

# Spiritan Magazine

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# Spiritan

Open  
wide  
the  
doors

Bethlehem  
all year round

Haiti: one year later

Lent: learning to let go

Dignity for all

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# God **knows** what it's like to be human

Pat Fitzpatrick CSSp

**H**e came as one of us. He knew what it was to be human. He came to tell us human beings are God's image and likeness. He loved us, and the world, so much that he gave his life for us.

The gospel of John soars: "In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God." It's sublime. Beyond our reach. Way up there. Far, far away.

But then — "The Word became flesh." There's so much we can learn from how his earthly life began: who was involved, who got the news, who was invited, who came to visit.

But then again — it's not just 'once upon a time this is how it happened.' The story is ongoing. William Kurelek, artist, mystic, got it right: "If it happened then, why not now? If it happened there, why not here?"

Not just then and there. Here and now it continues to happen: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.

## Bethlehem

I remember walking there south from Jerusalem into the hill country — olive trees to right and left in the surrounding farms. I passed Rachel's tomb. I climbed the hill to Manger Square to seek an outdoor bar-café. A cold beer never tasted more refreshing. Then back across the square to the church of the Nativity. Bend low to get inside through the opening in the stone wall. Once within stand tall and take in the surroundings. It was ... ugly.

Then line up to enter the Grotto of the Nativity beneath the main altar. Since I was traveling all alone, I didn't have to hurry through with a group. So, finding my way to the back of an alcove I sat down and took my time: the star of Bethlehem in the floor, the fireproof hangings along the walls, the non-stop file of pilgrims passing by the "very spot."

Several years later I was back again as part of a group. We spent more time in the hill country. There we sang our carols in a cave church. In those fields Bethlehem became more real.

Now, there is a dividing wall between Israel and the West Bank: a gross encroachment walling out the people among whom Jesus was born, among whom he became one of us.

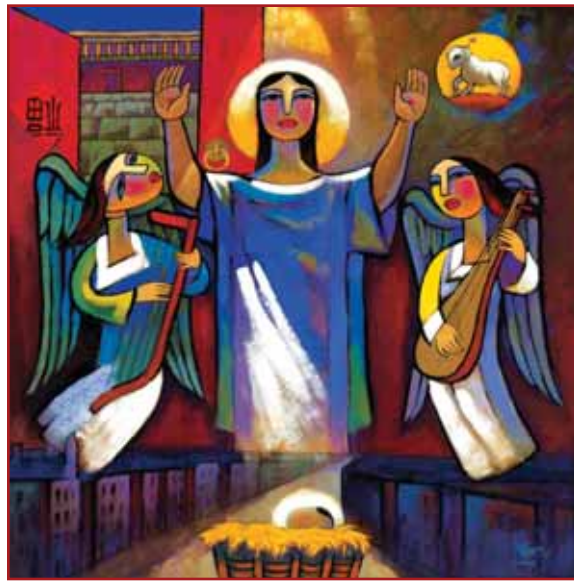
## Word made flesh

One of us — he knows what it's like to be human. Growing up: baby, child, teenage independence, sense of purpose, daily life, rejection, opposition, some success, letdowns, betrayal, death and resurrection.

One of us — we call it Christmas. There is such a "getting ready" for it. There are so many pre-Christmas preparations that we're often glad when it is over. And yet — is it ever over? Are we celebrating just one day — or is Christmas with us day in, day out the whole year long?

Bethlehem/Christmas is not just past tense, over and done with, whose memory lingers on. It is here and now, any day, any season, any place. Bernadette Gasslein sees it as a metaphor of refugees arriving in a strange land. And who of us in Canada is not a descendant of people from someplace else? Deirdre McLoughlin recalls a phone ringing with an urgent plea to come to the bus station in downtown Toronto. Brian Joel relives the birth of his young daughter. Erik Reichers plumbs its depth as a metaphor for Catholic Education: Build Bethlehem Everywhere.

So, this February issue of *Spiritan* is not out of season. Bethlehem is always in season — God comes into our lives who knows when, who knows where, who knows how. In the beginning, right here, right now, and down the road wherever that may take us. The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us. Getting in touch with God is always a local call. ■





# Holy family, refugee family

Bernadette Gasslein

**T**he picture changes quickly — perhaps more quickly than normal this year — as Sunday nips at the heels of Christmas Day, and ushers in a new scene that doesn't find its way onto Christmas cards. The family that had just received eminent visitors from the East flees Herod's political oppression, taking with them their precious child. The back-story is told later in the week: Herod's killing frenzy will slaughter the toddlers and babies under two. If we listen carefully, we can hear the cries of the women that echo over the centuries as their children are slaughtered, raped, or turned into child soldiers: Auschwitz, Cambodia, Darfur, Bosnia, Armenia, Rwanda ...

Rarely do we think of the "Holy Family" as a refugee family. Pius XII, however, articulated this reality clearly: "The émigré Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, living in exile in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien, and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land ..."

Some of these people never make it to a safe haven. Others languish for years in refugee camps. Others are exploited in their bid to seek refuge. Others do make it to safe shores, where again they face a whole series of challenges: language, culture, education, employment, building a network of relationships.

## We are all of immigrant and refugee stock

Recently we have seen emerging in Canada a hostile attitude towards refugees and immigrants. We seem to have forgotten that we are, all of us, with the exception of Canada's aboriginal peoples, of immigrant and refugee stock. Whether our ancestors fled the potato famine in Ireland, whether they came from France with Jacques Cartier seeking a life of adventure in the "New World", whether they escaped the crushing poverty of the Ukraine to homestead in the Prairies, whether they came from China to build the railroads, from Italy to work in our industrial heartland, from Vietnam to escape its communist regime, from Central America's wars or from Pakistan as economic migrants; whether rich or poor, Canadians today are all [the children of] immigrants and refugees who have found a new home in Canada.

Our forbears struggled, learned new ways, and offered to their children and grandchildren opportunities to build their

When the song of the angels is stilled  
when the star in the sky is gone  
when the kings and magi are home  
when the shepherds are with their flocks  
the work of Christmas begins —

To find the lost  
To heal the broken  
To feed the hungry  
To bring peace  
To release the prisoner  
To rebuild the nations  
To recognize one another as  
NEIGHBOUR

*Scarboro Missions*



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lives in safety and prosperity. A few brought with them conflicts from “the old country”, but the vast majority have become generous, contributing citizens who have endured hardship that most of us could not imagine, let alone cope with. Now established in safety, those same people have supported government policies that offered more generous assistance to people, who, like them, come to our shores and airports to start their lives anew.

### **Holy family — refugee family**

Does our “Christmas story” include the Holy Family as a refugee family? The mystery of the Incarnation celebrates the reality that humanity’s maker became human, a humanity that embraces human beings of every race and nation. Christ’s blood is “shed for all” (Eucharistic Prayer). From the circumstances of his birth to every aspect of his public ministry, we consistently recognize Jesus’ identification with the littlest and the least. “As long as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Jesus’ identification with all of suffering humanity urges us — no, commits us — who share his name to the task of recognition: of recognizing in all of Earth’s suffering peoples the face of Jesus, their brother. By extension, we are called to recognize, not only in individuals, but also in entire families, the archetypal refugee family, the Holy Family, and to offer them the same hospitality we would offer to Christ.

### **Each of us is a human person**

This challenges our ability to see the “other”, not as an enemy or a threat to national security, but as people in whom we see the face of Christ, “who are called to one and the same destiny, which is divine.” And to whom the Holy Spirit offers “the possibility of being partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery.” Given the fear-mongering rhetoric in some media these days, it can be difficult to sustain this way of seeing the world. But each of these children, men and women, however young or old, of whatever race, nation or culture, is a human person whose dignity and human rights we are called to defend, in the name of Christ, and in the name of the Church — regardless of their religion. *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, continues: “They also have a claim on our respect and charity that think and act differently from us in social, political and religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through kindness and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.”

