

One Heart One Soul — Spiritans celebrate 300 years

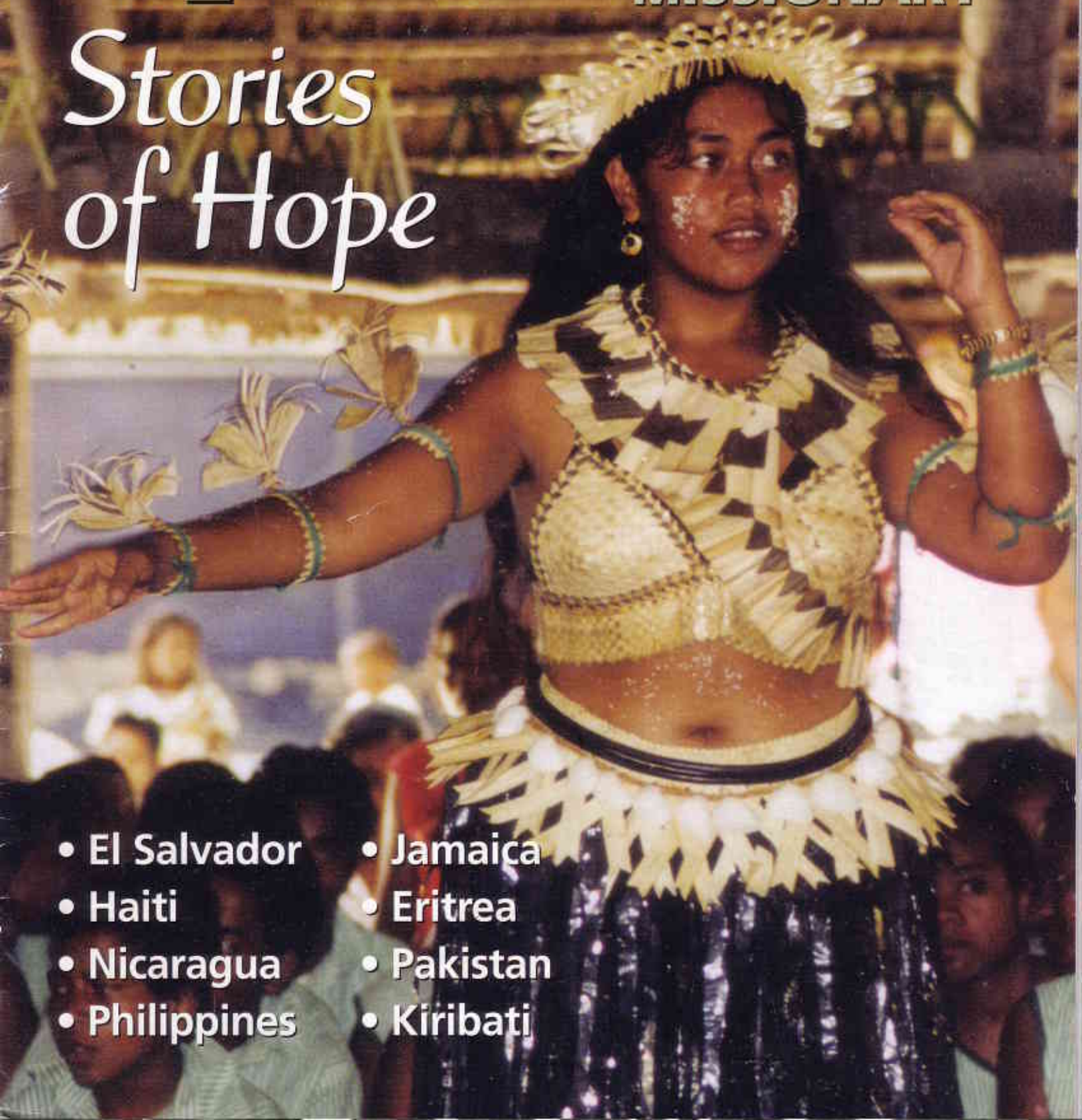
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Spiritans **NEWS**

MISSIONARY

Stories of Hope

- El Salvador
- Haiti
- Nicaragua
- Philippines
- Jamaica
- Eritrea
- Pakistan
- Kiribati



Story Power

There can be more than one correct answer to a question.

Q. Why did God make us?

- A1. God made us to know, love and serve him here on earth and to be happy with him forever in heaven.
- A2. God made us because God loves stories.

