



Spiritans Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation and InterReligious Dialogue

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From the General Council

“Laudato Si, mi Signore” is the canticle of St Francis of Assis which inspired the title and contents of Pope Francis' Encyclical letter ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME. As missionaries committed to a better life for all people, especially the poor, we can also find inspiration in the life of St. Francis and in this encyclical. Speaking of St Francis, the Pope says: “He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” (Laudate Si, n° 10). What a challenging program for us as missionaries!

This first ecological encyclical also challenges us to join forces with other believers of different faiths in our care for nature and leads us along the path of inter-religious dialogue, as it states: “The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and frater-

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ny” (Laudate Si n° 201). Thus Pope Francis unites inter-religious dialogue and Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) issues as part of the “ecological mission of the Church.” This is also the objective of this newsletter and one we hope to express in the different articles and contributions from Spiritans around the world. In this Newsletter we want to recognize and reaffirm that our Spiritan vocation and mission calls us to continuously strive for a better world where everybody is able to praise God in all joy and peace.

*Jose Manuel Sabença, CSSp
Marc Tyrant, CSSp*

From the JPIC & IRD desk

Welcome to the Spiritan JPIC & IRD newsletter. In this edition, we shall explore issues related to the environment, following the call of Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si mi Signore* on care of our common home. The encyclical will further help our reflection as Spiritans during this 2nd stage of our animation program outlined by the General Council. *Laudato si*, the first ecological encyclical is now part of the body of the social doctrine of the Church. Addressed to the peoples of the world, *Laudato Si* invites men and women of good will to approach environmental issues with the lens of human rights. The right to water, the loss of biodiversity, progressive decline in the quality of human life, the breakdown of society, global inequality,

forced migrations, consumerism and a throw away culture, underscore voluntary and involuntary violations of human rights, and the urgency for a serious evaluation of our present attitudes to the earth – our common home. *Laudato si* is an invitation for us to champion an



“integral ecology” and to see the link between social justice and the environment. In the face of multiple ecological questions, we often wonder “what can I do?” One way is to support efforts at mitigating the effects of climate change as illustrated by Brian O’Toole in this edition of our newsletter. Another way, is to raise awareness and follow the debates and resolutions that will come up during the Conference of Parties (COP 21) in Paris from the 7- 8 of December this year.

As Spiritans let us encourage and raise awareness about eco-friendly actions. As missionaries, we are often the first responders in the event of natural disasters. So, we cannot be indifferent to issues of ecology! From providing temporary shelters for those affected by flooding in the Philippines, standing with those whose farm lands are destroyed by oil exploration in Nigeria, championing recycling efforts in our communities, Spiritans advance the mitigation of the effects of climate change. In creating awareness about our stewardship of creation and respect for

ecology, each Spiritan will further the 2nd phase of our Spiritan animation program, allowing ourselves to be agents of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world. In this edition of our JPIC & IRD newsletter, we wish to share with you some of the stories of fellow Spiritans and suggested ways of responding to the damages caused by climate change.

Chika Onyejiuwa narrates an unplanned encounter with an injured man on his way to Sunday Mass in the creeks of Escravos, Niger Delta Nigeria, which made him realize how victims of multi-

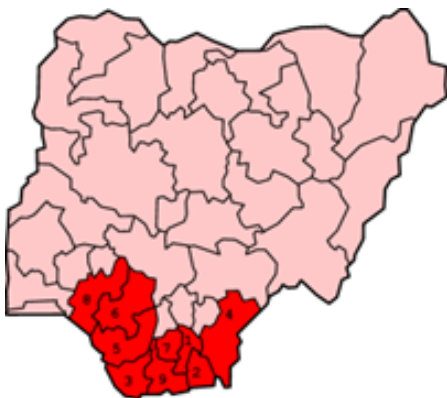
national oil exploration cannot even receive adequate medical attention in their land which produces the nation's oil wealth! Chinua Okeke Oraeki opines that the effects of heatwaves in Australia, include heat stress, poor quality produce, crop failure and food shortages. Brian O'Toole offers a practical response towards an eco-friendly environment – recycling. The section on inter-religious dialogue begins with Leo Illah, who shares the story of how a confrere Adam Bago responding to the effects of typhoon Nanmadol in the Philippines in 2011, built a mosque at

the request of Muslims – a practical approach to inter-religious dialogue. Our interview with Archbishop Dieu-donné Nzapalainga, explores the dynamics of an inter-religious peace-builder. Happy reading!

