

A Compilation of the History of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost) Under the Protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (The Spiritans)

Most of you who have been with St. John's Parish, St. James and recently St. James/Resurrection Parishes might have heard the name Holy Ghost Fathers. These are the same people called the Spiritans. This has been our name since the Foundation of the order. This name became more prominent when with Vatican II the third person of the Trinity was no longer Holy Ghost, but Holy Spirit, then we changed the name of the order which was named after the third person of the Trinity to Holy Spirit Fathers and Brothers, so the word Spiritans — people of the Spirit, became more meaningful

We are a Roman Catholic Religious Congregation of over three thousand members, founded in 1703 in France by a young man called Claude Francis Poullart des Places. He was a son of a wealthy businessperson and a lawyer in Brittany. Endowed with a superior intellect, he graduated in *summa cum laude* in 1697 and earned a degree in law three years later. After helping, his father for a year this pious young man gave up all aspirations for wealth and fame to become a priest.

In 1702, he went to Paris to study Theology. This young man was moved with compassion noticing the poverty of his fellow students for the priesthood to support them as best as he could, giving them spiritual guidance. They revered him very much and encouraged him to bring them together to form a community where they could pursue their vocation. This he did and saw the birth of the Congregation on Pentecost Sunday May 27, 1703.

For sixty years it was ruled by superiors who had been chosen in their twenties by equally young fellow seminarians, living together in a kind of “student republic.”

While others were satisfied with a few months to about one and a half years of seminary training, the Spiritans demanded three years of philosophy (prerequisites: mathematics and then still newfangled Newtonian physics), four to five years of theology with an option two years of Canon law or scripture studies; and then these young priests placed themselves at the disposal of the bishops for types of ministry judged less desirable by others. Moreover, for about 150 years the institute remained more a movement than an organization. It was held together by a common ideal rather than statutes. It just barely had the necessary structure to be recognized as an institute. Paullart the place died in 1709 less than two years after his ordination.

Mission

The Missions of the Spiritans are spread worldwide. While we may be found involved in many diverse ministries, we have dedicated ourselves to working with the poor, the disadvantaged and in those situations where the Church has difficulty in finding ministers. Spiritans witness to the gospel by just being with the people and identifying with them in their struggles and joys; we go into place to be with the people and be part of them.

In 1732, the year George Washington was born, the first of them came to North America, where he was soon followed by many others. They worked especially among the Indians and Acadians

in Canada and also taught at the seminary of Quebec. At the same time, others went to the Far East, where they labored in China, Cambodia, Vietnam, Siam and India.

In 1765, the Holy See began to entrust overseas missions directly to the Congregation. One of these was Guiana or Cayenne, in South America, where they took over the work of the suppressed Jesuits among Blacks and Indians. In 1779, the first two Spiritans landed in Senegal, Africa; they were the forerunners of many others on that continent. Thus, the Congregation's apostolate now extended over the four continents. (The fifth, new Holland, now renamed Australia, was then not yet much more than a name given to an obscure area of the world).

The Era of Fr. Francis Mary Paul Libermann

The great spiritual leader who would bring about the renewal of the Spiritans in the 1800's was a very unlikely candidate for the task, The Venerable Fr. Mary Francis Paul Libermann. Born in Alsace in 1802 as the son of Rabbi Lazarus Libermann and called Jacob. He was destined to follow in his father's footsteps and become a rabbi. Like several of his brothers, however, Jacob became a Catholic in 1826 and opted for the Catholic Priesthood. He had chosen Francis as his first baptismal name.

Fr. Libermann became epileptic in his seminary days and so his ordination was delayed. Overcoming the obstacle of this serious illness and with the approval of his spiritual director and the encouragement of the Holy See, he founded the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary in 1841, as a missionary group to work especially with people of Africa and African descent. A few days before that he had been quietly ordained a priest explicitly for that purpose.

This new venture took root and its first missionaries were sent out one of who is on his way to be canonized as a saint, the blessed James Laval, popularly known as the apostle of Mauritius. Two others went to work in Haiti and Reunion in the following year.

When the Irish-American Bishop Edward Barron came to see him for personnel to staff his immense vicariate of the two Guineas (in Africa) – it stretched about 5,000 miles along the coast of West Africa without limits to the interior – Libermann placed seven priests at his disposal. Many of these early missionaries died, but one of Libermann's first missionaries to arrive would go on to become the first Bishop of Gabon. As time went on, that vicariate of the two Guineas became "the Mother of all the churches in West Africa".