The first answer is one that many of us learned by heart in our catechism days. The second is Holocaust survivor and well known author Elie Wiesel's answer. The first is a statement of belief. The second is a tantalizing reply from the depths of Jewish experience.

The story goes that when God decided to select a nation to be the chosen people he first asked the Greeks what they could do for him. "If we were to be your people," they replied, "we'd honour you with the finest sculptures and the loftiest philosophy. Our great thinkers would probe your essence." God thanked the Greeks and went to visit the Romans to see what they could do for him. "We're a nation of builders. We'd construct great arches and monuments in your honour, and establish a wonderful legal system for you." God thanked the Romans and moved on.

Finally God came to a small group of people in the Middle East called the Jews. They had a reputation for being shrewd traders. "What could you do for me?" God asked them. "Lord God," they replied. "We don't have great buildings, we don't believe in graven images, and we're not into the essence of things. But we're a storytelling people. If we were to be your chosen people, we'd tell that story throughout the world." God finally smiled. These were his kind of people. "That's it!" he said. "It's a deal!" They became a people of the Book — a storybook people who never tired of telling how a ragged band of slaves in Egypt became the winners of the Chosen People of God contest.

Jesus was a Jewish storyteller, never at a loss for homely everyday parables to link God and his listeners. Yes, he talked about the kingdom, but he talked their language. In his stories God becomes a father dealing with his two sons, God identifies with a Samaritan outcast looking after a beaten up Jew on the road to Jericho, God is an employer paying everyone the same wage, God considers a poor woman's dime in the collection basket to be worth more than all the tax receipt envelopes of the rich.

Jesus' stories became our book of stories retold week after week. Why go to church on Sunday? There's more than one correct answer to that question too. One such answer: "We go to church so as not to fall out of the story."

Our own stories — the type of story you can read in this issue of *Spiritan Missionary News* — are usually about simple everyday happenings: Claude des Places preparing tomorrow's labourers, a man and a lady and Jenifer, Lydia at the foot of her cross, Père Antoine in Haiti, Mr. Nobody in Jamaica, Miriam — Child of God, Fr. Ted's 90th. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, William Faulkner said, "I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about."

We find ourselves in other people's stories too — we've been there or we wish we were there or we feel we should be there. Sometimes, perhaps, these stories leave us cold. They're not our story. That's fine. Not every story is for everybody.

Recently a radio programme on First Nations people was introduced as "Telling old stories in a new way." Interesting, I thought. Must listen to that. Two minutes into the programme my phone rang. Someone wanted to tell me her story.

Patrick Fitzpatrick CSSp

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Front Cover: Toka performing a traditional dance in Kiribati.

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Tomorrow's Labourers

Michael Troy, CSSp

When Claude des Places began his studies for the priesthood at the Jesuit College in Paris in October, 1701, probably the last thing on his mind was that two years later he would open a new seminary. However, as so often happens, the Holy Spirit, the "Right Hand of God", wrote straight on crooked lines.

Very soon after Claude became a comfortably housed boarder at the Jesuit College, he began to notice a rather badly dressed group of day-students in his classes, mostly country boys like himself. What a shame, he thought, that these young men, nicknamed 'pauperes' because they were getting free tuition in the College, were in such danger of losing their vocations because, all alone in the big city, they had to fend for food, lodgings and facilities to do homework.

In the beginning, no one objected when he quietly tried to help one or two of them with a little money or left-over food from the boarders' dining hall, but when it was rumoured he was going to leave his comfortable room in the College and go and live with these 'pauperes', everyone thought he was mad. And who could blame them, for Claude was not used to this kind of rough life in a lodging house, was not much older than the others and above all, was not a priest or a professor at the college, but only a seminarian.

Such stuff as dreams are made

To the outsider, life in rue des Cordières in those early days was nothing but misery. For Claude and his fellow boarders, however it was *leurs beaux jours*, (the 'time of their lives'), something like that of St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscans, when he and his first companions took on the job of repairing the little ruined chapel of the Portiuncula.

Rue des Cordières may only have been occupied for three years or less, but there was born the dream that would enrich not only the Church in France of

that time but the whole Christian world for centuries to come.

Dedicating themselves to the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, 1703, Claude and the others bonded themselves as an 'association of friends' with a 'one heart and soul' (*Cor Unum et Anima Una*) solidarity. They pledged themselves to be a special breed of 'tomorrow's labourers' ready to take on any work, however unrewarding, for which the Church was having difficulties finding volunteers.

