appeared over-spiced for me and eating the food was accompanied by shedding of tears, probably a way of enjoying a delicacy! But I think the spices induced the tears.

The wide margin between the rich and the poor not only amazed me but frightened me terribly and made me realize there was much to be done. Feudalism is still a way of life in Pakistan. Here we have both the big landlords and the 'haris' who work on the land almost as slaves. Among these poor people are the Marwari Bheels with whom I work. They are economically poor and exploited. In Pakistan and in Sindh in particular, bonded labour is very common. Here they are forced to borrow large sums of money to pay for medical treatments, to

marry their children well by providing a dowry and at death to perform the funeral rites appropriately. An entire family can be pledged or bonded in return for loans given to their parents or guardians. Even death does not give them respite from bondage. The misery, one can almost say slavery, continues with the burden of paying off the debts which are automatically transferred to children when parents die. What a vicious cycle!

In this milieu of poverty, there is little or no access to health, education and the basics required to live in dignity. Education of course is the least priority as they concern themselves primarily with basic survival, the safety of their family and children, and working long hours for what they and their animals will eat.

## Where to begin

Looking at the unending cycle and the evils of feudalism it was difficult to know where to begin. What's my point of entry, in this vicious and ruthless cycle that leaves the vulnerable poor little chance for survival? Here the mission statement of Christ came to mind and this has remained a propelling factor for me and addresses the crux of my work. "The spirit of the Lord is on me for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18).

## My expectations

After the long period of formation in the religious life and having come from a traditional Catholic background, I thought I had all that I needed to plant and cultivate the seed of the gospel anywhere. My assignment in Pakistan proved me wrong. Here I am not only sent to the 'lost sheep of Israel' but rather to those sheep 'that are not of this fold' whom I must walk with on a daily basis.

Previously I had a picture of the traditional church before my eyes even after reading and being informed about the mission in Pakistan.



Samina (in yellow dress) seems unaware that Damasus Okoro, CSSp (right) and a local health officer are discussing her condition.



"I am thrilled as I see our people showing interest in the Gospel message."

The Marwari Bheels are Hindus. My work is to dialogue with Hinduism, in the process proclaiming the message of liberation. I assist in establishing and supervising small primary schools, helping the sick by bringing them to hospital and also interceding where possible when injustices are being inflicted on our people.

### My first Easter

The experience of my first Easter here is still vivid in my mind. I had braced myself for the traditional Easter ceremonies. I went with a confrere to a distant ilaqa (village). The local language here was still very new to me and I was battling within myself as to which language I might sing the Exultet, as I knew it in Latin, English and my own native language. I asked the confrere if there was a good choir where we were going. Not to discourage me, he said I should not worry. On our way, like Isaac, I asked about the animal that would be used for the sacrifice. Again, he said I should not worry. Then we arrived in the village with a few scattered mud homes where the Holy Saturday liturgy was to be celebrated.

It was a humble bhagti celebration. Bhagti is a communal way of worship among the Marwari Bheels. It is the most popular expression of religious sentiments

for them. In the bhagti, there was no lighting of the Easter candle or singing of the Exultet. Rather we lit the incense and sang bhajans (hymns) emphasizing our unity with God and the union of our soul (atma) with the Spirit or Soul of God (Atman). This flowed into the gospel story of liberation and salvation culminating with a sign of fellowship with each other and with God through the sharing of bhavi (sweets or fruits).

### Great interest in the Gospel

The beginnings were very difficult due to the very different climate, food and language and a totally different set up than what I was used to. Now having become more fluent in the language and tuned in to the weather, I find my work exciting as I share Christ's love and his transforming grace among our people. I am thrilled as I see our people showing interest in the Gospel message. This I observe when I show them a film of the life of Christ. I find them clapping their hands and excited at the miracle scenes, especially when Christ feeds the 5000 or heals the sick. On inquiry, I realized that they too are yearning for liberation from hunger, fear, evil spirits, forces of oppression and from slavery. Yes, and a yearning for good health too. Our

health care apostolate has made the holistic nature of Christ's liberation very clear to our people. So while taking care of the soul, the body has not been left untended.

### Our people

A little girl Samina, had suffered for eight years from chronic TB of the spinal chord that left her almost paralyzed, subdued and lonely. After we brought her to the hospital, a light was seen at the end of the tunnel. But a complete cure required constant check ups and the taking of medications. On a visit to the family, I was greeted with a silence that made me very frightened. I realized she had not taken her medications for a while because they were finished and they had no money to get more. Hope came again when we got the drugs for her. Around the family house the voice of poverty was very loud.

Therefore despite the challenges the mission poses, there is much more to be done to bring the Gospel message into the hearts of our people. This special outreach to these marginalized but unique people has remained a soul-searching experience that keeps propelling me to action. It has been a new classroom where I have learnt a lot and am still learning, thanks to the support of the experienced confreres who were in the field long before I came. ■

# Availability: The Spirit of Our Ministry

Raymond Ugwu, CSSp

**M**y desire to “go teach all nations” was re-affirmed when news of the first group of Spiritans in the Philippines came to us in the Seminary in Nigeria: they built “Nipa” huts and churches, and tree houses, and they made ways where there seemed to be no way. This touched my adventurous spirit and inspired in me a desire for the Philippine mission. When the time came for me to apply for my first appointment, without hesitation I choose the Philippines



because of the new Spiritan focus on Asia, the internationality of the group, their contributions to the diocesan seminary, their move to begin a formation programme, their ministries to the sick, the imprisoned, the youth, the Filipino-Chinese and the mountainous people of Dikila-an and environs.

