Global Pandemic Brings Challenges and Opportunities to Spiritan Ministries

Our Spiritan mission has remained the same for more than three hundred years—to go to the ends of the earth and bring the Word of God to those on the margins. So what happens when a novel virus sends the world into lockdown, and no one can go anywhere?

As people across the globe rang in the New Year, no one had yet heard of COVID-19 or could have foreseen what 2020 would have in store for us.

By spring, a novel coronavirus was attacking people all over the world, the weak and the strong alike, spreading more quickly than anyone could have imagined.

As "social distancing" became the new normal to slow the spread of the disease, COVID-19 left a trail of destruction in its wake.

Hundreds of thousands of people had already died, countless others were fighting for their lives, families and friends were kept apart from one another, and livelihoods were destroyed as businesses were shuttered and unemployment soared.

For the Spiritans, the question became clear: How do we reach out and continue our mission during these challenging times, when people cannot physically be together, but crave connection more than ever?

The answer to that question varies as widely among our ministries as our ministries themselves vary, but one thing remains consistent.

Throughout these dark times, God has given humanity an opportunity to be the light, to connect with each other, to help each other, and to nourish each other more than ever. And that’s exactly what we remain committed to doing.

Spiritan parishes and communities all over the world, including the United States, are harnessing the power of technology to bring us together in virtual celebration, while we have to stay apart.

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Welcome

How quickly everything can change. In our Spring issue, I was preparing for the 21st General Chapter of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in Lichen, Poland, which has since been postponed due to the global pandemic.

While some of us are fortunate to be affected by COVID-19 by inconvenience alone, countless others are suffering through illness, quarantine, job loss, economic hardship, school closures, loneliness, and bereavement of loved ones taken too soon by this terrible disease.

Please know that whatever struggles you are facing as a result of these scary and uncertain times, you are in my prayers daily, and we are together in Spirit, if not in person.

As Pope Francis pleads in his Prayer to Mary during the Coronavirus, “Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform to the will of the Father and to do as we are told by Jesus, who has taken upon himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows to lead us, through the cross, to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.”

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From daily livestreamed Masses, to video updates of encouragement, to virtual gatherings, we are finding ways to stay connected—and it’s working!

People are coming together to support those fighting on the front lines of the pandemic.

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Holy Ghost Prep donated personal protective equipment from its science department to Bensalem Fire and Rescue to be used by the town’s department of public safety.

Spiritan-founded Duquesne University is one of three Pittsburgh universities that has reached out to hospitals to offer dorm space and other facilities if they are necessary for patients or healthcare employees.

These are indeed challenging times, but together we will seek and find more opportunities to lift each other up and build connections with those on the margins.

With God’s ever-abiding love, we will emerge from this troubling time in history stronger in our faith and Spiritan mission.

Faithful friends and supporters like you are logging on and participating in online events and connecting and worshipping with each other from afar.

Spiritan schools are providing online instruction and sharing “virtual victory laps” to celebrate graduates and their achievements.

Those who have are stepping up to give to those who don’t.

Ministries like food banks and Meals on Wheels are seeing increased support and a new generation of volunteers.

Sophia Bakar is one of many graduates the Duquesne University Office of Mission & Identity is recognizing online for their hard work and achievements.

The Hazelwood Meals on Wheels at St. Stephen’s Parish in Pittsburgh, PA, has seen an increase in new volunteers and support.
Dear Friends,

We have all been affected in some way by these uncertain times. The sad fact is that the impact of disease and economic collapse disproportionately affects people who are hardworking, yet have no economic safety net. Spiritan priests and brothers often minister in such communities.

In the next few pages, we’ve shared some of the hardships that our Spiritan confreres are facing overseas as they struggle to continue their ministries in the time of COVID-19. Throughout the years, with your help, we’ve supported their life-changing work to evangelize those who might otherwise be forgotten.

At this time, we are asking for your help in supporting two critical projects that will provide necessary aid to communities devastated by the pandemic.

Brazil is a global hot spot for the coronavirus. Spiritans have served in the rainforests of the upper Amazon since the 1860’s. COVID-19 has crippled an already fragile economy of mostly self-employed residents in remote Fonte Boa, Amazonas. Two Spiritan priests in Our Lady of Nazareth Parish have initiated a food distribution program through nine outstations to bring help to roughly 1,000 of these unemployed people during this crisis.

