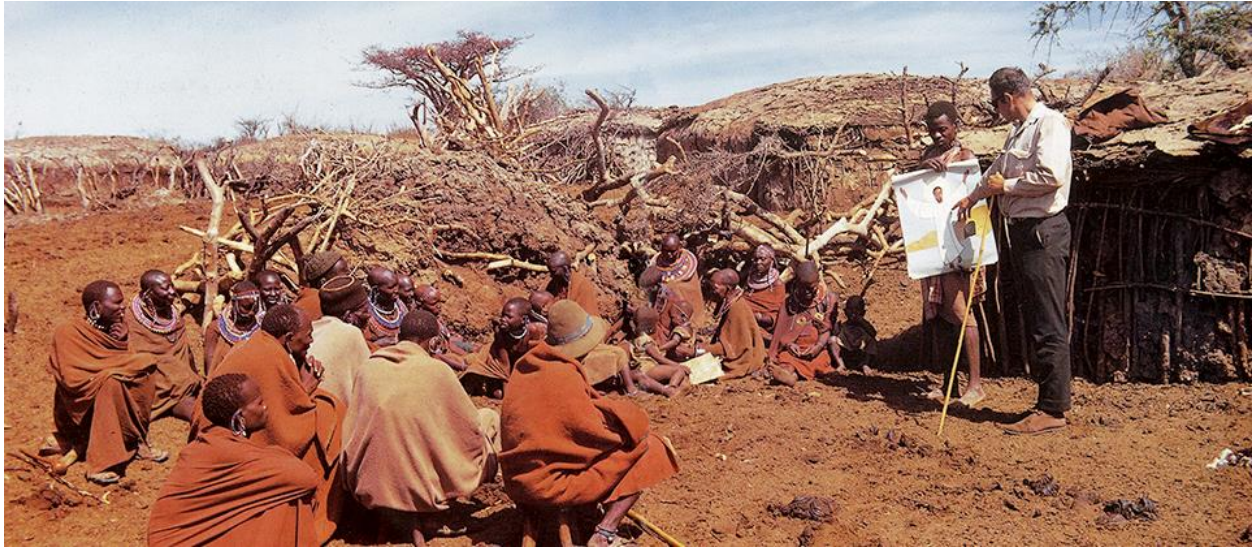


Congregation of the Holy Spirit

Overseas With Fr. Bill Christy, C.S.Sp.



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Life in a Kikatiti Parish in Tanzania 1989-1991

Overseas Training Program (OTP) could be likened to an internship. It's where a man in formation can experience the life of a missionary while still in formation and temporary commitment to the Congregation. I went to Tanzania in May 1989 after I had finished my second year of theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

At Tangaza College in Nairobi, Kenya, I studied African Traditional Religion, African Culture and contemporary African politics. After these classes I went south to Arusha, Tanzania for a short time, and then

returned to Tabora, Tanzania and the Center for Swahili Language to study the language for 100 days.

I was assigned to Kikatiti Parish in Arusha Diocese. The parish covered a vast area and included people from many tribes. The mission had been built there because the tar road passed nearby and the weekly market drew people from all the surrounding villages; market day was the telecommunication network.

On the day I arrived, all the goods (from used clothing to plates and spoons to bananas and beans to building supplies) were spread out on tarps on the ground. When we pulled into the church yard, the pastor, Adrien Hebert, had set up a few chairs and a small table and was opening the makeshift parish office. In the yard people gathered; waiting for marriages to be announced, babies to be baptized and reports of burials that had taken place in the outstations.

Kikatiti was a huge parish with over twenty outstations. My main ministry was to visit them all each month and animate the 150 small Christian communities in the parish. I didn't even get to every community during my time in the parish. But the key element to the OTP is not what you can accomplish but rather the experience to be a "learning minister".

As a "learning minister" I could ask anyone for help or insights on my new experiences — cultural, theological, spiritual. It was at this time that I enjoyed a freedom to pull back from ministry from time to time to see what I was doing. It helped me see what was changing in me from my exposure to ministry.

It was engaging and disengaging from ministry that let me assess my life and growth as a missionary. The people I met and interacted with were wonderful — taking from me what I could offer; but even more so, I was

given the gift of being so freely welcomed into their lives. Culture, language, faith and worship are not static. They are living things that can only truly be appreciated in a living community — be that of the small Christian community, the family or the parish. The community's welcome of me into their lives opened a pathway of understanding — in them as well as me. Fighting for words in a strange language, exposed to a strange culture, I had to express my faith to them in a way that brought me down to the roots of my belief. Only the very core of my faith could be communicated. At first I was fearful that core was not deep enough to sustain us, but to my joy, it was. It was deep enough for me to stand on, deep enough for me to build on and most importantly, deep enough to share.

It was sharing the core truth of faith, both of my personal faith and the faith of the Gospel, that provided me with the most fruitful growth — as a person, as a Christian, and as a missionary. That was what showed me that my calling was to first evangelization — sharing the core of the Gospel and the core of myself with those that have never been exposed to the Good News.

Further information can be obtained from the Vocations Director.

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