



# Spiritana

## Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation and Interreligious Dialogue

NEWSLETTER NO. 3 - OCTOBER 2016

CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - CLIVO DI CINNA, 195 - ROMA tel. +39 0635404610 e-mail: ccssjpjpic@yahoo.it

## ACKNOWLEDGING GENDER CONTRIBUTIONS TO SPIRITAN JPIC Sustainable Development Goals NO. 5

Jude Nnorom, CSSp.

Bringing the Book of the Gospels to the lectern for proclamation on August 9<sup>th</sup>, (National Women's day in South Africa) a few years ago, and dancing joyously as young people do on such occasions in our parish, I could not but notice a young man of about 16 years, who wore a "dress and was dancing "like a lady!" What a joke during Mass, I thought! Other young people were laughing and giggling. After Mass, I approached the young man, holding my anger and demanded why he wore a dress to Mass! With a serious face he replied "I want to be in solidarity with the ladies in our country." When has the wearing of a dress become a symbol of solidarity? I imagined there were other more "serious" ways of showing solidarity with women than wearing dresses. But come to think of it, perhaps, such a graphic method might shock us to realize the urgency and necessity of gender equality. Perhaps, we need to "wear" the socially constructed dresses and oppressions suffered by women to begin

to appreciate their contribution in proclaiming the reign of God. Perhaps, it will help us to appreciate that action for JPIC demands gender equality and respect for the Human Person.

Some may wonder how a clerical religious missionary institute can advance gender equality in mission? How can we male religious "achieve gender equality and empower women and



Respect for the dignity of the Human Person is a useful lens for understanding gender equality. It provides an avenue to appreciate women's multifaceted contributions in ministry and their invaluable stewardship of God's creation! Another useful lens is the adaptation of the recently-adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (NO 5) on gender equality, to our ministries.

girls" in our ministries? An attempt to answer this question, involves exploring how we partner with women to advance JPIC. Women constitute a greater number in Parish churches, specialized ministries and other religious missionary engagements. Perhaps, we should make them more visible, by amplifying their voices and giving them credit for advancing JPIC, which is the core of our evangelical ministry.

In this edition of our newsletter, we wish to primarily acknowledge the role of

### In this issue:

- ◆ GENDER CONTRIBUTIONS TO SPIRITAN JPIC
- ◆ ALONGSIDE THE OPPRESSED IN GERMANY
- ◆ LAY SPIRITAN MISSION IN BOLIVIA
- ◆ WOMEN AND MEN AS EQUAL PARTNERS IN CANADA
- ◆ WITNESS OF A LAY SPIRITAN IN CAMEROON
- ◆ INTERRELIGIOUS LIBRARY IN MAURITANIA
- ◆ THE MARAKESH DECLARATION



women as exemplary agents of change on issues related to JPIC. We salute and thank the women who partner with us in our various ministries. From over 50 countries, including Canada, Cameroon, Germany and Mauritania, we read stories of collaboration and how our missionary

efforts are appreciated even when we think they are not. Spiritan female collaborators advance refugee and migrants rights, an end to the trafficking of women and girls and education for all irrespective of creed. Their commitment is enhanced by close association with the spirituality

of our congregation. In our interreligious section, we have included the *Marrakesh declaration* in which leading Muslims from all over the world chose to advance the rights of religious minorities. Happy reading!

## ALONGSIDE THE OPPRESSED: WORKING WITH VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Doris Köhncke, Spiritan Associate from Stuttgart, Germany

As a Spiritan Associate, my commitment for migrant women and victims of human trafficking has its roots long ago. Already as a young person, I was touched by the work of missionaries alongside the poor in Africa or Latin-America. I wanted to become a missionary myself, but not as professed in a religious congregation. I was very happy when I came to know “MaZ”, a programme of the German Spiritans for young people to share daily life, prayer life and work with missionaries abroad. In 1994-1995, I spent one year as “MaZ” in Tanzania. When the Spiritans were looking for someone to coordinate the MaZ-programme some years later in 1998, I agreed to move to Stuttgart in South-West Germany to join the small Spiritan community and the work for MaZ. I was also involved in Spiritan activities in the field of JPIC (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation).

Almost 10 years ago, we reflected in our German Spiritan JPIC group about refugees. I was asked to engage in activities for migrants and refugees with existing NGOs in Stuttgart, another lady led helping hands in Cologne. Through this, I came to know FIZ, a counselling centre for migrant women in Stuttgart. When after some months FIZ was looking for a new director, I took it on as a fulltime job. Although I am employed by the association to which FIZ belongs, I still see my work as a commitment in Spiritan spirituality which I have been doing for 7 years now.