The Merger

When Libermann had started his little congregation, the Holy See had at once suggested that he come to some agreement with the Spiritans, whose purpose, spirit and works were very similar to his own. In 1848, the conditions were ripe to bring this matter to a successful conclusion on

Pentecost Sunday of that year, the two congregations resolved to merge. Liebermann's group disbanded as a separate institute and its members entered the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. Then Liebermann was elected its First Superior General and a Founder of the new Congregation; Congregation of the Holy Spirit under the Protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

He reorganized the institute and gave it a mighty impetus – one so strong that, even though he died four years later, it could develop into one of the larger religious orders of men. The Congregation of the Holy Spirit spread all over Europe, North America, the West Indies and large parts of South America; all over Africa, islands in the Indian Ocean, Pakistan and on to Australia, Papua New Guinea and recently the Philippines, Taiwan and Paraguay. Here in the states, it engaged heavily in what is now called social work and in education on every level.

In Africa, in particular, the Spiritans labor was blessed. While the original mission in West Africa expanded mightily, work on the other side of the continent began in 1862 on the island of Zanzibar in the 2,000-mile long mission of the same name. Bagamoyo, located in what is now Tanzania, became “The Mother of all churches in East Africa.”

Thousands of Spiritan priests and brothers devoted their lives to bringing Christ to this continent; and other religious orders came to share in the task. In 1842 the first three African priests could be ordained. One hundred-fifty years later we find on the continent about 450 dioceses in East Africa and over 300 in Nigeria not to talk about the rest of the countries in the West Coast and central parts of Africa, mostly staffed by African Bishops, taking care of over hundred million Catholics.

The new world order that began to arise from the ashes of World War II affected, of course, also the church existing in that world when everything came up for re-appraisal. One result of this was a scarcity of candidates for the priesthood and religious life in most countries of the northern half of the world. In the other half, however, vocations became more abundant, so that personnel losses in the north were greatly offset by gains in the south. The Congregation has flourishing provinces there, notably in Africa. Thus it is able to continue its mission today in over sixty countries of the world.

United States of America.

When religious freedom became the law of the land with American independence, some Spiritan priests could settle in the States. They came as refugees from 1794 on and went to work in the Baltimore Diocese, which then covered all the new States. Corporate involvement began in 1872 when Bismarck expelled the Congregation from Germany and its personnel migrated to the USA. They worked among immigrants from among Europe and in 1878 opened a College at Pittsburgh, which developed into what is now Duquesne University. Work among African-Americans began in 1889 in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, in 1895 in Virginia then in Michigan and New York, and from 1911 on, all over the Deep South, in some twenty states. Overseas, American Spiritans went to work mainly in Africa, especially in Tanzania, and, closer to the states, in Puerto Rico and Mexico. Here in the U.S., Spiritans of the Eastern Province minister in 15 parishes, as well as a High School and University Catholic education.

Archdiocese of Cincinnati/Covington

In 1851 Archbishop John B. Purcell visited Fr. Francis Libermann and asked him to staff the Inter diocesan seminary in Cincinnati. He consented Fr. Ignace Schwindenhammer was told to embark with some companions for the U.S.A. Somehow the affair fell through. It was only when the Congregation was expelled from Germany as Jesuit-related that. In 1872 the decision was made to begin a province by opening a college in Covington, Kentucky. As the provincial designate Fr. Joseph Strub could not go at once, Fr. George Ott was temporarily in charge. When they arrive in Covington, the local bishop told them that they have come “one year too soon”. There was no place for them to stay together and Fr. Ott went to Cincinnati to explore possibilities.

Archbishop Purcell received him with open arms and offered him St. Boniface in Piqua with its five mission stations. The offer was eagerly accepted; a parish in Berlin (Forte Loramie) followed and a House for Brothers near Pontiac was acquired. The Spiritans earned their bishop’s praise doing the work they were doing.

Fr. Ott, however, had overlooked that all these little places in a very rural area offered no chance to develop a new province. What the Congregation needed would be works in or near a large city. When Fr. Strub arrived in 1874, he saw this mistake at once and decided to withdraw gradually from most of these little stations. The departure was hastened by a conflict with Archbishop Purcell who began to assign some Spiritans to different stations without the consent of their religious superiors. In late 1876 all Spiritans had left Ohio, except two who left the Congregation to join the diocesan clergy.

In 1891 Archbishop William Henry Elder asked the Spiritans to come and take over the ministry to the blacks in Cincinnati but this couldn’t materialize until the time of Archbishop John T. McNicholas, OP, in 1928, three years as an Archbishop of Cincinnati. This parish given was St. John the Baptist Church in Cincinnati.