In the past year that began with the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti, we have seen many more people asking to come to our country to begin their lives over. Let us remember that holy refugee family and welcome them as they knock at our doors today. ■

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# When God is a child

Iona MacLean



**W**e met her in a village called Santa Marta in El Salvador. She was about four years old. She had been born in a refugee camp in Honduras and had lived there most of her life. A few months before our visit, she and her family and several hundred other people had finally been allowed back into their own country from which they had fled because of the war and government terrorism. They were starting from scratch to rebuild their community in an environment still poisoned by violence, fear and poverty. Yet, for all the horrors and hardship these people had suffered, they welcomed us.

The leaders of the village told us their story. Their words and the white flag flying above the village expressed the desire to live in peace. As we were shown around, a group of old men played guitars. The women were bathing their children in the stream or cooking over open fires. The people gathered for Mass, a rare and precious event because priests had such difficulty getting permission from the military to visit the community.

But of all the memories of that day in Santa Marta more than twenty years ago, the clearest and most moving is of that

little girl — born a refugee, born into poverty and uncertainty, witness to the worst that humans can do.

Yet there she was, watching us with curiosity and seemingly without fear, smiling shyly when asked if we could take her picture. A vulnerable child in the midst of overwhelming and frightening circumstances, she nevertheless gave us a “garland instead of ashes,” to use Isaiah’s words [Isa. 61:3], beautifying her surroundings and our lives.

## **It is profoundly important that God comes among us as a child.**

We see a child and we marvel at their vulnerability and dependency. We know that what we do in the present will affect the child in the future. Whether the children in our own family or the children of the world, they need love and safety, food and shelter, education and peace in order to grow. Children who are brutalized by war, domestic violence or extreme need often become brutal, abusive, or irresponsible adults continuing the destructive cycle. If we can provide a protective, loving and nurturing environment for children everywhere, we go a long way toward the peaceful world God intends.

## **A child makes us think of new beginnings and touches us with hope.**

How do we worship a God who is revealed as a little one? What change happens within us if we pray with all our hearts and minds to a God who identifies with us even in our smallest state, vulnerable and fragile, needing love and tenderness?

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,  
No hands but yours,  
No feet but yours.  
Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion  
is to look out to the earth.  
Yours are the feet by which he is to go about doing good.  
Yours are the hands by which he is to bless us now.

**St Teresa of Avila**



# Baby girl

Brian Joel, Lay Spiritan

First comes the false labour that has us scurrying home from an overnight visit to her parents. Then comes the real labour about a week later and we are scrambling, never really ready enough for the urgency the situation demands. The contractions are coming regularly now and the pains are as hot as she remembered with the first two.

It would take the better part of an hour to organize the kids, grab the emergency bag and wait for the babysitter before heading off to the hospital. It doesn't go as smoothly as during the rehearsal; it rarely does.

We arrive at 7:00 pm and when we settle in the room she lets out a little groan followed by a scream. The contractions are more frequent and more painful now, but the examination shows that we have to wait some more. Despite the pain she refuses the epidural insisting on a natural birth. They're professional, but it is evident that in our culture no one is comfortable with a screaming woman about to deliver.

The doctors want to go for a coffee break. The nurses urge us to accept the epidural before the anesthesiologist leaves for the day. The epidural is refused a second time. They offer laughing gas; the mask on her face makes her claustrophobic; she swats it away with a swiftness that stuns everyone in the room.

At this stage, the nurse is pleading with me to accept the epidural. Don't ask me; I'm not the one in pain.

It's a struggle but our baby eventually arrives at 9:00 pm. Thank God ... it's a girl, she's perfect and we are happy. Mom really needs to rest now.

I cradle my baby girl in the silence of the nursery until they tell me it's time to go. She's so tiny, so helpless that I want to hold her and protect her against everything in the world that can harm her. I am in the presence of a miracle and I feel my eyes fill with tears.

I know now that Christmas can come at any time and that year it came in May. ■

- Might we not be reminded of God's purpose, as expressed in Mary's song, to scatter the proud and bring down the powerful, to lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things? [Luke 1:51-53]
- Might we not be reminded of Jesus' words as he took a child by his side: "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me"? [Luke 9:48]
- Might we not truly realize that we honour God when we honour the powerless and fragile ones in the world, when in the name of Christ we bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners? [Luke 4:18]

We see a child — our own child, a newly baptized child, a neighbour's child, a poor child, a refugee child — and want to make the world a better place for that child. When God is a child we *know* that the world can be a better place. That is why God came to earth in Jesus Christ, to overcome the darkness with light, to show that love is stronger than hate and even than death.

"When God is a child," we know that a new day has begun and our hope for the future is assured. God incarnate in a child evokes gladness and wonder. In a world often ugly and frightening, we are given beauty and delight, a "garland instead of ashes," a reason to celebrate life itself. ■

Iona MacLean is a Presbyterian minister serving in Pictou, Nova Scotia. Reprinted from *The Catalyst*, Citizens for Public Justice. Used with permission.





# Where the word becomes flesh

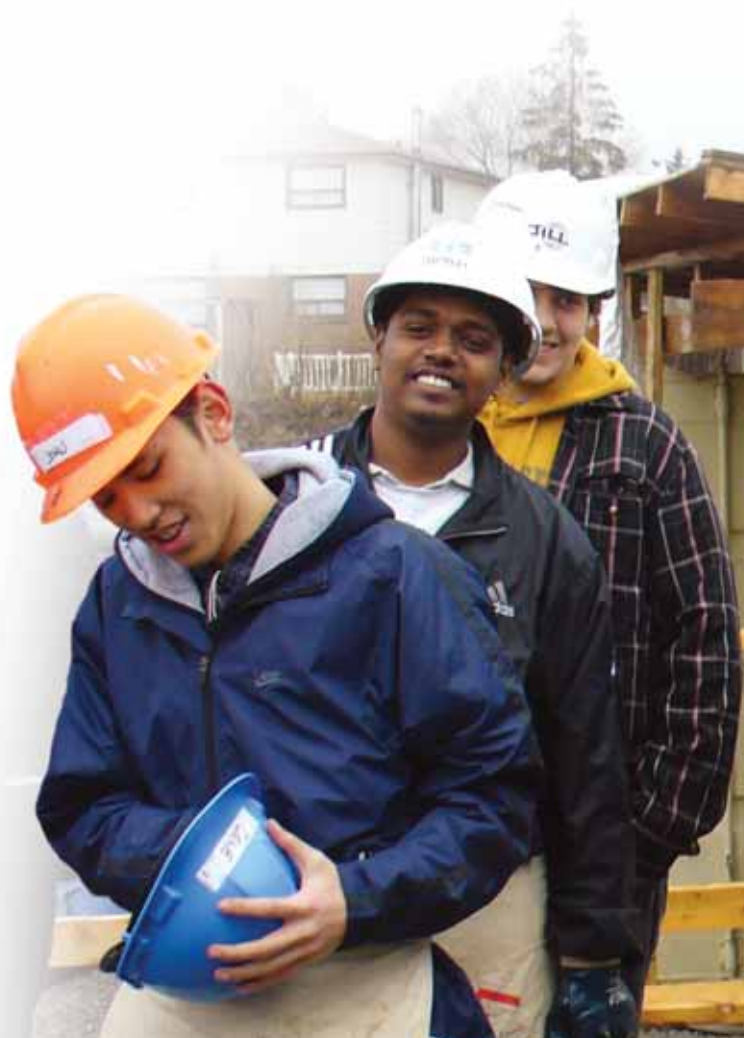
**B**ethlehem — not the place you would normally start from, not your usual entry into Catholic Education. Isn't Christmas time-out from school — a welcome break from “Do we have to go to school today?”