In FIZ, we are counselling and supporting migrant women who need legal information, personal support or social assistance. A special target group are women who became victims of human

trafficking. Let me share the story of Joy with you:

Joy (which is not her real name) was born in the South of Nigeria, near Benin-City. At the age of 15, poverty brought her family down. Joy left school and

Different people brought Joy through the Sahara to Libya and onwards by boat to Italy. The journey took one year. She was raped, she was afraid she would not survive the trip through desert and sea. Once she arrived in Italy, she was

brought to a lady who was presented to her as her “Madame”, her chief trafficker – in the case of Nigeria it is usually women who often have been the victim of trafficking themselves. Three days after her arrival, she was sent out on the streets for prostitution. She was told that she had to pay back 60.000 Euro to the Madame for the costs of her trip to Europe.

Joy’s suffering continued for three long years.

The Madame mistreated her, demeaned her, and beat her. One client injured her with a knife. She thought of running away several times, but where to go? She knew nobody in Europe, and she did not speak the language. And she was afraid because of the oath: she knew she was obliged to pay the 60,000 Euro, otherwise the spiritual power could kill her or her family.

When Joy became pregnant, the Madame told her that she would take her baby. Joy planned her escape. She kept some of the money she earned and travelled to Germany where she applied for asylum. She was brought to a camp for asylum seekers. The social worker there brought Joy into contact with our counselling centre FIZ. It was the first time that she told her real story. She was relieved to share her sufferings – and at the same time, she was afraid because she broke the oath.

Joy gave birth to a healthy baby boy.



started selling vegetables in the market, but she did not earn much. As she was desperate, a neighbour offered her a job in her sister’s hair dressing saloon in Italy where she could earn 1,000 Euros a month and thus, improve the situation of her family. Joy and her parents felt hope again and agreed. Everything was arranged for her to travel to Italy. At this moment, Joy did not know that she was becoming a victim of human trafficking, and that the neighbour and her partners were going to make a lot of money with her – at her expense.

Before leaving Nigeria, she had to undergo certain rites at a shrine and swear an oath that she was going to obey and do whatever she would be asked. A traditional priest took blood, hair and fingernails from her and put them into a package which he kept. Through this, he had the spiritual power to control her. If she were to break her oath, Joy or her family could be harmed, injured or killed. Joy was terrified by these rituals.



We supported her and transferred her to trauma therapy, medical care and German language classes. We also informed her about her rights and introduced the necessary steps in the asylum process. The first important measure was to prevent her deportation to Italy, because according to the European system, her Asylum would have to be scrutinized there.

After long four years, Joy was granted the right to stay in Germany. We continue to support her in order to find a professional training and to help her manage her life. For the first time after so many years, she can live without fear. But it is hard for her to know that for many years, she cannot travel back to her family again – the network of traffickers could find her again.

The fate of Joy is one example of what women are going through and how they are maltreated and misused. For me, our work with them is based on the gospel of Luke which is also the base for the

Spiritans mission:

“Unrolling the scroll Jesus found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.” (Lk 4:18-19). It is my mission to focus on those who are afflicted, who are strangers, who have undergone oppression and violence. As Fr. Libermann wrote in his “Provisional Rule” to his missionar-



ies: “They should become advocates, supporters and defenders of the weak and poor.” I want to contribute to this mission by the little I can do.

## THE PRESENCE AND MISSION OF A LAY SPIRITAN MISSIONARY IN BOLIVIA

### Maria Jesus de Souza

In the year 2002, I was happily working with the Spiritans in Northern Brazil. In July of that same year I was surprised to receive an invitation from the Superior of UCAL, the Union of Circumscriptions of Latin America, to be part of the first missionary team to open a Spiritan mission in Bolivia.

I must confess that my initial reaction was a mixture of joy, some tears and fright. I took a month off to pray and to discern before accepting the invitation. Once I said yes, I never felt fear or anxiety afterwards. I was at peace and I reflected that if they have confidence in me to be part of this new team which will begin a new mission

outside of Brazil, it must be because I have the qualities and skills required to help and to serve. So, off I went, with faith and courage, full of enthusiasm to throw myself into this new challenge, trusting in the words of Jesus: “I will be with you always....”.

On 5th February, 2003, we arrived in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, where we were very well received by the leaders of the local parish communities, with music, dance and typical local food, and best of all, with enormous smiles on their faces. For me, that day was an experience that would completely change my life from then on and would cause me to com-



PARTICIPANTS IN THE COURSE FOR HEALTHY FOODS LED BY THOSE INVOLVED IN THE PASTORAL OUTREACH TO CHILDREN

pletely reorient and change the direction of my life. Therefore, at this point, I will cite here some verbs that I have constantly used all through my years since then; these were a wake-up call and indeed in certain situations a requirement, leading me to what I am today in terms

of conscience, of growth and my commitment as a person and as a missionary.

The verbs: *to be, to see, to forgive, to do, to help, to serve, to experience, to feel, to grow, to enchant, to love, to pray, to breathe, to relax, to change, to accept, to prune, to turn back, to wait, to eat, to shut up, to quieten, to cry, to learn, to teach, to sleep, to dream, to cry, to rejoice, to laugh, to dance, to sing, to read, to start again, to rest, to visit, to believe, to trust, to build, to accompany, to be present, to reveal, to be indignant, to contemplate, to renounce, to transform, to rethink, to rebuild, to react, to follow, to go and return after arrival and not to give up despite the difficulties and challenges.*

I gradually discovered that doing isn't everything, that presence makes an enormous difference when it is a quality presence capable of communicating hope, joy, faith, enthusiasm, love and compassion.

