Meeting People Where They Are

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Front cover: Photo by Justin Anantawan, VICS volunteer in The Gambia
Back cover: Photo courtesy of Frank O’Neill, Lay Spiritan
Trust me—I know what it’s like.
I’ve been there too.
I know about little or no resources, about friends who let you down, about being left on your own.
I know about fear and that deep down sinking feeling. My friends felt it on the stormy lake. I felt it in the garden. As I prayed I remember saying, “This is more than I can take.”
I know about insecurity and giving up a job I had worked at for close on twenty years. I know about leaving home. I know about being on the road and wondering where the next bed and breakfast would come from.
I know about feeling rejected. I know about being told I didn’t belong. I know about being spat upon and insulted and abused.
I know about loss and the end of everything. I know about betrayal and arrest and being condemned. I know about being put to death. I know about failure and emptiness.
Yes indeed—I have painful moments of being human.

My finest hour
My finest hour was there outside the city when I was being lifted up in crucifixion. My finest hour was there when all seemed lost. Did you ever think a cross could be a sign of hope? That people would actually use that as a sign of blessing?
And now? Where am I? Let loose in the world. “He is not here. He is risen.” That’s what my angel messenger told my women friends.
No longer am I among the dead. I have conquered death and am alive. I delight in turning up unannounced.

I delight turning up in disguise. I don’t like appointments. I prefer appearances.

Like that time Mary Magdalene thought I was the gardener and it was only when I called her “Mary” that she knew who I was. Like that time I joined my friends on the road to Emmaus. They thought I was a stranger. But then we had a meal together and they recognized me in the breaking of the bread.

Let loose in the world
You know what—I delight turning up in disguise. I don’t like appointments. I prefer appearances. I’ve been there with you incognito. Let loose in the world, I feel free to turn up anywhere anytime. They tell many stories about me—I like this one:

A group of computer salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. The meeting ran overtime so the men had to rush to the station, tickets in hand. As they barged through the terminal, one man inadvertently knocked over a table supporting a basket of apples. Without stopping, they all reached the platform and the train and boarded it with a sigh of relief.

All but one of them. He paused, thought for a moment and experienced a twinge of compunction for the boy whose apple stand he had knocked over. He waved goodbye to the other salesmen and returned to the main platform. He was glad he did. The young boy was blind.
The salesman gathered up the apples and noticed that several of them were bruised. He reached into his wallet and said to the boy, “Here, take this twenty dollars for the damage we did. I hope it didn’t spoil your day.”

As he started to walk away the bewildered boy called after him, “Hey, are you Jesus?”

He stopped in his tracks. And he wondered.

I guess you could call me the Christ of surprises.
Lentememt

Pull over from the passing lane
Ease the pressure on the pedal
Lentamente, lentamente
Lent’s forty days slow us down
To let the Word of God resound
Len-te-ment

Desert silence,
Ears alert, calming hurry-scurry,
Listening stillness —
A sense of real presence.
Answering attention —
Pray-ers, seers once again.

Desert testing,
The adversary lurks in lifeless land
Suggesting we must carry with us
Self-importance, power and popularity.
We fight the backward glance, the tugging whisper
Insisting it’s all folly
To leave behind such luggage
On our pilgrim path.

Desert companion,
Through forty days and forty nights
Sustaining us with manna,
Accompanying our struggling steps
Toward journey’s end
Outside the city walls.
In loneliness —
Deserted —
Raised up above the jostling noise
And strident shouts of city commerce.
Apart — left hanging —
Yet dying for us all.

Forty days and forty nights
Lentamente, lentement
Training us to take our stance
With the ever-faithful women
Near the cross on which he hung.
And on the fortieth day to rise with him —
Renewed.
More ... or ... Less?