Mission statement

If this 'mission statement' (to use a modern term) was quite extraordinary, the 'formation program' (again to use a modern term) was even more so.

These young men would model their clerical training not on seminaries for the upper clergy and their often less than demanding spiritual formation, or on seminaries for the lower clergy and their not infrequent very skimpy study of theology, but on religious institutes like the Society of Jesus. This would involve, after careful screening of applicants, six years of serious study (2 philosophy and 4 theology) and an almost military regime life style, study habits, household chores and community prayer! Why?

As they saw it, all this was necessary if they, as 'tomorrow's labourers', were to measure up to the demands of their future ministries as 'rag-pickers of the Church'.

However, this kind of seminary, organized by seminarians themselves and demanding so much of human nature, far from scaring, attracted so many high spirited and generous young men that all sorts of adjustments soon had to be made.

The price of progress

For starters, in six years Claude had to make many leaps of faith and financial gambles in the necessary move to bigger premises and quieter areas as well as draw up some basic rules for the residence. Proper prayer and studies were

not possible on noisy streets or in a free-for-all young men's residence.

Then Claude had to make a great personal sacrifice. Although a gifted speaker and zealous to preach the gospel himself, he now had to forget all this and become a full time mentor of those who would!

Les Messieurs du Saint Esprit

Although a born organizer, Claude soon realized that he could not do everything himself and so invited some home-town priest friends to come and help him. Later he was able to depend for this support on his own ordained students like Louis Bouic who, after Claude's death, as third Director, guided the seminary with great distinction for 53 years.

It was these volunteer associates (familiarily called *les Messieurs du Saint Esprit*) who first as secular priests and later as religious confreres eventually became the present Society of the Holy Spirit or Spiritans.

Le style est l'homme

Claude, then, was no outside sponsor financing a new project or a qualified armchair lawyer drawing up its bylaws, but a regular chartered member taking all the bumps and slowly but deservedly becoming identified with what all his fellow 'tomorrow's labourers' would ever hope to be.

As a gentleman (in the truest sense) he taught them the value of courtesy and mutual respect, as a scholar to be lifelong learners, as a man of God to merrily serve the Lord. His rules at first sight might seem harsh, but like St. Benedict, the founder of the Benedictines, he knew how to temper them with a gentle kindness.

Lessons for now

Claude and his friends were little concerned about titles as long as the good work went ahead. He intentionally avoided any publicity when he and his first twelve companions made their commitment to the Holy

Spirit on Pentecost Sunday 1703.

In fact, from the outset, Claude had to be careful to insist that he was opening a 'residence' for clerical students following regular lectures not in the residence but at the Jesuit Theology College.

This he did to avoid trouble both with the government because its draconian law of 1666 forbade the opening of religious communities without prior authorization, and with the Church that forbade opening a 'seminary' without permission of the local bishop.

At first sight, this whole story of the early foundation of the Spiritans may seem just ancient history, but in the light of the many sad recent clerical scandals, much may be learned by those who train 'tomorrow's labourers' from Claude's carefulness in continuous screening of candidates for the priesthood and in never shortening or lowering the standards of their spiritual or theological formation. ☩

300th Anniversary

Papal Audience — May 26, 2003

An anniversary is always a time for giving thanks for the road that has been traveled and the gifts received. Today the Church is happy to do this with you, thanking God for all the work accomplished by your Congregation over the last three centuries, particularly in the evangelization of Africa, the Caribbean and South America.

Celebrating an anniversary also means rounding a cape and pressing on ahead... "Cast out into the deep!" Be faithful to the twofold heritage that you have received from your founders: dedication to the poor and the missionary apostolate — the announcing of the Good News of Christ to all peoples. These two orientations of your lives open up large horizons for you. They involve being at one with those whom the world reduces to dependency or pushes to the margins, the poor who make up the vast majority on some continents, but who are also found in our most developed societies. In this way you will be witnesses to the closeness of Christ and let them hear the joy of his call.

Do not let yourselves be halted by difficulties... but put your trust in the freedom and strength of the Spirit who accompanies and guides the Church.

From the start, your founders wanted to place you under the protection of the Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Heart. I confide once more to her caring intercession all the members of your Congregation dispersed throughout the world in the service of Christ and his Church. May the trust that Mary had in the Word of God be a light for your own lives.

With all my heart I give you my apostolic blessing.

From the Vatican, May 26, 2003