My first missionary activity was to visit families, to get to know the various





A COURSE IN ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE, TEACHING FAMILIES THE CORRECT USE OF HERBS IN ORDER TO MAKE THEIR OWN HOME-MADE SYRUPS AND CREAMS.

groups which existed in the parish, to get to know the local culture, customs, the lifestyle, how they celebrate, their way of being, how they organize themselves and what makes them tick. I discovered lots of open wounds, huge needs and shortages but also a very rich culture with very welcoming people, loving, caring and joyful, happy to receive missionaries and to welcome them into their midst. Following on from the above, the practical side began to take shape especially in terms of pastoral outreach. I divided my time be-

tween the formation of leaders who would be in charge of catechesis for children, teenagers, adolescents and adults, liturgical preparation, basic Christian communities and youth ministry. Later on, I gradually took on other commitments according to the people's needs.

#### Accompanying Families Through Children's Ministry:

Together with pastoral leaders, we constantly worked with parents and their children, giving special attention to the

indicative needs and requirements of children from zero to 6 years of age. Through the use of these objective indicators, we were able to work with families and now the communities are promoting the integral development of children. This work helps us maintain a constant dialogue with the accompanied families. Apart from this, families have become involved in formation and capacity-building programmes for the prevention of common illnesses such as dehydration, diarrhea, flues, diseases carried by rats, skin diseases; they also receive training on how to use foodstuffs in the most healthy and nutritive manner. In addition to all the benefits mentioned above, another hugely important knock-on effect is the promotion of dialogue, of good coexistence and peace in families, as well as the benefits of working together for the common good.



ATTENDING PEOPLE IN THE HEALTH SERVICE THROUGH THE USE OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES.

## BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE: WOMEN AND MEN AS EQUAL PARTNERS

Joy Warner, JPIC Coordinator, TransCanada Province and Lay Spiritan

This year I celebrate my 25th year as a Lay Spiritan of the TransCanada Province, my 50th wedding anniversary and 55+ years as an activist for peace, justice and planet Earth. Looking back on these many years of non-violent protests, lobbying Members of Parliament, writing endless letters, signing petitions, peace walks and demonstrations, speeches, workshops, meetings, it is clear that I have always addressed these issues through the lens of women and children, and always grounded in my faith and subsequently in Spiritan spirituality.

Two well-known Canadian women present cogent arguments as to why we need more women at the decision-making tables of the world:

Author Margaret Atwood writes in the *Globe and Mail* in March 1983 "There are two things men do that women don't: they make war and they commit rape. That's two good reasons for working towards a future society that derives

most of its values from women."

Ursula Franklin, Physicist and first female full professor at the University of Toronto, writes "War has always been a decision of the few for which the many paid. When women got into the peace business it was in the first place because of their experi-

*"A king is not saved by his great army;  
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.  
The warhorse is a vain hope for victory,  
and by its great might it cannot save.  
Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,  
to deliver them from death,  
and to keep them alive in famine."*

(Psalm 33, v. 16-19)

ence mopping up the leftovers of decisions in which they had no part."

My own organization, Voice of Women (VOW), the oldest Canadian women's peace organization, got started by col-

lecting baby teeth to analyze their strontium 90 content in order to prove the danger of above ground nuclear testing.

Worldwide, women make up 22% of members of parliament and yet, even once elected, they tend to hold positions in the so called "soft industries" such as health, education, and welfare.

Rarely do women hold executive decision-making authority in more powerful domains or those that are associated with traditional notions of masculinity such as finance, and foreign and defence policy. I believe it is vital to advocate for women's leadership in peace and security issues so that a different value system emerges, i.e. a non-patriarchal, mutually supportive, collective way of organizing our world which recognizes that peace and non-violence are not only the goals but also the means for achieving those goals.

Women ask such questions as: "Why not channel the funds at present being spent





on the military (some US\$1735 billion annually) into climate change mitigation, humanitarian programs to support the most vulnerable, conflict prevention and resolution, public services, social justice, human rights, gender equality, green job-creation, and anti-poverty programs?

They also ask why are we spending approximately US\$100 billion per year on nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, when these resources are sorely needed for education, health, job-creation, environmental protection (including preventing climate change) and supporting sustainable development. Nuclear weapons spending impacts negatively on all countries and the world as a whole – not only the ones with nuclear weapons programs.

As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on August 2012 so succinctly sums up the problem: “Our world is over-armed and peace is underfunded.”

In my own town of Hamilton, Ontario, I helped found a Culture of Peace Network based on MANIFESTO 2000. The Manifesto 2000 for the Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World was drafted by a group of laureates of the Nobel Prize for peace and unanimously adopted by all the member states of the UN. The Manifesto is not a petition; rather, it's a commitment by each person who signs it to follow the six principles of a culture of peace in his or her daily life, family, work and community.