Maybe it's time-out to stand back and ask, “What is Catholic Education really all about?” and in the process discover that Bethlehem — “the house of bread” — gives us much food for thought. *Build Bethlehem Everywhere* is an unusual title for a book on Catholic Education — until one reads through it and discovers it opens unexpected insights into this topic.

Author, Erik Riechers, may or may not have come across William Kurelek's two questions about Christmas: “If it happened there why not here? If it happened then why not now?” Like Kurelek, he believes that Bethlehem is not just in the past, not just part of one hectic season, but takes place all year round.

He writes, “It opens to us the God possibilities of our daily grind. It enables the ordinary to speak to us of God and this makes the ordinary the place where God can be found.” What was more ordinary than Bethlehem? I am reminded of Andrew Greeley's opinion: “Maybe half our heritage is transmitted to children around the crib at Christmas.”

The “house of bread” links Christmas and Holy Thursday and all the in-between meals where Jesus was present. If



“Maybe half our heritage is transmitted to children around the crib at Christmas.”

Andrew Greeley

We must speak of the God who dwells in tents, tenements, trailers and townhouses with the same frequency as we speak of his presence in our tabernacles. Tell the next generation the Good News of the God who is as familiar with the smell of TV dinners as with the aroma of incense.

Jesus is found in jeopardy: Our own quest for the Christ must take us to those in jeopardy.

something so ordinary as bread is God-revealing, how about wine, water, oil, fire, stories, songs and symbols? Do they speak to us of God? How about maple trees, playing children, giggling teenagers doing the same?

Riechers encourages us to look within our human experience for the in-breaking of God. “We must speak of the God who dwells in tents, tenements, trailers and townhouses with the same frequency as we speak of his presence in our tabernacles. Tell the next generation the Good News of the God who is as familiar with the smell of TV dinners as with the aroma of incense.”

### **The word becomes flesh**

Riechers encourages us to “break the word open for our children ... so that they might see all the places in their lives where the word of the printed page wants to become flesh in their actions, behaviour and choices.”

Teachers, parents, priests are not just mouthpieces for what theologians wrote. Their challenge is to pass on a living word — “this means something to me.” Only then will religious information become religious formation. Only then will words become flesh.

“Our love needs a little flesh: we teach the young to show a fleshed love — in the cards they write, the meals they prepare for one another, the flowers they send, the gifts they bestow, the caresses they offer and the tears they wipe away.”

### **“Bethlehem”**

Bethlehem, where the Word became flesh, pushes us to “complement rather than contradict, be in dialogue rather than diatribe, be in harmony and reject harassment,



The ordinary speaks to us of God  
Bread broken reveals Christ  
crucified. Wine, water, oil, fire,  
stories, songs and symbols can  
speak to us of God.

Scour the Nativity scene  
all you like, but you will  
never find a fully prepared  
person in it, no matter  
how hard you try.

Bethlehem is the place where we  
are welcomed with our blemishes,  
flaws and weaknesses, and where  
all that is tarnished within us still  
finds itself embraced.



Christmas challenges us to discover the face of Christ  
In each brother or sister that we greet  
In each friend whose hand we shake  
In each beggar who asks for bread  
In each worker who wants to exercise the right to join a union  
In each farm worker who looks for work in our fields.

If we see Christ in their faces,  
Then it will be impossible  
To rob them, to cheat them, to deny them their rights.  
They are Christ and whatever is done to them  
Christ will take as done to himself.  
This is the meaning of Christmas:  
Christ living among us.

**Oscar Romero**

## “Go forth and build Bethlehem everywhere”

In Bethlehem you will never find a fully prepared person, no matter how hard you try. There are no Pharisees, Sadducees or other religious experts at the scene. You have Mary surprised by the angel's greeting, Joseph who had contemplated quietly dismissing her, shepherds who are part of the religiously unwashed and foreign non-believers.

“All men and women engaged in Catholic Education have arrived with more worry and weariness than they wanted to bring. We have come like the original cast of characters.”

Bethlehem is the place where we are welcomed with our blemishes, flaws and weaknesses. The invitation has been made out to the weak and the wounded ... the clean and the strong are nowhere to be seen.

“Go forth and build Bethlehem everywhere”:

Create places where God can be encountered as the one who welcomes our weakness.

Parents: when their children don't make them proud, parents can still make them welcome.

Spouses and friends: sit down to coffee, reconcile differences, forgive transgressions, join hands in friendship and love.

Living with the sick and suffering: hold their hands, welcome them to our time, our love and our concern. Where tears hold sway, wipe them.

Church: Call others back to a people, a God and a Church that will welcome their weakness.

Every school we have ever built must become “Bethlehem.” ■

*Building Bethlehem Everywhere*, published by Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association, ccsta@ccdsb.on.ca.



enjoy diversity without encouraging division, heal rather than hurt.”

Bethlehem reminds us that “we can't cuddle with Christ and shut out the poor, we can't draw away from the sick and suffering, the elderly and the ill, the most vulnerable of the world.”

Bethlehem has no closed door, no door at all: “We open wide the doors through kindness, consideration, compassion, attentive care, and tender love. We shut the doors through cruelty, neglect, bitterness, and an unloving attitude. These keep the stranger from knocking, and give the unwanted guest every reason to vacate the premises.”

Bethlehem teaches us to “look for Christ in unsuspected places: in a stable, consorting with peasant types; in jeopardy: barely born, he is already hated by Herod, who uses his guests to hunt down the Messiah, disguising his intentions as homage when his heart is set on homicide. Our own quest for Jesus must take us to those in jeopardy and obscurity. Jerusalem is the city where the action is happening, but Bethlehem is the city of his coming. Hay does not constitute the normal bedding material for kings.”

“In Catholic Education we open up the hearts of our students to find Christ in thousands of places where society and culture will not go, but where Christ most assuredly can be found.”

Bethlehem exhorts us to “be open to the modern world, to the culture, to the world that surrounds us ... We desire to teach all the children that pass through our door ... to be inclusive, not exclusive, to leave every table together.”

Bethlehem implores Catholic Education to “hear the human cry to belong, to be needed and respected ... The worst of all possible scenarios is to be lost, and to realize that no one is coming to look for you.

“The aim of our Catholic schools must always be to ensure that no matter how lost our youth may have become, as long as we have breath to draw, we will never stop looking for them.”



Bethlehem all year round: all are welcome

# Christmas lasts forever

Deirdre McLoughlin, Lay Spiritan

**A**s a 12-year-old during the great depression, the late William Kurelek had a number of Nativity dreams, each involving Christ being born in different places in the far North of Canada. Each dream ended with the questions.

“If it happened there, why not here?”

“If it happened then, why not now?”

How would we respond if today we were approached as Mary was? She was a very young woman with a deep faith. The angel Gabriel had shocked her and waited for her answer “behold the handmaid the Lord be it done unto me according to thy word.” She moved with trepidation into the uncertainty of her answer. Mary had freewill as we do, she was not forced to say yes, she could have made all sorts of excuses, but her faith, her yes were given with courage and freedom.

Jesus is born, her world forever changed. Karl Rabner exults “Light the candles, it is Christmas and Christmas lasts forever!”

We are all accepted at Bethlehem, just as we are, warts, imperfections and all. Our sense of awe and wonder is awakened as we observe the motley crew gathered around the crib in the stable, everyone welcomed and accepted, the baby lying in the hay, the homeless couple, shepherds unwashed, foreign visitors bearing gifts, cows and sheep with warm breath, all included: God in all.

One night several years ago Lay Spiritans were gathered in Ashling House in Toronto. The phone rang and a friend from a far Northern Reserve was calling from the Toronto bus station. She sounded scared admitting she did not know what to

do. She and eight members of her family had just got off the bus after a thirty hour journey. They thought they could connect with a bus to Guelph where they would visit their son, brother, father, uncle, who was in jail for murder. The last bus had left already. A short discussion ensued with the community and within ten minutes two cars were on the way to meet the travelers. The positively exhausted crew, ranging in age from 7–64, were warmly welcomed, fed and bedded down for the night.