Let us pray that we have

More quiet, less noise
More others, less self
More fasting, less feasting
More reading, less ignorance
More listening, less talking
More family, less television
More warmth, less coldness
More patience, less anger
More reverence, less putdowns
More generosity, less selfishness
More awareness, less blindness
More empathy, less envy
More acceptance, less jealousy
More exercise, less sitting
More trust, less fear
More courage, less hesitation
More them, O Lord, less me
More you, O Lord, less me

AMEN
“The Spiritans”, a friend of mine remarked, “aren’t you an Irish group of teaching priests?” This friend is a fellow-priest, one of the fourteen who are in retirement with me in the Houses of Providence in Toronto. “No”, I replied, “incorrect on both counts.”

In fact the Spiritans are neither an Irish religious order nor a teaching group. We are an international order of priests, brothers and laypeople, founded in France in 1703 to provide missionaries for the native peoples of the new French colonies.

The founder, Poullart des Places, and his small group started a new Congregation to operate a seminary dedicated to the Holy Spirit. The priests ordained there were sent to French territories overseas. They were referred to as “Spiritans” although they were not officially religious in des Place’s Congregation. It was some years before they were recognized as such.

We are indeed lucky that a scholarly history of the early years of the Spiritan presence in what is now Canada has been researched by Fr Henry Koren CSSp and is included in his books A History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and Knaves and Knights both published by Duquesne University Press.

Fr Koren records that two of the first French colonies to receive Spiritan missionaries were in North America – the Miquelon Islands and New France. Most of the other colonies were in India and the Far East.

Fr Pierre Maillard

Among the first missionaries to come from France to what is now Canada was Fr Pierre Maillard. He arrived in Louisbourg in June 1735. His mission territory was Acadia (Nova Scotia) and included Ile Saint Jean (Prince Edward Island) and Ile Royale (Cape Breton).

Soon after his arrival he began an assiduous study of the Mi’kmaq language. As early as 1738 he began to develop a written language for the Mi’kmaq people. The members of this nation use it to the present time. He wrote their first grammar, dictionary and religious texts that included prayers, hymns, sermons, and the forms for use in baptisms, weddings and funerals.

His linguistic work was largely instrumental in the fact that the Catholic faith was preserved by the Mi’kmaq people and kept alive all through the years when they were deprived of priests after the British expelled these in 1765. Dr Silas Rand, a Baptist pastor in Nova Scotia, remarked that after fifty years without priests “I do not know that a single convert has yet been made.”

Fr Jean Le Loutre

In 1737, Maillard received help from the Spiritan seminary in Paris in the person of Fr Jean Le Loutre. After a period of nine months spent mastering the native language, the new arrival was sent to Shubenacadie where the Acadians and the Mi’kmaq had been without priestly ministry for nearly fifty years. Unlike Cape Breton, Nova Scotia was under the command of the British. However, Jean quickly gained the respect of his flock and also of the local British authorities.

But this period of peace was short-lived because in 1744 hostilities flared up between the French and British in Nova Scotia. After the fall of Louisbourg, all priests were commanded to report to the authorities. Maillard trusted that they would be treated fairly, but they were all arrested and expelled. Only
Le Loutre, suspecting a ruse, made his escape through the forests to Quebec along with a band of Mi’kmaq. When the coast was clear he returned to Chebucto (Halifax), but soon after he was arrested and expelled to France.

By now more Spiritans arrived and ministered to the Mi’kmaq in the ensuing years of turbulence and war. In 1755, in the Grand Déménagement, the Acadians, including all their priests, were expelled from the colony.

**In Quebec City**

Other Spiritans who came to New France at the same time as the group which went to Acadia had a totally different experience. The first of this group, Fr François de la Mothe, arrived in Quebec City in 1732. He was quickly followed by a number of his colleagues from the Spiritan Seminary in Paris.

Bishop Pierre Dosquet of Quebec badly needed seminary professors. The Jesuits and the Recollets were working with the native peoples of the region and there were ample local vocations to provide pastors for the parishes. But the situation in the diocesan seminary was a sorry one. Academic and spiritual matters were badly neglected. In 1735 la Mothe became its director and in 1753 the Abbot of Isle Dieu wrote “the majority of the staff of the Quebec seminary had been furnished by the Holy Ghost Fathers”. The next year the Bishop of Quebec wrote, “these are the best priests I have in my diocese.”