Not surprisingly the values upheld in Manifesto 2000 are also expressed through a biblical vision:

- Respect all life: Genesis 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.
- Reject violence: Romans 14:19 So then let us pur-

sue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

- Share with others: Acts 2:44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.
- Listen to understand: 1 Thessalonians 5:11-13 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
- Preserve the planet: Psalm 24 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.
- Rediscover solidarity: Luke 10:27 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
- True justice is the harvest reaped by peacemakers from seeds sown in a spirit of peace. James 3:18.

These values of a Culture of Peace also dovetail with the following TEN PRINCIPLES OF LAY SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY which I highlighted at a Spiritan gathering several years ago:

- AVAILABILITY / TAKING TIME versus the frenetic business of modern life which values doing, getting and having more than being.
- INCLUSIVITY / WELCOMING THE STRANGER versus erecting barriers, fences and anti-terrorism legislation which teaches us to be suspicious and fearful of those who are different. from us. COMPASSION for the refugee, the outcast, the poor.
- VALUES DIVERSITY AND INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE versus my way or the highway. TRIES TO LIVE OUT ANTI-RACIST VALUES IN COMMUNITY.
- INCULTURATION OF THE SPIRI-

TAN CHARISM in the here and now and messiness of life. Resisting pious platitudes and accepting people where they are at. Understanding that Family life and parenting are also part of Spiritan spirituality.

- VALUING WOMEN/ WELCOMING THE GIFTS AND TALENTS THEY BRING, as stated at the Maynooth Chapter in 1998: “Over the next 6 years we will also pay special attention to the role of women in the Church and in society.” (Maynooth 1998, p. 104 ).
- COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE AND PEACE/OPTION FOR THE POOR: Our current Rule of Life tells us we must be “the advocates, the supporters, and the defenders of the weak and the little ones against all who oppress them” (SRL14), which means that “we must make every effort to analyse situations, to lay bare the relationship of individual cases to structural causes” (SRL 14.1).
- COLLABORATION/BREAKING DOWN HIERARCHICAL BARRIERS BETWEEN CLERIC AND LAY/ MUTUALITY AND COLLABORATION: We respect and encourage the ministry of lay people in the Church and in the wider society. We wish to eradicate clericalism as an obstacle to real cooperation. (Quoted in Spiritan Missionary News)
- SENSE OF HUMOUR/FUN CELEBRATION/HOSPITALITY. Celebrating together good food, music, laughter, jokes, storytelling, an open door and an open heart.
- CREATIVE LITURGY which nurtures and heals. Monthly home-Mass where people share their worries, celebrate their joys and reflect together on scripture in a deeper way than is possible in a large parish situation.

• COMMUNITY, ONE HEART AND ONE MIND. Versus the selfish individualism advocated by society around us.

By coming together from so many different places and cultures, we are saying to our brothers and sisters that the unity of the human race is not just an impossible dream. In this way, our community life is an integral part of our mission and a powerful witness to the message of the gospel. We take for our motto the words used to describe the early Christian communities: “One heart and one spirit.”

If the whole world lived out values like these, we



TRANSCANADA LAY SPIRITANS AT THE PENTECOST MASS



would make giant steps towards a peaceful, cooperative and healthy world community.

At The Hague Appeal for Peace meeting in 1999 I sat on a panel of International Women grappling with how to prevent the New Millennium from being as violent and war prone as the previous one. My short speech focussed on how women contribute to creating a culture of peace.

At the risk of sounding like an essentialist, I contended that women were, by and large, though not exclusively, the ones who spend their time nurturing relationships in the family and in the community. In the very fine book *Community Alternatives to Alienation*, Margo Adair and Sharon Howell write, “Women’s work’ has always been dismissed - the work of remembering the details, noticing the emotional nuances, keeping the peace, keeping food in the fridge and clothes laundered. Yet these seemingly mundane affairs form the basis of community life. Women’s ways weave the substance of community ties. We

need to value their sensibilities and move them into public life. The qualities embodied in our relationships over the kitchen table are the very qualities needed for our strategies and actions.... For the world to survive everyone must act like a woman.” It is increasingly obvious that the feminine/feminist principle is sorely needed in the way we organize our global, social and economic relationships, an understanding which led our foremothers to found Voice of Women in the first place. Just as much of women’s unpaid work is unacknowledged as real work, so also is much of their work of developing a culture of peace.

A statement from the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in 1995, noted that women are to an alarming degree the main victims of war and violence. More recently United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon released a distressing report that showed that 35 percent of women worldwide—that’s one in every three women—have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. The report also found that one in ten girls under the age of 18 was forced to have sex. The statement also declares that “the dynamic movement

towards a culture of peace derives inspiration and hope from women’s visions and actions.” This vision sees war as the end of a continuum of violence which starts with bullying and violence in our homes, schools and communities and which legitimizes force as the ultimate way to deal with conflict.