It was in the small hours of the morning, everything was quiet and as I lay awake I had an overwhelming sense of peace and gratitude that we had been able to welcome our Ojibway friends. Taking them to the bus for Guelph the next morning, the 64-year-old grandmother told me that if we had not been

there they would have had to skip Guelph and go back home at once — they only had enough money for one night and their bus tickets.

The wonderful storyteller John Shea says that “the wood of the crib is in the wood of the cross”, as we attempt to recognize the inclusivity of the Nativity, to be open and faith-filled as Mary, to answer yes and move forward into the uncertainty of our answer. We will ponder much in our hearts. Following Christ is accepting the cross. This is a theme that is stressed over and over. We are Christ filled and searching like the Magi where we must go, how we should live, observing what is happening around us. Our spiritual journey is gradually awakening to what is already there and often begins as a little child when we stare in wonder at the Nativity scene.

If it happened there, why not here?

If it happened then, why not now? ■

Three wise men  
One dark like me –  
Part of His  
Nativity.

Langston Hughes



# Learning to let go

Oliver Iwuchukwu CSSp

**O**n a Sabbath day in Nazareth, Jesus found his mission statement. He had been away from home for a while. Now, back among his own, filled with the power of the Spirit, he accepted an invitation from the leader of the synagogue to speak to the people he grew up with. He chose a passage from Isaiah that he and they had often heard. *“The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.”*

This became his mission statement. This quote would set the tone and the direction of his ministry as an itinerant, revolutionary preacher. He would live those words and teach them to others.

His focus would be the poor: in that time and that land — the overworked and unemployed, the homeless, the blind, the lepers, the sick — those on the fringes of society. He would rail against the oppressive structures and imposed observances of the religion of his time — structures and observances that, in his opinion, oppressed and burdened ordinary people.

That was then. How about now? What might we do in order to walk in the footsteps of Jesus? What holds us captive? What holds us back? The answers range from fear and hatred through past traditions to material possessions.

## Fear

Fear prevents us from moving forward towards freedom, it clogs our life, holds us down, imprisons us. Fear of people, of situations, of the past, of domination, of historical memories we haven't come to terms with — all these fears become stumbling blocks, they threaten us. *“To him who is in fear everything rustles”* (Sophocles). Fear clogs.

Fear of failure prevents us from becoming the people we might be. We're no longer free to say what we think, to come to a decision. *“Fear people's approval and you'll meet your prison guard,”* said Lao Tse. Jesus did not care much what people thought about him. The only thing that mattered for him was doing the will of his Father.

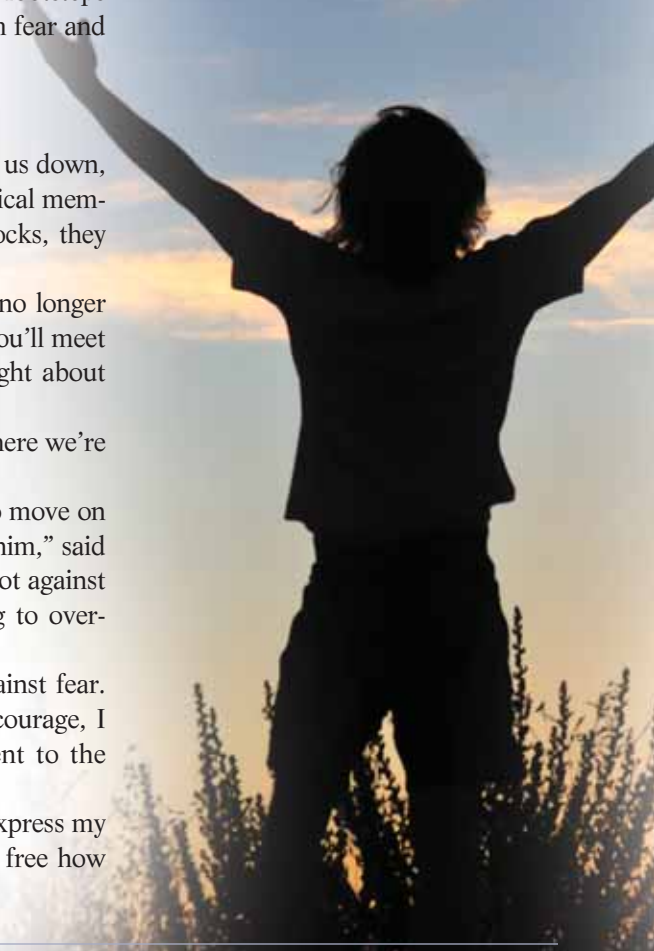
Fear can prevent us from building an intimate home. So we settle for one where we're only physically present.

Sometimes the good others are doing gets in our way. We become unable to move on together. *“We saw a man casting out devils in your name and we tried to stop him,”* said the self-satisfied disciples. *“Don't stop him!”* replied their master. *“He who is not against you is for you.”* *“Don't see him as an adversary. Don't be afraid he is going to overshadow you,”* Jesus seems to say.

He tells us to fear only what can kill the soul. He repeatedly cautioned against fear. *“Do not be afraid,”* he told his followers on a number of occasions, *“Have courage, I have overcome the world.”* Free from fear, we can experience each moment to the fullest.

There are questions we need to continue to ask ourselves: How freely do I express my views? What holds me back from doing what I really want to do? If I'm not free how can I contribute to the missionary project of setting captives free?

*God, thank you for the opportunity you give us to respond in our given place at this given time. Grant us eyes to see the good we do. Grant us wisdom to know what we need to change.*



## Hatred

We generally hate what we fear. In a way, therefore, fear begets hatred. And experience teaches that fear and hatred do not house together with freedom and love. A hateful heart is a heart in captivity.

Hatred paralyzes. Our real enemies are not those who hate us, but those we hate. They paralyse us, hold us captive as long as we continue to hate them. Anthony De Mello has a beautiful story that illustrates this point: A former inmate of a Nazi concentration camp was visiting a friend who had shared the ordeal with him. "Have you forgiven the Nazis?" he asked his friend. "Yes," his friend answered. "Well," he continued, "I am still consumed with hatred for them." "In that case," said his friend gently, "they still have you in prison."

## The past

The past is an invaluable gift. We rightly cherish where we've come from. It helps us understand who we are. "No one ever told him where he come from, so he don't know where he goin,'" said Kunta Kinte's grandmother in *Roots*. The past is indispensable for our understanding of the present.

But it's how we remember it, how we handle it, that is important. Haunting memories can disrupt, even destroy, the peace of the present: people or happenings we can't forget sometimes become a stranglehold. The past can mess up the present. It can become a prison. Much depends on what we dig out from the past, and on how we respond to it. "History may be servitude, History may be freedom," wrote T.S. Eliot.

Yes, we need to look back, but let it not become an excuse for not moving on. We do not want to end up like Lot's wife who looked back and turned into a pillar of salt, frozen in time, no longer able to move forward.

We can get pre-occupied with the past and worry that it will bring to light what we might want to leave buried. Like Herod haunted by John the Baptist we end up with a troubled conscience. The past can hold us captive. Memory can magnify misdeeds — making the past a prison riddled with anxiety.

But forgiveness liberates. "Your sins are forgiven. Move on."

## Traditions

When tradition mythologizes "the good old days" it can keep us walking forward, but forever looking backwards. Yes, let's distil from the past whatever good we can, but let's not canonize all of it by insisting: "That's the way things should be."

Traditions are good, but insisting on them as the only way can make them into dead weights. Jesus accused the Pharisees of forever living out of their traditions. They were fixated on particular practices and beliefs and became immobile, unable to respond to the present. Jesus put it this way: "You make God's word null and void for the sake of your traditions."

