Olbalbal: A Mission of Hope


The Spiritans began our work of evangelization in Maasai country in the era of Vatican II and drew our mission thinking from its mission statements.

Here in the diocese of Arusha (Tanzania), well-known pioneers in missionary work traveled and followed the Maasai cattle markets in the 1950s, making friends with the elders of the Maasai and building a store of good will between the Maasai and the missionaries that we benefit from even today.

Direct evangelization of Maasai communities began at Loliondo Mission in 1966, with Spiritans pitching tents in one Maasai community after another to preach the Gospel. This was a dramatic departure from the way most missionaries had approached their missions up to that time, which was to work mainly with school children.

The framework that was established—which we continue in our approach to missionary work even today—is this:

We come not to transplant a parish from New York or Dar-es-Salaam to some place in Maasai country but to enflesh the Good News of Jesus in this unique people and in their unique way of living and solving the problems that arise in the environment in which they find themselves. The church we offer the Maasai should fulfill, while at times correcting, their traditional beliefs and practices.

Our aim from the beginning has been for the Maasai to feel at home in the church, that they come to feel it is their church not...
Welcome

Christmas is often described as a season of hope. Joining together with loved ones to celebrate the birth of our Savior, we rejoice in this yearly reminder that the Light of the World still shines today.

As believers, we are fortunate that this “season” is more than just a few weeks of festivities; it transcends beyond the December hoopla giving us assurance every single day that through Jesus Christ, the flames of our hope will never be extinguished.

In times of happiness, in times of tragedy, there is always reason to hope. Thank you for your prayers and support as we Spiritans travel to the ends of the earth to share this good news with those who are in greatest need of hope.

May knowing Jesus bring you peace to bless each day, hope for each tomorrow, and joy in every season.

From the Spiritan Archives

The Circle Bible was composed by Fr. Ralph Poirier, C.S.Sp., during his mission at Kijungu from 1971-1974. He chose ten “touchstone” events and parables that embrace the basic and straightforward Good News of Jesus, a message capable of unlimited deepening and expansion.

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a foreign transplant. We should remember that even a parish in Arusha might seem to them a strange foreign church. We design our teaching and liturgy that it be an outgrowth and completion of their traditional beliefs and practices. This involves incorporating Maasai religious myths into our teaching; for example, those of the creation and the fall. It means also praying and singing in their language, adopting their religious symbolism and prayer forms.

Olbalbal Mission was an outstation of my mission at Endulen where I worked from 1966 to 2011. I took up residence at Olbalbal on December 12, 2012. In January of 2014, Fr. Arkadiusz Nowak from the Society of African Missions (SMA) joined me there. We have four full time catechists: Matayo OleTajeuo, Yohana Wandai, Yohana Namanjari and Simon Tauta.

During the years since, we have had 478 baptisms that bring the total number Christians that we serve to about 680. Fr. Arkado left Olbalbal in March 2018 to open a new Maasai mission with two other SMA missionaries. We miss him but are thankful that the Maasai work is expanding.

At present we serve the main mission stations of Olbalbal at Meshili and Ngoile where there is Mass every Sunday. In addition, there are seven outstations that we visit each week with a prayer service and Gospel teaching.

We also take on projects such as helping Maasai girls continue their education at the secondary level and in trade schools where they study tailoring. Another project is helping needy children receive orthopedic and other operations that would otherwise not be possible, working closely with Plaster House that is connected with Salian Hospital.

We have a “Tuition School” for the weakest students in our local primary school, providing remedial classes in English, Kiswahili and Math.

In a new area we meet with the elders and explain who we are and where we come from. We explain that the Maasai know God from time immemorial. We come to talk to them of this One God, EnkAi, whom they know and worship.
We ask them if they would agree that we come regularly to speak to them of EnkAi. If they agree and most do, we go to the place each week for a meeting of prayer and teaching and discussion.

“We design our teaching and liturgy that it be an outgrowth and completion of their traditional beliefs and practices.”

During the first meetings, we emphasize that we do not bring a new or foreign God. We speak of EnkAi. Over the next 20-25 meetings, we teach the Circle Bible of Fr. Ralph Poirier, C.S.Sp., who composed it at Kijungu mission during the years of 1971 to 1974.

Ralph chose ten events and parables that embrace the basic Good News of Jesus. These ten “touchstones” are events and parables that embrace the basic Good News of Jesus. They are the basic teaching that our further teaching builds on and refers back to.

Our further meetings up to the time of the baptism of the community and beyond are based on the Sunday readings. We usually baptize after weekly teachings that last for about two years. After baptism we continue with our weekly meetings based on the Sunday readings.

The physical challenges have become more limiting, as I can no longer walk to places for teaching and meetings with the people. I used to be able to go to two or three places each day. Now my energy level enables me to go to only one place each day.