To counteract this enemy mentality, women are and have been building the culture of peace all around the world. VOW brought together Soviet and American women during the cold war, Vietnamese and American women dur-

- Their work is to transform decaying vegetation into something useful;
- Earthworm work is difficult and ground-breaking;
- Earthworms can’t always see where they are going;
- The results of the work are not immediately obvious;
- Together, earthworms prepare the soil so the seeds can grow when the time is right;
- Earthworms have the characteristics of both male and female.



AT THE GANDHI PEACE MARCH

ing the Vietnam war, Somali women from different clans living in Canada, and Turkish and Greek women through Women for Mutual Security in Europe. The Russian Committee of Soldiers Mothers took their sons home from the war in Chechnya. Pacific Women are protesting the misuse of their lands and waters for nuclear testing and other military activities. Bat Shalom and the Jerusalem Centre for Women, and their Palestinian partners, are working together in a joint effort to bring about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Women also believe that imagination and creativity are just as important as information in moving our societies away from a culture of violence towards a culture of peace. In searching for a new symbol for our peace work, our mentor and friend, Dr Ursula Franklyn, came up with the **Earth Worm** which we have adopted for the following reasons:

- Earthworms are found all over the world in virtually every kind of soil;

Finally, we must ask ourselves the hard question: As a peace movement and as Spiritans do we embody the alternative vision we uphold? I believe this is even more important than protesting against war. Are we modelling non-consumer lifestyles which value people more than profit and being more than doing? Do we treat each other with kindness and compassion and solve our conflicts without hurting each other? Do we value diversity and make a place at the table for all? In other

words, are we living the Culture of Peace and thus delegitimizing the violent status quo or, as Dorothy Day said, are we building the new in the shell of the old?

Ultimately our role is to keep on keeping on, as a visible, persistent witness to the utter incapacity of war and violence to resolve anything. We must slowly, patiently continue to build the Culture of Peace, men and women together as equal partners, which in the end is the only thing which will bring an end to war, violence and terrorism.

No violence to our earth.  
 No violence to our unborn.  
 No violence to our partners.  
 No violence to our enemies.  
 No violence to our children.  
 No violence to our prisoners.  
 No violence to our dying.



# THE WITNESS OF A LAY SPIRITAN IN CAMEROON

Mrs. Michele Adrienne Akono

In Cameroon, lay people were quite spontaneously attracted to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit because they were coming to pray in the Spiritan Fathers' chapel at the General Mission Procure in Douala. A group of Christians who lived in different parts of the city, felt the need to pray before going to their places of employment and, sensitive to the charism of the Spiritans, they came to the chapel every weekday morning to celebrate the holy Eucharist. Over the years their number increased and their closeness to the Spiritan Fathers grew deeper and deeper, such that the desire to form a more structured group emerged. I played a part in all this.

At that time the central house of the Province of Central Africa was at the General Procure. The Provincial Superior, Fr. Lambert, noted this desire and after some months giving us information about the Spiritan Mission in Black Africa, the life and spirituality of the founding Fathers Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann, a retreat was organised outside the city for us to reflect with other members of the Congregation, on how we, professed as well as lay people, might work together in support of the Church's mission. Thus after a time of growing together and following some preparatory steps, the first movement of lay people attached to the Spiritans in Cameroon came about, taking the name of 'Friends of Francis Mary Paul Libermann'.

We were all very happy to know that Fr. Libermann was a Spiritan and above all the pioneer of the evangelisation of Black Africa. I would like to remind you here that the most prestigious college in our country carries his name. It is to be found in Douala and is presently run by the Jesuits.

This is how the 'Friends of Francis Mary Paul Libermann' was born and I was chosen to be the Vice-President of the movement, whose objectives were well-defined in its statutes, which I can sum up as follows:

- to deepen the faith of its members;
- to develop a sense of community among the members;
- to share commitment to mission with the fathers;
- to support the Christian formation of the young;
- to remember the Congregation in prayer;
- to be at the service of the poorest;
- to participate in and facilitate important Congregation celebrations (ordinations to the diaconate and priesthood). Our first great challenge

was the organisation to mark the tercentenary of the Congregation on Pentecost 2003.

In such a way Groups of Friends increased in different Spiritan parishes across the country and after three years they were reorganised into Fraternities.

My readiness and my desire to play an integral part in the life of the Congregation, eventually led me to consider making a commitment as a Lay Spiritan.

It is helpful to recall here that from the time I was a child I was always in contact with Spiritans without really knowing it. I used to joke, when I was asked how I came to know the Spiritans, that I fell among them like Obelix in the magic pot when I was very young. My reply was very simple but it expressed well my particular story. My mother was a teacher in a Catholic school in south Cameroon and I was admitted there as a pupil. This school was in the parish run by the 'white priests', Fr. Jean-Marie DEGRUSON and Fr. Dominique JEANSON. They were Spiritans, though we did not know what this meant; all we knew was that we had our 'white priests' who taught us all we knew and gave us everything. The school was free, text-books, exercise-books, ink, pens; we used to receive all sorts of goodies from the fathers' friends and families in France every time they came back from leave.