A second project in arid South-Central Ethiopia (Borana Zone) aims to restock medicine and supplies for the Spiritan-operated Dhadim Catholic Health Program. The program serves more than 6,000 people and focuses on specific interventions to prevent and control diseases such as COVID-19.

We pray that Our Blessed Mother will be a beacon of hope for you and your families in this challenging time. Please watch out for each other and consider helping us achieve our goal of raising $9,400 for these two communities in desperate need of our help.

Keeping you in my prayers,


Cor Unum Event is Postponed

We are saddened to announce that we have made the decision to postpone the Cor Unum: Spiritans in Mission event due to the pandemic.

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Spiritan presence in Texas, the event was originally scheduled for October 21, 2020 in Houston, Texas. The event, which was intended to honor the Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza, Archbishop Emeritus of Galveston-Houston, will be rescheduled for a later date. More details will follow as they become available.
Global Mission Update

The Spiritan Office for Mission Advancement reached out to some of the Spiritan missions around the world to learn how they are affected by the pandemic. Following is a sampling of some of the challenges they face, as well as opportunities they’ve taken to stay connected and continue the Spiritan mission throughout this crisis.

Kenya >
"We have a charity program where we distribute 1000 Ksh (10 USD) to needy families every two weeks. This is meant to supplement the government effort to feed the poor and those unable to work due to the pandemic. The money is raised through appealing to our parishioners who are capable, as well as friends of the Spiritans.

As a parish we are providing spiritual support through the online Masses and reflections. As Youth Chaplain, I am not able to provide the youth with an opportunity to interact and participate in activities that enable them to grow in life skills and bond. Most of them are idle at home and therefore exposed to activities that might lead to addiction to drugs and pornography.

Our local income streams, mainly through contributions from friends, have been greatly affected. We are therefore struggling to meet our recurrent and development budget." - Fr. Stephen Mwaria Mukami, C.S.Sp.

Malawi >
"Given the poor economic situation in Malawi, especially in the parish I am serving, it is difficult to stream Mass because the internet is very expensive. We record the Mass and send it to the people through Whatsapp after the celebration. We have encouraged our faithful to discover the temple in themselves. It may be a time of either self-discovery or rediscovery." - Fr. Lucius Zuze, C.S.Sp.

Tanzania >
"In Tanzania, worship sites have remained open so Eucharist is celebrated as before, only now we have to sit at least two yards apart, wash hands before entering the church, no Holy water at the entrance, no receiving on the tongue nor by intinction. No sign of peace by shaking hands or kissing or hugging.

We provide sanitizer, masks, and soap to those who cannot afford these items. Food is distributed to those who are in dire need, as available.

In Tanzania, the pandemic brought with it fear, confusion and even stigma against those who were diagnosed as having been infected. In some cases, those who died of the virus were buried without relatives’ participation. That causes a lot of pain.

As missionaries we will have to trust in providence; to fund evangelization! To fund formation of future missionaries! To fund care for the elderly and sick confreres! That will bring a new awakening for the Province of Tanzania.

Praying and sharing the word of God together brings great hope and strength in facing this Pandemic. By accepting to do things differently, by observing the directives to curb the spread of the virus, we will overcome." - Fr. Evod Shao, C.S.Sp.

Taiwan >
"We are celebrating in our churches with the Congregation, with some restrictions like social distancing, wearing a face mask, taking temperature, etc. We use social media to share pandemic news and spiritual resources." - Fr. Sean O’Leary, C.S.Sp.

Pakistan >
“We send videos via Whatsapp for family prayers, centering first on the Resurrection and now on Mary. We are cooperating with Caritas in the distribution of food rations for the most needy in the parish." - Br. Mathieu Boulanger, C.S.Sp.

Ethiopia >
"With the lockdown, it is quite difficult to reach out to the people. Considering the remote location of our mission, access to the basic supplies is a huge challenge both for us and the people." - Fr. Chia Tersugh Emmanuel, C.S.Sp.

Nigeria >
"With the closure of the schools, school fees are not paid and there is nowhere I can turn for some financial support to even provide for the basic necessities of life such as food." - Fr. Kuha Indyer, C.S.Sp.
**Tanzania**

"We are still celebrating in the Church with limited numbers of participants. Internet is unthinkable, as many do not have computers or telephones. Above all, the internet network is very limited in our area. Many people do not have clean water; hence, frequent washing of hands is impossible. This is a challenge which we could not solve, but at least on Sundays when the people come for Mass, we encourage them to wash their hands before entering the Church and when going home.