The time-honoured way need not be the only way. Insisting that it is can lead us into two traps of a backward-looking mindset: sadness and boredom. Sadness occasioned by the

thought that the world as we knew it is no more. This leads to melancholy, loss of interest in the present, and loss of the sense of astonishment. The "as it was, is now and ever shall be" mindset confines us to sunset time. Sunset is beautiful — but so is sunrise.

Let us retain a sense of astonishment ever ancient, ever new, ever awesome. We can, for example, see Niagara Falls — for the twentieth time. Why can't we experience it each time anew as something wonderful? Jesus retained the sense of being astonished.

## Material possessions

Our strength as Spiritans is simplicity of lifestyle. If we learn to do without many things we escape the temptation to have more in order to be more — the temptation to think that who we are is a function of the material wealth at our disposal. Another interesting story told by Anthony De Mello: There was an old Grandpa in a home for the aged. His young grandson who had come to visit asked him: "Grandpa, how would

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Fear of failure prevents us from becoming the people we might be.

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you feel if a distant relative left you 10 million dollars?" The old man was silent for a few moments. Then he looked up and said slowly, "I would still be 95 years old." This wise old man did not see himself being other than he was even with so many millions in his bank account.

It must be admitted that Jesus is a very difficult man to satisfy, a very demanding master: the more you give the more he asks of you. "Sell all you have, then come and follow me" — to preach the gospel of simplicity — was his challenge to the disciples.

At what point would we say to Jesus, "Enough is enough"? His demanding answer would be, "The more things you can do without, the freer you become, and perhaps the happier. Things don't hold the key to a happy life. They get in the way of simple enjoyment in life." "Learn to let go" was the gospel of a demanding Jesus. Our own founder, Claude Poullart des Places, went from working for the poor to living with the poor because he was able to let go.

## Letting go

Jesus gives us a new insight into living life to the full — no clinging to power, no self-seeking. We arrive naked and we end up the way we began — others will decide what we'll wear and where we'll be buried. There are so many things we can be perfectly happy without. "Learning to let go" was the gospel of Jesus. ■

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Talk given at Spiritan retreat, June 2010.

# One **step** at a time

Interview with Joseph Phillippe CSSp

*The night of the earthquake I thought I was going to die. I prayed what I thought would be my final prayer, "God, my life is in your hands."*

*I smelt the smoke, and heard the cries from all around, "Jesus, save us!"*

*It was the end of the world. Many people were on the streets: it was like one huge wake — singing, praying, wailing. Nobody knew what was happening.*

*Then the aftershocks — renewed panic and calling out to Jesus.*

*Where were the people I was with? Were they still alive or were they dead? People looking for their children, their friends — nobody quite sure what was going on. Panic — yes, panic.*

*No way to communicate with anyone — the whole communications system was down. You just stayed where you were, unable to move, unable to go to the help of others.*



## **"It's a little bit tough"**

An interviewer's eyes widen. "A little bit tough" sounds like the understatement of the year. Is this priest totally unflappable?

He goes on: "I look at the earthquake like the creation of a new humanity in the world starting with Haiti. Why does this happen to a poor country like Haiti? It might be a way to rebuild the whole country and include everybody."

## **"You can do it again"**

His thoughts turn to his beloved Fondwa. "It's very difficult to look at what has happened. Twenty-two years ago I started to give them hope, to encourage them to move forward. It worked. Now it's hard to go back to them and say, "You can do it again."

"It took us so long to build what we have built: the school, the orphanage, the sisters' convent and the international centre. I estimate it will take us three to five years to rebuild. How and where we are going to get the resources is another thing."

But he remains hopeful: "In Fondwa our people are still alive, our networks of friends are still around — in fact we have more friends than ever before."

He is aware that the mood of the people has changed. In general they are caught between giving up and beginning again, not as motivated as they used to be. They have had to welcome a lot of refugees in their homes — a house built for

five might have twenty living under a tent in the same space. Many people who moved from the cities to the countryside have returned because they received no help where they went.

## **"It's very challenging"**

"We ask ourselves how long will people be in this situation? After a year things have not changed that much.

"We have the cholera issue, then the political situation where we don't know what's going to happen.

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*"I've lost all I've worked for in the past twenty-two years."*

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"With outside help we have created jobs for people, helped them to get their confidence back, move forward and do something for themselves.

"But it has not been easy. For instance in College St. Martial, we've had to pay \$200,000 to have the rubble removed. Fortunately there was some government help to do this.

"In Fondwa we rely on the people to remove the rubble, fill in the holes on the roads, plant trees — all with their hands. This is slow and painstaking — Fondwa was at the epicentre of the earthquake — but it does give employment."



## “We need less talk; we need action”

If Haiti gets 20% of the money raised “For Haiti”, Joseph sees that as a very good percentage. “We don’t have large international NGOs like Oxfam. After the earthquake the Canadian military were the first ones to arrive in Fondwa. They helped us rebuild our small houses. But the people in need are not as easy to help as they should be.

“The government is non-existent. Many government buildings are gone, along with many churches. On the other hand we now have a lot of international NGOs in the country with a lot of resources. There are three main actors in the country — the government, the NGOs and the local grassroots organizations. We need to find a way for all three to work together. We have been in touch with groups in Toronto, New York and Philadelphia.”

## Religious divisions disappearing

One good thing that has happened is that religious divisions have broken down. The Spiritans shelter about 300 people in their house in Port-au-Prince. Each one shares food with their neighbour — there is a renewed sense of solidarity among the Haitians themselves.

“Nobody died inside our Spiritan house,” says Joseph, “but they brought a lot of dead bodies to us and left them on the floor.

“The whole experience was a real test about how much we believed in God. If you didn’t have faith what else had you? In Fondwa when I found I had lost everything I also found myself saying, ‘God has given, God has taken, God will provide.’ I didn’t know how I was going to make it. But we have to continue to move forward. God will never abandon us.”



## We need:

- Volunteers to build houses, able to come for 6-12 months.
- Administrators, CPA accountants.
- People to sponsor a student at Fondwa University at \$45,000; to sponsor three students a year specializing in agronomics, veterinary medicine, management.
- Someone to put us in touch with a university in Canada to sponsor someone from Haiti.
- We welcome people to come and assess our needs to see how best they can assist us. We thank all those who have supported us. Moving forward in solidarity encourages us to keep going.

## One step at a time

Discouragement is an ever-present adversary. “My office in Port-au-Prince has been destroyed and it has been very difficult to find another. We cannot pay the teachers and other staff at Fondwa. We’ll keep our commitments to pay them whenever we have the money. They turn up because it’s a commitment for them too. \$100,000 would fix most of our problems ... but none of our friends have this kind of money.”

“How long can we continue like this? ... One step at a time ... God will never abandon us. Yet — it’s difficult.”

## Political stability

Joseph is convinced that the main problem now is to have political stability in Haiti. “If we could get the international NGOs, the local grassroots groups and the government working together we could rebuild the country.”

He speaks of a plan to create wealth in rural Haiti through Fondwa. “We know what to do. We need to look at the resources that can create working and business opportunities for the people. Then we need to provide access to water, to communication, to health care.”

One wonders if political stability will ever come to this tortured island. The presidential election and the ensuing chaos over voting, the return of Little Doc Duvalier, the almost total inertia of the present government, bureaucratic red tape at the seaport and airport, talk of grandiose solutions to on-the-ground problems, maybe too many competing NGOs, a very young population ...

