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MISSIONARY



Put Out
Into the Deep

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Put Out Into the Deep



An edition of *Spiritan Missionary News* dedicated to *vocations!* “Why bother?” some might well ask. In fact some have, bolstering their skepticism by references to statistics and recent publications which suggest that the search for vocations, at least to the religious priesthood, is futile. In much of the western world, including Canada, the steady flow of vocations that characterized the 40s, 50s and early 60s has dried to a trickle and in some cases disappeared altogether. So, has the time really come to quietly fold our tent and fade

It is impossible to believe that no Canadians will feel attracted to the Spiritan missionary charism, its flexible Spirit-filled spirituality and its supportive community life

away into the sunset? Hardly. St. Luke’s Gospel gives us the story of Jesus urging Peter to “put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Peter, who had just come off a night shift of empty nets, knew the situation was hopeless. Besides what did a carpenter know about fishing! But out of politeness he decided to humour his distinguished guest. The result was a record haul.

Interestingly, bulging nets are a current phenomenon in many of the religious families with a global perspective, such as the Spiritans. The vocation drought in developed countries is only one part of the story. The other is the effort to keep up with the vocation boom in the one-time mission countries. The struggle to provide accommodation, formation personnel and finance for those knocking on our doors in Africa, for instance, is also something of a crisis — but one with which we are happy to live.

Today’s Challenge

As for the Western world we might well ask ourselves if we have tried sufficiently to test the “deep waters” or are we still inclined to hug the safe and familiar shore. Today we are challenged to leave behind the geographical notion of mission in order to espouse the crossing of

ethnic boundaries in outreach to those who are distant from us in culture, faith and history. They may be at the other end of the earth or they may be our next door neighbours. We set aside our national ties as we welcome into our communities people of every culture and background embracing a truly global expression of mission. Sensitive to the constant exhortations of our Holy Father we affirm our commitment to the poor and marginalized. We accept that Spiritans are no longer simply priests and brothers but include a growing number of laity, men and women, married and single. We firmly set before us those apostolates highlighted during our most recent international general meeting (chapter) in Maynooth, Ireland: *proclamation* of the Good News to those who have not heard it; *education*, particularly as an aid to promoting the freedom and dignity of the poor and as a service to youth; *justice*, with an emphasis on accompanying refugees in their distress and supporting the struggle of women towards full human rights.

It’s in our blood

Besides, Spiritans are no strangers to “hopeless case” scenarios. Following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era our numbers were reduced to two. Somebody must surely have suggested that it was time to pack it in, but, thankfully, that didn’t happen. Later, in the 1840s, Francis Libermann, then a seminarian barred from ordination by epilepsy, joined with two fellow students to found a missionary society dedicated to bringing the Good News to the black races of the world. Only a dyed in the wool optimist would have bet on them but ... here we are on the brink of our third century.

It is impossible to believe that no Canadians will feel attracted to the Spiritan missionary charism, its flexible Spirit-filled spirituality and its supportive community life which have been energising experiences for so many thousands throughout the last three centuries.

So, like Peter, let’s put aside our hesitations, hoist the sail and head for the deep.

Michael Dyle C.S.P.

Spiritans: who



Pierre Maillard came from the Spiritan Seminary in Paris to Louisbourg, Cape Breton, in 1735. He went to work at once among the native people of the island, the Mi'qmaqs. He became the first outsider to master their language and developed a script so that it could be written. When resident missionaries were banned by the British administration, Sunday services continued to be held using the religious handbooks Pierre had written. Baptisms, marriages, and funerals all took place in the absence of their beloved priest when he was arrested and deported to France.

In 1745 Fr. Maillard returned illegally to work with his Mi'qmaq people. After the capture of Louisbourg by the British in 1758, and the deportation of the Acadians, Pierre led the Mi'qmaqs to safety in Miramichi where he succeeded in negotiating a treaty with the British which preserved their right to fish, hunt and gather food in what is now New Brunswick. As recently as this year, the courts have upheld the validity of the treaty.



Joseph Shanahan

He died in 1762, the last Catholic priest at that time in Nova Scotia. According to a legend, retold to every generation, bushes bearing beautiful flowers sprang up over his grave in the Anglican cemetery in Halifax. But his real memorial is the vibrant church of the Mi'qmaq people which flourishes to this day.

Anthony Horner and **Edward Baur** confronted the flourishing slave trade which had been depopulating central Africa for centuries. The hub of this inhumane traffic in people was the island of Zanzibar in the Indian Ocean, off the coast of what is

now Tanzania. In 1862, before Stanley, before Livingstone, these two German Spiritans set up a mission on the island to protect, house, feed and educate men, women and children whom they bought in the slave market. Their presence

was resented by the slave dealers because it brought the eyes of Europe, especially Germany and England, to this abominable trade in humans. Both sent naval vessels to interrupt the slave ships heading north to the Arabian peninsula and by the 1880s, thanks in no small part to the efforts of the Spiritan Mission, the Sultan of Zanzibar agreed to prohibit slavery.

While this fight against slavery was taking place, the Spiritans bought a large tract of land, on the mainland, just opposite Zanzibar, in a place called Bagamoyo. Horner and Baur and their fellow Spiritans built a settlement for redeemed slaves with church, hospital, schools, workshops and plantations. The long avenue of mango trees they planted still leads to the heart of what was once called the Freedom Village. Today a team of Spiritans, all Tanzanian, use the facilities to offer programs which are breathing life into a desperately poor and discouraged local community. Academic and technical education is available for the young of the town of Bagamoyo, health care and counselling services are offered for all. Around the large graveyard where former slaves and German Spiritans alike await the resurrection of the dead, life flourishes. A beacon of hope shines where despair ruled for centuries.

Joseph Shanahan was a tall, lean, loose limbed man, a true son of County Tipperary, Ireland. Blessed with great physical strength, good looks and a wonderful disposition, he took to Southern Nigeria from the day he arrived in November 1902. From the very start he admired the Igbo people and they responded in kind.

The mission had been started in 1885 and the Spiritans had endured great suffering and failure with little to show for their efforts. Most had died within a year of arrival. Fr. Lutz created a record by surviving ten years. Only two Spiritans were still alive when Shanahan landed.

Once he had learned to speak the native language, and had come to know the people and their customs, Shanahan came to the conclusion that education was their greatest need. As a youth, his family had placed their hopes in education at a time when most rural Irish believed that agitation and political action provided