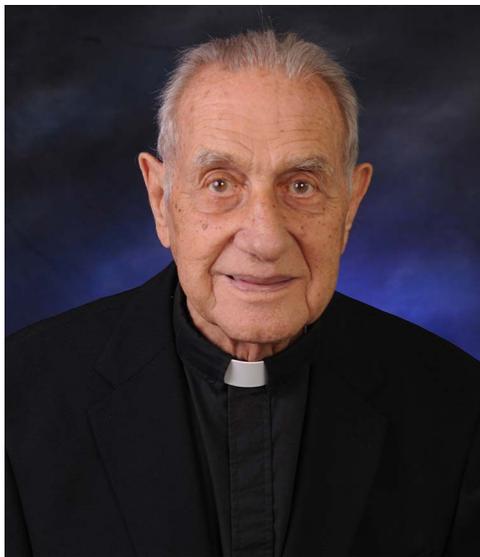


Fr. Adrien Hebert, C.S.Sp., Returns “Home” After Decades in Africa



“Welcome home!”

Those were the words that Fr. Lou Perreault, C.S.Sp., emailed in a message to Fr. Adrien Hebert, C.S.Sp., upon learning that Fr. Adrien was on his way to retirement at Libermann Hall, after nearly 56 years as a missionary in Africa.

Born in 1931, in Acushnet, Mass., and ordained in 1958, Fr. Adrien requested life and service as a missionary, and his first assignment was to the District of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, East Africa.

“I never regretted my decision for one moment,” said Fr. Adrien. “Even in those early days of my priesthood, I never doubted that I should be serving somewhere else as a Spiritan.. It has been a rewarding experience.”

Fr. Adrien credits a young Spiritan seminarian, whom he met while attending daily Mass as a 15-year-old student, for inspiring his vocations as a Spiritan and a missionary.

Mostly he taught in local diocesan seminaries in Tanzania, and later South Africa, training young priests, some of whom would later join him among the Maasai in Tanzania and the Zulu and Sutu in South Africa. Fr. Adrien said the Maasai are very prayerful and devout people, who embrace their Catholic faith once converted and instill it in the generations that follow.

During his time in Tanzania, he established 16 small mission outstations, built three churches, two mission houses and two small medical dispensaries. Two years after South Africa received its independence in 1994, Fr. Adrien was the only priest from the U.S. Province sent to help there when the German Province requested assistance, again teaching at local seminaries and celebrating Mass and dispensing the Sacraments to the local natives, mostly Zulu and Sutu.

“The process of evangelization takes time,” said Fr. Adrien. “Often, you may not be a direct witness to the fruits of evangelization and conversion that you helped to establish among peoples who have their own customs and traditions.”

Along the way, Fr. Adrien was able to work with fellow Spiritan missionaries in both Tanzania and South Africa, such as Fr. Ned Marchessault, C.S.Sp. -- who still serves in Tanzania among the Maasai -- and Fr. Joe Kelly (deceased). Though their mission work was far-flung and they only saw each other on rare occasions, the Spiritan missionaries Fr. Adrien knew “were great priests of faith, who were proud to be Spiritans and proud of their vocations.”

Towards the end of his time as a missionary in South Africa, Fr. Adrien served as chaplain to the Sisters of St. Paul at Mmabahloki Clara Home. There the sisters minister to and care for about 60 elderly and infirm people, many of whom are of different faiths and have debilitating illnesses and conditions.

Fr. Adrien said that, in retirement, he will miss the people to whom he ministered, and that the best way to make an impact as a missionary is to “respect the customs and the culture of the people; to become comfortable with their traditions and lifestyle and embrace it as your own.”