Kirya is one of our outstations of Mgagao Mission. At the station, we had a very small grass structure with two small windows, one door, and little air circulation. We used this as a church for many years.

With the arrival of COVID-19, we decided to pray outside under a tree where we could have more air with social distance to be more safe.

Due to some strong winds, this structure collapsed one day when we were celebrating Mass under the tree just in front of the structure.

We took it as a message that this structure, which had neither enough light nor air circulation, was not very safe for us, hence the need to rethink on a more safe structure.

The church has to be a place to protect our health, both physically and spiritually, and not to put ourselves in danger.

But this will take many years to realize, because this is in a primary evangelization area with extremely poor people." - Frs. Mathew Ambrosi Ngowi, C.S.Sp. and Acquiline Mrema, C.S.Sp.

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**Philippines**

"For us in the city, we stream our Holy Mass by Facebook every morning and respond to other needs by phone calls and emails. But for confreres in the poor mountainous mission, nothing is possible, except some very little contacts at the parish.

We distribute food to the poor neighbors. We receive food donations from our friends in the city and we organize the outreaches for the less fortunate around us. We are also making face masks to share with the poor, encouraging them to be positive with life." - Fr. Leo Agbene Illah, C.S.Sp.

"We are working closely with the local government unit and some of our parishioners to alleviate the hardship and hunger, especially the semi rural poor through food distribution and making efforts to serve their spiritual and sacramental needs." - Fr. Peter Wdzani Matthew, C.S.Sp.

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**Haiti**

"Haiti is less confined than other countries so we are lucky to be able to meet people but it is true that it is more difficult. This is experienced in daily gestures, in community, or through messages of hope broadcast here and there. Above all it makes me think about our way of life, it reminds me of my fragility and invites me to hope for a better, more fraternal and more united world." - Fr. Benjamin Osio, C.S.Sp.

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**Brazil**

"Here in Brazil, the State of Amazonas where we are working is the most affected by this virus. The state has the highest mortality rate in the country because of poor facilities and the distance to access these facilities."

- Fr. Emmanuel Dagi, C.S.Sp.

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**Uganda**

"At this time of confinement, we have very little pastoral ministry apart from the few Masses we celebrate on radio and TV stations. We are saddened to see many people without food. The government is trying to distribute food to the people but this exercise is facing many challenges. Hence, many miss out. But in all we trust in God’s providence." - Fr. Damasius Kayemba, C.S.Sp.

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Faith and the Coronavirus

By Fr. Binh T. Quach, C.S.Sp., Director, Donald S. Nesti Center for Faith and Culture, University of St. Thomas

As a Catholic religious missionary, the poem, "Footprints on the Sand," has assisted me through many desert periods of life when things become confused, uncertain, and as dark as the "dark nights of feelings" when one awakens to one's limitedness and powerlessness.

That poem reminds me that God's providential care and love are always accompanying us through each moment of our lives and especially when we feel alone and disoriented. The Divine Presence will never abandon us, for even a second.

God is actually carrying us in his loving hands, walking through the shifting sand of our life. He is carrying the weight of our burdens and our world's burdens in his loving embrace.

Our experience of the outbreak of the coronavirus so close to home makes real our vulnerability and powerlessness.

God's providential care and love are always accompanying us through each moment of our lives and especially when we feel alone and disoriented.

Furthermore, the social distancing that is taking place by the cancelling of so many public events, and especially the daily Masses and Sunday Eucharistic gatherings, makes us wonder whether God is present and what is the purpose of faith.

If the Sacraments are the signs of God's presence and the Eucharist is the source and summit of the unity of God's people, in this period of darkness, fear, and anxiety, where are we to find our consolation when we no longer have access to these sources of the grace of God's grace-filled presence?

As faithful Catholics and faith-filled citizens of America and of the whole global community, we need to hold on to the Covenantal Love of God.

The incarnational Love of Christ affirms that He is with us to the end of time; that is, He commits to remain with us in and through all of the ups and downs in our lives.

"Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ" is what we need to give witness to in total trust, that we express through the little gestures that we extend to each other on a daily basis as evidence of God's real presence.

Our experience of suffering, loss and sickness can themselves bring us together and be occasions for us to show deeper understanding and compassion for one another.