Relating the teaching to the life experience of the Maasai continues to be a tremendous challenge. Fortunately in the last 20 or 30 years they have come to know cultivation and many parables have this theme.

Most Maasai are not fluent in Kiswahili. I find expressing myself in the Maasai language to be an ever-present challenge that doesn’t seem to become easier as the years go by.

Most missionaries have no additional sources of income to support their work in Maasai country. Our Sunday collection here at Olbalbal averages the equivalent of $5.

Finally, Spiritans are often stationed in Maasai Missions for relatively short periods of time. There is clearly no possibility of getting to know the people and their problems and becoming familiar with Maasai language and culture during a two or three year stay in a place.

Novenas Are Available

Novenas to the Holy Spirit are available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. The suggested price per copy, including postage, is $2. For purchase and large order discount information, please contact the Spiritan Office for Mission Advancement at 713-522-2882.

Checks should be made payable and mailed to: Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 1700 West Alabama St., Houston, TX 77056.

< Fr. Ned’s article on Olbalbal has been condensed for space. To read the original article in its entirety, please visit www.Spiritans.org/olbalbal.
Dear Friends,

Hope can mean different things to different people. For an aspirant desiring a vocation in religious life, it might mean hope for adequate accommodations while he pursues theological studies. For a refugee and her children fleeing their war-torn home with only the clothes on their backs, it might mean hope for a safe and stable future free from conflict. For a student in an impoverished country, it might mean hope for an education that can help him rise above economic barriers.

One common thread of hope available to us all is the promise of God’s abiding love and forgiveness that we receive through the Good News of the birth of his son, Jesus Christ.

For centuries, Spiritans have traveled to the ends of the earth to bring hope to those on the margins. There are few challenges Spiritan missionaries haven’t experienced and worked to overcome, while sharing God’s message of hope with those who haven’t heard it.

As you plan your annual holiday giving, please consider blessing the critical and life-changing work of the Spiritans with your gift to help us help others in the New Year. Feel free to use the enclosed envelope, or donate online at www.Spiritans.org/Donate.

We hope the Holy Spirit inspires you, as it inspires us, to bring hope to those who need it most. May God’s holy light of Christmas fill you and your families now and throughout the coming year.

Keeping you in my prayers,

Fr. Dave Cottingham, C.S.Sp., Director
Fr. Mike Grey, C.S.Sp., Asst. Director
Ray Sylvester, Mission Projects

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“We go to the people not primarily to accomplish a task, but to be with them, walk beside them, listen to them, and share our faith with them. At the heart of our relationship is trust, respect and love.”

New students pose with their parents at Holy Ghost College in Chonku, Nigeria.
Resounding Support for Formation House Construction

More than 1,400 people showed their support for the building fund to establish a Spiritan Formation House in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Two events, the first in Houston, Texas on September 30 and the second in Arlington, Texas on October 7, grossed nearly $275,000 in support of this important construction project.

“The need for vocations is evident, and the outpouring of support has been very gratifying”, stated Fr. Joseph Lam Nguyen, C.S.Sp., who took temporary leave from his responsibilities in Vietnam to lead the organizing effort.

The money raised from these dinners moves the overall financial goal to the halfway mark.

Fr. Nguyen is pictured below (far left) alongside Frs. Brandon Nguyen, C.S.Sp., Martin Vu, C.S.Sp., Trinh Le, C.S.Sp., and Joseph Dang Hai Vu, D.D., as well as other event organizers.

If you would like to support a seminarian for a year in his formation process, you can do so for $1,200.

New Students Arrive at Holy Ghost College in Chonku, Nigeria

Twenty-one new students and their parents were welcomed to the fall term at Holy Ghost College at Chonku.

Tuition for the boarding school is 50,000 Naira ($142), the least expensive in the area, and supports room and board, school staff and improvements to the school.

Immediate project needs for the campus include a surrounding security fence and the installation of solar energy panels to ensure a more consistent power source.

Libermann School in Tanzania Scores Well

Congratulations to the 33 students who participated in the Standard Seven National Examination in Tanzania from the Libermann Pre- and Primary School in Kipawa, Dar es Salaam.

In total 33 students took the required exam. Twenty of those scored an “A,” while nine achieved a “B.”

The Spiritan school’s ranking places it at number 139 of the 6,726 schools that participated in the testing nationally. On the district level, the school ranked sixth out of 25 schools.

The Libermann Pre- and Primary Catholic School in Kipawa is operated in the tradition of the Holy Ghost Fathers who have ministered to Tanzania since 1868.

