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## From the Editor and Table of Contents

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# Fifty Years of Change

When I joined the Spiritans many moons ago, it was so easy to define who the Spiritans were. To put it simply, as Fr. Bob Hudson did in 1947 when he visited the graduating class in my high school, they were “African Missionaries”. Very simple for a teenager to grasp. A Spiritan had a motorbike, a pith helmet, lived in Africa and saw plenty of lions and elephants.

In my years in the seminary the notion that we were training to be African missionaries was reinforced. All the retired missionaries we met, as well as those home on leave, spoke continually about Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Kenya, and the Gambia. A few spoke of Trinidad or Mauritius but these were exceptions.

When we were asked, after ordination to the priesthood, in what region we would prefer to serve, I boldly answered “Africa”, as did all of our ordination class. Nobody wished to remain in Ireland to work in our schools and seminaries there.

When I was assigned to Canada I did not know what to think. We had a very small group of Spiritans in Ontario and the work there was only six years old. Weren’t Spiritans supposed to be missionaries in Africa?

What I was part of in the early sixties was a sea change in the Church and in all its institutions including the Spiritans. The Second Vatican Council called on the churches around the world to evaluate the needs of the peoples they served and to adopt their method of evangelization to suit local cultures. No longer would the Inuit of Canada and the Zulus of South Africa be evangelized in a uniform made-in-Rome formula. Latin in the liturgy was replaced by a thousand different tongues. Evangelization no longer took place only in Catholic institutions. The whole world was now the vineyard. The Good News was to be proclaimed to everyone.

And in the next forty-five years, the Church and, with it, the Spiritans have undergone total change. As I coedited this issue of *Spiritans*, I came to realize how far we have grown from being mere African Missionaries. Africa and its peoples remain the primary arena of our endeavors but the current *Spiritans* portrays a far wider scope of evangelization.

Our personnel have expanded from being composed of religious only to include lay Spiritans and volunteer coworkers. Our membership has gone from being 90% European to having a European minority. Our Spiritans have discovered many unusual ministries beyond school and parish service.

In *Spiritans* we try to catch the new Spiritans. Because of the rate of change and the addition of new works it is difficult to do. As our Superior General, Jean-Paul Hoch, said in an address to the Irish Spiritans, “From the beginning the main and almost unique commitment of the Spiritans was to the evangelization of Africa, including first evangelization, the building up of local Churches, formation of a local clergy, involvement in different types of education, and development work. Later came work for justice and peace, ministering to refugees, to those suffering from AIDS, involvement in dialogue with Islam and other religions etc. At present, it is almost impossible to gather the multiple engagements of Spiritan confreres under one heading. I think it is good that this be so: we should not make an audit of all our commitments to determine which are more “Spiritans” than others. In the final reckoning, what is most important is not where we are or what we are doing, but rather the spirit in which we do it.”

Gerald FitzGerald CSSp

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chaplain at Neil McNeil High School

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