



Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

November 28, 2023

Dear Brothers,

I arrived in Johannesburg on November 22 to participate in the 100th anniversary of our presence in the country. With many events and places to visit on the schedule, I was advised by the provincial superior of South Africa, Fr. Peter Surdel, to arrive early to give myself time to acclimate and visit Fr. John Strittmatter, the SCJ from the US Province who has been serving in South Africa since 1963. Fr. John is currently recovering from a fall (broken shoulder) in a nursing home. He is in good spirits. During our visit, he mentioned that he hasn't been to the United States since 1993 and hasn't renewed his passport since. He has no plans to return to the US anytime soon. His heart belongs in South Africa.

Before departing from the US to South Africa, I wanted to know more about the province. One question lingering in my mind was about the involvement of the US Province in South Africa. How did we end up there? I was informed that the South African Province was founded by German SCJs. However, during World War II, the SCJs there were confined in a camp and were not allowed to move about without approval from civil authorities. This made it difficult for them to minister to the people. The German SCJs made a plea for assistance. In one General Chapter, the General Superior invited any entity in the congregation to participate in the mission, and our superior provincial at the time, Fr. Richard Kiefer, accepted the invitation.

Many American SCJs have served in South Africa. Records from the Diocese of De Aar indicate that 12 SCJs from the US Province arrived between 1948 and 1950. In 1953, the newly formed Prefecture of De Aar was entrusted to American SCJs, with Fr. Aloysius Dettmer as the first Apostolic Prefect of the De Aar region. Their missionary spirit and sense of availability were

AMONG US SCJS WHO HAVE SERVED

Frank Aresta
Evert Baaij
Sylvester Benedict
Don Barnd
Charles Brown
Michael Caranfa
Aloysius Dettmer
Joseph De Palma
Philip Elmer
Vildac Giroux
Constance Hartney
Joseph Haselbauer
John Hasselhoff
Frank Hudson
Gabriel Kersting
Dennis Law
Danny Lopez
Kevin McInnis
Cletus Meiergerd
Patrick Meyer
Peter Miller
Frank Palishen
Bill Pitcavage
Joseph Potocnak
Antony Pudenz
Paul Rudy
Gerald Selenke
Greg Schill
Frank Strafalace
John Strittmatter
Leonard Tadyszak
Greg Timmerman
Steve Weise
Leonard Will
Bernard Zicke

genuinely inspiring and life-giving to the congregation and the Church.

In my conversation with Fr. J. Strittmatter, he shared the striking similarities between the United States and South African provinces. The German SCJs founded both provinces in the same year, and the missions entrusted to both were equally small, poor, and isolated. The people living in both missions were subjected to discrimination and were forced to live on reservations. The work towards achieving reconciliation and promoting racial justice is an ongoing process and is much needed in both countries. In both missions, there were only a few Catholics. As per the September/October 1932 issue of our magazine, *The Mission Call*, the mission in South Africa entrusted to us in 1923 had about 400 Catholics cared for by two SCJ missionaries. Early in their mission, both entities established schools for indigenous children, following the spirit of Fr. Leo John Dehon to educate young people. They depended on women religious to teach and administer our schools. Both entities faced innumerable difficulties in the early years, but their trust in the love of the Sacred Heart carried them through.

In a message delivered on World Mission Day in 2013, Pope Francis emphasized that the spirit of missionary work goes beyond a particular place: “Missionary spirit is not only about geographical territories, but about peoples, cultures and individuals, because the ‘boundaries’ of faith do not only cross places and human traditions, but the heart of each man and each woman.” American SCJs have been active in various mission fields, such as the DR Congo, South Africa, and Indonesia. Today, the sons and daughters from these mission fields are bringing the Gospel back to our land. Let them touch our lives as American SCJs did their ancestors.

I am thankful to Frs. Wayne Jenkins, Greg Speck, and John Strittmatter for providing me with the necessary information to compose this letter. The conversations with Frs. Greg and John were enlightening.

Fraternally,