**Into other regions of Quebec and Ontario**

As more and more Spiritans arrived, the bishops began to appoint them to the ever-growing network of parishes in the huge diocese of Quebec. Many were appointed to regions where there were large native populations. Fr Visien, who was appointed pastor of Sainte Anne de Beaupré in 1757, Giles Eudo who survived the fall of Quebec and the destruction of his parish church of the Holy Family in Orleans, Fr Brault, an expelled Acadian, who returned as a Spiritan priest, were typical of this wave of migration from France. Fr Francis Le Guerne led his Acadian flock during the Grand Dérangement to a village outside Quebec City where he continued as their pastor until his death in 1789.

These men and many others, along with the Jesuits and the Recollets, were pioneers. They laid the foundations of the Canadian church. Their work was expanded by many groups of religious missionaries, priests, sisters and brothers of whom the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) must take pride of place.

Today our church is a missionary church with newer communities, like the Scarboro Mission and Our Lady’s Missionaries, continuing the work of bringing the Good News to places in need of foreign missionaries, as Canada was a mere 250 years ago.

And we must never forget Brebeuf and his companions, Maillard and Le Loutre, Bishop Sheffer and Fr Leduc. They cleared the soil and planted the Good News. We are part of the harvest.

So when Bishop Cody of London invited Irish Spiritans to his diocese in 1954, in a way it was something of a homecoming. They felt they were standing on the shoulders of giants and were much more than “an Irish group of teaching priests.”

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*Image:.jpg*
Holy Ghost Prep. prides itself in teaching young men in the Spiritan tradition. Students initially believe a Spiritan education to be just a religion class on the schedule. I have discovered that a true Spiritan education transcends a religion class. To me, a Spiritan education is embedded in seven core values: sense of community, Christian service, concern for the poor, global vision, academic excellence, openness to the spirit, and personal development.

**Sense of community**
The community is the nexus that knits all the other values together. The community is not just your local neighborhood. It extends outward, to the global community — to every corner of the earth. Without community, none of the other values exist. The community, with all its members working together, makes the values what they are. The work these members do in the community is the spark that ignites the flame.

**Christian service**
One way to allow students to recognize how Spiritans view community is to provide a service requirement. They hired a co-ordinator to make Christian service a dynamic learning experience. He provides service opportunities in the local community. These activities include playing basketball and softball with an elementary school, serving food at a soup kitchen, helping the local Sisters run their annual Oktoberfest, and tutoring at a local elementary school. Students learn more naturally through experience. At my elementary school, I taught basic subjects, resolved conflicts between students, and managed kids. These skills cannot be learned
in the classroom. They are life skills that I learned because of my interaction with that community. For me, Holy Family transformed the spark into a visible flame.

**Concern for the poor**
Concern for the poor helps to expand the students’ perception and experience. Students take a day-of-service break from the traditional learning environment and leave campus to find and help the poor. The places where they go are disguised classrooms. We are forced to confront a community with which we are not familiar, thus opening us up to new ideas. I took a school van to St Bart’s Parish where I learned to stain doors, paint statues, and do other minor repairs. This was not something I would be tested on in class, but I acquired valuable skills through a positive interaction with this community. From interaction with new people my view of community was expanded – the single flame grew into a larger flame.

**Global vision**
At St Mark’s parish in Harlem, New York, I learned the value of my faith by participating in Mass with the local community. Their liveliness sparked my interest in my Catholic faith which led me to receiving the sacraments for the first time.

I took another step the following summer in Arusha, Tanzania. While I was accompanying a student from a local school, I saw a mural on the side of a building. I will never forget it. It was a painting of a brain wrapped in locked chains. Next to this image was a key upon which was inscribed the word “education”. Many of the people living in Arusha are leading economically poor lives. The mural highlights the importance students in Tanzania place on their education. They are well aware how much it can affect their future. Without this experience I would not have learned to value my own education.

**Openness to the Spirit**
The view of the Holy Spirit is expanded to include the spirit of a community. The people in St Mark’s food pantry showed us a great deal of appreciation. The flood of genuine “thank yous” I received was overwhelming. At Mass the next day, just before
we stood together as one to receive the Eucharist, people approached me again to thank me for the work I had done. The feeling I experienced that day was the Spirit working His way into my life.