But then again there are the Joseph Philippes who, day by day, renew their faith in God and are willing to reconstruct one step at a time. ■



# Glimmers of hope in the embers of despair

Noel O'Meara CSSp



**T**he soldier looks at our stamped documents. The barrier is lifted. We cross from the Dominican Republic into Haiti.

There is no more tarmac, only stony roads, rocks and holes to be avoided. There is a large UNICEF tent. Donkeys replace motorbikes. Most people walk. After half-an-hour negotiating these roads we come to a huge archway with Douane emblazoned upon it. Under its shadow a policeman looms. He finds out we are priests — Werby, Don and I. He bows, takes my hand in a warm handshake and waves us on. How totally different from the officious bureaucracy on the other side of the border.

There are Chilean UN soldiers with guns and Toyota land cruisers just beyond the customs.

## Inside Haiti

The scenery is rugged. We are in high mountains. Some of the road clings to the mountainside. The car, a small truck really, jerks and bucks, the average speed about 10-15 kms per hour. I wonder how trucks manage. They must be even slower.

Convoys with food aid make their way from the San Juan diocese with the confidence of experience. An armed escort accompanies them when they get into Haiti.

We pass a huge hydro dam somewhere in the mountains. Then climb high above the dam. A spectacular sight. Homes cling to the side of the mountain that contains the man-made

lake. How do they live? Their farms are now under water. No more maize. No more bananas.

The home of one of the major workers providing anti-retroviral drugs to the poor, Harvard doctor Paul Farmer, is here. He has written passionately about the poor and how they are discriminated against, especially when it comes to sickness and disease. He has dedicated his life to them and has built a hospital in this exact place. There is a market outside its gates. People all over the place. I am reminded of the pool at Bethsaida.

Further on we hit the main Hinche-Port-au-Prince road. We make good time, arriving at Hinche six hours after leaving San Juan.

Werby and I communicate in French. Don and Werby in Spanish, and Don and I in English. Quite a Babel in the cabin of the truck — but we all sing the same song.

## Hinche

The Caritas HQ in Hinche has been the centre of all our work. Its director is Haitian priest, Père Jacques, a thin gracious man.

He looks after children who had to leave Port-au-Prince in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake for a variety of reasons: death of immediate family; parents' need to place their children away from the city, away from danger, near food and helping hands; family members taking in their relatives; church people recommending children for help with education. There are 3,200 children in the programme: accepted

One cholera patient told me she gets drinking water from a river. If she were to seek water from a safer source, she would have to spend three or four hours a day fetching water for her family — and then would have less time to work and earn money. Those are the trade-offs that Haitians face.

**Nicholas Kristof, *New York Times***

Rubble left by the earthquake in the capital would fill enough dump trucks parked bumper to bumper to reach more than halfway around the globe.

***Globe and Mail***

Aid is not the answer ... Let Haitians assume full control of their own affairs and start rebuilding a life of their own.

**Kieran Green, *CARE Canada***

“Haitians have grown weary of solution-wielding foreigners who never deliver.”

The country's future will take at least two decades to change ... in the last two decades Haiti has become some kind of huge laboratory for all kinds of projects. Everybody needs to rethink their way of doing things. Haiti cannot continue being the Republic of Port-au-Prince. It has to be about the Republic of Haiti.

Nearly half-a-million households are headed by women. Many have lost small retail or food businesses, street stalls. The loss of this income, which supports several family members, makes them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation or dependent on food aid.

**Michaëlle Jean, former *Governor-General of Canada***

Spiritans got to work the day after the catastrophe to get back on our own two feet and to bring hope to its victims ... The post-earthquake situation in Haiti has pushed us to become much more involved with the displaced and the homeless.

We are very grateful for the generosity and solidarity of other Spiritans. We have received a half-million dollars from different Spiritan groups, \$200,000 of which we have already spent. We are slowly recovering.

**Paulin Innocent *CSSp***

“How is it we are here when so many others aren't?”

***Guilt-ridden survivors***

“There is enough money in the country already. The problem is that ten families own it all.”

**Jessica Leeder, *Globe and Mail***

Concern Worldwide — the Irish aid group that built and manages the \$2 million Tabarre-Issa camp, landed on a winning formula.

First they transplanted a community in its entirety, keeping their roots intact. Second, they offered a job. Third, they defused potential tension by sharing their resources with the existing neighbourhood.

Partner agencies are rebuilding five of six local elementary schools that collapsed in the quake. Concern has begun offering microcredit loans to residents.

**Catherine Porter, *Toronto Star***

## One island, two countries

Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic — nearly 20 million people distributed equally between the two countries. That is as far as the equality goes.

Haiti has only one third of the landmass, a lot of it mountainous. The Dominicans enjoy the rest. There is a lot of history, most of it sad. France and Spain do not come well out of the telling of it.

Over 200,000 died in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, on that fateful day, January 11, 2010. Many more were wounded for life. Families are broken. The future is bleak.

The world and its cameras came those first few days. Our hearts were touched and a most generous response was forthcoming.

Time has passed. Haiti has slipped back in the consciousness of the media. But the repair of the world, that part of it anyway, goes on.

into the Hinche Catholic schools, taken in by various families, given food, clothing and housing.

The schools, already over-crowded, swell with these newcomers. Extra teachers have to be hired. Doors of family homes, most of them poor shacks, open to receive the children.

I come across one family living in a small shack with 32 members — I cannot imagine how they live. All I see is one bed. Caritas delivers one box for every five members to each family every two weeks. This particular family receives 35 boxes, each box containing rice, beans, cooking oil, salt, sugar, and maize. It is spartan, but wonderful.

## Refugees from Port-au-Prince

I meet some of the refugee children. It is obvious how homesick many of them are. One 12-year-old girl writes a letter of thanks for what we have done to help. Her sadness particularly strikes me: at her age, the knowledge of what has happened to her home, her family, to the whole way of life she had become accustomed to — how soul destroying.

There are some 1.6 million people living in camps, and another 400,000 are living with extended family or friends. More than 1,300 schools and 50 health care facilities have been destroyed, and more are significantly damaged. The level of destruction is extraordinary.

The debris alone would fill 8,000 Olympic swimming pools. It is estimated that the earthquake has had the largest proportional impact any country has ever experienced.

## Port-au-Prince

After six hours we arrive in Port-au-Prince, the epicentre of the earthquake. Traffic is horrendous. Tents occupy any open space — tents of all shapes and sizes fill corners, gardens, every patch possible. The airport has tents all around it.

We pull into the central Spiritan house. It looks to be a fine structure, but close up you can see the cracks. Again — tents

everywhere. The Spiritans live in tents. They have opened their garden to their neighbours.

I get busy with the camera. A poignant photo is one of the Spiritan Provincial, Paulin Innocent, with some of his Council outside a Chinese tent, plus a wooden table and chairs. This is the centre of administration of the Spiritan effort in Haiti. A tent, a table, and a few chairs.

## Old Spiritan Seminary

Spiritans Patrick Eugene takes me to see his ministry based in the old Spiritan seminary — now empty and unusable. On the patio are two large tents housing a clinic manned by the Belgian Médecins du Monde.

The house is eerie. You know it is unsafe, the least after-tremor and that will be that! The rooms are closed and a permanent guard keeps watch. Dust and cobwebs are the sole inhabitants. It is a ghost house with mementos of Spiritan presence.

I see a room with the name Antoine Adrien. He was one of the great Haitian Spiritans who stood against the dictator Papa Doc Duvalier and suffered exile for so doing.

There must be over 1000 families encamped on the football field. What will it be like when the rainy season starts?

A large water truck blocks the entrance. Some people are already at the truck's tail holding their buckets under the leaking taps. Water comes by truck at certain times. Brightly coloured plastic canisters and buckets and pots are there in plenty. The water is for drinking, cooking, washing both bodies and clothes.

Living perpetually under canvas in a football field in the middle of a broken city — what a hell of a life.

I note the number of children and the fact that most of the tents are taken up by makeshift beds. Sometimes there is a person lying on that bed. Always there are the children.

There are small passageways between the tents, wide enough for a person to pass. On each side the tents are canvas to canvas. So little room. People are cooking on small stoves. Just one small blaze and there will be another tragedy. Where are the toilets?