They taught us how to work hard and do things well. Fr. JEANSON, who was 1.95 metres tall and weighed nearly 150 kilograms, used to always say to us: "When I was at school, the year of '06 we did not have the right to be wrong". They watched over us because we used to lodge just behind the presbytery. We used to hum tunes together when, at our own level, we helped with chores around the mission- doing the washing up, the laundry; it was a particular joy for us to make the altar breads for Mass, to grow vegetables in the garden; our work was often punctuated by the sweet music coming from the fathers' house: **THE SPIRIT OF GOD RESTS UPON ME...**

At the age of twelve, in 1970, I was admitted to BONNEAU college (named after a Spiritan bishop), run at that time by the Brothers and Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

Six years later I went to be trained as a nurse, receiving my diploma as a State-



Registered Nurse. It is, as it was then, a beautiful vocation....

Twenty years later, I found myself, totally by chance, at the General Procure, dragged along by a friend for the first time, and also by chance I met Fr. Ferdinand AZEGUE, whom I recognised as a friend of the family. In the course of a conversation, he revealed to me that the house was the house of the priests I had known, that they were Spiritans and that this was their Provincial House. Thus I came across faces I had known in my childhood, priests who had baptised, educated and above all evangelised my native land. I had always admired their patience, their devotion and their sense of renunciation....Lost in villages in the middle of the forest where hardly anyone could speak French, they were always full of joy and good humour.

To give you a little story: in the 1960s, after six months of learning the catechism, on the day of the test, the father asked an elderly catechumen how Jesus died on the cross and why. The old lady turning her head to one side asked him: "Why are you asking me that? All that happened in your country and the whole world knows that it is you, the white people, who killed Jesus. What do you want me to say?" And she turned angrily away from him. This story went round the country like wildfire and the father was very confused, but instead of getting angry, he took it all in good humour.

In the fraternity for ten years, I followed the rhythm of the formation programmes, retreats, recollections and tried to share as far as possible in the life of the fathers; each morning, after Mass, stopping to exchange greetings, give a word of encouragement, ask news of different priests, asking for advice from them when needed...

All that gave me great joy, but at a certain point, I realised that I was not doing enough; I wanted to serve, to do more, to make myself useful in the house of my fathers. Then, in the course of a discussion with Father Procurator, he asked me if I was ready to take the necessary step. At that time I had heard some vague things about Lay Spiritan Associates. I said to myself "Why not"? Then I made my formal request to the Provincial Council.

After approval from the Provincial Council, my formation began with my main accompanier being the Father Procurator, Henri MEDJO, the superior of the community I was attached to. After that it was Father Adrien REMY who, from the grandeur of his ninety four years of age, had an infallible memory; together with the Provincial Superior, these were unforgettable times for me followed by retreats and so on....

At the end of two years, on the 31st of May 2014, feast of the Visitation, I made my commitment. I experienced a depth of happiness that I cannot fully explain here. It was something I will never be able to understand. Between fear and worry that I would never meet the expectations of my Superiors, I said to the Lord: *'Take into your hands my God all I possess, all the faculties of my soul, my intelligence, my will, my heart, my hopes and my strengths. Only give me your love and I will be rich and I will not ask for anything more'*. Then, to quote St. Paul I said: *'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature, the things of the past are behind him and behold, all things are made new.'* 2Cor.5:17. I gave myself to the Lord with all the strength of my heart, in love for him. In his call, I felt I had found true happiness in the total gift of myself - despite my limits and weaknesses.

Being a Lay Associate in today's world, gives a continuing direction to my life, which is the fruit of my own mother's commitment, a mother who was so devoted to the Spiritan mission. She would have liked me to become a nun, with the approval of the fathers, but when the time came to decide I ran away from it.

One of the Spiritans, actually it was Baba Gaston, said to me one day: *"You see, you missed your chance - you could have been a Mother Superior by now"*. From that day he has always called me 'Mother Superior'.

This status made me very happy, even when difficulties were not lacking. But I



am aware that in the difficult moments of my mission, I can place all my trust in the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother too. Each passing day, I ask the Lord to make me a better person and to guide me by the grace of his Holy Spirit to do the little things I can in the context of the mission given to me; these include:

- doing the bursar's job at the Spiritan house at the General Mission Procure;
- being responsible for meals and those who clean the kitchen and the bedrooms;
- doing the best I can to help the guests and community members to enjoy their stay in the house;
- coordinating the liturgy and decoration of the chapel;
- develop fellowship with Christians who come to pray with us every day.

This is the mission which I live with great joy and with the support of my

community, of my biological family and my children and friends.

With its training of lay people, the Holy Spirit Congregation offers a solid Christian and missionary formation, taking account of the expectations and hopes of all, using an interactive method of deepening and sharing our faith. The formation programme is not too demanding, light and relaxed and takes account of the lived realities of each participant, keeping in view the vision and general orientations of the Congregation and the Province.