Another concrete way I experienced openness to the Spirit was through our senior retreats. During these weekends, from the examples of both student leaders and teacher leaders, students began to feel the effects of that openness to the spirit. By opening up to the spirit of the community, we opened ourselves up to our own spirit. The senior retreat links the fire of each person into one flame, one Spirit.

**Personal development**

This final value is the end goal of a Spiritan education. When I visited Holy Ghost Prep as an 8th grader, my Mom wanted me to enrol because the students seemed “so mature.” Because of its curriculum embedding the seven core values, Holy Ghost Prep has a reputation for maturity and personal development. This particular development turns the Spirit into a flame that is ready to light up the world.

Years ago, Fr Philip Agber CSSp told me something: “You must use your education to help others; otherwise, it is meaningless.”

Holy Ghost puts its students through a series of calculated experiences. These experiences culminate in the highest levels of personal development which completes the cycle of the seven core values.

A Spiritan education begins by developing a sense of community in which to learn and grow. This community then practices Christian service, shows concern for the poor, and shares a global vision. This community then encourages each student’s academic excellence. This community then fosters an openness to the Spirit, with the end goal of growing each member’s personal development. Each stage is marked by new knowledge of the self. Now, as mature, more fully developed men, students can use their education to work together and help others by repeating the cycle, just as many of our faculty at Holy Ghost are currently doing.

**So what is a Spiritan education?**

Simply put, it is learning from community and giving back that education to community.

Reprinted with permission from *One Heart, One Soul* – Newsletter for the Province of the United States.
Pope Francis has asked the special group of priests he commissioned to hear confessions during the Jubilee Year of Mercy to never judge those who confess their sins, but to embrace them as if putting a coat on someone in need.

In an audience with the priets who will be serving as “Missionaries of Mercy” during the Holy Year, the pope also succinctly laid out anew his vision of re-evangelization in the 21st century.

“It is not ... with the club of judgment that we will bring back the lost sheep to the fold, but with the holiness of life that is the principle of renewal and reform in the church,” he told the priests.

“Holiness is nourished by love and knows how to bring upon itself the weight of those who are weaker,” he said. “A missionary of mercy takes the sinner on his shoulders, and consoles him or her with the power of compassion.”

Created by the pontiff just for this Jubilee Year, the priests received their mandate in a special ceremony in St. Peter’s Basilica as part of the Ash Wednesday celebration. They are to hear confessions during the year and will be granted “the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See.”

In speaking to the priests the pope outlined three particular characteristics they should practice when hearing confessions. The most poignant of the three was a reflection Francis offered on the shame people sometimes feel in coming to confession.

“It is not easy to offer yourself before another man, knowing he represents God, and to confess your sins,” said the pontiff. “Shame is an intimate sentiment that affects the personal life and requires from the confessor an attitude of respect and encouragement.”

The pope then reflected on how the Bible expresses the shame felt by three characters in the Genesis creation story: Adam and Eve, when they realize they are naked in the Garden of Eden; and Noah, who is found naked after becoming drunk.

“This reading tells me how important our role is in confession,” said Francis. “Before us there is a ‘naked’ person, with his or her weakness and limits, with the shame of being a sinner.”

“Do not forget,” the pope exhorted the priests. “Before us there is not sin, but a person that feels the desire to be accepted and pardoned — a person who does not want to be further distanced from the house of the Father but wants to do everything to live as a child of God.”

“Therefore, we are not called to judge, with a sense of superiority, as if we were immune from sin,” said Francis. “On the contrary, we are called to act like Shem and Japheth, the sons of Noah, who placed a robe over their father to hide his shame.”

“To be a confessor according to the heart of Jesus means to cover the sinner with the robe of mercy so that they are not shamed anymore and may recover the joy of their filial dignity,” he said.

Francis also called on the priests to express the “maternity” of the church and to respect the desire of forgiveness present in the heart of someone who is penitent.