Jude Nnorom CSSp

Nigeria : Bridging the gap between Christian narrative and social Justice

Chika Onyejiuwa CSSp



Map of Nigeria's Niger Delta

The Niger Delta of Nigeria has won international reputation for a myriad of reasons. For me, it was where I underwent a radical change of direction in my understanding and approach to pastoral ministry. I managed a parish in Ogonu, Warri diocese in Nigeria with some outstations in *Escravos*¹, a collection of settlements in the creeks which were accessible, only by powered boats. I needed at least three hours to make it from the Parish Centre to my 'outstations' through challenging waterways and turbulent ocean currents. On one of my trips to *Escravos* for Sunday Mass, I ran into a badly injured accident victim who was bleeding profusely. He had fallen off his motor-cycle on one of the many rough, slippery and marshy footpaths connecting the creek settlements. There was neither first aid nor a means to convey him to the nearest public health facility, a three hours journey to Warri. Seeing that he was in mortal dan-

ger, I did all I could to save him from bleeding to death. I took him to Warri and eventually, I could no longer make another three hour boat sail to *Escravos* for the Sunday Mass. For weeks after I could not take my mind off this event. It is still difficult for me to get my mind around the fact that most communities in that region lacked basic facilities like access to portable water, electricity, transportation, health and educational facilities while these facilities were not only available but very efficient in the camps of the oil corporations located inside the villages secured with walls and guards. An injured shell worker would have been adequately treated without any need for the long and arduous journey that was necessary for the accident victim who was native.

The *Escravos* event has remained with me because it put me on the path of introspection and re-evaluation of the content of pastoral ministry. My intention, in this article, is to share a little bit of my inner struggle and conversion associated with this experience with the hope that it will probably provide some support for my confreres and our associates who could be at the threshold of similar experience. My consequent conversion is two-

dimensional; one is my clear inner conviction that pastoral ministry is not so much the celebration of the sacraments and promotion of religious devotion as contributing to create a more just society. The second is that care for the earth is an integral part of social justice and the pastor's mission to the poor².

The above experience was for me a wake-up call to active involvement with issues of social justice. My response came rather slowly, preceded by a period of inner struggle and resistance, because it came as an invitation to let go of the security of the traditional parochial ministry I had been groomed into, and the "loss" of priestly identity that would invariably follow it. At the heart of my quest for social justice are two important questions. The first is a question of justice for the land and the mangrove forests destroyed; and the water bodies polluted due to oil exploration, drilling and spillage. The second is justice for the people who bear the



brunt of the unbridled activities of the corporations who explore the earth; and have their settlements washed away by the sea when the oil corporations displace the water from its original basin to gain more land. It is always about economics not a thought for the good of the people! A narrow understanding of economics sees it in terms of produc-



tion, exchange of goods and services, competition for scarce resources and profit making. But in its original and broader sense, economics is the distribution of the earth's resources for the sustenance of the ecosystem. It is characterized by a synergy involving non-human and human communities of the ecosystem; hence the original sense of economy (oikonomia). Ethicists like Douglas Meek and Christine Firer Hinze have differently given two insightful meanings of "oikos". In one sense of it, oikos is understood to be a household in which God desires to give people access to life; and in another sense, it is a household of creation in which God desires creatures to live together in a life-giving interdependent relationship. The common denominator in each of these nuances is that God desires life lived in dignity for all his creatures.

Obviously, not much of this life is being enjoyed by the inhabitants of the creeks of the *Escravos* and other rural communities in Africa and developing countries. Their poverty is systemic and is the evidence of a disconnection in the synergy which oikonomia evokes. Jesus unilaterally committed himself to dis-

mantling such breaches in whichever garb they appear. He has come for all, "... that they may have life and have it in abundance" (Jn10:10). Paul echoes the same sentiments in his letter to Timothy that the world was created for the enjoyment of all (1Tim6:17). The same strain of thought forms the kernel of Pope Francis' admonition in his first encyclical. Evangelization is to make the kingdom of God a practical human experience on this earth through the creation of more just and equitable society (*Evangelium Gaudium* 180). Scripture experts tell us that Isaiah's vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Is 67:17 and also John (Rev 21:1) was a deep longing for a transformation of human

ego, domination and power into compassion that will result in a new world social order where justice, peace and solidarity would be her ethos. It therefore becomes imperative for us as missionaries and agents of the Gospel, to be, "the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them." (SRL 1849; Libermann N.D. X, 517)

