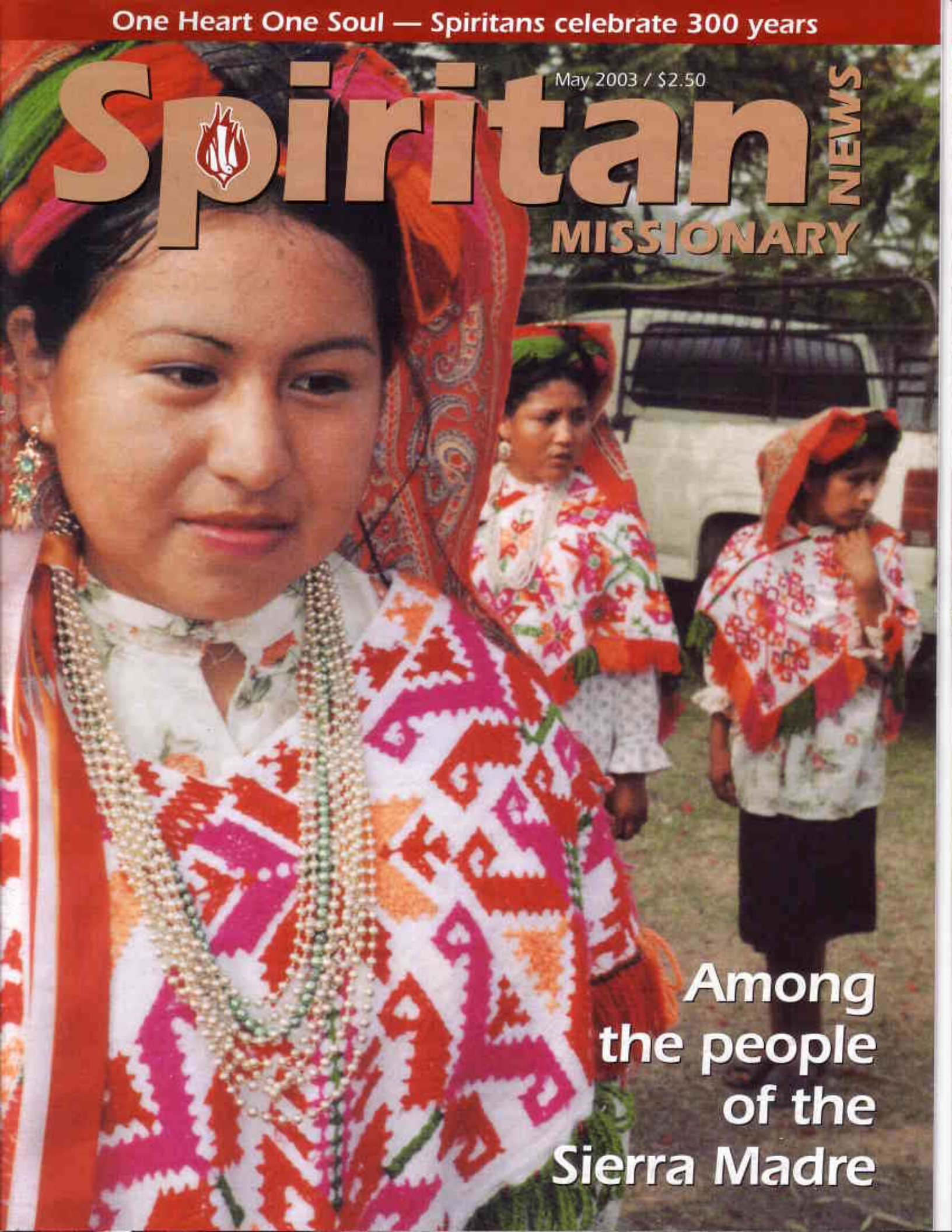


One Heart One Soul — Spiritans celebrate 300 years

May 2003 / \$2.50

# Spiritans

NEWS  
MISSIONARY



Among  
the people  
of the  
Sierra Madre

# New beginnings for an Ancient People

**M**y recent visit to our Spiritan mission team in Mexico, my first since 1998, brought home to me how international such teams have become in recent times. Take Coxcatlán for instance. The old Spanish church in the centre of the town was built by the Franciscans in the 16th Century. The weekly market was in progress the day I visited and hundreds of vendors hawked their wares under canvas awnings, giving protection from the fierce sun which produced a temperature of 110 °F in unshaded areas.

The market area surrounds the church and as I sat with the two Spiritans who operate out of this central location, the cries of the vendors and the delicious aromas of the food being cooked and sold in the immediate vicinity filled the room.

