

# Brothers on the Move

*Brothers on the move* is the theme of this set of Profiles of Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America. Our mission re-assignments often suggest the movement of the Spirit as we discern our role in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, advancing His Church and her mission, serving the men and women of our times, and giving new expression to the Charism of Edmund Rice.

*Mission Frère* brings together a number of initiatives as a Province response to Congregation Chapter Calls for service at the margins with people made poor. The new assignments touch communities in Zambia, New Orleans LA, Bonita Springs FL, Chicago IL, and Harlem NY, the site of the Christian Brothers' first school missions in the United States.

Spirituality is at the core of each ministry. Brother Jack Mostyn, former Assistant to the Congregation Leader, will bring his well developed skills and experience in spiritual direction to a new assignment. He as well as Brothers Ben McDonough, John Holden, Arthur Gammara, and Tim Smyth are among those who will be on the move and whose profiles follow.

Should the reader be in the process of discerning what to do with the rest of your life, or know someone in such discernment, you might consider the value of a conversation with a Christian Brother. We love to share the gift of our vocation. Religious life is experiencing a period of revitalization responding to the challenges and the excitement of a new day in the Church. Perhaps what you seek, echoing in the call that keeps coming, is what we have found as disciples of Jesus following the example of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice.

## Brother John (Jack) H. Mostyn, CFC



Brother Jack began mission life in the Brothers as a high school teacher and track coach for seventeen years, some of which time was spent “on the missions” in Dominica, West Indies where he

learned to coach soccer and cricket. At one point in this phase of his life Brother was appointed a local leader of one of the communities. Later, after a period of intense preparation, he transitioned into the ministry of spiritual direction.

He has been instrumental in helping create several training programs for spiritual directors and supervisors of spiritual directors on both coasts of the United States. He helped found and was president of Spiritual Directors International, an organization with more than six thousand members scattered around the globe. He was the first Coordinator of Mission Integration at Iona College in New Rochelle, New York.

In 1999 Brother was nominated and appointed to the Leadership Team of the then Eastern American Province of the Congregation of Christian Brothers. His six year term was interrupted when he was elected to the Congregation Leadership Team at the Congregation Chapter in 2002. He was based in Rome, Italy until May of 2014. This position involved travelling globally visiting the various schools and ministry sites within the Edmund Rice Network.

At the Congregation Chapter in March of 2008 he was elected to the position of Deputy Congregation Leader. He continued to live in Rome and was part of the leadership team that ensures that the direction of the Congregation articulated in the Chapter Documents is followed throughout the Congregation. This team spent many days and hours crafting "A Way into the Future" for the entire Congregation. Its thrust was endorsed by the 2014 Congregation Chapter and is now in the stage of implementation.

This year, Brother Jack is participating in the Hesburgh Sabbatical Program at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, in renewal activity and preparation for his next ministry.

A life "on the move" was perhaps foreseeable when, Jack Mostyn, as an eighteen year old at Bergen Catholic HS in New Jersey, gained the attention of sports writers and the nation's major athletic programs. Local and National headlines reported: *Schoolboy runs 100 Yards in 9.3; Bergen Catholic's Mostyn Equals World Sprint Record.* And the in the late spring of his senior year: *Latest Star to 'Retire' Next Month.* The New York Times explained: *Track Bids Can't Catch Sprinter: Mostyn to Reject 15 Scholarships for Religious Life.*

## Brother Robert Benedict McDonough, CFC

Brother Robert Benedict McDonough's enthusiasm for the bagpipes finds roots in his Scottish-Irish family. He is a featured performer at family weddings and funerals. Brother traces his vocation as a brother and a teacher to the example and encouragement of the Sisters of Charity at Our Lady Star of the Sea School and the Christian Brothers at Monsignor Farrell High School, both schools on Staten Island, NYC.

He recalls the impact of the times of his youth: *As a fourth grader I was trained to be an altar boy along with my brother. The first week of practice was in Latin but the second week of practice was in English. By grade seven I was the official trainer for altar boys.... The nuns had us very involved in the Viet Nam War. We were writing soldiers and sending gifts. In retrospect, the war years and destruction and death had me think about the real meaning of life. In high school I tutored evening at Mount Loreto Orphanage. In senior year Father Aldo Toss (noted authority in religious education in that era) got me*

*interested and excited about liturgy and I was part of a group which planned and set up for school liturgies. This developed a lifelong love for liturgy.*



*Brother Robert Benedict McDonough, CFC piping on the Atlantic shore.*

Br. McDonough's assignments as a Christian Brother have brought him to Saint Cecilia Grammar School and Saint Lucy School in East Harlem, NYC; Blessed Sacrament High School in New Rochelle, NY; Rice High School in Central Harlem; Archbishop Curley Notre Dame Prep in Miami, FL.; Catholic Memorial High School in West Roxbury, MA; and Saint Patrick's School in Roxbury, MA. While the ethnic groups varied Anglo, African-American, Puerto Rican, Haitian, Dominican, Cape Verdean, the essential formative goal of "teaching as Jesus taught" remained the constant.