By and large, the most challenging of this experience is the aspect of environmental advocacy. There seems to be a lack of clarity on the connection between ecological justice and the basic Christian narrative. Yes, courses are taught on social ethics and the principles of the social teachings of the church but how they can be explored as instruments and tools of social analysis and ecological advocacy is hardly highlighted as a fulfilling requirement of seminary formation. At most, it is an ecological awareness that lacked any connection to the basic Christian narrative. This gap needs to be recognized and bridged sufficiently to motivate actions in favour of ecology as a faith expression.

In his latest encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis places a finger on the missing link as he identifies dualism as the unhealthy phenomenon that disfigured the gospel in the course of history [98]. As a matter of fact, a large proportion of human consciousness has been formed by dualism and is largely responsible for Christian apathy to social justice, especially care for the earth. Unfortunately, dualism shut down the more authentic Christian thought which held that salvation and kingdom of heaven are events of this earth and include both the human and the material universe. Consequently, unjust social structures which should be addressed by practical means are spiritualized and reduced to religious devotions and rituals! This must not be understood as an effort to cast aspersion on Christian rituals in favour of social actions. Each has its own proper place but retrieving the Christian narrative from the clutches of dualism is imperative for ecological advocacy especially in the light of *Laudato Si* and the ecological crisis that has engulfed the earth – our common home.

Curiously too, *Laudato Si* is a papal statement that borders on the second step of my conversion. It calls for a unified view of reality. The conversion journey of the pastor must get to this point where integral action for the ecosystem is believed, preached and practiced as the Church's mandate to evangelize. At the moment, we see the world from the dualistic world view and unless there is a change, spiritualization of injustice will continue to be an escape route for Christians.

Chika Onyejiuwa CSSp

¹ Escravos is a Portuguese word for Slaves. It is the general name for the communities in the creeks where Warri and Bini rivers meet to join the Atlantic Ocean.

² Pope Francis: *Laudato Si* – Encyclical letter on care for our common home

Your comments and suggestions are most welcome as to how we can improve this Newsletter on JPIC/IRD.

We would also like to invite you to send us information on any initiative or activity that you may be engaged in to foster our Spiritan service in JPIC/IRD.

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Heatwaves in Australia - Chinua Okeke Oraeki CSSp

The philosopher Heraclitus opined that change is the only constancy in life. His insight cannot be truer in the climatic field. Scientists are of the opinion that the "earth's climate has undergone many changes over the course of geologic history, but the past one million years or so have been among the most dynamic. During that time, the planet has experienced repeated cycles of glacial (cold) and interglacial (warm) periods lasting about 80,000 years on average."¹ The causes of these changes include changes in the earth's orbit and rotation that affects the intensity of the sun that penetrates the earth, the amount of greenhouse gases - carbon dioxide, methane and water vapour "in the earth's atmosphere."² If varying climatic conditions have been the hallmark of the climate through the ages, is there veracity in the current hue and cry about climate change? Secondly, what are the consequences of climatic change on humans? To help us explore the above questions I shall examine the heatwave phenomenon in Australia.

Australia at a glimpse: Australia, situated in the Southern hemisphere, covers an area of 7.692 million square kilometers. It is bound by both the Pacific and Indian Ocean, and is both a country and a continent. As a country, it is the sixth largest in the world. Among the continents, it ranks "the smallest... the lowest, the flattest and (apart from Antarctica) the driest."³ About 20 percent of Australian land mass is classified as desert.

