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A Rainbow Coalition of Missionaries

I am always amazed, even after forty-five years in Canada, to meet people who believe that the Spiritans are a group of Irish priests. Granted the first Spiritans to establish a footing in English Canada were all Irish. But they represented a religious order that is world-wide and diverse.

Today our current Superior General is French but speaks Mandarin from his time in Taiwan. His assistant is from Ghana. The general bursar is Portuguese. The origins of the twelve new major superiors (see Page 22) are as diverse as the countries in which they serve. And not an Irishman among them.

A Papua/New Guinean Spiritan works in Australia, an Australian Spiritan is in Kenya. The longest-serving "foreign" missionary in Nigeria is from St. Vincent in the West Indies. An Arabic-speaking Spiritan from the U.S. talks to his Muslim neighbours in Iligan, Philippines in their native tongue. Polish Spiritans evangelize in Mexico using the ancient Tenek and Huasteco languages. Nigerians minister in Dublin, Puerto Ricans in Paraguay, and Madagascar Spiritans in Papua/New Guinea.

Even in English Canada not all Spiritans speak with an Irish accent, The Spiritan pastor Peter Wayow of Dundalk, Ontario was born in China and grew up in Trinidad, the pastor Alex Osei of St. Joseph's in Moose Jaw is from Ghana and David Okenyi of St. Joseph's Parish in West Hill, Toronto, is from Nigeria. He is ably assisted by Michal Jurkowski from Poland.

I think that the *Spiritan* catches the excitement of this truly international body. Like our team in Mexico which has twenty-five members from fourteen different countries, the *Spiritan* reflects a rainbow coalition of missionaries and their works.

Not so very long ago, we Spiritans operated in missionary teams consisting of priests and brothers of the same nationality. The Irish groups generally worked in British colonies, the French Spiritans in French territories overseas, the Belgians in the Congo, the Germans in German possessions. All the members of each team had a common language, culture and heritage. All had trained in the same Spiritan seminary in their home country. There was practically no communication and very little collaboration between the teams.

How things have changed! Today, all mission groups are multinational, multicultural and multilingual. Seminarians live and study with Spiritans from outside their home country, something that was very rare in former times. This helps them to live and function in the cooperative mission groups to which they are appointed after ordination. To live and work happily with others from a wide variety of cultures is a difficult challenge. I hope the *Spiritan* reflects the enthusiasm and joy of Spiritans in the mission fields today despite the double challenge of integrating among the people they serve and into the team they work with.

In this issue a Ghanaian talks of his work with the aboriginal people of Western Australia, a Nigerian is interviewed about the Church in Nigeria and North America, an American writes of Christian/Muslim relations and a lay Spiritan contributes a poem.

Happenings here at home are also recorded such as the festivities that marked Peter Fleming's retirement, along with a lovely essay on prayer by a teaching colleague of mine, as well as an article by a confrere who is a full-time missionary in retirement, Learning by Doing.

They all have something valuable to say. I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I and my co-editor Pat Fitzpatrick enjoyed putting it together.

Gerald FitzGerald, CSSp

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