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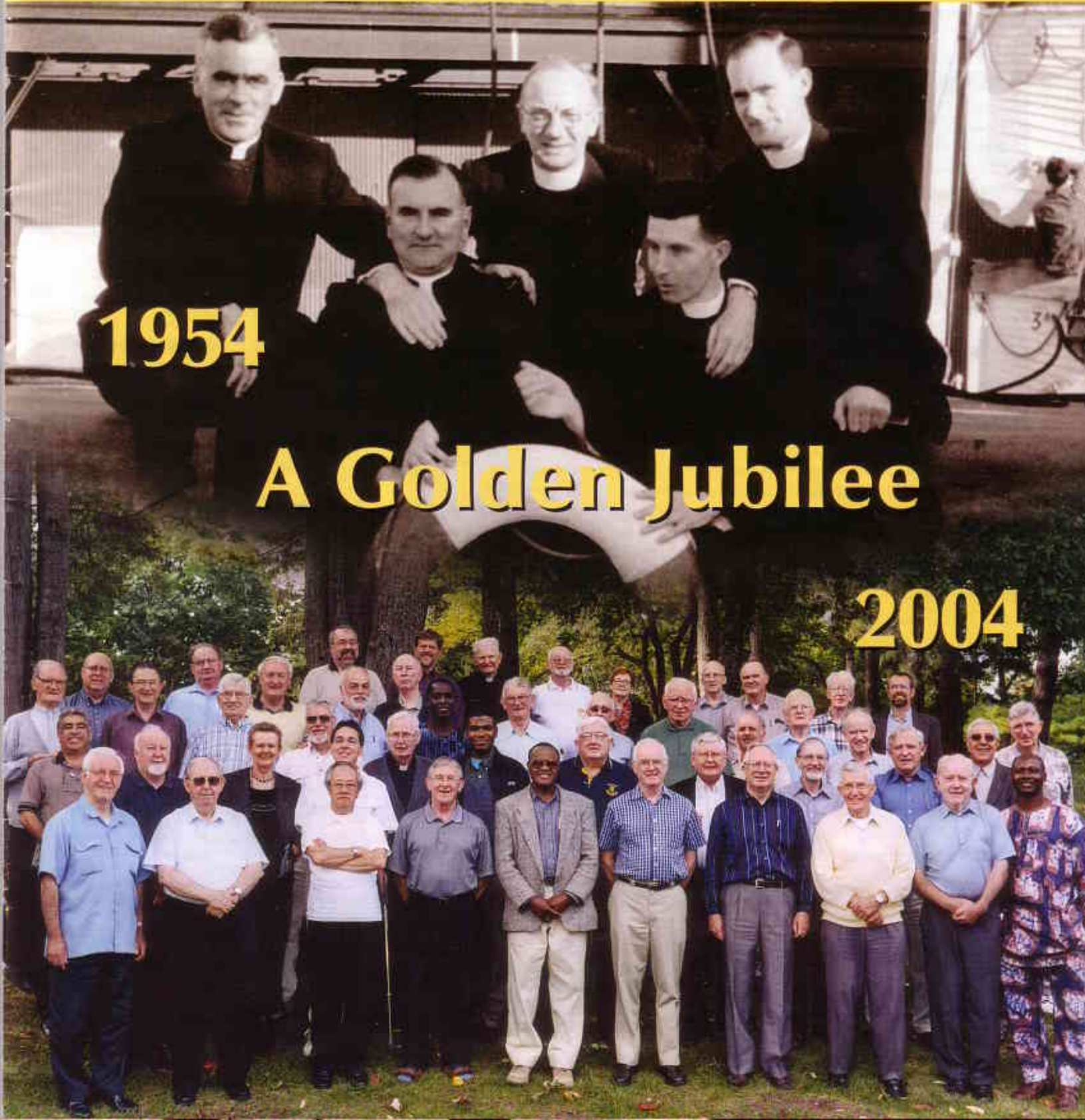
Spiritana **NEWS**

MISSIONARY

1954

A Golden Jubilee

2004



A place to stand a place to grow

In October 2004 the Spiritans celebrate fifty years in English-speaking Canada. And although the first Spiritan arrived on our shores in 1732 and our group has been well established in Quebec for a century, we were virtually unknown in the rest of Canada fifty years ago.