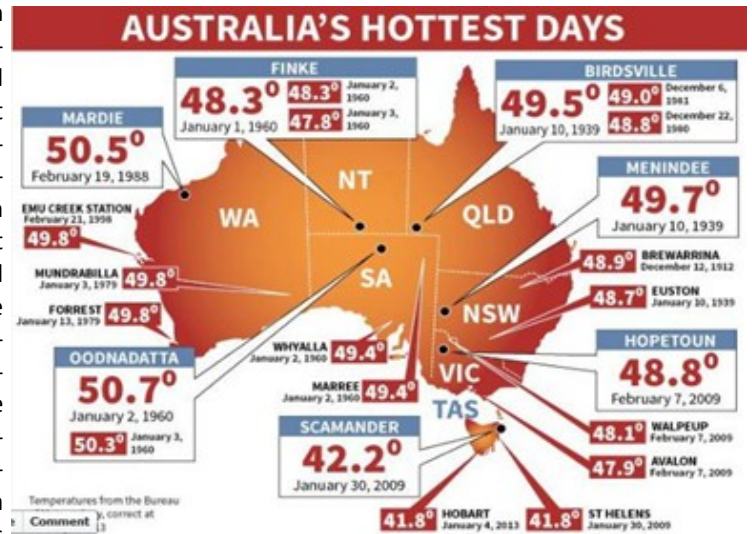
Australian Geographic



Heat wave in Australia: Heat wave is "defined as heat impact event for all community and business sectors in Australia."⁴ Heat wave is declared when the average daytime maximum temperature and average night time minimum temperature exceeds a given locality's average temperature for three consecutive days and over.

Australians have had series of heatwaves. The major ones that affected a cross section of Australian communities were in January 1908, January 1939, New year 1960, late January 1960, Summer 1972/1973, February 2004, mid-January to early February 2009, and January 2013. The 2013 heat wave affected parts of Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. It was estimated that over two-third of the country experienced the heat wave.

Effects of heat waves: Heat waves have adverse effect on human well-being. Excess heat "can cause heat stress, exacerbate the symptoms of existing or underlying illness and, in extreme cases, cause long-term impairment or death."⁵ Excessive heat causes death by triggering heart attacks,



Australian Meteorological center

strokes and exhaustion especially among the elderly and the vulnerable people in the society like the homeless people, low socio-economic people who cannot afford air-conditioning, and people with heart condition. A research by Macquarie University risk scientist Lucinda Coates, and colleagues on hazards of natural disasters in Australia from 1803 to 1992 came to the conclusion that heat stress caused more deaths than the combination of deaths from floods, tropical cyclones, bushfires and storms. Elderly people are also adversely affected by heat waves.

Another consequence of heat waves is bush fire, and Australia is rife with bush fires. Excessive temperatures create atmospheric conditions that are susceptible to bush fires by drying up the environment. All the major bush fires in Australia have high temperatures as one of the key constituent elements that bred the fire.

A further effect of heat wave is crop failure or yielding poor quality produce. Excessive heat scorches the earth and makes crops have stunted growth. Farmers around Victoria complained about the negative effect the Victorian heat wave in summer last year had on their crops which included burnt leaves. Excessive heat coupled with drought is a recipe for massive crop failures and shortage of food. Shortage of food leads to food price hiking and the poor people in the society will find it extremely hard to make ends meet. Heat wave also has a negative impact on the economy of Australia. People do not work at optimal capacity when the weather is too hot.

Heat waves also leads to power failures thus affecting the means of transportation like trains and trams making it difficult for some people to get to work and for some goods and services to be conveyed. Extreme heat without adequate rain fall brings about shortage of water supply. This is due to the fact that farmers will have to irrigate their crops more, and lots of water will be lost through evaporation. Humans and animals will have to consume more water to keep cool. Efforts to save water consumption by the city of Melbourne indicate that, "During the recent drought in Victoria, conservation efforts included a non-mandatory target for public consumption of 155L of potable water per person per day. On days with peak tem-

perature greater than 30°C, this target was regularly exceeded."⁶ Human activities are sending greenhouses gases into the atmosphere and these greenhouse gases are contributing to climate change. All of us have a duty to mitigate and reduce the effects of climate change and irregular patterns of heat-waves. Spiritans in Australia will continue to raise awareness about heat waves through their various ministries.

¹ Ice age & Past Climates <http://www.who.edu/main/topic/ice-ages-past-climates>.

² Ibid.

³ The Australian Continent <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/the-australian-continent>

⁴ State of the Climate 2014 <http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/> by Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO

⁵ Feeling the Heat: Heatwave and social vulnerability in Victoria. Victorian Council of Social Service Report 2013.

