

Summer 2016

Beyond Borders

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Recommended Citation

McAuley, P., & Fogarty, J. (2016). Beyond Borders. *Spiritan Magazine*, 40 (3). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc/vol40/iss3/7>

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Beyond Borders

Paul McAuley CSSp

This past summer, from August 14th to 19th, just over forty Spiritans and Lay Spiritan Associates from Quebec, English Canada and the United States gathered in the beautiful town of Granby, Quebec, south of Montreal for a week long assembly. This meeting entitled “Beyond Borders” was the culmination of six years of preliminary discussions among the Spiritan leadership of the three North American Provinces of Canada (Quebec), TransCanada (English Canada)

and the USA. These discussions centred around the challenges facing our North American Spiritan communities as our membership ages and diminishes, as our financial situations become more precarious and yet as the needs of North American society continue to call us to be a gospel centred, Good News witnessing community in a fast changing world.

The purpose of the assembly was in the title – “Beyond Borders”. We are not French Canadian, or English Canadian

or American, nor are we young or elderly, nor cleric or lay ... we are Spiritans, a three hundred year old Religious Congregation supposedly dedicated to the poor and engaging in ministries and missions for which the Church has difficulty in finding workers. Granby challenged us to set aside our differences and to re-discover our commonality as Spiritans.

The participation by all members was impressive as everyone attending had made a special effort and in some cases





a sacrifice to be there. We were all saying in one form or another that we trust in God and want to make this work, we want to continue a Spiritan presence in this part of the world since we have seen God work wonders with the Spiritans in North America in the past and we trust God is not finished with us but will use us to be agents of change and transformation in the future.

For me, there were two outstanding, re-occurring themes during the week. Firstly, we referenced quite often *Laudato Si*, the second encyclical by Pope Francis, “On Care For Our Common Home.” Such a powerful document has resonated with people all over the world and care for our earth, our

common home, can unite and is uniting people of all faiths (and even those who profess no particular faith or creed). This was certainly a “Beyond Borders” calling.

The second theme of the week seemed to be that of “radical welcome.” Yes, we as Spiritans claim to live in community and hold all things in common. As Religious, we strive to follow the example of the early Church as described in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:44-47). Our gathering in Granby reminded all of us to revisit that vision and ideal and redouble our efforts to concretize it in our own communities, giving “radical welcome” to each other

and to those among whom we minister.

As we finished our closing Mass together on the Friday morning, we felt enthusiastic and renewed, but knew the Granby “Beyond Borders” meeting was not just the end of six years of work, no, it was the beginning of, God willing, a new way of being Spiritan in 21st century North America. ■



Granby Reflections

Joe Kelly CSSp

I returned with a new enthusiasm and a renewed confidence in the future of the Spiritan Congregation in North America. Our discussions were cordial, full of hope, and free of harsh words or complaints. I am convinced that the Holy Spirit has taught us new ways to be more caring towards one another and to extend that welcoming attitude to the people among whom we minister.

Spiritans joining us from other places will have to be made feel truly at home.

In spite of our awareness of present difficulties we were very enthusiastic, open and honest.

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Granby Reflections

Gary Warner, Lay Spiritan

I came away from the Spiritans "Beyond Borders" assembly in Granby deeply moved by the positive spirit that prevailed throughout the meeting and by the willingness of the participants to throw themselves earnestly into the exploration together of where the Spirit could be directing us in our North American provinces as we look to the future.

The transformation in the European provinces, referred to in Fr Fogarty's message, from a mood of resignation brought on by diminishing numbers and an aging demographic to a new missionary dynamism focused on shared projects within a transnational structure, resonated as an exemplary lesson we can learn from.

The message brought by Fr Gittins, author of *Living Mission Interculturally*, in radical welcoming communities, presented as essential to our future, hit home for me. We face in TransCanada and elsewhere in our Spiritan world the challenge of going beyond multicultural to intercultural living, moving beyond a relationship of invitation and inclusion to one of radical welcome.

The urgency of this task cannot be overstated.

I was also struck by calls to embrace our fragility, to recreate rather than repeat, to be witnesses by our lifestyle and community life, to avoid the pitfalls of diocesanization, to enhance collaboration with lay people, and to respond to Spiritan priorities, including interfaith dialogue, ministry to the marginalized and for the Integrity of Creation.