The Guide for Lay Spiritans, recognising the different forms of belonging, brings something positive to those groups of people who, aware of making up the people of God, want also to become missionaries. It is important to note here that the Guide, as its name suggests, is our 'road map', which I also dare to call our Rule of Life.

It is for this reason that we have insisted on the training of lay people. For the young Province of Cameroon, the path has only just opened up, a path full of hope, and we are sure that the seeds will bear abundant fruit. We believe, as many people do, that each person is unique in the eyes of God and that the paths to holiness are diverse.

Cameroon, my country, has just celebrated one hundred years of Spiritan presence. One hundred years have passed, but the mission continues and at present, is still ongoing.

The celebration enabled us to look back at the missionary accomplishments of the Spiritans, above all in the perspective of their charism of builders of the Church in Cameroon. The ceremonies were rich in colour; Pentecost 2016, far from being a moment of closure, became a new moment for being sent out on mission as part of the great Spiritan family, because the Congregation is even now benefiting from a new Pentecost.

All this witnesses to the vitality of Spiritan mission. And this moment of thanksgiving was for me an invitation to remain docile to the Holy Spirit, who is speaking to the Churches, in full conformity with the words of the Virgin Mary: "Do what he tells you".

To finish, I would like to ask the Lord, with the help of all of you present here, dear members of the Spiritan family, to keep in your prayers the intentions of this great movement of renewal.

In union of prayers.





# INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

## TESTIMONY OF MADAME AMINATA DIBA, LIBRARY OF HOPE, AT THE CATHOLIC MISSION OF ROSSO, MAURITANIA

Mrs Aminata DIBA, Mauritania

I already knew the Mission well before being employed there, thanks to Fr. René Prévôt, priest in charge of the Spiritan Parish.

My journey with the Catholic Mission of Rosso, in the south of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, therefore, began just after the closure of AGETA (General Association of Extractive and Agricultural Groups for the Study and Use of Improved Technology). This was a project financed by the French Fund for Development, and was my first job. During an interview with Fr. René and Fr. Bernard Palletier in the church at Rosso, they suggested that I worked in the Mission on the refurbishment of the library.

I was very happy with this interview and the resulting decision concerning the importance of the tasks confided to me, namely:

- computerisation of the library;
- management of the database.

From my own work experience and faced with these new challenges, I realised that I needed to approach the matter professionally and patiently. It is for this reason that, as a Muslim woman belonging to a different faith altogether, I am still grateful to the Catholic Church. It is thanks to

the Catholic Church that I have not only found a new job, but also a new professional family. Moreover, I thank Fathers **René Prévôt and Bernard Palletier** who accepted me and inspired me to make a professional commitment to the job given me which would also be of benefit to the Church.

That said, when speaking of religions and tribes, it is always necessary to demystify some commonly held assumptions, to arrive at mutual respect and the affirmation of values which actually unite people. By means of our religious convictions, we really need to go beyond our prejudices, for they can only cause division. I was persuaded that the job confided to me therefore, needed a lot of patience, commitment and would draw



on my basic education and training.

During this period I greatly appreciated the kindness of the resident priests of the church at Rosso, my home town, because they were always open to receiving people without distinction of race, religion or tribe; above all they made themselves available to the academic sector, which involved the training and education of the young people of the Region. Dear Fathers, I am not the only one satisfied with these services, so important for the people of Rosso, for there are a whole lot of people who are of the same mind. I remain a witness to a situation which has improved from day to day, according to the cases coming up, concerning the majority of young students from poor families, who very often had no money to buy as much as a pen to write with.

Dear Fathers of the Catholic Church, you have always considered and resolved such needy cases to the benefit of the young people. These same young students who come to the Library of Hope, have also given us great pleasure, because you can see on their faces how filled with joy they are, especially after passing their baccalaureat and other professional exams - all because the Library has given them the tools they needed.

The Rosso Library, where I work full-time, is also a school which gives some supporting courses in all professions, both in French and in English. We take in children from both primary and sec-



PARISH IN NOUADHIBOU



ondary schools. What has struck me forcibly over the years, are the possibilities which have opened up to me as a Muslim woman working in a non Muslim environment. Here is a good example of collaboration which can be a model of co-existence between different religious communities.

I am very grateful and want to encourage such a human and fraternal climate of mutual acceptance, which in these days finds meaning in the context of efforts at Islamic-Christian dialogue around the world. I believe that Rosso is a good example of this.

I also want to say a word about the short stay of Fr. Clement Chimaobi EMEFU who made a great impression on everyone at Rosso between 2012 and 2014. The presence of this young Spiritan priest, compared to that of his elderly predecessors Bernard and René, was a time of creativity, new ideas and an openness to the world of Islam, which remains engraved in the history of Rosso, above and beyond the Library of Hope, where he was the Director during his time there. He was really able to help the young people develop their skills and imbue them with a desire to get on in their lives. In spite of his other religious commitments, he was able to bring unity, dynamism and reconciliation to the young people around



him. This new element in the Rosso Catholic mission's project also had the effect of bringing together our fellow citizens who previously were very mistrustful of other religions.