Without much preparation about the people and their cultures, I arrived in the Philippines on September 10, 2004, exactly two months after my Ordination on July 10, 2004. My first night brought me face to face with a new language, new food, new culture and people and customs. The following Sunday we went to where I was to spend six months in the Philippines learning the Cebuano language which is widely used in the remote region of Mindanao. During my time in the language school, I stayed three months in a Chinese-Filipino Parish, Obrero-Davao City. I also had a week's language practice in Calidngan parish in Cebu Province. These exposures made me appreciate the people's way of living, thinking, culture and civilization. It also equipped me to face the ongoing tension necessitated by the way they practiced their Christianity and what I was used to at home.

After the five weeks practical exposure to Filipino families and basic Ecclesial Communities in Cebu, I finally came home to Iligan, the Spiritan mission land in the Philippines. Here my official assignment is to be the chaplain of two colleges: The Lyceum of Iligan Foundation (which is purely for the college students) and the Iligan Capitol College (which houses both college, high school and elementary departments). My work here includes monthly celebration of the Eucharist, Spiritual direction, organizing recollection and retreats for the students.

### Teaching ministry

One day, the rector of the philosophy college seminary asked me, "Are you ready to teach in our seminary?" I agreed at once because the request actualized my desire to contribute to the intellectual, moral and spiritual formation of students searching for happiness, knowledge, truth, and meaning in life. So I teach a variety of courses to the young men in the seminary who are in training for the priesthood.

Though teaching ministry is not easy, it offers me joy, happiness, an opportunity to study and reflect, and to serve God and



Above: Chibuikere Ojilere, CSSp serves in prison ministry in the Philippines.

Facing page: Raymond Ugwu, CSSp — "Working with youth keeps you always youthful."

humanity. Due to our different cultural background, and because of some institutionalized academic standards, both I and the students struggle to understand the other's way of life, language, principles and ethics. These obstacles teach professors and pupils to accept the setbacks, frustrations and objective discipline found in any formation process.

When not teaching in the Seminary, I am available to replace any of my Spiritan brothers if they have to be absent from their mission. Being a "Mobile Pari" has helped me gain experience of many types of ministry.

### Hospital ministry

For more than two months, I was the acting chaplain of the Mercy Community Hospital run by the Missionary Sisters of Mercy. There, we administer the sacraments to the sick and those who take care of them, bringing Christ to them on their sick bed, give them hope, comfort and strength to share in Christ's sufferings, and help them to understand suffering as a mystery and to bear their pain more bravely. At the same time we minister to the spiritual needs of the doctors, the sisters and other staff dedicated to helping the sick in their struggle for life, and against sickness and death.

### Youth ministry

Working with youth is a ministry that keeps you always youthful, current with the time, alive and active. It leaves you with an ever exciting experience of growing up. For four months in 2005 and since February 2006, I serve as Chaplain in a youth center called Catholic Center Campus Ministry run by sisters of the Company of Mary. It is a center for students from different colleges who come there for spiritual enrichment. This ministry keeps me working and thinking about the welfare of students, how to liberate them from all vulnerable and dangerous exposure, and how to bridge the age old gap in communal living caused by years of religious suspicion between the Muslims and Christians.

The challenge of this work is the constant struggle to understand the day-to-day life, language, interest, signs and symbols of the youth. How do I penetrate the youth circle, articulate and understand their problems, inner fears, shyness, loneliness, old hurts, and feelings of inadequacy, awkwardness and love? How do I open up new possibilities for them to understand themselves, to encounter new depths in life, and to gain support and trust? In my homilies, retreats and boarding house meetings, as well as in social gatherings, I try to bring this about.

## Prison ministry

This is another ministry I have been doing during my time in Iligan. This is because it helped me to realize the plight of prisoners and their families, to see the prison community as a community of God's children and it pulled me away from an initial "I don't want to get involved" attitude. From September 2005 to January 2006, as the acting chaplain of Iligan City Jail I became a prisoner, not in chains but in ministerial association with prisoners, prison staff, prison volunteers and prison dependents. Together we formed the prison society which participated in the suffering of the inmates. Hence, I thought like a prisoner, thought for the prisoners, acted like a prisoner and worked with the prisoners and prison associates.

However, accepting this ministry was not so easy when my mind was set on the fact that prisoners are receiving due punishment for the offenses they committed, and so don't merit protection and care. But daily encounter with them and listening to their stories has given me a new understanding of who a prisoner is, someone who deserves mercy, concern, kindness and protection.

In Iligan City Jail, the living conditions are dreadful, yet with different activities like games, talent shows, songs and dances, catechism classes and the Eucharistic celebration, we kept ourselves busy, alive and

*Prison ministry pulled me away from an initial "I don't want to get involved" attitude.*

happy. The challenge in this ministry is getting volunteers and financial support to take care of the sub-human living condition of the inmates, the slow judiciary process and rehabilitation of the ex-convicts.

