

Autumn, 2023

TONGUES OF FIRE

Newsletter of the Spiritans, British Province

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that
separated and came to rest on each of them.
Acts 2:3

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PARISH MINISTRY: SERVING THE POOR IN DOVER AND AYLESHAM.

The 21st General Chapter of the Spiritans, Bagamoyo 2021, proposes in its third article, "outreach to young people, and attention to people on the peripheries of society, the new urban poor, migrants and respect for ecology." Welcome to the Dover-verse! Dover has a rich history dating back to Roman times. Its iconic White Cliffs have served as a symbol of Britain. The Dover Castle, built in the 11th century, played a strategic role in various conflicts. The town thrived as a major port and gateway to continental Europe,

witnessing all the historical major wars. Dover was described as the hellfire corner during the Second World War with thousands of shelling being fired by the enemy across the sea. Today, Dover remains a vital port and a place steeped in historical significance. Dover is approximately



Induction ceremony of Fr. Leo as
Parish Priest, Dover

21 miles (34 kilometers) away from the nearest point in France, which is Calais. The English Channel separates the two, and the distance is often crossed by ferry or through the Channel Tunnel.

St. Paul's Catholic Church in Dover was founded in 1868. It has played a central role in the community's religious life. It was originally established to serve pilgrims who were travelling from Europe via the sea to Canterbury. A great part of the history is the Dover Priory which was home to many monks and religious pilgrims. From about 1139 to 1504, the monks in Dover welcomed people on spiritual pilgrimages.

At the request of the Catholic Bishop of Southwark, Archbishop John Wilson, the Spiritans began assisting and serving the people of Dover in 2019. The first Spiritan to assist a diocesan priest was Fr. Patrick Adusei Poku, C.S.Sp.



Family Day at St. Paul's, Dover

In September of 2020, I joined the mission in Dover, replacing Fr. Patrick on the 12th of May 2023.

WHY DOVER:

The Spiritan Charism of serving the poor is most relevant to Dover at this very time. I believe that the Holy Spirit has led us to this place to fulfil His purpose by putting the Spiritan Charism at the service of the local community.

1. The Homeless: Because of the realities of the border and the activities of the Port, Dover is constantly a town with hundreds of stranded people. We are constantly dealing with homeless people in Dover. Many of them cross over from different parts of the world, some fleeing war and hunger, some seeking greener pastures and others lost and stuck in transit. They come hungry and cold, and we constantly respond to them along with many other humanitarian groups.
2. The Migrant Ministry: The influx of migrants from all around the world, both legally and illegally puts a lot of pressure on Dover and, as Spiritans, we are privileged to be at this location to respond in partnership with other groups to their needs. Some migrants arrive on trucks, and some come in via illegal boats. We partner with the UK Border Force to get information when they arrive, and visit the places where the migrants are housed temporarily.

Apart from the community food bank, we have our own food storage, and we partner with St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) to help the many poor people who knock on our doors constantly looking for food, positioning ourselves in the ministry of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) which is central to Spiritan Ministry in Europe in this century.

3. Rough Sleepers: We are actively involved in setting up what we call the WINTER NIGHT SHELTER, a project for rough sleepers in the streets of Dover during the chilly winter nights. We cook every Thursday evening in winter and go on the streets along with partner churches to help the poor. We work with the Dover Local Council and with other NGOs like the Christian Outreach Centre and CTID (Christians Together in Dover) to run this programme.

4. Drug addiction and Alcohol Misuse: Drug and alcohol addictions are other major problems in Dover. We support the Alcoholics Anonymous groups to help and serve the many people suffering from this situation. We assist those who come to our door and some we encounter in our street ministry by connecting them to the right network of volunteers.

5. Seafarers' Apostolate: We have a great opportunity to minister to the seafarers who dock in Dover from all over the world. This year, I was privileged to celebrate the Eucharist on the ship, ministering to hundreds of seafarers who were mainly from the Philippines and other Eastern European countries. Together with the Stella Maris (Apostleship of the Sea) chaplains, we now collaborate in this new area of ministry. There is an opening for Spiritan Chaplaincy to help minister to many of these seafarers as we receive more personnel.