From this parish centre Spiritans Marc Henri Jeoffre and Andy Hien-Van-Do minister to the people of the market town itself and to the country people scattered over a vast hilly area in the foothills of the Sierra Madre mountains. Mass is said in over thirty different communities. The people in these communities are indigenous native people called the Huasteco, descendants of the mighty Mayan civilization. Their native language is Nahuatl and their traditional dress is highly colourful.

Marc was born in southern France, attended primary school in Spain and Italy before the family returned to France. At the conclusion of his studies in philosophy he went to work in the Spiritan mission in Madagascar before being sent to Ireland for his novitiate. On finishing his theological studies he joined the Spiritans in Mexico where he is learning Nahuatl, his sixth language.

With him is Andy who was born in Vietnam. He survived the infamous "reeducation" program there and fled to the U.S. He studied in Houston, Texas, and joined the Spiritans in that city. After getting academic qualifications and practical experience in evangelization, he was appointed to work in the Mexican mission.

The old Spanish mission of Coxcatlán which had received little or no pastoral care since the time of the revolution of 1910 is now being restored as a vibrant Christian community.

In Tanlajas an Irish and a Polish Spiritan work together. In San Antonio, where the native language is Tenec, it is an American and a native of France. In El Pujal a Pole and a Huastecan share a common ministry. And in Coxcatlán a Frenchman and Vietnamese working together as a team to uplift and confirm people of an ancient civilization are an example of what the modern Spiritan movement is all about, as we celebrate our 300th anniversary.

A quote from the documents of our last General Chapter summarizes well what I experienced during my visit to our missions in Mexico:

"Mission, seen as the announcing of the Good News of the Kingdom, has always been at the very heart of our Spiritan life. But recently, a certain style of Spiritan approach to mission has emerged more clearly: more emphasis is put on being close to people, on the quality of our life and presence, on solidarity, on opening up to new horizons and a greater collaboration with others. The missionary adventure gives us the chance to share a journey with many other people which stimulates us to spiritual growth and a renewal of the meaning of our own commitment."

*Gerald FitzGerald CSSp*

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# *Spiritans*

Francis  
Libermann  
1848

# **300 Years**

## **1703 - 2003**

Claude  
des Places  
1703



# The Hands that Rocked the Cradle

Michael J. Troy, CSSp

Hopefully during the present tricentennial celebrations in honour of Claude des Places, it will be remembered that great men and great enterprises never come into the world fully developed like Athena from the head of Zeus, but start off small and needing tender loving care.

## **A model Christian household**

Claude des Places was born on February 25, 1679 in Rennes, the capital city of Brittany, France. He was the eldest child and only son of Francis des Places and Jeanne le Meneust.

All too frequently during the bloody pogroms of the French Revolution, noble families and rich business people of the Old Regime were demonized as enemies of the People and the Republic, idle, arrogant and ruthless exploiters of the working class and, as such, well deserving of the guillotine. There were, however, many exceptions, especially in Brittany. Claude was fortunate to have been born into one such household. His parents were exemplary Christians and citizens, very hardworking and magnanimous in their dealings with employees and the poor neighborhood.

Claude's father was not only one of the wealthiest business men in the city but also enjoyed considerable standing in the community as a lawyer advocate in the Breton Parliament. He was legitimately proud of his family that could trace its nobility back to the Middle Ages and spoke frequently about its many deeds of valor on the battlefields of France and their outstanding loyalty at all times to the Catholic church.

## **Claude's mother**

Claude's mother also belonged to the aristocracy and although her father

died young and "left nothing to his daughter except a good education", it was thanks to it that Jeanne became governess to the First Family in Brittany, that of the President of the Provincial Parliament, Claude Marbeuf. After the President's wife died leaving a large family, Jeanne became as indispensable to the Marbeuf children as Maria, the *Sound of Music* heroine, was to the Von Trapp family. In fact, even after Marbeuf remarried, Jeanne delayed her own marriage another twelve months in order to help the new bride cope with her instant large family, a big city mansion and three country castles.

## **The hands that rocked the cradle...**

As a result of her own husband's frequent absences on business and government affairs, it was left to Claude's stay-at-home mother to take care of him. Who more qualified than this wonderful lady who had previously given so much of herself to look after other people's children?

What wonder then that these early years *chez lui* were to be the all-important foundation of Claude's future holiness. Jeanne had him baptized and consecrated to the Blessed Mother the day after his birth and, up to his seventh birthday, dressed him in white for all Mary's big feast days.

With such a loving mother's care, Claude, as the records show, early manifested a great love for prayer and the things of God — even building little altars in honour of the Mother of God.

## **Early childhood schooling**

As early childhood kindergartens were unknown in those days, Claude was fortunate that his parents could afford to hire the best of tutors for him