The Archbishop asked the Spiritans to take care of the growing African American Community in Dayton and in September 5, 1928, Frs. Edward Malloy and Fr. Henry Thessing became the pastors of St. John the Baptist Parish which was between Krug and William Street in Dayton. St. John’s Parish was truly Home for the African America Catholics in Dayton until in 1963 when this church has to give way to the new high way now I-75 & State route 35. Parishioners were asked to join St. James and Resurrection while a few opted to go to St. Agnes. In 1994 with the abrupt departure of Fr. Tom Stricker, the Holy Ghost Fathers were again asked to serve the Parish of Resurrection and Fr. Freddy Washington was appointed the Pastor. These two parishes merge in October 1999 when constraints led to the closure of St. James Parish. These two parishes continued their Journey of finding a neutral location where they can worship together and also to give chance to their long awaited dream of having a church on their own. Thanks to God on May 14, 2005 a new parish and new Church was dedicated by Archbishop Daniel Pilarzcky with his first appointed Pastor Fr. Francis Tandoh, a Spiritan priest.

Since 1921, the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans) had dedicated their ministry in Dayton among African American Catholics and still are continuing his ministries among the urban and rural parishes. At the moment we are serving eight Parishes in the Archdiocese: Our Lady of Grace, Queen of Martyrs, St. Benedict the Moor, St. Mary in Dayton, St. Augustine in Germantown, St. Mary in Camden, St. John in New Paris and Visitation Parishes. We strive always to be a light that shines to brighten the life of the people we serve and the entire Archdiocese. Spiritans in the past has served or began the parishes below too.

5. Fort Loramie Oh St. Michael 1873-1875

In March 1873 Abp. John B. Purcell of Cincinnati offered this parish in what was then called Berlin to the Congregation at the request of its Swiss-born pastor Anton Meyer, who wished to retire in our community of Piqua. Fr. Francis W. Schwab became its pastor. The following year He was replaced by Fr. William BIGOT, assisted by Fr. Charles Steurer. The Spiritans presence in Berlin was short lived for they soon saw themselves forced to leave the archdiocese. Fr. Bigot, however, preferred to stay in Berlin as a diocesan priest and continued there until 1903.

6. TROY OH St Patrick 1872-1876

This mission parish was served consecutively for an average of one year by the Frs. Charles STEURER, John B. KAYSER, Matthew HHEIZMANN and James RICHERT.

7. PIQUA OH St. Boniface 1873-1876

This German Parish was accepted by Fr. George OTT in 1873 and Fr. Francis W. SCHWAB served as it pastor from April 1873 until October 2, 1876 when it was returned to the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Several other Fathers resided there also while taking care of neighboring parishes.

8. FRENCHTOWN OH Holy Family 1873-1876

Fr. John B. KAYSER was listed as its Spiritan pastor from 1873, but remained there until 1877, the last year As a diocesan priest.

9. TIPP CITY OH St. John Baptist 1874-1877

Formerly called Tippecanoe, the town was another mission Parish which was manned consecutively for an average of one year by the Frs. John B. KAYSER, James RICHERT and Matthew HEIZMANN UNTIL the Spiritans withdrew from the diocese.

10. PONTIAC OHIO St. Joseph's House 1873-1877

Built as a novitiate by the Marianists, this house was acquired in 1873 to serve especially as a Brother's community and formation house. It also was used as a central community for the Fathers working in Ohio. The last Spiritan left it in 1877 and it was sold in 1882.

11. VERSAILLES OH St. Denis 1873-1878

The following Fathers served in this parish: Fr. Francis W. SCHWAB and Fr. George OTT in 1873, Fr. John B. KAYSER, 1873-1876, Fr. James RICHERT 1876-1877 AND Fr. Francis ROTH. Who had left the Congregation in 1876 at the expiration of his vows, but regretted it soon after And was finally readmitted in 1887.

42. DAYTON OH St. John the Baptist 1928-1963

In 1928 the Congregation accepted to open a parish for African-Americans in Dayton and St John the Baptist Church was handed over to the Spiritans, as the territory around this old church, dating from 1893. was being taken over by African Americans. The parish had a fine physical plant, including a school. Fr. Edward J. MALLOY became its first Spiritan pastor. Twenty-five adults and 25 children enrolled in the parochial school, 20 of them African-Americans. When in 1934 he was succeeded by Fr. Edward C. WHITE, he handed over a congregation of 155 adults and 57 children in the school. The other pastors after him were the Frs. Henry J. THESSING, 1936-1945; Joseph POBLESCHKEK, 1945-1945; John M. LUNDERGAN, 1947-1948; THESSING again until 1950; James KILBRIDE, 1950-1959; Paul LIPPERT, 1959-1963.