



Be careful what you wish for!

Since he “pestered him so much”, the provincial finally assigned Fr. Adrian Hebert to Africa... for 53 years. Born in 1931 in Acushner, MA, and ordained in 1958, he needed another year of theology before he received his first assignment to the District of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. The only U.S. Province missions then were to Puerto Rico and Africa. In Africa, the Dutch had a specific area, the French had a specific area, and the U.S. had Tanzania. That is where Fr. Adrian served for most of the years between 1960-94 at various ministries included teaching - at St. James Seminary in Moshi and Oldonyu Sombu in Arusha - rector, and parochial work and diocesan treasurer at Kishimundu. Several years were devoted to missionary work with the Maasai before he returned to teaching at Usa River. He worked at the large lake area of Kikatiti Mission of Nyumba ya Mungu (House of God) where there were 16 small mission outstations. There he built

three churches, two mission houses and two small medical dispensaries before he was sent to the Monduli Mission. The U.S. Province currently has four members in Tanzania, while the provinces of Africa now supplies priests internationally. Fr. Adrien is amazed at how international the Spiritans have become!

South Africa received its independence in 1994. Two years later Fr. Adrian was the only man from the U.S. province sent there to help when the German province requested help. At Vrede Parish in Bethlehem Diocese in the Free State Province, and at Pomoroy in Dundee Diocese, he became involved in parochial ministry and was the Director for Postulency. True of the Holy Spirit Fathers' mission, they were doing the same work there - first evangelization, parish work and administering to the underprivileged and underserved, all work Fr. Adrien loved doing. He was able to baptize and confirm many who were initiated into the Church in those years. He worked with Fr. Jed Dilworth (from the English Province and a former OTP student of his in Tanzania), and Fr. Ned Marchessault, whom he greatly admires, at Endulen for three years. (Coincidentally, they were both assistants to a German priest who had attended Duquesne University.) Today there are only two priests from the German Province in South Africa and most of the Spiritans come from Nigeria. There are twelve 12 tribes in South Africa, and Fr. Adrien worked mostly with the Sutu and Zulu tribes who have very different customs, cultures and thinking. The Zulu people are perceived as being more arrogant and harder to get to know, while the Sutu are seen as more warm and welcoming. They live in mixed groups and tension is often high. There is a small Catholic population, but mostly it is a mixed group. All are respectful of each other, but missionary speakers must be very careful to respect the different cultures and beliefs, and their compassion must be visible.

Now Fr. Adrian serves as Chaplain with the Sisters of St. Paul at Mmabahloki Clara Home. They minister and care for about 60 elderly and infirm people in a government subsidized building that was established specifically for them. Many of the patients are blind, unable to speak and suffering from dementia, but the Sisters are devoted to their work and the people they serve. They are established and have a special vocation where they live in community and acknowledge their need for religious support to fulfill their vocation. Through the mass and the sacraments, they are sustained in their religious life. Fr. Adrien said, “One can't do anything without meaning, and their lives are a constant reminder of the Lord. Fulfilling a vocation is in itself fulfillment.”

He returns to the States about every three years for Chapter meetings or Assemblies. It was on this occasion that I talked with him. He spoke of how “the world of today is not the same, we are in a new age, the development of the Church has taken on a new character.” But he says “Change is habitual and ongoing; all missionaries have to adjust to change. Change is good. You change within your own community where you live and are among friends and family. The community sustains you. It is so important for missionaries to support and encourage one another.”

He fondly remembered several Spiritan friends - seminary classmate Fr. Joe Deniger, Fathers Tuozzolo and Perreault who were also in the same seminary; Fathers Joe Kelly, Ned Marchessault and Vince Stegman with whom he worked in Tanzania; the late Fathers Remo Bonifazi, Bill Jackson and many others; and of course the Maasai who were “very nice people”. He is happy as a missionary and would choose this life again as a Spiritan. “We need to see the similarities of peoples and cultures, to see the kindness expressed in different ways; among different people!”

It was a pleasant and uplifting afternoon I spent with Fr. Adrien, and I learned a lot from him. When we finished, Fr. Adrian stood up, turned to me and announced, “I'm happy.” I was happy, too, just feeling his joy and contentment!

- Mary Winkler, editor