It is a time for us to grow in the awareness that we are not alone.

It is the virus itself that becomes the means for us to come to a greater awareness of our interdependence and our need for one another to create a healthy living environment.

As Pope Francis teaches us, only we can effectively deal with the biological, psychological and spiritual viruses that are part of the world we live in.

In this way we can increase our awareness of our capacity to care for our common home, whether at home or globally.

We might say that the coronavirus has forced us to live in little life-style enclaves closed in ourselves and afraid to touch.

But even while we should not make physical contact, we can make the spiritual contact with God and each other through the way we smile at each other, reassure each other with hope, and let Him carry us all when we seem most vulnerable.

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God is with us and we are with each other.
In Memoriam

Fr. Louis Perreault, C.S.Sp., of Bethel Park, a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, died peacefully May 15, 2020 at Libermann Hall, Bethel Park, PA. He was 84 years old.

Fr. Perreault was born September 11, 1935 in Putnam, Connecticut. He professed his vows as a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit on August 22, 1957 at the Holy Ghost Novitiate in Ridgefield, CT, and was ordained to the Priesthood June 6, 1962 at St. Mary’s Seminary, Ferndale in Norwalk, CT. Fr. Perreault was first appointed in 1963 to Gerard High School, Phoenix, AZ, for eight years. In succeeding years, he ministered at Sacred Heart Parish in Lake Charles, LA, as parochial vicar and then as pastor. He was also appointed as Episcopal Vicar for Black Catholics in that diocese.

From 1986-1995, he was pastor of Our Lady of the Valley in Hemet, CA, and then was assigned there as parochial vicar until 2000. From 2000 to 2008, he was chaplain at the St. Rose Dominican Hospital in Henderson, NV.

He retired and moved back to Hemet to care for his mother until her death. In 2012, he moved to Libermann Hall in Bethel Park, PA, and faithfully fulfilled the role of Superior since 2015.

Fr. Perreault was preceded in death by his parents, Gilbert and Helena Gougeon Perreault.

The funeral Mass was celebrated on Friday, May 22. Because of the current limitations on public gatherings, the funeral was livestreamed on the U.S. Spiritans Facebook page. Burial will take place at Sacred Heart Cemetery in Lake Charles, LA.

Feast of Blessed Jacques Laval

On September 9, we will celebrate the Feast of Blessed Jacques Laval to honor the “Apostle of Mauritius,” a man who worked tirelessly to empower and care for a forgotten people.

Jacques Laval was born on September 18, 1803 in Croth (northern France). After studying humanities at the Collège Stanislas de Paris, he earned his medical doctorate in 1830 and was a practicing physician in France for several years. In 1834, a near-fatal accident changed his life, inspiring him to close his medical practice and begin studies to enter the priesthood. He was ordained in 1838, served as a parish priest until 1840, and then joined the Spiritans.

As a Spiritan priest, Fr. Jacques Laval ministered on the island of Mauritius, where most of his parishioners were poor and former slaves. He lived with them, learned their language and culture, and helped them improve their teacher education, sanitation, and agriculture. He also used his medical training to help those who suffered illnesses. He was so successful and beloved there, converting 67,000 parishioners, that he came to be known as the Apostle of Mauritius.

When Laval died on September 9, 1864, it is said that more than 30,000 mourners followed his casket. He became the first beatified Spiritan on April 29, 1979. A building on Duquesne University’s campus is named “Laval House” in his honor, and students in Spiritan formation reside there during their theological studies.

As we celebrate the Feast Day in his honor on September 9, may we strive always to lift up, empower, and care for others with Blessed Jacques Laval as our inspiration.
During the Influenza Pandemic of 1918, Philadelphia was among the hardest-hit cities.

One of the Spiritans’ ministries was to aid victims on the front lines.

The Archbishop of Philadelphia, Dennis Dougherty, offered the use of archdiocesan buildings as a temporary hospital to care for the inflicted.

St. Katharine Drexel’s Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament served as nurses and went door to door to care for the sick. St. Peter Claver Parish, pictured above, was staffed by the Spiritans and opened its school as an emergency hospital.

Other orders of sisters, such as the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph, Sisters of the Immaculate Heart, and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, treated thousands of patients.

Inside this Issue: Read about how Spiritans in the United States and abroad are continuing our mission in the age of the coronavirus.