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Spiritana **NEWS** MISSIONARY

50 YEARS OF MINISTRY 1954-2004



“Down the Arches of the Years”

As we celebrate our 50th Anniversary in English Canada, we Spiritans look back in joy and gratitude.

On October 1954, six Irish priests in black cassocks gathered in a rented house in Woodstock, Ontario. They had come to establish a new branch of the Holy Ghost Fathers in a country where other religious groups, whose primary objective was to send what then were called “foreign missionaries” to establish and serve the Church in distant places, were flourishing. They were justified in imagining that they were starting a process that had been so successful in so many other “home countries” such as France, Germany, England, the U.S.A., Ireland, Holland, Poland and Portugal. They presumed that the passage of time and a continued supply of newly ordained priests from Ireland would lead to the spread of information about the group’s purpose and special charism across the country, the attracting of vocations to the priesthood, the foundations of high schools, the building and staffing of a seminary, the selection of an overseas mission and the steady stream of young Canadian priests following in the footsteps of Brebeuf, Monsignor Fraser, Leduc and Bishop Scheffer.

How could they have known the changes in the social structures and in the Church that lay just around the corner? The nineteen sixties turned everything upside down.

So, did the dream of the founding fathers end in failure? Did everything that they hoped for fail to materialise?

No. In fact things happened way beyond their dreams. The flow of vocations to the priesthood which came to a stop in the late sixties came alive again in the seventies and eighties. The results of this infusion of new blood means that the future of the Spiritans in Canada is now in the hands of Canadians.

Another exciting development has been that newly ordained priests from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Poland have been appointed to membership in the group. What was once an Irish community is now truly Canadian, in that it is multicultural.

Also as the years passed, the Holy Ghost Fathers, now called Spiritans, attracted to their group, men and women dedicated to the dream of Des Places and Libermann who were anxious to share in the work, community life and spiritual resources of the group. In this area of Lay Spiritans, Canada was the initiator and remains in the forefront of a movement that has been taken up by many other Spiritan groups worldwide.

In addition another group of lay people, who did not want a close spiritual association with the Spiritans, but who were inspired by the spirit of the group and who wished to share in its overseas projects, emerged. Called “VICS Volunteers”, over 600 of these dedicated and skilled Canadians have served in some of the most disadvantaged and out-of-the-way places in the world.

This issue of *Spiritan Missionary News* contains articles about our works in Canada and abroad; stories about Spiritan priests, lay Spiritans and VICS volunteers, their ministries and their vision.

Yes, Fathers Leo, Nick, Garry, Paddy, Bob, Des, your hopes and dreams have been realised. Your vision and talent and labour have indeed borne fruit. May the next fifty years be as exciting and as productive.

Gerald FitzGerald, CSSp

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Evangelization

Job Descriptions

Anthony Gittins, CSSp



What does God do for a living? God reaches out to the ends of the earth and gathers in all people. Mission is God's job description.

Jesus brings mission down to earth. He too reaches out and gathers in. That is his job description. He can truly say, "When you look at me, you see what my Father does for a living."

Jesus invites us to a new way of living. Our job description is discipleship.

Disciples are challenged to show wisdom by trusting people, to lead people by serving, to handle offences by forgiving, to handle goods by sharing, to handle enemies by loving, to handle violence by suffering. Jesus calls us to think differently, to repent: not to worship our insular idea of God. Like Mary, we must proclaim God's greatness and love and what God has done for us.

The technical name for this is Evangelization.

Evangelization is not a programme, but a way of doing adapted to the needs of the people being evangelized. It comprises four essential elements: proclamation, witness, dialogue and liberation.

Proclamation

"There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom, and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (Pope Paul VI).

We should not confuse proclamation with proselytizing. Proselytizing connotes brainwashing, aimed at gaining converts, paying scant respect to personal freedom,

"To bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free"

and even presuming that the salvific end justifies any coercive means. Proclamation, on the other hand, gently yet firmly announces the good news while showing the greatest respect for the thoughts, beliefs and freedom of others.

Witness

There has to be a certain fit between what we say and how we live. Jesus not only spoke about God's love, but his life constantly and consistently bore witness to it. Witness is the way we live the proclamation. The word "martyr" comes from the Greek word for witness. In a real sense we are called to be martyrs for our faith — not necessarily to die for it, but certainly to live it. By the way he lived, Jesus proclaimed the unconditional love and compassionate forgiveness of God.

Dialogue

In dialogue we genuinely listen to the other. Our answer is not predetermined: we hear the other person out. We never know where real dialogue will lead us. We allow God to take us to unknown places, with no control over the direction we take. True dialogue changes both speakers. Its outcome can never be known ahead of time.

Inter-church dialogue (ecumenism) is sincere and respectful conversation between Christians. Inter-faith dialogue attempts something similar between Christians and members of different religions, no matter how worldwide or small scale. "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in (other) religions.... (They) often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all persons" (Vatican II).

Such encounters break down boundaries and cross frontiers. They take us to people we haven't yet met and places we haven't yet seen. These people and places may disturb us and our entrenched points of view. But we trust God enough to allow him to lead us beyond our narrow world.

Liberation

Jesus defined his mission as follows: to bring good news to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." "Captives" includes those in all kinds of addictive situations. The "downtrodden" includes all those who are broken spirited. Giving new sight to the "blind" embraces offering vision, fostering insight and removing blind spots.

Proclamation, Witness, Dialogue and Liberation cannot always be practised simultaneously. Sometimes one, sometimes another will be emphasized. None of them is optional. The good news cannot be watered down. It cries out to be told by each baptized Christian according to his or her gifts, abilities and opportunities. ❖

Neil McNeil: Spiritan experiment in Canadian education

The blessing and official opening of the Neil McNeil High School was a gala day. Not only for the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers in Canada, but for the Catholic people of east end Toronto. Mgr. Denis O'Connor, Pastor of St. John's and Chairman of the Archdiocesan Secondary Schools' committee, blessed the school premises. Fr. Leo Brolly CSSp represented the Superior General. Fr. Tim O'Driscoll, Provincial, travelled from Ireland to be present. The Holy Ghost Fathers opened the new school on September 8th, 1958 with a staff of six Fathers, two lay teachers and 200 students. The school, dedicated to the memory of that great champion of Catholic education, the Most Rev. Neil McNeil, Archbishop of Toronto 1912-1934, insists on strong discipline, application to work, and a healthy competitive spirit inside and outside the class. *(Press Release)*



Colum Corrigan and six Grade 9 students on opening day, September 1958.