“As you go into the confessional, always remember that it is Christ who welcomes; Christ who listens; Christ who pardons; Christ who gives peace,” said the pontiff.

“We are his ministers; and in the first place we always have need to be forgiven by him,” said Francis. “Therefore, whatever the sin being confessed, every missionary is called to remember his true existence as a sinner and to offer himself humbly as a channel of God’s mercy.”

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Evangelists of the Passion

Tony Lobo
Up the country paths
The wind whispered,
“...I knew you before I formed you
in your mother's womb.”
Jerusalem ... A disturbance —
The eyes of a soldier fastening on a stranger
Ordered him to shoulder a criminal’s heavy cross.
Beneath the load, a strange peace enveloped Simon.

Sorrow-filled Seraphia waited her moment, slipped in
to hold her veil before the bloodied face of her Master,
thus stepping into history:
“...Before you were born
I set you apart.”

On Calvary hill, soldiers crushed the legs of two prisoners.
Cassius, the centurion, glanced at the crucified One:
Valour beheld valour.
Sharply nudging his steed forward
he lanced the chest above.
A prophecy fulfilled.
The wind sighed,
“In my book every moment of your life was laid out.”
Blood and water gushed into his upturned face.
Drawing back, Cassius wiped his eyes.
Startled at his perfect vision — his squint gone,
Immortal words burst forth from him,
“...Truly, this was the Son of God.”

Thereafter, followers named Cassius Longinus
... the one with the lance
And Seraphia Veronica
... the one with the true image.
Simon and Longinus became disciples, journeyed afar
Longinus to martyrdom ... to tell all.
Veronica, in Rome with Nicodemus, treasured her holy veil —
On beholding it, the sick Emperor Tiberius was cured.
In the exulting wind the larks sang,
“...I appointed you as my prophet, my witness
... to the nations.”

But the foremost evangelizer, the most silent one,
In solitary retreat in the hills of distant Ephesus:
No voice was heard, but
her message, her example went out to all the earth:
“Retrace my Son’s ... Stations of the Cross.”
Our Lady of Good Counsel — Caribbean Canadian Catholic Church

40th ANNIVERSARY

Carlyle Guiseppe CSSp, Pastor

For forty years we have seen and been blessed with many people and talents gracing our pews. They have passed through, grown, developed, come and gone.

Some are in the process of that now. Now is the time to celebrate and reflect who they are and who we are.

It is a time of giving thanks to God for the many who have gone and for those who are left. It is a time to reflect on what we have achieved, where we are, what we have become — and where we are going. A time to look to the future with God, with confidence.

Many people started the journey. Some have died, some have moved on. But what of the future? We must ask ourselves what legacy have we left behind or are leaving behind — a legacy and ability for continued growth and development? An ability for prosperity?

Our Home, our Mother, our Caribbean identity
This place has been our Home, our Mother — a place of Caribbean identity, joy and support; a place of spirituality, comfort, growth and development. Are we leaving her dry, unable to sustain or support herself in the times ahead? She has empowered us and sacrificed herself for us so that we can move ahead, be respected and proud, sharing with other people and churches the talents, ideas and strengths that we have received, nurtured and developed under the enfolding presence of our Mother here in Canada — Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Looking forward forty, fifty or sixty years to the next generations of Caribbean migration — what do we leave behind for them to celebrate? How do we pass on the importance of being here or having the arms of our

Here at Our Lady of Good Counsel you are...
Mother open to all? How do we continue to stand proud in Canadian society, knowing that we have answered the call of our Mother, our Home, our Lady of Good Counsel?

Development and age bring with them their own problems. Mobility concerns worry us. But this should never completely stop us from staying in touch, from connecting and even sharing with each other and with this church, our home.

You and we are family
Communication, keeping in touch, constant contact, making the grand effort to revisit our past home should be our cry. At family gatherings on Sundays when you are not here, you are missed — all are saddened by your absence. You and we are family — we are a part of you when you are absent or not a part of us. Family celebrates together its successes and failures, joys, pains and sufferings, the struggles of life and its achievements. This we do at Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Today as we celebrate, have we been true family members? Have we lived up to our family commitments? How can we give back and say thanks to God for all that we have received or given? A visit, your presence in the pews once a month at least, financial contributions, time and talents in groups — all are needed.