But the seed planted then has grown and spread and we have proudly taken our place alongside the other great missionary movements which have flourished in Canada for much longer than we have. The soil here must be particularly suitable for growing missionaries as there is hardly a religious group in the country which does not have a significant presence in mission fields, home or abroad.

Canadian priests and sisters, religious brothers, lay associates as well as volunteers, are to be found in large numbers in works of evangelization worldwide. I would hazard a guess that there isn't a third world country where you will not find Canadians at the cutting edge of God's mission on earth. From the frozen tundra of the Canadian Arctic to the steamy jungles of tropical Africa, Canadians obey the Gospel injunction to "go, teach all nations". The Good News is being witnessed to by hundreds of dedicated religious and lay people in places where it had never been witnessed to before or where the witness given had been an inadequate reflection of the teaching and example of Jesus.

Compared with the other Canadian missionary movements, we Spiritans of the Province of TransCanada, have arrived later in the day to work in the vineyard of the Lord alongside the Scarborough Missions, Our Lady's Missionaries, The Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Salesians, the Jesuits and the Redemptorists, the Sisters of Providence, the St. Joseph and Loretto Sisters and so many other labourers who have borne the heat of the day.

Maybe it is because well over half the area of the country is officially classified as mission territory by the Church, that Canada has been such a fruitful source of mission vocations. The work of the Oblates and Jesuits among the aboriginal populations, the stories of Leduc, Brebeuf and Scheffer, have given the Canadian Church a mission orientation. This is reflected, not only by the generous financial support given to Church Extension Societies' missions and to the individual mission movements operated by religious organizations, but also by the numbers of young people who volunteer two or three years of their lives to serve in the Lord's vineyard.

The Spiritans have flourished in this environment. The seed planted in 1954 fell on good soil and is bearing fruit. We ask no further reward for our fifty years presence in English-speaking Canada.

To assist you, our friends and benefactors, to revisit with us the highlights of our years in English-speaking Canada, in 2004 each issue of the *Spiritan Missionary News* will contain some articles reprinted from previous issues. This issue contains articles on the ministry of education and on prison ministry which have appeared previously.

Gerald FitzGerald CSSp

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Editors: Fr. Gerald FitzGerald
Fr. Patrick Fitzpatrick

Design & Layout: Tim Faller Design Inc.

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A Role Model for Youth

Michael J. Troy CSSp

Young people, always in search of stars to follow and role models to imitate, need to hear something about past and present-day real heroes and heroines to offset all the rave reviews of the latest rock-celebrities, who, too often, have clay feet in their daily private lives.

In this connection they may come to hear something about Claude des Places, one of the youngest ever founders of a major religious Congregation who accomplished so much and influenced so many other young people during his short life.

Although this young man belonged to a different century, it is remarkable how similar many of his experiences on and off campus were to those of any high school or university student in Europe or North America today.

He, too, had to struggle with all the agonies and ecstasies of growing up and making career decisions that at first were not fully understood or approved by his friends, his professors or even his family.

High School Days

Claude began high school at the local Jesuit College in Rennes. There, before long, he was recognized as an honour student. As valedictorian at his graduation he gave such a remarkable speech (a dissertation in Latin) that he was invited to Versailles in Paris as guest of the Royal Family. Wow!

But Claude was more than a serious scholar. He was a great all rounder, very popular with the staff and greatly admired by his peers. Handsome, gifted with a wonderful speaking voice and stage presence, in all three years in high school he had important roles in the annual school plays and featured in frequent gigs and ballet sessions. Outside of school he was an avid hunter, a very good horseman (no cars in those days!), and very useful with a sword and a gun. He even thought of joining the armed forces.



Portrait of Claude at age 16.

The Serious Side of His Character

Claude may have been a live wire in and out of school, lively and restless like everyone else, but there was a deeper side to his character.

He had been given a wonderful Catholic upbringing at home (particularly by his mother Jeanne) and, like so many boys then and now, he might have been considered “out to lunch” if others knew he still believed in God and said his prayers, but not Claude!