## Parish ministry

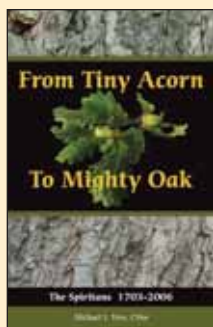
In Iligan, the Spiritans take care of two parishes, one in the mountains and the other in the city, and for six separate weekends, I supplied in the absence of their pastors. The one in the mountains is a mission of primary evangelization. There, the parishioners are poor tenants taking care of the rice fields, banana and coconut plantations of their land owners. The parish of Our Lady of Fatima, Dikila-an, is made up of thirty-two out stations set apart by mountains and streams. My first experience in this mountain made me realize how difficult the missionary vocation can be. It is this experience that I call my "missionary Baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit". On that day, I had to be driven for

forty minutes and had to hike for fifty-two minutes to minister to the people. The weekly collection is less than five dollars and the basic necessities of life cannot be easily found. I may end up spending fifteen dollars or more helping the needy, the sick and the financially pressed.

The Resurrection of the Lord Parish, Pala-O, is a city parish for the Filipino-Chinese living in Iligan. It helps to bond the Filipino-Chinese together and to uphold their Chinese spirituality and heritage in line with the gospel message as adopted by the Philippines church. Ministering to a community like this opened me up to another cultural world view and way of life.

To call me a "rolling stone which gathers no moss" might be a name befitting such a "mobile pari" as me, but my eighteen months contribution to the Spiritan mission and presence in Iligan-Philippines has been a fruitful, enjoyable and enriching experience. It has been a great experience with ever unfolding joy and inspires me with zeal to do more whenever the opportunity comes. Thanks to this "missionary availability", the propelling force of our ministry, and my confreres who have always inspired, encouraged, supported, motivated, and challenged me to forge ahead in this evangelical mission of God in the Philippines, I look forward to many fruitful years in this small corner of the Lord's vineyard. ■

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

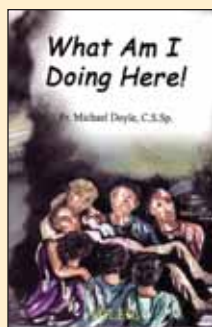


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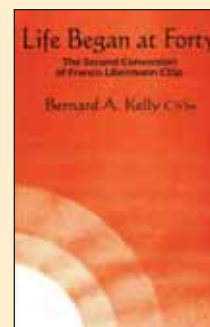


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# Why Have I Come?

*Emeka Nzeadibe, CSSp*



**W**hat could move a young Nigerian Spiritan to opt for a missionary insertion in a context where successive socialist governments have left a lasting impression on minds, people and structures? Is it meaningful to embark on such an adventure in a post-Marxist society? These were the questions I asked myself before setting out for Rostock.

To get a feel of what it would be like, to see things for myself, to visit the confreres who were already there and to hear their stories, I made a trip to the city in 2003. What I saw and heard confirmed my initial intuition. After a nine month intensive language course, I moved in March 2005 to Rostock. What then does coming to work in Rostock represent for me? A little background information may serve to make the point clearer and the contrast sharper.

My name is Emeka Nzeadibe. I come from Nguru Mbaise in south-eastern part

of Nigeria, Igboland. The church there is young and dynamic. Its presence in the public sphere is taken for granted. For most people, it is almost unimaginable to live without faith or religion. Rostock, where I work, is a town situated along the Baltic Sea coast on the north-east of Germany, in the Mecklenburg region. It was part of the Eastern Bloc. During the German Democratic Republic period, religion practically went underground. The Christians who held forth had it rough. Today 80% of the population has nothing to do with God, church or religion. They simply ignore it. Among the remaining 20%, 15% are Protestants and 5% Catholics. That means that the Rostock Spiritans meet a largely dechristianised population. How then do I find a way of being a missionary in such a place, where to believe is an exception and not believing is as normal as the air you breathe? What is the meaning of my presence and activities here?

## Meeting — encounter

To put down roots in Rostock, I need to be just like my confreres, Johannes Henschel and John Doyle: be open, meet people eye to eye, and reach out for the un-beaten paths. Taking refuge behind the priestly garb or clerical functions is out of the question. Putting down roots means going beyond the frontiers of the parish to be there for the people who are searching, those whom the classical pastoral approach cannot reach, to be present in non-church settings. In this regard, my missionary presence in Rostock is rooted in the Concept “Meeting-Encounter” whether in the Parish community, at the University, among the youth or the immigrants. Meeting people involves being interested in their stories and questions, joys and difficulties and having time for them. It involves above all an ability to move into situations that apparently have nothing to do with being a priest, but everything to do with being

Photos: Emeka Nzeadibe, CSSp celebrates World Youth Day and Corpus Christi Mass in Germany.



human. I am not just there to exercise an office, to administer sacraments, to sell my wares or to tell them what they cannot do. A good measure of flexibility and an easy-going attitude are therefore prerequisites for these unknown sites.