MINISTRY AT THE PARISH: Our parish comprises two Churches; St. Paul's Church in Dover town, which is the main Church, and St. Finbarr's Aylesham, which was merged with St. Paul's in 2015. Together they are called Parish of the Good Shepherd. We are blessed with two primary schools: St. Richard's Primary School and St. Joseph's Primary School. We also have a secondary school called St. Edmund's Catholic Secondary School which has a population of over 1000 students. We serve these schools with regular masses and activities. Our Youth Ministry is a centerpiece for the mission in Dover. We have the Teenage Youth Group and the Adult Youth Group, also called FAMILIA UNA (coined from the Spiritan Motto; COR UNUM, ET ANIMA UNA) who were recently in Portugal for the World Youth Day. I serve the Dover Mission with our seminarian on Pastoral Ministry Experience (PME), William Sianyuka, C.S.Sp. who has recently arrived from Zambia.

-Rev. Fr. Leo Agbene Illah, C.S.Sp., Parish Priest, Parish of the Good Shepherd.



Fr. Leo and Dover Team, WYD, Lisbon



Seminarian William and Fr. Leo

Autumn Highlights!

Chief among the crayons that coloured Spiritan Life in the UK in the period between a smiley summer and an undecided autumn were the Sabbatical Renewal Course, the National Orientation Course (First Batch) and the Provincial Town Hall on Data Protection.

SABBATICAL RENEWAL

The Sabbatical Renewal Course was held at St Mary's (Redemptorist) Monastery on the beautifully wooded Kinnoull hill of Perth, Scotland, and was masterfully delivered by the indefatigable Fr Ronald "Ronnie" McAinsh. He focused on 'Dealing with Transitions', a theme that fit like a glove considering that a vast majority of those on sabbatical have to make significant transitions to get the most out of them. It covered the week of 30th October to the 3rd of November and the Spiritans were represented by Frs. Isah Katuka, Nicholas Kerebba, Vincent Nnatuanya, Bartholomew Zubeviel, Raymond Anyanwu, Ifeanyi Chibuzo Fidelis, Alphonsus Beni and Ugo Ikwuka.



Fr. Ronnie McAinsh, CSSR



Spiritans on Sabbatical Renewal, Perth

NATIONAL ORIENTATION COURSE

The first part of the National Orientation Course took place on the beautiful Cheshire plain of Wistaston Hall Retreat Centre in Crewe, managed by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It hosted 26 priests from different orders, dioceses, nations and languages from the 20th to the 24th of November. The Spiritans on this course were Ifeanyi Chibuzo Fidelis and Vincent Nnatuanya. It was an intense and powerful week of mindset change, facilitated by seasoned speakers from different walks of life and vocations. Refreshing and sometimes heated discussions covered the areas of culture shock, safeguarding, complex Catholicism, and especially accompaniment as a model for successful pastoral ministry in the UK. Understanding the climes of one's place of work makes for better adjustment and efficiency. The participants collectively reported that fears were doused, anxiety was displaced and certain trepidations gave way to passion, hope and a resolve to stay. The Second Batch will meet in January, and both will come together in Hertfordshire to conclude the course in June 2024.



National Orientation Programme Participants, Crewe

PROVINCIAL'S DESK

Autumn (Fall) is a season of transition, a reminder of the value of change, as the bright, buzzing, verdant summer transitions unto the dark, quiet calm of winter. One of the key Provincial events of the season was the weeklong course for our overseas' confreres on renewal experience with us. Auspiciously, it was on the theme of Dealing with Life Transitions. The programme, held at the serene St Mary's (Redemptorist) Monastery in Perth, Scotland, was outstandingly facilitated by an octogenarian psychotherapist. I needed renewal too, so, I availed myself of the opportunity. We are naturally apprehensive of change. But, to be open to transitioning is to be liberated. Yes, that moment when we are



Frs. Ugo, Kenneth and Fabian
at the JPIC Summit, Portugal

betwixt could be quite precarious. I could imagine a good example in that moment when the Prodigal Son hit rock bottom. It can leave one depressed. But it should rather be an opportunity to be availed of to take the leap as did the wayward son who "got up", and resolved to embark on the long and difficult journey home. Yes, "transition involves loss and risk". It takes courage to get up, and in the case of the Prodigal Son, to face the possibility of rejection and scorn: Trust is Key.

