

2-2007

Mission and Money

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Recommended Citation

Fitzgerald, G. (2007). Mission and Money. *Spiritan Magazine*, 31 (1). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc/vol31/iss1/8>

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MISSION & MONEY



Papua New Guinea



Mexico



Malawi



Haiti

Storing treasure in heaven while spending it on earth

Years ago in the Spiritan seminary in Ireland, which was operated on a monastic model, talking was forbidden during mealtime. In the dining hall where two hundred young men ate hungrily, edifying literature was read by a reader in a high pulpit during the course of the meal. I remember hardly anything that I heard during mealtime in my nine years of training there. But one phrase, “the clink of money around the altar”, the title of a chapter from a book by a French parish priest in suburban Paris, remains in my memory to this day.

The book, whose name I forget, had to do with how a dormant and almost extinct parish community had been revitalized. I forget the many chapters about how the author accomplished this, but I do remember him saying that nothing turns off a congregation quicker than references to the financial needs of the parish.

I resolved there and then never to mention money from the pulpit when my time came to preach. I have kept very few of the

Gerald FitzGerald CSSp

resolutions of my youth, but this one is still intact. I hope this article will not be considered as infringing on it.

Spiritan treasurer

After I retired from teaching I was asked to be treasurer of the Spiritans in English-speaking Canada. Some years later I was appointed as representative of the treasurers of the fourteen Spiritan groups in North America and the Caribbean. In this capacity I attend meetings, along with other regional representatives from around the world, with the General Bursar of the Spiritans in Rome, Fr. José Lopes de Sousa CSSp, who is ably assisted by Fr. James Iben CSSp.

The assets of every region in our religious order — property, investments and bank holdings are owned and operated by the Spiritans of that region. The central administration in Rome owns certain funds bequeathed to the Spiritans over the years

and these cover most of their costs of operation. Due to the expansion of the Spiritans into many new countries and territories in recent years, the administration is now running a deficit and is eating into the capital of these bequests.

Financing the missions

Individual Spiritan groups, such as those of us in English Canada, have total control over the funds earned by way of salaries and pensions as well as money donated by friends. Having paid all our living expenses, any surplus is used to support Spiritans in mission territories. Our Canadian group has historical relationships with Haiti, Papua/New Guinea, Mexico and Malawi and our missionaries there receive the bulk of our surplus funds. Newly established mission teams, in places like Taiwan, the Philippines, Pakistan, etc. suffer as they have no historical connection to any of the older established Spiritan provinces. As international teams they have no one country that they can turn to for help.

However a fund called "Cor Unum" has been set up by the General Bursar to assist mission groups with the expenses of supporting and educating the young men in training for the priesthood. All groups with a surplus contribute to this central fund. Our Canadian Spiritan group is one of the chief contributors. But apart from this assistance to educate their seminarians, many mission teams have little outside financial help.

Tax exempt receipts

The Government of Canada is very generous to Spiritans and to all other religious orders which operate in the country. As our priests have taken vows of perpetual poverty, all income they earn is tax free but must be paid directly into the central common fund. All Spiritan priests live on a budget from this source. Another concession we are granted is that we are allowed to give tax-exempt receipts for all donations we receive from our benefactors.

As our income is tax-free, we can support ourselves from our salaries and pensions. We give some of our surplus to Canadian charities working here with our aboriginal people, the urban poor, immigrants and refugees, prisoners and the sick. We support organizations which foster justice and peace, ecumenism, the environment, etc. But we send over 90% of our surplus and 100% of all donations to Spiritan missionaries overseas. Our teams in the four mission territories previously mentioned receive the bulk of these funds, but some are used to provide scholarships for post-graduate studies in Canada to young African Spiritan priests.

Generous benefactors

As well as the funds we generate ourselves, we are blessed to have the support of hundreds of generous benefactors. Your donations are a vital part of the money we send to our missionaries for their support, their works of evangelization and their humanitarian projects. These donations are sent overseas in their entirety very quickly after we receive them. We pride ourselves at the speed with which we put your money to work. It does not linger in Canadian Bank Accounts. Each day we process a dozen or two tax receipts and speed the gifts to a Spiritan whom we know will use it wisely and account to us for its use. Donations vary greatly in size but having been taught by Christ in the gospel story of the Widow's Mite, we realize that

the value of the gift is not measured in dollars but in the sacrifice it entails to the donor. We offer prayers daily for our donors and their intentions.

I don't think that money has corrupted the Spiritans of Canada. Despite living in one of the world's wealthiest countries, despite receiving large amounts of money through salaries, pension and donations, I am always impressed by the modest life-

styles of our members. But then, most have served in third-world countries, and who can waste money on superfluities and luxuries after experiencing the abject poverty of so many people whom Spiritans serve in these places?

The love of money is the root of great evil, but the wise use of money to spread the Good News of Jesus is indeed the source of much good. ■

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