Do not forget the prayers and sacrifices of those who were our foundations. Greatness is seen not by what you take away or take out, but by what you leave behind.

Family for life
We are a great people and our Mother loves us all and has indeed blessed us. Here at Our Lady of Good Counsel you are never a stranger, never orphaned. You are family, family for life. It does not matter who we are, good or bad — remember that you belong. Problems of immobility, inclement weather, distance, inconvenience, no parking are only challenges to overcome — for we are a great people.

Many organizations and groups have started and matured here in the past. Our Mother has grown old looking after so many children. How can we make her young again? God has called you and empowered you and placed the future of your church in your hands. Its future depends on you, Continued existence and keeping its doors open depend on you. Do we hear our Mother’s call to return and participate fully?

Our mandate from the Archdiocese is to look after all Caribbean people, their descendants and all who make this community their home. Spiritual growth, development and prosperity are our task for those who are present with us and for the future generation. Our mandate covers the whole Greater Toronto Area.

I call upon you to give thanks today for all that you have received, the past, present and still to come, the joys, the growth pains and sufferings, the trials and tribulations, the peace and blessedness of Our Lady of Good Counsel, our Home. As we have received, let us give back, let us say thanks.

never a stranger, never orphaned. You are family, family for life.

Guyana — One People, One Nation, One Destiny

Jamaica — Out of Many, One People

St. Kitts & Nevis — Country Above Self

St. Lucia — The Land, The People, The Light

St. Vincent & the Grenadines — Peace and Justice

The Republic of Trinidad & Tobago — Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve

The Republic of Trinidad & Tobago — Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve
Someone once said that the cause of World War III will be ... water! Shrinking fresh-water resources, an expanding Sahara, and yearly droughts all seem to confirm this theory. Water in Africa is priceless —
The rain in turn provides plenty of grass for herds and plenty of milk at home. But the rainy seasons are getting shorter and the dry seasons are lengthening from year to year. The cow bells fall silent in the villages — life dies, and deserted villages revive only in the evenings. Herds trek long distances to find water and families follow the herds. A village seems to be abandoned because of the daily task of searching for water. This makes women and often children “disappear” every day as they carry their heavy water containers 10 and 20 kms in search of distant ponds and riverbeds that have not dried up.

Bridges — yes, but no waters
In the dry season people dig pits in riverbeds, sometimes several metres deep, in search of the precious liquid. This is not the clear water we were taught about in schools — colourless, odourless — but still it’s water!

Periodic rivers are permanently etched into the African landscape. Strange as it seems, one sees bridges — but no river. Interestingly, when the river appears, capriciously choosing a new riverbed, the old bridge stands as a monument to a bygone age “next to” rivers. The emphasis should be placed on the words “the bridge stands”, because there were times when I crossed over a bridge in the morning and in the evening when I returned to the

Someone is singing, someone is laughing, and then ... suddenly there is water! All conviviality is over and what seemed like a family meeting turns into a struggle for both water and survival. The issue now is getting water before the tap dries up.
mission, that bridge was gone, carried away during the day by a flash flood.

A major challenge here is drilling wells and boreholes or building water reservoirs. We drilled such a well on an earlier mission, and it cost us $20,000. Now we have the 180-metre hole, which to this day remains ... just a hole! There was no water. Cleverly enough, often a company investigates for the presence of water, but they will not give you a guarantee that water is there.

A different set of challenges are the water tanks fed by rain water. Sometimes the water is pilfered by humans or animals, as was the case in the Ngorongoro parish. One day elephants paid a visit to the mission. They can smell water at distances of up to 20 kms. Cleverly, the animals lifted the concrete lid of the tank to quench their thirst in front of the vigilant eye of Fr Joe Herzstein. His loud protests went unheeded by the elephants.