### **Being an African priest**

It may interest you to know that being an African priest here makes a lot of difference. It makes me stand out in so many situations, especially when I take on assignments, or speak in public or celebrate outside our normal Catholic community. The Rostockers are simply not used to it. Africa for most of them is a far off land, which has

### **Other Africans**

There are about 280 Africans in Rostock. They perceive my presence as something positive. Some of them have been in the city for years, attended church services and worship, but still were scarcely noticed or given any attention. One told me that each time he sees me at the altar, he has a particular sense of elation. He added that their presence can no longer be ignored. One referred to me as a "Figure of Identification". That, of course, I find difficult to accept, but it is very important for them. They recently held an election, to choose those who would represent their interests in the City. I was invited to the election.

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## **How then do I find a way of being a missionary in such a place, where to believe is an exception and not believing is as normal as the air you breathe?**

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little to do with their immediate perception except as a continent of wars, woes and worries.

I met a lady some time ago. She asked me, "In which asylum-seeker centre are you?" I told her that I was a priest. She asked, "A Catholic priest?" I said, "Yes". She told me that she was also a Catholic. There and then we began a deep dialogue. After an ecumenical religious service in the Rostock university church, which I presided, someone approached me and asked "Are you aware that today is probably the first time an African priest celebrated in the university church, since the foundation in 1419?" I said, "That's great, historic!" After another ecumenical service I had a chat with the Landessuperintendent (i.e. Bishop) of the Lutherans in Mecklenburg. He marveled at the fact that I work in Rostock, saying that in their church it was not possible. Last summer, Lutheran pastor Johannes Henschel and I went to bless a lifeboat for the Fire Brigade on the sea-coast. The tourists were on the beach and the locals were there as well. You could imagine the spectacle and the curiosity an African priest on their Baltic seacoast triggered off. After the blessing, we were driven in the lifeboat for half an hour. I thoroughly enjoyed it!

Before it began, one of them said "We have a priest here, let him conduct the election. At least he will be honest!" The others supported him enthusiastically and I conducted it. It was quite honest.

### **Learning their language and culture**

From the very beginning, I was conscious of the fact that my integration into German society presupposed a mastery of the language and an intelligent access to the cultural codes. From my earlier experience of learning French, I knew that it could be frustrating to begin from zero, to see myself just like a child who could not adequately express himself, while what I wanted to say was crystal clear in my mind. My command of the German language, though not perfect, is for the people I meet amazing. Besides, on arrival in Rostock. I took a course on culture and civilization at the University with a view to understanding the people I meet, their background, what gets them going, what forms their mentality and ways of life. I am happy that the people I meet do not have any particular difficulties understanding me. This makes communication flow freely, eases contacts and invariably contributes to breaking barriers and prejudices.

However, even with an adequate knowledge of the language, the learning is not yet over. A closer attention to people and things unfolds ways of being and doing that are particular to the people. For instance, the reflective aspect of the liturgy, which gives the impression of being distant (or outright dry) is striking. It is certainly far from the full-of-life, and the *joie de vivre* liturgies in Igboland. However that is not a sign that the people do not know how to celebrate. But I think it says something about them, about their society, culture and style of communication. Mecklenburgers are thought to be a rather distant and cold bunch, when they do not know you or when they are learning to know you. But if they trust you, they open their hearts to you. I have experienced this particular quality. When I speak or interact with them they usually seem to "want some more".

### **With the students**

Moreover being young and coming from another culture gives me access to other layers of the population: students of the Rostock University, foreign students and young people. Knowledge of English, French, and German comes into ready use in these areas. I reach out to them through Sports and Students' Clubs, through soirees, forums for discussion, prayer circle etc. With the students I go to the beach parties or discothèque and dancing. I also do inline-skating, and play volleyball.

Being a Missionary in this context then means "being there": with your person and personality. Being there creates possibilities that only presence can bring about. The people I meet get to know me, to know that I am also human and that I am interested in them as persons. They also get to know my convictions and what I stand for. At the same time a bridge is built for further possibilities. It is all about being a modest witness to reconciliation among people and cultures. Our international team in Rostock, by its intercultural make-up, bears witness to this fact. It is a sign which speaks far more than words.

For me, the Rostock Project is not only an authentic missionary challenge; it is a great opportunity to bring the Good News of Jesus to a people who have lost it, to walk with them in the manner of the earliest missionaries in our Church, to live with them in the hope of a brighter future. ■

# Why Are You Here?

*Hyacinth Anayor Nwakuna, CSSp*



**W**hen a request from the editor of this magazine came to me to articulate my experiences as a member of the Spiritan team in Ireland, one of the significant things that struck me immediately was the astounding common questions that Irish people with whom I come in contact, continually ask and still ask me: 'Hello' [Dia dhuit], they say, 'How are you?' [Conas tá tú]. 'What is your name?', [Cad is ainm duit] 'How long are you in Ireland?' 'What are you doing in Ireland?' 'Are you studying?' 'Do you like it?' I found these questions very integral and fundamental to my missionary work in Ireland.

## The changing Irish society

Whenever I reflect upon these questions they bring to mind the nature of mission today in the changing Irish Society. There is a movement away from the idea of ministry as the monopoly of those ordained, to the understanding that ministry is the responsibility of the whole people of God. There is also what President Mary McAleese would see as 'the apparent or alleged fear of recent inflows of immigrants' into the Irish society.

