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John Kamondia Wambu

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# The **they** people of South Hedland

*John Kamondia Wambu, CSSp*

**O**ver a year ago I joined Fr. Tom Kessy in South Hedland, Western Australia, to help in the Spiritan parish there. The town is a good example of how our world is increasingly becoming a global village with people of different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds living and working together.

The plight of the local Aboriginal people is indeed a sad one. Although they are the native indigenous people, although they have lived in this area for millennia, they have no input into the development in the region, no influence in the society of which they are the hosts. To the newcomers, the Aboriginal people have become the 'they' people. 'They' break into our cars, litter the town; 'they' are lazy, drunkards; 'they' do not take care of their children.

## **A welcoming people**

From the beginning, my experience with the native Australians was so different. From day one I received nothing but welcome in their community. I discovered values among them which our individualistic society has long abandoned. I discovered a profound spirituality, a respect for the physical world, strong community bonds, talents in art and music, riches that many in the rest of Australian society have not yet become aware of.

Like any people who have had no input into their destiny, who were never allowed to make decisions for the good of their community, many Aboriginals are angry, wounded, frustrated, and lack self esteem. As with aboriginals world-wide, the teenage suicide rate is high.

## **A people who thirst for Good News**

Christ came with good news for the outcasts, marginalized and oppressed. I realized that my mission to my people, my role in their society was to bring Christ's gospel, his good news, to them. Fr. Tom, myself and the members of our parish team have a vibrant home visitation pro-



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gram. This activity creates and sustains bonds with the wider parish community.

The parish youth group, the choirs, the family empowerment circle, all include native Australians. As a result of the application of Christ's good news message, the 'they' people are now 'us.'

## **Being African Helps**

The good news was brought by missionaries to my people in Kenya in the 20th century; recent enough for the memories of its arrival to survive.

The memories of a culture being suppressed and activities forbidden, without

them ever having been examined or understood, left hurts that still linger. If only Francis Libermann's norms and insights had been applied. He urged his missionaries to walk with their people, to live with their people, to learn from their people. Evangelization, as he saw it, was Africans being missionaries to themselves. He urged patience on his missionaries. He told them to relax, to let the gospel message be integrated into the culture, its religious beliefs and practices, and above all its stories. This takes time and cannot be imposed or accelerated from outside.

My vocation as a Spiritan missionary is to become an Aboriginal among the Aboriginals, to make my own their cultural heritage, to become part of their song-lines in imitation of Christ. My role is to listen, to share, to be part of the Aboriginal experience with all its agonies and ecstasies. ■

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John Kamondia Wambu is a professed Spiritan doing his period of practical mission apostolate before ordination. He is from the Kiambu district of Kenya.