I want to testify also how my own two children have greatly benefited from the educational values they learnt while coming to the Library. My first child, ten years old, is entering into the sixth year in secondary school; the younger one is six and is in class CE 1 of primary. Each one

of them has a level of education well appreciated by the teachers in their schools; these teachers are also thankful to the Catholic Church in its educational role for all the school children of Rosso and in the Republic of Mauritania as a whole.

Finally, I wish to thank Frs. René PREVOT, Bernard PELLETIER, Clement Chimaobi EMEFU, as well as the bishop of Nouakchott, Mgr. Martin HAPPE, not forgetting the wonderful missionary sisters of the Church at Rosso.

**IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE ALL-MERCIFUL, THE ALL-COMPASSIONATE**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE MARRAKESH DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS**  
**OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM MAJORITY COMMUNITIES**  
**25TH-27TH JANUARY 2016**

WHEREAS, conditions in various parts of the Muslim World have deteriorated dangerously due to the use of violence and armed struggle as a tool for settling conflicts and imposing one's point of view;

WHEREAS, this situation has also weakened the authority of legitimate governments and enabled criminal groups to issue edicts attributed to Islam, but which, in fact, alarmingly distort its fundamental principles and goals in ways that have seriously harmed the population as a whole;

WHEREAS, this year marks the 1,400th anniversary of the Charter of Medina, a constitutional contract between the Prophet Muhammad, God's peace and blessings be upon him, and the people of Medina, which guaranteed the religious liberty of all, regardless of faith;

WHEREAS, hundreds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals from over 120 countries, along with representatives of Islamic and international organizations, as well as leaders from diverse religious groups and nationalities, gathered in Marrakesh on this date to reaffirm the



**إعلان مراكش**  
**MARRAKESH**  
**DECLARATION**

principles of the Charter of Medina at a major conference;

WHEREAS, this conference was held under the auspices of His Majesty, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, and organized jointly by the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs in the Kingdom of Morocco and the Forum for Promot-

ing Peace in Muslim Societies based in the United Arab Emirates;

AND NOTING the gravity of this situation afflicting Muslims as well as peoples of other faiths throughout the world, and after thorough deliberation and discussion, the convened Muslim scholars and intellectuals

DECLARE HEREBY our firm commitment to the principles articulated in the Charter of Medina, whose provisions contained a number of the principles of constitutional contractual citizenship, such as freedom of movement, property ownership, mutual solidarity and defense, as well as principles of justice and equality before the law; and that,

The objectives of the Charter of Medina provide a suitable framework for national constitutions in countries with Muslim majorities, and the United Nations Charter and related documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are in harmony with the Charter of Medina, including consideration for public order.

NOTING FURTHER that deep reflection upon the various crises afflicting humanity underscores the inevitable and



urgent need for cooperation among all religious groups, we

AFFIRM HEREBY that such cooperation must be based on a "Common Word," requiring that such cooperation must go beyond mutual tolerance and respect, to providing full protection for the rights and liberties to all religious groups in a civilized manner that eschews coercion, bias, and arrogance.

BASED ON ALL OF THE ABOVE, we hereby:

Call upon Muslim scholars and intellectuals around the world to develop a jurisprudence of the concept of "citizenship" which is inclusive of diverse groups. Such jurisprudence shall be rooted in Islamic tradition and principles and mindful of global changes.

Urge Muslim educational institutions and authorities to conduct a courageous

review of educational curricula that addresses honestly and effectively any material that instigates aggression and extremism, leads to war and chaos, and results in the destruction of our shared societies;

Call upon politicians and decision-makers to take the political and legal steps necessary to establish a constitutional contractual relationship among its citizens, and to support all formulations and initiatives that aim to fortify relations and understanding among the various religious groups in the Muslim World;

Call upon the educated, artistic, and creative members of our societies, as well as organizations of civil society, to establish a broad movement for the just treatment of religious minorities in Muslim countries and to raise awareness as to their rights, and to work together to

ensure the success of these efforts;

Call upon the various religious groups bound by the same national fabric to address their mutual state of selective amnesia that blocks memories of centuries of joint and shared living on the same land; we call upon them to rebuild the past by reviving this tradition of conviviality, and restoring our shared trust that has been eroded by extremists using acts of terror and aggression;

Call upon representatives of the various religions, sects and denominations to confront all forms of religious bigotry, vilification, and denegration of what people hold sacred, as well as all speech that promote hatred and bigotry; AND FINALLY,

AFFIRM that it is unconscionable to employ religion for the purpose of aggressing upon the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries.



PARTICIPANTS AT THE MARRAKESH DECLARATION

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.

CONTACT PERSON: JUDE NNOROM, CSSP, AT [csspjpic@yahoo.it](mailto:csspjpic@yahoo.it)

CONGREGAZIONE DELLO SPIRITO SANTO, CASA GENERALIZIA, CLIVO DI CINNA 195, 00136 ROMA

Many thanks to our translators, John Flavin and Angi Lepore (editing) and all JPIC&IRD collaborators.