Its unprecedented economic development has propelled Ireland from being a country of emigration to one of immigration. And this newly found economic prosperity, with an associated perception of Ireland as an attractive place for work and study, poses a problem of how to cope with immigrants of all categories arriving in Ireland. Irish people have never experienced such an influx of immigrants before and are very concerned to know who is in their midst, what each person is doing, and, if possible, when each person is going. There is a perception that foreigners who are in Ireland are either working for economic purposes, studying, or are asylum seekers. Missionary work is hardly envisaged.

## Called by name

The question 'what is your name' is a question anybody could ask another person. It is natural and vital for ordinary human relationships. Because name is very important for Irish people, and they appreciate names, they would like to identify and know people by name and relate to them not just by the title they hold, but as a person 'first' and then subsequently as a 'Fr' 'Dr' or whatever title the person holds. For

them this makes relationship more personalized. This is because there is a huge captivating sense of respect and dignity for the human person. In Ireland everybody is somebody, even children. Such that when I addressed some priests as 'Fr' in my first few weeks in Ireland, they instantly cautioned me and reminded me that I should call them by their 'names'. Whenever I mention my name is 'Hyacinth' what comes to the minds of some is 'flower' or a BBC T.V. programme featuring the incomparable 'Hyacinth Bucket'. Fortunately this becomes a base for my name to remain indelible in the minds of many.

## A "return match"

'What are you doing in Ireland?' 'Are you studying?' These are questions I have responded to, often times to the same people. To come as a missionary is 'grand', 'absolutely fantastic,' 'lovely,' for many, but for others it is difficult for them to imagine that Ireland is turning out to be a mission territory, in the sense of receiving missionaries. Some will explain at length that long, long ago, Irish missionaries were in Nigeria, today ... here you are ... isn't it amazing? It is a 'return match' ... Tá fáilte romhat ...

Photos: Hyacinth Anayor Nwakuna, CSSp with students at Blackrock College and the Emmanuel community in Manooth.

'you're welcome'. And because missionary work is greeted with positive regard by many of them, they eventually inquire whether I like living and working as a missionary in Ireland. And that is why they pose the question 'Do you like Ireland?' that is to say 'Am I happy being with them?' Do I accept them as they are, with their values and world view? And I do. I find them very good, I am happy in their friendship, and enjoy their easy and caring way of life.

### **Arrival in winter**

My journey to priesthood started in 1987 when I joined the Holy Ghost Juniorate Ihiala, Nigeria. Having been

tremendous and superb. They are outstanding in hospitality and spirituality. I am comfortable and at home in their midst. What makes me marvel is that they are 'aging with grace' and many of our elderly Spiritan members still make a valuable contribution to the missionary outreach of the Congregation. The hallmark of it all is the marvelous provision made for me to gradually integrate into the work, both through educational and cultural empowerment.

Since I arrived I have joined the Blackrock College Pastoral team to which I am officially assigned. Part of our work is the organization of liturgies for the students

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## **Long, long ago, Irish missionaries were in Nigeria, today ... here you are ... isn't it amazing? It is a 'return match' ... Tá fáilte romhat ... 'you're welcome'.**

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ordained in July, 2004, I set out three months later for missionary work in Ireland. Full of anxieties and uncertainties of where I was going, I was relieved at Dublin airport to see Fr. Pat Palmer, the Provincial, who was there to welcome me. Immediately I felt at home. His presence at the airport was really a source of inspiration for me. Inside the airport building it was warm, but it was winter time. So outside I experienced real Irish winter weather for the first time. It was rainy, windy and extremely cold. The weather was really not friendly. I was dispirited, weighed down and almost reluctant to proceed out of the airport terminal. At the beginning it was a struggle to cope with the weather but I thank God I speedily acclimatized. It wouldn't be an exaggeration if I say I am enjoying it now.

### **Blackrock College**

The few years I have lived and worked in Ireland have been a wonderful experience. I am happy working with the Irish people who are friendly, caring and welcoming. The warm reception given to me by the Irish Spiritans is indeed excellent. They really love to see me and they desire to see more Nigerian missionaries. My community, Blackrock College, is quite

including the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. It also includes taking the students on retreats and visiting them at their pastoral placements and reflection centers. I am also taking Religion classes with the 4th year students in a module called 'Justice in the Developing World'. I found the students very attentive. Their openness to discussion in the classes, their curiosity to know about current events in the Church and society, and more especially their concern about situations in the developing world, overwhelm me. In fact their genuine contributions add to my own insights and experience.

### **Young people leaving the church**

My work in Balckrock College is more of a youth apostolate. The mass movement of the youth from the Church is like an earthquake that is about to shake the institution of the Church to its deepest foundations in Ireland. Young people are leaving the Church and they are indifferent to its message. This indifference is a symptom of deeper malaise that needs to be addressed urgently today in the Irish Church. One of the ways to address this is to ascertain where the Church has gone wrong, and then how to restore the confidence of the people in her teachings.

I am not perturbed about the criticism of the Church because it will turn out to be beneficial. The Church is flexible enough to adopt a listening ear to the values and aspirations of the people, especially the young. And again it is when we are criticized that we learn to adjust our own image of ourselves. But I am concerned about fellow-Spiritans George Boran's view: 'When the first generation decided not to practice or educate its children in the faith, the second generation has no faith reference' If this is true it will have enormous influence on the future of Catholicism in Ireland. This is a major challenge to us missionaries here today.