## A man who wants the best for his people

This is Patrick Eugene's parish or at least what is left of it in the material sense. Patrick greets everyone — one hand perpetually holding a cell phone to his ear, the other gesticulating at somebody or other — a man who wants the best for his people.

He tells me of his plans for a technical, professional school. He will use the old Spiritan buildings. He feels they can be fortified, recuperated. He points out that, as things stand, the kids have nothing in their future. There is no other technical school in this whole section of Port-au-Prince. He wants to do something about that. He has plans. ■

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# Dignity for all

Joe Gunn

**W**hat would you say if you were invited to address a gathering of your former high school teachers?

CPJ's (Citizens for Public Justice) Joe Gunn found himself immersed in this dilemma in Pickering, Ontario, when invited to deliver three hours of conferences to 35 Spiritans and their associates from all over Canada in early December 2010.

Joe engaged this religious order and the men and women who collaborate with them in reflections about CPJ's public justice efforts. The day seemed successful until the priest who once kicked Joe out of Grade 12 Chemistry class loudly opined from his wheelchair that the expulsion was "well-deserved!"

(*The Catalyst*, Winter 2010)

(The priest in question was former co-editor of *Spiritans*. His initials are G.F. — Editor)

Joe Gunn is executive director of Citizens for Public Justice. He is also a graduate of Neil McNeil Catholic High School in Toronto. His bio reads: "The call to do justice is his life's vocation. So working at CPJ is, for him, a privilege. Where better to encourage the flourishing of public justice than at an organization which is totally devoted to engage Canadians to work collectively toward this end?"

Based in Ottawa, Joe works nationwide. His current focus is on the elimination of poverty in Canada, under the rallying cry Dignity for All.

Joe began the morning session with one of Jesus' best-known parables. "Feed the hungry, give the thirsty a drink, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick, spend time with prisoners." It's all there in Matthew's gospel — the final judgment: the test that will sort out those who "got it" and those who didn't.

We read the text from Matthew, and, most likely, think of it as the final exam for each of us individually. Joe suggested another approach: how about applying it to ourselves as a religious community, a parish, a diocese, the Canadian church?

"Much church talk is looking in the mirror. We seldom ask how we might cooperate with other Catholic groups — maybe other Christian groups — to tackle current issues at the local, provincial or national levels. How about cooperating with anyone and everyone who is involved in like-minded projects?"



"Pope John Paul II made 'solidarity' — formerly associated with Trade Unions and Communists — into a universally good word in the 1980s."

We claim to be followers of "the Way" — a word Jesus used when speaking of himself: "I am the Way." The way speaks of getting there, being further along the road, but not yet arrived. We will always be on the way. So let's not wait until we have it all worked out.

The way used to be described as a six-step sequence: 1) What is the gospel message about justice? 2) What does that message ask of us in order to change our lifestyle? 3) Listen to the victims of our society and learn from them. 4) Denounce whatever oppresses them. 5) Work with others. 6) Assist the poor and distressed.

Joe Gunn suggests a total reversal of these steps: 1) Reach out to the poor and distressed — feed them, clothe them, give them money, come to their assistance. 2) Spend some time with them, listen to their stories, get to know them. 3) Develop a critical analysis of the society that, at least partly, causes their situation. 4) Make judgments, decisions and plans in light of the gospel. 5) Work with others — be ecumenical.

"Working for Public Justice brings our faith into the public sphere. We come to know who has the power to get things changed. We debate and challenge, approve and support as needed.

"CPJ supports ecumenical endeavours and prefers a Christian voice rather than an Anglican, Presbyterian, United, or Catholic voice. We choose to be inclusive rather than exclusive, to consult among ourselves and with others ahead of time — all this so as to have a common voice before going public."

Joe's final advice was "walk the talk." He quoted Isaiah: "This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Jesus found that to be the case in his day too. Are our lips and our lives, our talk and our walk in sync? "We need to walk the talk before we squawk." ■



# Much has changed — much **remains** to be done

From a talk given by Dr Ellen Einterz, VICS volunteer

One of the nice things about living in one of the poorest, least developed parts of the world is that it is seldom difficult to see what needs to be done and always easy to keep busy doing it.

Myra Bates and I have kept busy building a hospital and healthcare service in a desperately poor, remote corner of northern Cameroon called Kolofata.

We have been caring for motherless infants, supporting schools and teachers, digging wells, vaccinating children, teaching in markets, in homes and under trees, providing opportunities for girls and women to develop marketable skills, and sharing every day the sorrows and joys of a huge community of people — brothers and sisters of ours from other nations, of other languages. Their lives differ so markedly from our own.

## Much has changed

In twenty years much has changed.

Four hundred patients a day are treated in the hospital or one of its health centres.

Infant mortality has plummeted as women have come to defy the centuries' old superstition that prevented them from breast-feeding their newborns during the first three days of life.

The childhood death toll from measles, neonatal tetanus and whooping cough — once three of our major killers — has dropped to zero.

Other highly-prevalent diseases have also dwindled or disappeared. One of these is trachoma — a chronic contagious eye infection that causes the upper eyelids to turn in so far that the lashes scrape the surface of the eyes blind. Another is schistosomiasis, caused by a water-borne urinary tract parasite that makes the bladder bleed. Our boys had to be taught that it is not normal to urinate blood. Guinea worm disease, characterized by the slow spontaneous expulsion of a 3-foot long worm through the skin, is yet another. Polio has been gone for years.

## Other things have changed too

In our most distant, austere village, cell phones have transformed daily life. Internet access is limited, slow and rare, but



it has nevertheless brought us to within a click of just about anywhere, anytime — or at least anytime the power is on.

Where bicycles used to be a sign of wealth, our dirt roads now hum with motorcycles, even a few cars.

The district's first bridges — just one lane wide, but still, real concrete bridges that go over rivers rather than down into their beds — are being built.

Everyone with a scrap of land cultivates millet, the staple crop. Today there are also vast orchards with mango trees, date palms and experimental grapevines yielding truckloads of fruit every year.

## Much remains the same

But in many ways life in Kolofata is still lived as it has been lived for generations.

Bricks fashioned by hand from mud, straw and dung are the building blocks of most houses, few of which have more than two rooms. Roofs are made of thatch, floors of beaten earth, doors and windows of thin sheets of corrugated aluminum cut and tacked onto rickety frames. In some villages houses are made entirely of straw.

Termite-ridden power poles topple as they have always toppled with infuriating frequency, causing our lights to go out and our water to stop running for days or weeks at a time. This is a serious problem for the hospital, but scant worry for most families, who have neither running water nor electricity.

Kerosene lanterns provide light; food is cooked over wood fires; water is hauled from hand-dug wells, foot-pumped from boreholes, or scooped out from under river sand.

There are still no paved roads in the district; there is no post office, no newspaper, and no industry. Three-quarters of the population are illiterate and unable to speak either of the country's two official languages. Most earn their living as subsistence farmers or herders of goats, sheep or cattle and manage on a family income of around \$30 a month.

### **Outbreaks and epidemics define the seasons**

Early in the year, during the middle months of our long dry season, clouds of dust blow down from the Sahara and we brace for respiratory tract infections and meningitis. Gastro-intestinal disorders hit hardest just before the rains. Malaria and malaria-induced anemia start and progressively worsen during the rainy season.

It is at this time of year that we receive so many children convulsing, comatose or gasping for breath. As the rains end, cholera comes — alarmingly, attacking whole families or neighbourhoods at once, striking suddenly and killing quickly.