⁶ Economic Assessment of Urban Heat Island Effect <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/Sustainability/AdaptingClimateChange/Pages/UHIREport.aspx#p22>

Chinua Okeke Oraeki

Cssp



Ireland : Recycling - Brian O'Toole CSSp

Trash has value : Plastic bags, newspapers, cardboard boxes, razors, watches, toothbrushes, aluminum cans, ball-point pens, water bottles, Kleenex, lightbulbs are all considered disposable; and are with us for only that brief period between the shop checkout and the landfill. All of us as consumers are encouraged to buy things rather than make them and to throw things out rather than fix them. Most of us now recognize that such behavior is responsible for untold environmental degradation. Alternative practices and attitudes are called for. There is a growing practice in Spiritan communities in Ireland of managing household waste so that the energy from trash is not lost and buried in landfills. At the national level it is hoped to increase recycling rates from 40 to 50 per cent by 2020.

The recycling story: Ecology teaches that on the macro level na-

ture wastes nothing. There is a scientific law, called the law of energy conservation. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only be converted from one state to another. Perhaps an example will help to illustrate this principle. Energy from the sun's rays is used by plants to grow. The energy is thus stored in the plant itself as it grows. If you burn that plant, the energy is released as heat and light in the form of fire. Thus the energy from the sun was converted to plant energy which was in turn converted to heat and light.

This principle is very important in our world where useful sources of energy are needed in order to power all the things we use to keep us alive, like electricity. However, we are rapidly running out of these energy sources. For example, we burn coal and peat to create electricity in our power stations. But coal was

formed over millions of years and is what we call a **fossil fuel**. If we use all the coal, we can't create more. Oil is another example of a fossil fuel, which we use to power motor vehicles. These are what are called **non-renewable energy sources**.

Because we are using up all these fossil fuels at ever increasing rates, we could run out of effective means of producing energy. Remember also that the burning of fossil fuels is responsible for the greenhouse effect and air pollution. It is therefore very important that we try to find clean sources of energy and conserve energy as much as possible.

How can we conserve energy?

One very effective way is by **recycling** resources, which requires less energy than producing new ones. It also means that less damage is done to the environment in attempts to obtain raw materials and to dispose

of waste. Examples of recyclable materials include: paper, aluminum, steel, glass, and some plastics. Many companies will pay for recyclable materials which provide communities with a way to contribute to the environment but also to benefit materially. One example is aluminum beer and cold drink cans. A can thrown away could litter the earth for 500 years before it disappears. Recycled aluminum cuts related air pollution 95% and uses 90% less energy than making aluminum from scratch.

Other products are even easier to recycle simply by letting nature take its course. Vegetable matter, like grass cuttings or kitchen scraps can be used to make compost. This can make your soil very fertile and you could even sell it to other people instead of them having to buy expensive and environmentally harmful fertilizers.

Let us talk this over:

- ♦If we run out of coal, oil and other non-renewable energy sources what will happen to life as we know it?
- ♦How much of the above mentioned recyclable materials do you throw away every week?
- ♦How does recycling benefit the environment?
- ♦How can recycling benefit the community?

The following are some courses that we might consider:

- ♦Save electricity and water.
- ♦Minimize the use of fossil fuels like coal, oil and petrol.
- ♦Establish community recycling programs for paper, aluminum and steel cans, glass and plastic.
- ♦Make compost and mulch. This way you are returning the plants' stored energy to the soil.
- ♦Eat more vegetable and less

meat. It takes 8 kg of soya bean and grain to produce 1 kg of beef. If we reduce our intake of meat by 10%, the savings in grain and soya beans would feed millions of people.

- ♦Avoid buying products in plastic or polystyrene containers. Use a cloth or string bag to do your shopping instead of plastic packets from the supermarket.

Be the change – make it happen:

We change ourselves, our attitudes and our conduct by acting differently. Every action taken in favor of



a just and more sustainable environment, no matter how small has an intrinsic value. It is good that every Spiritan community focuses attention on what we should be doing and then learns how to do it. A starting point could be by taking steps to practice the 3Rs 'Recycle, Reuse, Repair'. As Spiritans we can never consider ourselves or our obligations in isolation from others. Though we are many, we are one body. Every individual action that contributes to integral human development and solidarity both global and local, helps to construct a more sustainable environment and, therefore a better world.

Brian O'Toole CSSp

A prayer for our earth

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

***Pope Francis,
Laudato si 246***





Inter Religious Dialogue

PLEASE HELP US BUILD A PLACE OF PRAYER!