Along the way he obtained a masters in remedial reading, competency in Spanish, and proficiency on the bagpipes. A creative and successful teacher, dean, principal and district chairperson, he had assumed that schools were his lifelong niche.

He recalls: *In May of 2006, I was asked by the Province Leadership to consider moving to Bonita Springs, FL and our Los Hermanos Community. I had been involved in schools since I was a student in kindergarten. This was a shock for me. I spent some time discerning and agreed to go for a year.*

For the next eight years he was intensely engaged with the Mexican and Guatemalan immigrant community of Bonita, running the Juan Diego Pantry, coordinating Christmas and Thanksgiving drives,

working with church music groups, and facilitating mission immersion experiences of students from the Edmund Rice Network of schools in North America. He notes modestly: *My involvement with the migrant communities here has blessed me greatly. These are God's poor struggling to survive. I truly have seen the face of Christ ministering to me in these the least of my sisters and brothers.*

This year Br. McDonough will be returning to Harlem, the area of the Brothers' original foundation in the United States. He and Brother John W. Casey have agreed to be part of *Mission Frère* fostering community engagement and collaboration in discerning how the Brothers might best accompany the people of Harlem into the future.

## Brother Francis Arthur Gammaro, CFC

When the diocese of Orlando saw the need for catholic secondary education in Ocala, an area with a rapidly growing Catholic population, the Bishop and a local pastor invited the Christian Brothers to establish a new school. Noting the higher socio-economic nature of the area and the possibility of an eventual transition to lay leadership, the Brothers agreed to provide a team of experienced educators for the time necessary to establish a quality school, grounded in the faith and the strong traditions of a truly Catholic education. During the initial years Brothers assumed the roles of principal, dean of student services, and master teachers, all with extensive preparation and decades of successful experience.

With graduate degrees in Chemistry, Library Science, and Computer Science, and thirty seven years of high school and graduate level teaching, Brother Francis Arthur Gammaro had no difficulty taking on the role of master teacher. For the previous five years he had a similar role in the re-launching of St. John Neuman School in Naples, Florida. He had delighted in the warmer weather and the adventure of something new – his first experience of co-education. His earlier assignments had been in the all-male cultures of Rice HS, Power Memorial, Iona Prep, and Bergen Catholic, all in the much colder northeast of the United States.

At Trinity all was new. The building and extensive campus were being constructed around the Brothers as they welcomed the first classes. Aside from his teaching, mentoring of teachers, and moderating of student organizations, Brother Arthur became the go-to person for organizing the data bases and programming systems and developing the office of the registrar.

Gifted students sought to be in his Honors Chemistry and Honors Physics courses. Those for whom science and math were more of a challenge advised each other that Brother Arthur is one teacher who can make things simpler and is always available to help -- and he is fun.



*Brother Francis Arthur Gammaro at Trinity Catholic HS, Ocala, FL.*

This year came the moment to move on. The mission of the Brothers as the founders of Trinity High School has been successfully completed. A skilled lay staff have demonstrated their capacity to carry forward the tradition and spirit that has been established.

Brother Arthur has accepted an appointment to the faculty of St. Laurence High School in Burbank, Illinois. Overlooking the prospect of dealing with the cold of Chicago winters, he is delighted to introduce fresh groups of scholars to the joys and challenges of modern chemistry and physics. He will be residing in the Brothers' Novitiate serving also as a role-model for the young men joining the Christian Brothers.

## Brother F. Sean Whitty, CFC

Francis Sean Whitty attended Brother Rice High School in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada where he met the Christian Brothers for the first time. He was so impressed with the Brothers who taught him that he made a decision to join the Congregation in September, 1966 in Lakewood, New Jersey. After finishing his novitiate in West Park he was one of the first group of student Brothers to return to Newfoundland to finish his academic training.

He graduated in 1969 with a B.A (B. Ed) in French and Religious Education and was assigned to teach at St. Bonaventure's School. For the past forty years Sean has been teacher, administrator and counsellor in many of the Brothers' schools across Canada. He has earned Masters' degrees in Religious Education (St. Michael's College), Pastoral Studies (Loyola University) and School Counselling (University of Ottawa) – all of which have found expression in his various ministries over the years.



*Brother Sean Whitty with two students from St. Mary's Dum Dum alternative school established by the Christian Brothers in Calcutta. They ably served as guides when, earlier this year, Brother directed a mission immersion group of Iona College students in India.*

In 2005 Brother Sean had the privilege of being a member of the first international Brothers' community at Mt. Sion in Waterford, Ireland, the founding house of the Christian and Presentation Brothers and the resting place of Blessed Edmund Rice. While at Mt. Sion he conducted high school retreats, introduced the Kairos retreat program to local high schools, and encouraged the practice of Taize Prayer in the Blessed Edmund Rice Chapel. His work continues to bear fruit for the local people and the many international visitors to this Edmund Rice Heritage site.