**Water — inside and outside**

My mission in Ngorongoro at a village called Olbalbal has its undoubted advantages — and disadvantages. When I moved into my room there was a burning candle and a kerosene lamp. After a few days I enjoyed a small lamp powered by solar battery. In the corner was a 10-litre bucket of water. On it stood a plastic basin for washing, but that was no guarantee water was there.

I use the outside “shower” which consists of four walls, a tin roof and a concrete floor. Our major convenience is a water pipe with a tap next to the mission. Olbalbal is a village with a local health clinic and a primary school for approximately 500 students. The Maasai use a pond — a more correct term would be “swamp” — to water their herds. A few years ago, thanks to a project, a spring was improved in the mountains; from it water is now brought by pipes to the village. A pipe passes next to our mission and fills our plastic tank of 1000 litres capacity.
“At the tap” each day
Most of the time the water appears at approximately 10 a.m. for a short time and again at 4 p.m. The Maasai use this water for drinking and for washing their clothing. Multicoloured dressed women begin gathering at the tap at about 8 a.m. They come equipped with colourful plastic buckets usually used for selling cooking oil. They sit “at the tap”, talk, laugh and joke. After some time, more women arrive driving donkeys that will transport the water to their homes.

As the hours go by, it gets noisy and cheerful. Someone is singing, someone is laughing, and then ... suddenly there is water! All conviviality is over and what seemed like a family meeting turns into a struggle for both water and survival. The issue now is getting water before the tap dries up.

Shoving, quarreling, loading buckets
Someone jumps in the colourful crowd with her bucket — and someone stronger pushes her aside. Everyone wants to be the first to fill her container. Each woman has a thousand reasons why she should be the first to get water. An attempt to “regulate” this is a classic Gordian knot, and the awareness that there is not enough water for all does not help. Any lucky woman with a full bucket moves aside, carefully guarding her treasure.

Women load buckets on their backs, fastening them with one of their many scarves, or they look around for donkeys and load the containers into canvas pockets on their backs.

The last drops of water fall from the tap leaving many buckets still empty. Calm returns along with laughter and chatter. Women exchange news from various places — who was born, who is sick, who is getting married, how children are doing in school. They slowly disperse to their homes to look for firewood or for other chores. The joyful buzz will return in the afternoon, once again turning into a fight when the first drops of water appear at the tap.

Sometimes it happens that voices wake me up as early as 2 a.m. even though the water will not appear until approximately 10 a.m.

Plastic bottles that I put on our corrugated metal roof are silent witnesses of all this. These small bottles, filled with water, are exposed to the sun for a few hours. I have heard the sun will purify the water: is it true that water, placed in a plastic bottle and exposed to several short hours of sunlight, becomes “clean” and safe to drink?

Seeing the bottles on the roof, the Maasai have verified one more time ... these foreigners are nuts.
Psalm of Humanity for Creation

O Divine Love, O Infinite Beauty, Creator God,
how breathtaking is Your creation.

From the grains of sand beneath our feet
to the vast starry night sky,
as we contemplate Your infinite revelation,
how can our hearts not be transformed?

Humanity’s pillage and over-consumption is hurting
Your exquisite creation.
Hasten our steps along the journey to healing;
“take us to the heart of what it is to be human.”

Turn our eyes to those already open to Your voice,
already inspired by Your Gracious Spirit to
walk with the poor and live more simply.

We praise You and thank You for Your forgiving Mercy;
for strengthening our spirits to do Your Will.

May the love for our common home grow
so that Your creation will flourish,
so that as one human family,
we have renewed hope with the dawn of each new day.

Praise to You,
O Divine Love,
O Infinite Beauty,
Creator God.

Amen.
Justin Anantawan is a VICS volunteer, teaching at St. John’s Basic Cycle School for the Deaf in Serekunda, The Gambia. He writes wonderful journal entries and is an amazing photographer. VICS tends to share stories of ‘life giving’ volunteer experiences, but the truth is, part of volunteering is about getting through each day, adapting and experiencing situations through new eyes. Justin shares one of these experiences.