Spiritans response to a cry after typhoon Sendong in the Philippines - *Leo Illah Agbene*

Often, we spend a lot of time and words trying to establish good relationships between Christians and Muslims in our world today, but in my opinion, there are more speeches and ideologies than expressed actions. Spiritan missionaries in the Philippines wish to share a practical approach to inter-religious dialogue. A kind of dialogue

On the 17th of December, 2011, the whole of the Parish area, comprising about 30 mountainous farm villages and the entire region of Iligan city was hit by Typhoon Sendong. This typhoon killed almost five thousand people in Iligan and Cagayan de Oro cities. The Spiritan Parish in Digkilaan, dedicated to Our

Our confrere Fr. Adam Bago, Parish priest at the time of this disaster labored so hard to help the victims. He buried bodies all around the parish with short prayers, unfortunately some were buried by name as their bodies were not found. I joined Fr. Adam in January and many confreres and friends of the Spiritans from the city came to our help and responded with relief materials in different parts of the Parish. The Parish center became a refuge for Children, men and women, Muslims, Lumads¹, and Christians. No question was asked about religion, everybody was desperate for survival!

After the initial period of assistance, we encouraged people to return to their homes. But what home will they return to, since what used to be their homes no longer exists? So we took the initiative to build simple temporary shelters for the victims. Fr. Adam got the first group of families relocated to *Dodongan* village after completing some wooden



Aftermath of Typhoon Sendong

that is deeper and speaks directly to the heart; this dialogue is that of love and action. Everyone understands the language of love. When you reach out to people in times of difficulty, you prove the essence of true religion which is love. Spiritans have labored for more than 17 years in the Muslim dominated mountains of Digkilaan, Iligan city, Mindanao Philippines. We have had a lot of challenging situations and conflicts and the Parish has always been a center for many victims and refugees. Some communities within the Parish had suffered more than five different attacks from Muslim rebels in the last 10 years and up today, killings continue in different parts of the parish. Often the victims run to us for help.

Lady of Fatima, was heavily affected by this disaster. Thousands of people ran to the Church for safety and many lost family members. Hundreds of people lost everything, children, animals, and crop. Our Prayer leader Mr. Johnny Demecillo in Manga chapel lost his first son together with his daughter in-law and their only child. Many parishioners died and the cry of anguish was heard in every home.



Fr. Illah with the Muslim Iman



The construction of a mosque

The next community to be assisted were in the village of *Kabangahan-uno* and later, the people of *Caluda* and *sil-ica* villages received temporary shelters. With the help of friends and companies, we were able to build almost 250 temporary shelters for about 200 families. Muslim families were the first to be given houses because they were the most affected. We built wooden houses for them and assisted them with food. At this critical point, a cup of rice is precious for any family.

Seeing that we responded to every human person in need despite religious affiliation, Muslims in these communities responded with love. They experienced love from us and responded in love! They never believed that Christians could offer them such a great gesture of love and hope. Barriers and prejudices gave way to gratitude and the reality of our common humanity surfaced. For us as missionaries in this conflict area, it was an opportunity to dialogue without words, but only with action. We pushed on to providing shelter in Malaigang and later Fr. Adam discovered some fully dominated Muslim communities in Panorogangan, Dulag, Kalilangan, Rogongon with so many people dying and suffering of starvation. We took up the challenge to provide them with temporary shelters and with food. We invited some medical doctors who are our friends to help the people for free.

There was a change in the land! The Church became the place of gathering for all people, the Imams, the local indigenous people and the Christians.

**“Help us build a Place of Prayer.”
What? Should Spiritans build a Mosque for Muslims?**

A difficult challenge came when the Muslim communities together with their Imams began to cry for help to Fr. Adam Bago, CSSp. “Fr.” They said; “you have provided us with temporary shelters, but our problem is where to pray, please help us.” Looking at the past conflict between Muslims and Christians in this community and bearing in mind our own identity as Spiritan missionaries, an attempt to respond to this need may be totally misunderstood. However, after much reflection among the brothers, we decided to take the risk. We reasoned that this action will help advance dialogue with our Muslims brothers and sisters. We trusted in the Holy Spirit through the intercession



Sports for Peace – Inter-religious Peacebuilding

of our founders, and hoped that this risk will radically touch the hearts of our Muslim brothers and sisters to understand that we are all children of one creator. I dare say thanks to the Holy Spirit, it did! On the 10th of January 2012; we began the first construction of a small mosque for the Muslim community in Malaigang. It was followed by another in Panorogangan, Dulag and Kalilangan.