The Church in Ireland will regain its credibility only when the values it preaches are lived within the institution itself. I believe our mission today in Ireland does not merely require talking and preaching but depends particularly on our witnessing to a Christian type of life. In that way the confidence of the people can be renewed and the faith will be a sign of hope and inspiration.

I so much enjoy my apostolate in the school here because I see it as an integral part of work of evangelization. The way the Christian faith is declining in Ireland has made it so difficult to get the youth involved. I believe that through the school apostolate we can talk to the youth and preach the word of God to them. If we are to be "fishers of men" it is best to catch them young.

### **The challenge of secularism**

My missionary work in Ireland is not limited, however to the school environment; I reach out to others in the cities and country areas. I minister in the parishes when necessary, in the hospitals when there are demands, in convents and among some devotional groups. I believe that missionary work in this part of Europe is challenging, and will continue to be challenging as we are working with people who have lost confidence in the teaching of the Church. And again secularism is becoming the dominant culture. By secularism I mean a culture or mindset based on the proposition that 'God's existence need make no difference to the individual, and ought make no difference to how society is run. Therefore the public forum should be religion-free'. It may be more acute in future, but I am not scared. I remain optimistic because with God everything is possible. ■

# Vietnam

## — A New Spiritan Mission?



In the history of the Church, a surprisingly large percentage of new initiatives began with tragedy. History repeated itself on February 2nd this year when Fr. Brian Fulton, CSSp collapsed and died in Ho Chi Minh City while jogging in a local park.

Brian had been in Vietnam since March 2002. Because foreign missionaries are not permitted in the country he was officially there under the auspices of an NGO concerned with the care of orphans.

But he was also there to establish the connections needed for a future Spiritan team in the country. Its initial members would probably be Vietnamese Spiritans ordained in the United States, later supplemented, when a change in government occurs, with Spiritans of other backgrounds. Already the Spiritan teams in Taiwan are establishing relationships with the very poor fishing families of Hue in Central Vietnam.

But Brian was our pioneer. The Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Saigon spoke at his funeral Mass: "From Rome, our Cardinal has asked me to represent him and to share with the Congregation the sadness of losing such a good and devoted missionary. He asked me to thank the Congregation of the Holy Spirit for having given us a generous religious missionary, who loved and served the poor and the marginalized of Vietnam. The life of Fr. Brian was truly a concrete witness to the Good News. He came to Vietnam and spent more than four years in our service, as Spiritans, who are religious and missionaries, always do. As the government has not yet given permission to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit to work and serve officially and openly in Vietnam, Fr. Brian

asked to come here to learn Vietnamese and to help in charitable works. This is why he lived alone for the last four years. He reached a good proficiency in the language and worked especially with the lepers and the poor."

In these public words, we can see the first fruits of Brian's commitment to the poor and to Vietnam. His witness is the foundation on which we are challenged to build.

Our Superior General, Jean Paul Hoch, writes, "*With the death of our confrere, who was preparing to open a community in Saigon next September with some other confreres, the whole project seemed to have fallen apart. But now, to everyone's surprise, it seems that we will be able to strike deeper roots and rely even more on the support of the Church in Vietnam which through its laity and pastors, is urging us to go ahead with this new community and to share our Spiritan charism with young Vietnamese. The General Council fully supports this initiative. We ask you to pray for this project.*"

Vietnam is a country where over 250,000 were executed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries just for practising the Catholic faith. And in the present era, Vietnamese Christians are still suffering discrimination for their faith. But the blood of martyrs has been the seed of Christians and today in a population of about 40 million there is a Catholic population of about 3.5 million.

In the memories of Spiritans world wide, the name of Brian Fulton of Gounock in Scotland where his body lies buried will always be associated with this Vietnam, its wonderful people and its vibrant church. ■



# Food for Thought

Happy moments — praise God  
Difficult moments — seek God  
Quiet moments — worship God  
Painful moments — trust God  
Every moment — thank God

Quoted in *Spirituality*, Dominican Publication,  
November-December 2005

Jesus was a masterful storyteller. Like George Lucas (Star Wars), some of his stories were grand and sweeping with kings, armies, robbers, brigands, and others. Others were simple stories of the everyday: lost coins, lamps that run out, trees and birds, fishing and bread making. What Jesus knew instinctively, though, was that ordinary folk like parables, because they will be remembered and repeated long after any religious lesson...

A few years ago, the Wachowski brothers released a small film, *The Matrix*. Within a few days there was a buzz and box office receipts were piling up. This dark, offbeat sci-fi thriller became a pop sensation, but more than that, began a dialogue and debate about existence, good versus evil, and the nature of humanity, as well as God and Jesus Christ. Among ordinary people, there has been far more theological discussion and reaction to *The Matrix* and its two sequels than to any church statement.

As Christians we are called by virtue of our baptism to tell THE GOOD NEWS. This Good News is essentially a story of the Creator's love affair with the creation. This Good News story is grand, sweeping, bold and exciting — filled with drama, adventure, heartbreak and love. What have we done to the script to make it so dull, boring and unpalatable to so many people?

Perhaps we as a church should go to the movies more often. With a little humility, maybe we can learn something from George Lucas.

**Paul McAuley, CSSp**

The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness: not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free: free to sing their own songs, speak their own languages, dance their own dances. Free also to leave and follow their own vocations.

Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his or her own.

**Henri Nouwen**  
*Reaching Out*  
Doubleday, 1975

In the Western world, as we know, our churches do pretty well with those who walk through our doors on Sunday, but, and this is the problem, fewer and fewer people are walking through those doors. We seem to know what to do with people once they come to church, but we no longer know how to get them there.

**Ron Rolheiser OMI**

# Come for Coffee

*Extract from a letter from Willa Suntjens,  
VICS Volunteer in Ethiopia*

On Sunday, Dejere invited Cliff and me to a coffee ceremony in their house — part of their tradition. On our arrival an armful of freshly cut grass was scattered on the packed earth floor by one of the younger boys in the family.

Meanwhile the older brother chatted with us, eager to practice his English. He stood up to pour our cokes explaining that in his culture it is very impolite to pour a drink for a guest while sitting. He told us that there were nine children in the family, the oldest twenty-eight years old and the youngest eight months old.

Their father is seventy-four but has a much younger wife now. We were invited to meet his father who, it turned out, was sitting on a bed behind the dividing curtain in the same room. This distinguished-looking man looked very stately with a white muslin shawl wrapped over his shoulder. We presented him with a bag of fruit and candy that we had brought. When his wife came in, we gave her a bouquet of rather gaudy purple artificial flowers that we were told are appreciated as gifts.

## The coffee ceremony

We returned to our places of honor on the floor-mat to witness the coffee ceremony. Dejere's young sister glided in silently carrying a charcoal brazier, which she placed on the floor in the room. Then she bought a set of miniature coffee cups, a clay coffee pot, a flat metal pan, a metal stir stick that looked like a teensy garden rake, and a container of green coffee beans. Sitting on a low stool in front of the brazier, she set the flat pan on the top and spread the coffee beans on it. It wasn't long until the air was filled with the marvelous aroma of roasting coffee.

When the beans had turned a rich brown, the young girl brought the pan over to us so we could fan the smoke towards us and inhale the wonderful fragrance, expressing our appreciation as we did so. This done, she retired to her stool where she used a small wooden mortar and pestle to grind the roasted beans. She spooned the freshly ground coffee into the narrow spout of the pottery coffee pot, added water and set in on the heat to boil.

As the coffee brewed, an older sister served us the two "meats of Easter" — mutton and chicken in a special sauce. These meats are particularly special because for fifty-five days prior to Easter the Orthodox Christians follow a strict vegetarian fast. Another traditional dish appeared before us. It was made with whole boiled eggs that had been simmered with Ethiopian spices turning them an unappetizing yellowish-brown. Of course, along with this, we had the essential injera and wat.



"...the air was filled with the marvelous aroma of roasting coffee."

## The injera pancake

Injera is the national staple and is eaten at least once a day. It is most commonly made from tef, although the Gurage people in this area like to use flour made from false banana and in some areas they use sorghum. Injera is a most interesting food item. It's like a giant, spongy grey pancake at least 18 inches in diameter and made from slightly fermented batter. This batter is poured onto a large flat piece of metal or directly on top of a cast iron stove. Then it is covered with a cone-shaped lid made from basket materials impregnated with mud (otherwise the wicker could catch on fire). The steam created allows the top of the pancake to cook so it does not have to be flipped.

Ethiopians use these huge, soft pancakes as platters for their communal meals. Heaps of wat (spicy meat sauce) and sometimes little piles of local curd cheese are set on the injera. You rip off a piece of injera and use it as a scoop to take some of the wat.

Our friend Dejere brought a pitcher of water and a basin so we could wash our hands before we dug in. I consciously tucked my left hand behind me so I wouldn't be tempted to use it for eating — an absolute breach of etiquette. By now I counted at least twenty adults and children lined up against the opposite wall watching us. Only Dejere's brother ate with us.

By the time we had finished our meal, the coffee was ready. Our little hostess poured it for us, adding three heaping teaspoons of sugar to each of the tiny cups. It was strong and black, smelled wonderful, and tasted even better, sweetness aside. Fortunately we weren't offered the traditional three cups or I would have been awake for the rest of the week. As we sipped this delicious brew, Dejere tossed incense on the burner so that the room was soon filled with cloying smoke. ■

## Dida Wario, CSSp The first Ethiopian to be ordained as a Spiritan priest

It's early morning... In the grey light before the sun comes up the cattle are waiting for the thorn barrier to be removed so they can go to pasture for the day. The women have finished milking and everyone except a few herd boys are inside the houses drinking milk or eating whatever they are fortunate enough to have for that day's breakfast. It's quiet and peaceful as the wind slowly moves the trees surrounding the village. A normal beginning of the day in Borana country, Ethiopia.



Such scenes as the above are about to become a thing of the past for **Dida Wario**, the first Borana to be ordained as a Catholic priest and the first Ethiopian to be ordained as a Spiritan missionary. He will leave shortly after ordination for Kenya and his first assignment as a missionary.

When the first Spiritans went to Dhadim in southern Ethiopia in 1975 no Borana had heard of the Catholic Church and very few had any knowledge of any Christian religion. With few exceptions they all followed their traditional tribal religion which has very developed religious ideas and ritual, but with no element of Christianity in it, and no concept of Catholic priesthood.