“I will relate a funny incident that tested my technical ingenuity and from which I emerged victorious. A couple hours ago I was trying to take a shower. During the past few days, I was having issues with the faucet because when I turned the knob, water would leak from it and most of it would not go through the showerhead. So, I ended up unfastening the knob completely, kneeling and letting any water that came out of the pipe run over my body. Unfortunately, today the rubber stopper attached to the knob came loose and fell down the drain. So, I could not refasten the knob to stop the water from flowing. I panicked because Albert (maintenance support) was off and I could not call him in the middle of the night to come fix the faucet. I knew I had to deal with it somehow or waste a whole night’s worth of water. So, I stuffed into the faucet a ribbon of fabric I found lying around. It worked somewhat but there was still water coming through the fabric. I rethought my plan, got a small plastic bag and stuffed it in there, fastening the outside with the fabric. This worked better, reducing the water to a fast drip. However, after ten minutes, the water pressure caused the bag to burst and water started flowing again. My next option would have been to stop the water coming to the house, but the two night-watchmen had no idea how to do this. Then I thought perhaps one
of the candles I bought would be the right size to fit in the faucet. It wasn’t. Finally, I remembered my roommate in Jamaica telling me that whenever his neighbours stole the plug from his outdoor washing basin, he would carve a new plug out of foam. I did not have foam but then I remembered that just a few hours ago I had bought something from the market that could be carved: a carrot! So, I took a carrot out of the fridge, got my knife, kept peeling until it was the exact size of the faucet, stuffed it in the hole and fastened it with the fabric. Voilà! Problem solved. Life is good.”
“Mercy” is the word that summarizes the Gospel. We might say that it is the “face” of Christ: the face he showed when he went towards everyone, when he healed the sick, when he shared a table with sinners, and especially when, nailed to the cross, he forgave. There we find the face of divine mercy.

Pope Francis

Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful and charity in everything.

St Augustine

The church should be an open house with open doors.

Pope Francis

Converting people is a two-way street: the conversion of the missionary and of the people. We all need a little more conversion — especially those of us in North America. So God is sending all the nations to us.

Vincent Donovan CSSp

A community of disciples went to their elder and asked him to go with them to pronounce a guilty verdict on another disciple. The master agreed to go with them, but he carried on his back a basket filled with sand. The basket had a hole in it. “Why?” they asked the elder. “I can’t pass judgment on another,” he replied, “unless I am aware that my own sins trail behind me like this sand from my basket.”
On Pilgrimage in France
Paul McAuley CSSp

Last Fall, a small band of pilgrims set out from St Joseph’s church in Scarborough – off to France for a two-week pilgrimage. The pilgrimage brought us first to the south of France with two wonderful days in Lourdes, its life-size stations of the cross, Mass and a candlelight rosary procession. From Lourdes, we travelled to the magnificent Chartres cathedral. We then spent a few days in the Loire valley at Tours getting to know the famous St Martin of Tours. The next stop was the palace of Versailles just outside Paris.

From Paris, we embarked on a four-day river cruise down the Seine to Normandy. We visited Notre Dame church in the small village of Pinterville. It was this church to which our very own Spiritan, Blessed Fr Jacques Laval, was first assigned after his ordination in 1838. He later travelled to the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean and spent the rest of his life ministering to the people there. Fr Laval was the first person beatified by John Paul II.

Standing at the altar of the little old church in Pinterville celebrating Mass for our group, I could sense that Blessed Laval was praying with us.

Another moving experience came the next day when we visited Juno beach, the site of the Canadian landings long ago on D-Day. We remembered those who fought and fell that terrible day.

Back to Paris and many of its beautiful and sacred places: Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre, Madeleine church, Notre Dame of course, and the Convent of the Miraculous Medal.

The final leg of the pilgrimage brought us to Lisieux, the childhood home of St Thérèse.

As we flew back to Toronto, I was sure many in our little St Joseph’s group were reflecting on the trip, its sacred spaces and places, our prayer and sharing and laughter and fun. We felt truly blessed.
God is a God of the journey who has patiently travelled a long path with us on our journey of faith — we are on the way, with some standpoints, then on our way again. Meet people where they are and accompany them wisely, patiently, mercifully on their path.

*Pope Francis*