### **The severely malnourished child**

Malnutrition among toddlers peaks during the hungry months before the fall harvest. It can be vicious. A typical child is brought to us soon after weaning, at twenty-one or twenty-two months, his body a tangle of wiry limbs, knotted joints and frayed-yarn yellow hair. He has oozing sores on his legs, behind his ears and at the corners of his mouth. His tongue is bright red. As his heart, liver and kidneys weaken, that bare-bones body balloons with useless retained fluid until his feet become bulbous pouches, his eyes slits between the pillowy puffs of their lids. His skin sloughs off in ragged strips, and in places the flesh underneath is raw and shiny like the flesh of a peeled peach.

He is starving and he will not eat — the paradox of the severely malnourished child. When playing, coaxing and pleading fail, we try to feed him by force, but he resists us violently, tearing out his nasogastric tube unless we make it impossible for him to reach up and touch it.

Unable to comprehend his misery, he cries all day — a plaintive, tearless wail that crescendos whenever anyone comes near him. His mother holds him and murmurs softly, cajoling him to swallow a little milk, a little millet gruel laced with ground peanuts or sesame seeds, a little beef broth. He will take none of it, and so she tilts a spoon over his lips, gently presses his cheeks, and drips what she can through his clenched teeth.

Given half a chance, and a mother with the patience of Job, even a severely malnourished child can pull through. But it takes weeks — sometimes months. The skin sores start to dry up, the healing begins to subside, eventually he sits again, he eats — not much at first — mostly he just clutches some piece of food in his fist and nibbles gingerly around the edges. But he eats. He cries a little less and sleeps a little more. He smiles, and it is in this moment, and not until this moment, that you know he is going to make it. He will be okay.

Your heart dances and, looking around, you are not in the least surprised to find that the tress and the mountains and the clouds and the sky all seem to be dancing as well. All is as all should be.

### **The world turned upside down**

There are some Myra and I cannot save. The fight just leaves them, and we watch in horror as they lose their grip. Irritability gives way to lethargy, lethargy to coma, coma to death.

When that happens — in fact whenever we see a child suffer grievously, whether from malnutrition, cholera, a sickle cell crisis, AIDS, tuberculosis, or any of the dozens of other

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead

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monstrous illnesses that target our kids — we feel as if the world is turned upside down, inside out. These tiny children, these most trusting, most vulnerable among us, are asked to bear so brutal a share of the world's suffering.

The last will be first, but meanwhile, those of us at the head of the line, those of us with the God-given means and strength and understanding to act, surely also have a God-given responsibility to be more than lookers-on.

### **Much we can do**

If by the Kingdom of God we mean a world in harmony with the teaching of Christ, then there is no east and west and north and south; there are no borders, colors, or distinctions. We are all one, and the good news, the best news, is that there really is so much we can do to relieve suffering, to allay grief, and to offer hope to those who need it most.

One of my nephews, a philosopher himself, often ends his letters to me with something like, “This letter is over — you can go back now to saving the world.” He has been to Kolofata, so I think the tease is really only half a tease. Short of saving the world, we can at least, and we do in fact, make a gigantic difference in the lives of thousands. Having a chance to do that — one person, one patient, one life at a time — is our great fortune. ■

If we launched ourselves today toward the nearest planetary system discovered so far ... we would have 300,000 years of asking "when will we get there?" before we got there.

**New York Times** editorial



Christ was born in a cave and Christianity in the catacombs.

**G.K. Chesterton,**  
*The Everlasting Man*

Encouragement heals because it reaches the heart. Encouragement liberates, it enables a person to give all that he or she has to give.

**Francis Libermann**



Faith in the church has never meant believing it does everything right; it means never abandoning hope despite all the things it does wrong.

**John Allen,**  
*National Catholic Reporter*

Although the earth [in Haiti] yearns to be sown with seeds, it remains still. That is because drifting from the solitary huts is the scent of cooking beans and roasting maize — seeds that were destined for the ground, but have ended up in cooking pots instead. ... Families have given up the precious seeds set aside for the next planting to cook them for their guests.

**Development and Peace**



Haitians have so little, need so much, and have been suffering for months despite all the promised largesse, the presence of so many giant aid organizations. ... The system is definitely broken. It shouldn't be like this.

**Craig Kielburger, Free the Children**



## Fr. Arthur Carragher CSSp, 1922–2011

“Kedu?” This short word opened up a long relationship between a young priest and a one-time missionary in Nigeria. The year Fr. Arthur left St. Patrick’s parish in Obolle-eke was the year I was born.

What interested me, the young priest, is that “kedu?” (how are you?) is the local greeting my people use when they meet each other. As our friendship grew I came to realize that Fr. Arthur had picked up many expressions of my local language: “I am fine,” “I am hungry/thirsty,” “what is your name,” etc. He remembered the names of most of the towns in the parish. He played for me some of the tricks with coins and cards that he had used to entertain the children in schools.

Fr. Arthur told me stories of his ministry in this rural and difficult Obollo-Eke parish. In 1952, it was one of only three parishes in what later came to be Nsukka diocese. There weren’t many cars then, and the missionaries traveled mainly on motorcycles and bicycles. Most of the time, the distances ranged from twelve to twenty miles. Three quarters of the journey the bicycle would carry the priest, and the other quarter the priest would carry the bicycle. There were also rivers, streams and brooks to cross to the next mission station.



One of the stories Fr. Arthur told me was about his experience on a particular trek to a mission town, Agudene, about fourteen miles from the parish house. He had to cross the Amanyi river on a bicycle. Everything went fine till about one third of the journey back home.

Fr. Arthur was totally exhausted, riding through the rugged terrains of the towns and villages. He barely made it to the town square at Ogbodu Aba where he literally collapsed.

The young men immediately rallied around him. He was no stranger to any of them. One of them hurriedly climbed a coconut tree, felled down some of the heads, cut them open, and gave the milk to Fr. Arthur. With the strength from that coconut milk Fr. Arthur rode another six miles to his parish home.

He later recalled, “That milk gave me a new life and spirit.”

Years later in Canada, as we talked about his missionary activities, he told me, “You know, David, I left my energy in Africa.”

I am privileged to have known Fr. Arthur as a priest and confrere, and more so as a minister in my home parish. I represent all the people of those parishes in giving thanks to God for the gift of this great missionary. May God grant him eternal rest now in his Kingdom.

— Fr. David E. Okenji CSSp

## TransCanada Jubilarians

### 2010

#### Ordination

70 years Ted Colleton  
60 years Arthur Carragher  
Edward Graham  
Frank McCabe  
50 Years Gerald FitzGerald  
John Geary

#### Profession

60 years Enzo Agnoli  
Michael Doyle  
John Geary  
Matthew Grogan  
50 years Peter Wayow  
25 years Grzegorz Makowski

### 2011

#### Ordination

60 years John Cunningham  
50 Years Dermot Doran  
Francis Laverty

#### Profession

60 years Patrick Doran  
William McCormack  
50 years Joseph Kelly  
25 years Robert Colburn  
Alexander Osei

## Lay Spiritan honoured

Congratulations to Dr. George Webster, Lay Spiritan, who received the 2010 Lifetime Achievement Award of the Canadian Bioethics Society. “The award is given annually to an individual whose demonstrated scholarship and leadership has contributed significantly to health care ethics in Canada.”

George is ethics consultant, researcher and educator with the Catholic Health Association of Manitoba.



Photo: Tom Fulton

Return Address:  
Spiritan  
121 Victoria Park Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario  
CANADA M4E 3S2  
P.M.#40050389



# Candles

wax, wane

and stand on supple spines,  
drip-tipsy with warmth  
and glowing amber haloes.  
They are my friends,  
honeyscenting dinner guests  
that mingle and murmur,  
cast shadows on the dull spots,  
send glistenings onto goblets  
and radiate across my tablespread.  
Resplendent lovers, they  
kiss my neck-hollow with gold  
and dip a playful finger in my red wine.  
Fading as I do at the tapered end of an evening,  
they melt me to sleep in a gentle pool.

— *Kate Marshall Flaherty*