The first thing to be established by the Spiritans in Dhadim was a primary boarding school. They realized that no lasting progress can be made in any society without an educated population. The Catholic religion followed a few years later; the first Borana Catholics were baptized in 1981.

Vocations take time to be generated and mature. Dida's family lived near the school in Dhadim and Dida attended grade school there. His family did not become Christian until 1990. Dida by this time was in high school in Yabello town where as yet there was no Catholic presence. After graduating from high school Dida began working with the Medical Missionary of Mary sisters in Dhadim in the health department and with AIDS counseling. By 1995 he had experienced enough Catholicism and saw enough of Catholic priests to make his decision. He was accepted into the Catholic Church and in 1998 he began his philosophy studies at the Spiritan seminary in Tanzania.

After three years of philosophy and a year of spiritual development in the novitiate in Tanzania, Dida moved on to Nairobi, Kenya where he studied theology for four years at Tangaza College, a Catholic theological consortium.

We congratulate Dida on his ordination to the priesthood and wish him many happy and fruitful years as a Spiritan missionary. ■

## We Welcome

**Fr. Anthony Sevali, CSSp** is the newest arrival in the TransCanada Province.

Born in Sierra Leone, he is a member of the Spiritan West African Province and has been assigned to the Archdiocese of Regina to work alongside Frs. Alex Osei and Michael Conteh in St. Joseph's Parish, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.

Ordained in 2001, Fr. Anthony Sevali has previously been a missionary in Nigeria and Sierra Leone.



## Congratulations to our Jubilarians – 2006

### Profession

65 years — Fr. Gerard McCarthy

55 years — Fr. Patrick Doran  
Fr. William McCormack

50 years — Fr. Louis Anthony Cassidy

25 years — Fr. Neal Shank

### Priesthood

60 years — Fr. Robert Hudson

55 years — Fr. John Cunningham

50 years — Fr. Amadeu Venancio Pereira  
Fr. William McCormack  
Fr. Enzo Agnoli

25 years — Fr. Gabriel Ezewudo

## Promoter of Peace

Lay Spiritan **Gary Warner** has been selected as Hamilton, Ontario, Citizen of the Year for his service in the promotion of peace in the city.

A professor of French Literature at McMaster University, Gary is fresh from being named to the Order of Canada.

At the Awards' Dinner, Gary's record of service and achievements ran to 19 pages. His wife Joy, also a Lay Spiritan, is regional coordinator of KAIROS, an ecumenical justice group and is chairperson of the Canadian Spiritans Justice, Peace and Reconciliation committee.



Photo by Jack Hourigan

## Letter to the Editors

In the February edition of *Spiritan*, I read Fintan Kilbride's article, "Learning by Doing". Most of the article is quite good but the final part, under the heading, The Essence of our Faith, is "Shocking" and I do not think it should have been published in a Catholic magazine and particularly in our *Spiritan*. It is a denial of the official teaching of the Church.

In his well known Encyclical "Casti Connubii" (1930), Pope Pius XI gave the official teaching of the Church as follows: "... any use of marriage whatsoever in the exercise of which the act is deprived, through human industry, of its natural power of creating life, violates the law of God and nature and those who do anything of this nature are marked with the stain of grave sin."

In 1968, Pope Pius VI published his well known Encyclical "Humanae Vitae" and herewith the essence of it: "We must once again declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun, and, above all, willed and procured abortion, even if for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as a licit means of regulating birth. Similarly excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act or in its accomplishment or in the development of its natural consequences proposes, whether as an end or as a means to render procreation impossible."

Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia, page 139, makes the following statement: "One of the most consistently held teachings of the Catholic Church has been that deliberately and directly interfering with the marital act in order to prevent conception or birth is a gravely evil action."

I do believe that you should, in some way, let your readers know that, as Catholic (Priests) you do not agree with Fintan Kilbride's statements on contraception.

(Father) Ted Colleton, CSSp

## We Remember

### Fr. Michael Brosnan, CSSp

Michael was a professed member of the Spiritans for 55 years. He was born in Ireland and ordained as a priest in 1960. He served as a missionary in Nigeria and Brazil, did development work in the Yemen Arab Republic, taught philosophy in England and Malaysia and served as Chaplain at York University, Toronto, for seventeen years. After a brief illness, he died in the early morning hours of February 27th, 2006 at the age of 76. Fr. Michael will be greatly missed by his fellow Spiritans, his relatives and his friends. We ask you to pray for the repose of his soul.



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**June 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

(Pentecost weekend)

**18 years and up**



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# To Water

And what if I were to sing  
to water  
like a farmhand crooning to the milk cow?

And what if I were to thank  
water — more space  
than matter — for permitting me  
to float on its skin?

Water, I am 90% you.  
I might as well sing  
myself a gurgling lullaby.

I wonder at the whales —  
their songs and skins immersed in sea —  
who cannot live if beached.  
Birthing calves in water,  
brine in their blood;  
whalesongs the waves they disappear in.

Then I'll sing to you, water,  
for if I don't, you won't  
flow through me but catch  
death in baleen, my throat.

— *Kate Marshall Flaherty*

Inspired by Professor Masaru Eurotto's experiments showing how water is deeply connected to our individual and collective consciousness.