The school’s mission is to lift the education level of Kipawa Community by helping poor people. Learn more at www.libermannschooltz.org.
Spiritan Presence Remains Steadfast as Refugee Crisis Persists

The number of displaced persons from conflict and disasters continues to grow. In its latest report, the UN Refugee Agency estimates that there are over 68 million who have been uprooted from their homes globally. Thirty-one people are newly displaced every minute of the day.

Africa is one of the continents most affected by this crisis. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, the total number of people forced to leave their homes due to conflict reached 18.4 million in 2017.

Nigeria
In Nigeria, a country caring for 3.3 million displaced persons, Spiritans are working to provide relief to some of the thousands of individuals affected by conflict and religious persecution in bordering countries.

Under the leadership of Fr. James Akpagher, C.S.Sp., Spiritans recently delivered food and bedding supplies to Camp Dauda in Northeast Nigeria. Some 8,000 people are temporarily housed there.

A second delivery to Camp Ugba was made in late spring. Dauda and Ugba are just two of five camps created by the Nigerian government for internally displaced persons. In total the camps are struggling to house more than 100,000 people.

Tanzania
Fr. Paul Flamm, C.S.Sp., works in Tanzania with refugees from neighboring Burundi. Fr. Flamm writes:

“We are working in two refugee camps in the Kigoma region of western Tanzania with more than 80,000 people who have fled the ongoing civil war in Burundi. The refugees face many hardships in their life in exile. They fled with only the clothes on their backs. The assistance they receive from aid agencies, while appreciated, is barely enough to get by on. Their movement outside the camps is restricted, hence employment opportunities are very limited. Perhaps the greatest burden the refugees bear is the uncertainty of their lives. They spend months and even years without news of loved ones left behind in a country torn by war. There is pressure on them to return home. But the situation in Burundi remains very dangerous. No one knows if they will be able to recover the land and property they left behind.”

At present there are makeshift churches in each of the camps. The goal is to have a more permanent structure to serve the needs for both camps.

Recent donations of $60,000 for this project have allowed Fr. Flamm and the other Spiritans to begin the process to make this vision a reality. The seed money will allow building construction to begin.

Long before last year’s wave of incoming Burundian refugees, Tanzania has been a popular destination for refugees due to its shared border with eight other nations. Since the 1960s, many refugee groups have fled to Tanzania thanks to its “Open Door Policy” that governed a period of generous refugee intake from the early 1960s to the 1990s.
Spotlight on a Seminarian: Kamil Bejgier

Kamil Bejgier, originally from Poland, is the newest addition to the Spiritan novitiate community in Chicago, Illinois. At age 24, he is the eldest son of Edmund and Katarzyna Bejgier, with three younger siblings: Antonina, Bartosz and Damian.

He joined the Spiritan seminary in Poland more than four years ago. After studying philosophy, he participated in his Pastoral Missionary Experience in the Philippines. He spent a year in Cebu City studying Cebuano, the second most used dialect of Filipinos. During the last few months of his missionary experience, he lived in Midsalip working with Spiritans at St. Joseph Parish.

“I was part of different Spiritan communities and shared many experiences,” says Kamil of his missionary work. “I am grateful to our Loving Father who guided me through life to the moment I went to the Philippines and grounded myself more firmly in my vocation, to which I hope to remain faithful and I trust the Holy Spirit to be led evermore as I am now in the novitiate.”

He credits his vocation to the Holy Spirit’s gentle guidance and Mother Mary’s prayers, for through her intercession it first struck him that God may have been calling him to religious life. Knowing he would prefer a religious community to diocesan life, he prayed for a few months before learning of a Spiritan community not far from his home.

Having made his Oblation in Chicago on October 2, Kamil says his experience has been very good so far, and he prays that he can take in as much as possible during his time there. He notes that novitiate life can be busy, but there is always time for prayer for which he is thankful.

Kamil adds that he is humbled by the language barrier, because although he thought he knew English quite well, he feels he sometimes struggles to express his thoughts and the new environment can sometimes be distracting.

Led by Fr. Bernard Kelly, C.S.Sp., Kamil and the other novice are currently learning about Spiritan history. “It is indeed a very interesting journey through the stories of our founders,” says Kamil of his studies. “We hope that by learning more about them, we may find our life stories reflected in their stories and by that realize how we are all connected with the same Spirit.”

Of his future assignments, Kamil says that if God wants him to be a missionary priest one day, he will be happy to go wherever the Spirit will lead him. He humbly asks for prayers for himself, his fellow novice, his formators, and new vocation to the Spiritan family.
“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, so that in the power of the Holy Spirit you may be rich in hope.” Romans 15:13

Inside this issue: Learn more from SOMA Director Fr. Dave Cottingham, C.S.Sp., about how the Spiritans' presence brings help and hope during the ongoing refugee crisis in Africa, and how YOU can help.