Fear can stunt transition and consequently growth. If we don't transition (developmentally, for instance), we can be children living in adult bodies. But change also occurs at other levels; social, cultural, religious, sexual etc., all inviting us to transition. Some, for instance, have refused to transition from the Tridentine pyramidal model of the Church to the circular or inverted pyramid "People of God" model of Vatican II. Some have also not transitioned from the kindergarten notion of God as dwelling in a Golden Castle full of ice-creams in the skies and Hell being an unending devouring fire that awaits their enemies.

As missionaries, the basic considerations are: How are you going to transition in terms of your physical space i.e., availability to others, and how vulnerable are you in the service of the Gospel i.e., sharing your emotional space, and how prepared are you to lose your life for others i.e., sharing your spiritual space. Significant life transitions can also occur in random chance events. The facilitator recalled that he "got his vocation to the priesthood" in a session with a psychiatrist while on placement, studying psychotherapy. Sharing his concern that he might have come to the priesthood for the wrong reasons, the psychiatrist quipped: "Well, you could as well stay for the right reasons." We should be awake to such "eureka!" moments.

Another auspicious moment in the season was the Spiritan Union of Circumscriptions of Europe's summit on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) that was held in Portugal. Pope Francis' message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees came timely preparatory to the event that was themed around immigration. The Pope's message was dedicated to the freedom that should always mark the decision to leave one's native land. Disturbingly, this is not always the case as the Holy Father referenced with the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt, faced with the threat of the King Herod.

Among the causal factors for migration are: conflicts, natural disasters, or more simply the impossibility of living a dignified and prosperous life in one's native land which is usually informed by unjust internal and external social structures. It is against this backdrop that Pope John Paul II contended that "building conditions of peace means in practice being seriously committed to safeguarding first of all the right not to emigrate, that is, the right to live in peace and dignity in one's own country". Pope Francis pertinently noted that this commitment begins with asking what we can do, but also what we need to stop doing including "the arms race, economic colonialism, the plundering of other people's resources etc." This is even as "the principal responsibility falls to the countries of origin and their leaders, who are called to practice a good politics – one that is transparent, honest, farsighted and at the service of all, especially those most vulnerable." The Pope concludes that until the right not to be forced to emigrate is guaranteed, people will still have to emigrate in order to seek a better life.

This was a key consideration at the Spiritan JPIC summit which showcased the best of the Lay Spiritan Vocation as it was richly and flawlessly hosted under the auspices CEPAC, the Portuguese Province's JPIC project, headed by the Lay Spiritan Associate Ana Mansoa.

Both VIVAT and Kibanda represented by Fr Kachi Adindu CSSp and Fr Chika Onyejiuwa CSSp respectively, were in agreement on the importance of such Spiritan JPIC projects as CEPAC (Portugal), Spirasi (Ireland), and Revive (UK) as palliative but not curative for the immigration crisis. The cure, which accords with the Pope's World Day of Migrants and Refugees message, lies with the comprehensive dismantling of the causal structures of injustice. This calls for effective advocacy as a primary mission of JPIC.

The warm hospitality enjoyed by the summit mirrored the comparatively pro-immigration disposition of Portugal whose High Commissioner for Immigration, Prof Jose Leita, is an activist for migrants' rights. In some other countries, it is as though one must be anti-immigration to be made the Home Secretary. With statistics, the Portuguese Migration Observatory made some startling revelations at the summit that sieved the facts from the myths of immigration. For instance, while the common perception is that about 444.3 million immigrants born outside Europe currently occupy Europe, in reality, there are only 203.5 million. More people in Europe perceive immigration as problem than opportunity. Given the very fruitful events of the season, I cannot but agree with Samuel Butler that Autumn is the mellower season, and what we lose in flowers, we more than gain in "fruits" – the inverted commas are mine.

Perhaps we are all immigrants
trading one home for another
first we leave the womb for air
then the suburbs for the filthy city,
in search of a better life– Rupi Kaur

NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS

SPIRITAN ACCOLADES

CONGRATULATIONS to our confreres, John Baptist Baalabore and Sylvester Adeniyi C.S.Sp. who are part of the Chaplaincy Team of Sandwell and Birmingham NHS Trust on winning the Star Award for 2023.



PROVINCIAL CHAPTER 2024

The Provincial Chapter was officially convoked and will take place from Sunday the 4th to Friday 9th August 2024 at the Chester University.

PROVINCIAL AGM 2023

The Annual General Meeting was held on 8th September at St. Brigid's Church, Manchester and was a huge success!



Delegates
rubbing
minds
at the AGM
2023

For comments and
inquiries, email
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