Today, these communities are relatively peaceful. They have a different image of priests and Christians. They

are shocked by the love of sharing beyond borders. To add to their surprise is the fact that the first amount donated for the Mosque building in Malaigang was by a Catholic family in Iligan City, a friend of the Spiritans who was impressed with our mission. Today, once they see the car of the priest arriving in these communities, the Muslim children as well as Christian children all run to greet the priest.

The Muslims now participate in the Parish fiesta every year, presenting a Muslim dance in the Church. At Christmas, they come to the parish for their Christmas rice and gradually, the dialogue is made stronger. To further advance friendship among the youth, Fr. Adam Bago, CSSp introduced *sports for peace*.

Muslim and Christian youths come together to play in a gym still under construction for the Parish community. We have to live a life of dialogue every day; offering peace and harmony even to those who don't believe it is possible. “Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called Children of God.” (Matt 5:9). Today, we are continuing our mission of dialogue through education. We have more than 100 scholars in Partnership with other donor individuals and groups. We have more than 20 Muslims and Lumad children on this program. You can become part of our mission today.

Illah Leo Agbene CSSp

<http://www.spiritansphilippines.com/>

¹Lumad is a Cebuano word that means, native or indigenous. The Lumad(s) are a group of indigenous peoples who live in Southern Philippines.



- Inter-religious Peacebuilding - Chat with Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga, CSSp

Alain Mayama CSSp - Jude Nnorom CSSp

During their Ad Limina visit to the Vatican in May, Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Central Africa (Conférence Episcopale Centrafricaine) visited the Generalate. Our confrere, the Archbishop of Bangui, and president of the Bishops conference of Central Africa, His Grace Dieudonné Nzapalainga CSSp, granted an interview to Alain Mayama (General Councilor) and Jude Nnorom (JPIC & IRD Coordinator) about his work in promoting inter-religious dialogue (IRD) in Central Africa. According to the Archbishop, the level of violence experienced in Central African Republic (CAR) in the past two years has been unprecedented. Suspicion, anger, division and the inappropriate mobilization of religion as a major driver in the conflict will take a long time to heal. Together with Imam Oumar Kobine Layama, President of the Islamic Council of CAR, and Pastor Guerkoyame-Gbangou, President of the Evangelical Alliance of Central Africa, Archbishop Dieudonné formed the Inter-faith peace platform of CAR. He said, “we signed an agreement to provide leaders of our various faith traditions with the resources they need to stop the violence and promote inter-community living. Our focus was to establish local peace committees in Bangui and other areas, and for these committees to

become agents of peace through inter-religious collaboration”. Our message was clear “nobody is mandated to fight in the name of any of our faith traditions, and those perpetrating violence in the name of religion are not representing us.” Because, “in our interaction with Anti-Balaka and Seleka rebels, we knew that religion was not the primary driver of the conflict. Socio-political issues, historical grievances, marginalization, exclusion from the political process, lack of infra-



Pastor Guerkoyame-Gbangiou, Imam Oumar Kobine e

Mons. Dieudonne Nzapalainga

structure development, poverty etc are some of the root causes”.

The Archbishop’s focus on IRD is aimed at enhancing the dignity of the human person irrespective of his/her religious affiliation. He describes IRD as voluntary actions that involve reaching out to others outside one’s faith tradition with gestures that promote collaboration and inter-communal peace. For example in CAR, when he heard about the extremely poor living conditions of Les Peuls (The Fulani people) who are mainly Moslems, he em-

barked on a trip of about 225 kilometers from Bangui to Yaloke in the Yaloke- Bossembele sub prefecture in the Ombella – M’poko prefecture of the western part of CAR. He went with the medical team of his Archdiocese to offer medical help and humanitarian assistance to the Peuls. He said; “what I saw was a humanitarian disaster. People were living in the bush and forest literally like animals. For me, it was essential that the Peuls are brought out of the forest. In this

regard, we needed to negotiate with the political leadership and local authorities”. However, “our immediate response was to take care of sick members in the Peul community. There was a young girl suffering from tuberculosis and her parents pleaded with me to take her to Bangui, as she cannot be treated in Yaloke. I accepted, took her and her

parents in one of the cars and began our return journey to Bangui”.