Evangelization in Our Time

John Fogarty CSSp, Spiritan Superior General

“**T**heir identity as a people was shattered, they were without power, privilege or direction.” When was that? Way back in Old Testament times when the Jewish people were in exile. But the disciples of Isaiah continued to believe that God was still with them, present and active among them and in the world around them. Even in exile – if only they had eyes to see it: “Behold I am doing something new, it is emerging. Can you not see it?”



Today, led by Pope Francis, many committed Christians think likewise –they are both courageous enough and open enough to rethink their priorities as Christians. They are

Any vision for future Spiritan mission on the Continent of Europe would clearly have to involve collaboration with the wider Congregation and, in particular, with the African Provinces

We are being invited to move away from an understanding of group – where there are those who belong and those who have come to help – to the concept of an international Spiritan presence and mission in a particular country.

engaged in a process of reflection, listening and dialogue. “We are called to recreate, not to repeat”, wrote Carlos Mesters.

Where do the Spiritan Provinces in Europe and North America fit into this approach? A number of these Provinces (groups) have not seen any new entrants for several years; all are deeply conscious of diminishing and aging resources – membership of the Province of France, for example, dropped from around 1500 in 1969 to some 500 in 1999, and there was a widespread sense that the era of overseas mission, with which we had been so familiar, was coming to an end.

from which the majority of our vocations are emerging. Which of us older Spiritans ever thought we would be looking to Africa to “re-christianize” Europe and North America?

How to go about it

The European Provinces accepted the invitation of the General Council and together set about identifying agreed criteria for future Spiritan missionary outreach in Europe: Youth Ministry, work with Migrants and Refugees, issues around Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

New missionary work in Europe would focus on international/intercultural

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communities, collaboration with lay people, and response to the needs of the local Church.

Our Spiritan groups are already becoming more and more intercultural and international, where every member, no matter his country of origin, feels at home and becomes an equal partner in the life and mission of the group. The receiving group is challenged to foster a genuine sense of belonging to those who come from “outside” and to insure their inclusion in the decision-making processes of the group. And the “outsiders” are asked to identify fully with the mission to which they have been appointed. We are being invited to move away from an understanding of group

– where there are those who belong and those who have come to help – to the concept of an international Spiritan presence and mission in a particular country.

The Spirit is in our midst

There are, indeed, many encouraging signs of the presence of the Spirit in our midst, among them the inspiring daily example of many members, the increasing demand for Spiritans to serve immigrant communities in Europe, the growth of Spiritan vocations in Vietnam and India, the current discussions in regard to “mission beyond borders”, involving the Provinces of Canada, TransCanada and the USA.

All of these developments present new challenges and new opportunities. In a sense, the Provinces of North America have taken the lead in a process that will ultimately have to involve the entire Congregation. We need to initiate serious research and reflection into the future of Spiritan mission on a continental basis, in the light of our charism and our resources. What is

the future of Spiritan mission in Africa, in Latin America, in Asia?

A failure to take responsibility for the future, despite its uncertainty, is ultimately a failure in leadership at all levels.

Challenges for Spiritan mission today

We need to return to the originality and simplicity of the gospel, to the witness of lives transformed by an encounter with Christ. We are reminded of the prophetic words of Vatican II: “The future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.” ■





Granby Reflections

Oliver Iwuchukwu CSSp

Two ideas engaged my attention most; each an invitation to hope and radical conversion.

The first is a point stressed by Fr Gittins CSSp: *Unless international communities become intercultural they will not survive*. Prophetic! A wake-up call to urgent action to secure a future for the Spiritan presence and ministry in our North American Continent.

The second is the theme: *Beyond Borders*. After the meeting, I took a second look at this catchy phrase, two fuzzy concepts yoked together. Perhaps there is more to borders than I had initially thought. A border, by any definition, is a limit, a boundary. In addition to our provincial boundaries, are we not always framed by many borders: our nationality, language, race, age, and the other items in the cultural baggage we carry with us? Do these not limit our ability to see and go beyond where we are? If so, intercultural living, a radically welcoming community, is possible if, and only if, we are able to go beyond the limits imposed by these boundaries. Difficult but not impossible. Granby is, therefore, a stepping-stone on the long and difficult road to the home we intend to build together, beyond borders.