As one of his biographers tells us — “Claude gathered some of his friends and without saying anything to his parents or teachers, formed a small prayer group with

one of the most famous in the Kingdom of France, where gifted students from several provinces and even abroad entered into keen competition.”

An Unruly Law School Campus

The real test for Claude came when he was 19. To satisfy his parents’ wishes he spent three years in the Law School of Nantes.

Student life there was an all time wild. “Instead of being locked in intellectual discourse with the professors in the halls of learning, the law students were frequently involved in brawls, fist fights, even armed violence on the streets”.

Although this young man belonged to a different century, it is remarkable how similar many of his experiences on and off campus were to those of any high school or university student in Europe or North America today.

its own rules of devotions, silent reflection and self-discipline exercises.” However, as that biographer was quick to add, Claude was no Jansenist (the religious fundamentalists of his day) or ready-made saint, “he had a very lively and restless temperament that inclined him in a very different direction.” In passing, it might be mentioned that among this group was none other than the now well-known St. Grignon de Montfort, a life-long friend and later a collaborator in trying to solve some of the serious religious problems of the Church in rural France.

Third Level Studies

Graduating from high school at 16, Claude was considered too young to go on to University, so he was given a ‘finishing off year’ in the university city of Caen on the coast.

Away from home, for the first time, as a biographer put it, “Although there were many opportunities to become dissolute in a large town of young men from different countries who were, like him, on their own, Claude apparently didn’t compromise his morals but went on to win three of the five student awards. This was no small achievement in a college that was

Claude once again passed all his exams with flying colours. At 22 he graduated with a Licentiate in Law. His family had great plans for him.

Claude, however, had other ideas. He would become a priest.

The Die is Cast

With the world at his feet and so many promising careers open to him, he had great difficulty deciding between a military career which was a family tradition, law and provincial politics like his father, management and future ownership of the family real-estate business, or the priesthood where he saw several possibilities as a diocesan or a religious priest.

But once the die was cast, there was no turning back; not even a compromise with his family’s suggestion that he now combine his theological studies with another degree at the Sorbonne, the University of Paris. No, Claude would concentrate solely on the spiritual preparation and take non-degree courses at the Jesuit College in Paris. This, as history was to show, made all the difference in his life.

Social Justice Issues

All during his high school and univer-

sity studies Claude had been very active in the usual sodalities and charitable organizations, many similar to the present day Legion of Mary, KC Squires and Vincent de Paul Society. As a seminarian at St. Thomas College and member of the AA’s (The Assembly of Friends), he became involved in helping immigrant chimneysweepers from Savoy and some poor seminarians at the Jesuit College. The hostel he opened for the latter eventually became the famous Holy Spirit Seminary, and the nursery of a whole new religious foundation — the *International Missionary Congregation of the Holy Spirit* (the Spiritans)

Claude’s Legacy to Youth

Claude des Places, then, was no ready made hero or miracle-working saint, but an ordinary school boy and young adult, striving by the grace of God and his own best efforts to be and do the best he could and hopefully to be a credit always to his family, high school, college, country and the Catholic Church.

Even in founding the Holy Spirit Seminary he was no old or middle aged rector laying down laws for others, but a young man in his prime — the first to follow the Rules he wrote.

Most unexpectedly in the late summer of 1709 he fell seriously ill of pleurisy accompanied by a violent fever and after a short but painful illness, patiently borne, he died peacefully at the age of 30 years and 7 months on October 2 of that year.

His Death and Last Request

Even in dying, Claude left a memorable lesson to his youthful associates, many of whom had difficulty understanding why God would take one still so young, so necessary to the Seminary, and only two years a priest.

Claude, breathed his last breath, happily quoting Psalm 84, the triumphant pilgrim hymn, confident that the good God would use his untimely death for the best interests of his young foundation.

He made only one request — that his friends bury him not with an expensive tombstone, but in a nameless plot among the poorest of the poor, whom he and they had pledged to serve.

His wishes were observed and today he lies among his beloved poor in an unmarked grave in Paris. But three centuries later he still lives on in the Spiritans. ☪