On the way back, the archbishop and his team had a hair-raising encounter with anti-balaka militia. He recounted the story in these words. *About 25 kilometers from Bangui, we were stopped by the anti-balaka. First, they stopped the vehicle with the Peuls. When I arrived, they told me that the first vehicle with the Peuls was stopped and the anti-balaka were demanding to kill them. I came out of my car and*

told them politely “you have no right to kill any human being including the Peuls.” Suddenly many militia members of Anti-Balaka surrounded us. It was quite frightening! One of their chiefs came towards me visibly angry. I told him to come closer and I said to him, “I know you are angry, and I am going to pray for you and to bless you.” I placed my hand on his heart and prayed silently. Then I noticed that something in him changed. Immediately another Spiritan, Br. Elkana shouted “Mons. they are about to kill another Peul here.” This man a (Peul) was brought down from the car and the anti-balaka began to beat him with a knife. One of our drivers came in between them to stop the fight, and he was injured in the fight. Interestingly the chief whom I blessed earlier told his fellow anti-balaka “don’t kill him.” This chief became like our guardian angel. He called his colleagues by name and told them not to kill the Peuls. For me this was a miracle. From a dangerously tense situation a few seconds ago, we began to experience, the power of love over hatred. Then I came forward and took the machete from the man who was beating the Peul and told him, “you know you don’t want to kill anybody.” Our driver’s hand was bleeding profusely and we needed to continue our journey to Bangui for him to be treated. We also took the Peul who was about to be killed and put him into the car. As we were about to leave many anti balaka came out and began to harass us. They were shouting at us and saying, “how can you prevent us from killing these Peuls who have been killing us. I told them that Peuls and Moslems are our brothers and sisters and we have to leave together. If one of our brother or sister is sick, we have to take care of the person irrespective of whether he is Moslem or Christian. That is why I cannot leave this person and will take her to the hospital. And I said to them, “now that I have explained to you, you can allow me to continue and take this person to the hospital but you can kill me if you want to since you have weapons. I am responsible for bringing them from Yaloke to Bangui”. Then they started discussing among themselves. One of them came crying and said to me that a Peul killed his father and that is why he wanted revenge. I told him that it probably was another Peul but not this one am taking to the hospital. Those am taking with me have nothing to do with the death of your father. I told him a proverb, “if a goat kicks something while passing, are you going to kill all the goats because of the fault of one goat.” After a few minutes, they left us to continue on our way.

When asked if he had any special training on IRD, Archbishop Dieudonné replied that his upbringing in his family and the Spiritan formation he received prepared him for the respect of each human being as a creature of God despite religious affiliation. Also his missionary experience in Marseille, in the south of France as chaplain at St. Francis de Sales House for the Apprentis d’Auteuil, grounded him in ministering to people from different backgrounds and recognizing the gift of God in each person. He dedicated the awards he received together with Imam Oumar Kobine Layama, Pastor Guerkoyame-Gbangou, to the ordinary people of CAR who are working hard to overcome the present challenges in their beloved country. He says IRD is a great tool for peacebuilding. We need to go out and encounter Christ in other people despite their religious orientation. Above all he said that IRD is the action of God through us. We should make ourselves agents of God’s work by opening ourselves to actions in support of IRD. We do not need any special skill to be compassionate and to see God in the other!

Interview by Alain Mayama CSSp - General Councilor
Jude Nnorom CSSp - JPIC-DIR Coordinator



With Fr. Edward Flynn CSSp. VIVAT representative in Geneva, Archbishop Dieudonné, Imam Oumar Kobine at the reception of the Sergio Vieira de Mello world Humanitarian award at the UN in Geneva. You can watch a short video of the ceremony on : <https://youtu.be/4r1fTLzBhiM>.



The name VIVAT is derived from the Latin verb « VIVERE » meaning « LIVE » and expresses the deep wish for all that exists: *mar s/he live, may all persons live, may all creation live* ». It evokes the programmatic prayer of St. Arnold Janssen, the founder of the two congregations from which the organization originates: « *Vivat Deus Unus et Trinus in Cordibus Nostris* » (« *May the One and Triune God live in our hearts* ») and is the unifying symbol of the two congregations. The logo depicts three persons embracing, welcoming and supporting one another while at the same time looking behind their own circle to the larger outer world that is longing for unity and communion. The three olive shoots springing from the second letter of VIVAT stand for the hope and the transformation that VIVAT International envisages for the world.

Our site: www.vivatinternational.org

Membership: WE are 25’386 Sisters, Priests and Brothers from 12 religious Congregations, working in 122 countries, with laity and NGO s.



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