Since his return to North America in 2010, Sean has served as Chair of Province Life and Renewal, organizing yearly summer retreats for Brothers in various parts of the US and Canada. He also has compiled prayer services and spiritual book reviews for the Brothers' communities to help Brothers grow spiritually and prayerfully.

Brother Sean is now headed to New Orleans, Louisiana. He will be one of three brothers who share their home and life with lay volunteers – young women and men, recently graduated from college, who have decided to dedicate one or two years to serving the poor while living in an intentional gospel based community.

## Brother John T. Holden, CFC

West Africa, and in particular Sierra Leone and Liberia have captured world attention for their struggles with the Ebola crisis. For the Brothers in this part of the world, the time of great stress stretches back to the horrors of the civil wars of the past two decades. At the end of the open hostilities few in these countries had escaped personal tragedies. One Brother was killed, all had suffered the loss of a family member or close friend. There were clear signs of post-traumatic stress syndrome among the population, including Brothers who had suffered with the people while continuing to minister among them for ten years during this horrific civil war which finally ended in 2002.

In 2000 Brother John Holden left his homeland in Canada, responding to an invitation from Congregation Leadership to come to Africa and to accompany Brothers in working through the grieving process and in developing support systems that would allow them to carry forward their ministries to others, particularly the youth of their afflicted land. John made a 3-year commitment to do so following

a Congregational Cross cultural Passover Program in India in 1999. His three years have become sixteen years, ten of which he spent ministering in Sierra Leone bridged in between with five years as director of novices in Cape Town, South Africa.



*District Personal Growth Team Members work with mentor Brother John Holden in preparing and facilitating events nurturing the personal and spiritual lives of Christian Brothers in West Africa: Brothers Charles Belmoh, Titus Kallon, and Andrew Koroma BACK: Brothers Victor Alpha, Martin Vamboi, and John Holden.*

Brother John feels the time is ripe now for him to move on again enabling local Brothers to use the strengths and skills he has nurtured among them to put their own stamp and creativity on programs, thus ensuring continuity into the future. This past year, with the help of generous donations sent to the District by some former Christian Brothers in Canada and a few U.S. friends, Br. John helped coordinate local Brothers' communities to respond to families in their areas that have been most affected in the wake of the devastating Ebola epidemic.

This year Brothers around the globe were invited to consider making themselves available for new "Our Way Into the Future" -- community engagement initiatives in the more marginal regions of Africa and other parts of the Developing World. Brother John Holden was one of the first in our Province to respond. In his application he suggested that his work in West Africa was now done as others are there to carry it forward. He, on the other hand, is ready for the next challenge and enthused about whatever the Lord of surprises is about to offer.

## Brother Gregory Timothy Smyth, CFC

The teaching of secondary school science and fostering of teen faith development through retreats and service projects have been core ministries for Brother Tim Smyth. That is, when he has not been asked to take on assignments at other frontiers of evangelization.

After teaching at St. John's Indian Mission in Arizona and serving as Principal of Seton High School, Brother was asked to take on the role of Province Vocation Director. Soon he was elected to the National Board of Vocation Directors. While in this role he himself was recruited by the Bishop of western Kentucky to be pastoral associate for three struggling and underserved parishes in rural western Kentucky. Over the years he also became involved in Prison Ministry and was elected President of the National Association of Religious Brothers (now known as Religious Brothers Conference).

The past ten years have been ones of relative stability. He has been at St. Laurence High School where he teaches Physics, directs Campus Ministry, and serves as chair of the school technology committee.



Brother Tim Smyth brings a Kairos retreat to the final blessing.

Just before Christmas this year Brother Tim received a phone call asking if he would be willing to take on another challenge -- this time in Bonita Springs, Florida.

The Brothers have been in Bonita since the mid-eighties. Asked to assume responsibility for a high school in Naples, the Brothers accepted on the condition that they might also open a mission among the migrant farmers in Collier County. The initial ministry called for direct engagement with seasonal agricultural workers. As a growing number of the workers began to bring their families the needs shifted from evening prayer sessions in the camps to tutoring in English, legalization of immigration status, finding homes, and becoming a part of a new country. Groups of students from Edmund Rice Christian Brothers Schools in North America come to Bonita each year to volunteer their services with the children of the area.

St. Leo's parish hosts the mission and is a vibrant center of liturgical and parish social outreach. Brother Tim's experience and talent now will be tapped in the role of Director of Spiritual Formation. He will work in collaboration with the Brothers' Director of Volunteers promoting formation that transforms service into gospel based community engagement.

Asked to comment on the new assignment Brother quoted St. Paul: *We are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Corinthians 4)*

