Journey to Tanzania
Sheds Light on Spiritan Mission, Possible African Partnerships

At the end of spring semester, Vice President for Mission and Identity Reverend James McCloskey, C.S.Sp., traveled to East Africa with a delegation of Duquesne administrators and faculty to explore possible partnerships between the University and the established Spiritan ministries. The group included:

- Christopher Duncan, McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts
- Dean Alan Miciak, Palumbo-Donahue School of Business
- Dean David Seybert, Bayer School of Natural & Environmental Sciences
- Dean Olga Welch, School of Education
- Dean Greg Frazer, Rangos School of Health Sciences
- Dean Eileen Zungolo, School of Nursing
- Sister Rosemary Donley, Jacques Laval Endowed Chair in Justice for Vulnerable Populations
- James Swindal, chairperson, Philosophy Department
- Anne Marie Hansen, assistant professor, Rangos School

The journey, organized by Hansen, a lay Spiritan, in cooperation with the Office of Mission and Identity, also enabled the group to actively learn about Spiritan life and mission in the context of Africa. Following is Fr. McCloskey’s reflection on this experience.

—BY THE REV. JAMES MCCLOSKEY, C.S.SP., VICE PRESIDENT FOR MISSION AND IDENTITY—

Kilimanjaro is a snow-covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. Its western summit is called the Masai “Ngake Ngai,” the House of God. Close to the western summit there is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude. (Hemingway, 1936, p. 52).

So begins The Snows of Kilimanjaro, Ernest Hemingway’s tragic saga of expatriate life in East Africa. In the shadow of that same mountain, I, along with nine other members of the Duquesne University community, traveled to Arusha, Tanzania, visiting health care facilities, schools, parishes and social service agencies sponsored by the Spiritan Congregation there. What we were “seeking at that altitude” was something more intangible and indefinable than mere cultural exchange or even service. It was the meaning of Spiritan life in relationship to its history in Africa—and the meaning of that same Spiritan mission today at Duquesne.

Our visit, from May 18 to May 26, was hosted by the members of the Spiritans in Tanzania. It was designed to acquaint us with projects such as the DREAM program, an AIDS clinic jointly sponsored by the Spiritans and the San Egidio Community of Italy, Tengeru Secondary School, Njiro Hill Seminary, the Okoko School for Handicapped Children, Mount Meru Hospital, and Saint Augustine University, among other social ministries. Meetings with the leadership team of the Spiritans in Tanzania began and ended the experience.

On the visit to a class in the Secondary School for Boys in Moshi, students shared their career aspirations with Deans Miciak, Duncan, Seybert and Welch. It was clear that the career paths they sought were varied and centered on a number of professions.

“They all had high career aspirations—to be scientists, lawyers, entrepreneurs. I told 1. Sr. Rosemary Donley and Dean Eileen Zungolo meet with a staff member at the USA River Health Clinic. 2. Deans Miciak and Seybert are surrounded by Maasai children following Pentecost Mass at Endulen.
them that the profession of teaching is critical to their achieving these goals,” said Welch.

“I was very inspired by the Spiritan commitment to educating the poor, demonstrating that people can improve the quality of their lives if given an opportunity to learn,” said Miciak. “In many cases the students were learning without the benefit of books, computers or any learning aids whatsoever. It makes you wonder what they could achieve with the proper support.”

Swindal recalled the wonderful hospitality from the Spiritans at the mission seminary, established 25 years ago on an abandoned former sisal plantation in Arusha.

“The Spiritans have built a chapel, faculty residence, three large lecture halls, five dormitories and a large meeting hall. It’s a lively place with a very robust farm—replete with animals and fruit trees—a soccer field that doubles as grazing area for the cattle and beautiful grounds with an array of exotic plants and flowers about the buildings. The seminary now trains upwards of 125 seminary students, including Spiritans, as well as Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), Passionists, Palotines and Assumptionists,” he said.

A highlight of our trip was the celebration of the Pentecost Sunday liturgy, a major feast of the Spiritan Congregation, at the mission of Endulen. Located on the lip of the Ngorongoro Crater, a wildlife preserve and conservation area near the Serengeti Plain, the Endulen parish ministers to the Maasai people, a nomadic tribe indigenous to Tanzania and Kenya. The Mass, celebrated in both Swahili and Maasai, was a vibrant experience of music, dance and drama, presided by Father Ned Marchessault, an American Spiritan now resident in Endulen for the past 20 years.

“I will never forget the power of the liturgy on Pentecost Sunday, offered in the Maasai language,” added Donley. “This experience is linked, at least in my mind, with the rescue work carried out by a Spiritan bush pilot and his three colleagues. From their mission, they fly seriously ill or injured people to obtain medical care. This glimpse into the face of Tanzania brought the spiritual and corporal works of mercy into focus and helped me envision the exciting partnership between Duquesne University and the work of the Spiritans in Africa.”

No program, presentation or lecture on Spiritan values could ever substitute for the rich experience of personal contact with the members of the Spiritan community in East Africa and their partners in mission. Their zeal for service to the poor—and the quality of that service—was a powerful reminder of the treasure that we hold in our own Spiritan legacy at Duquesne.”