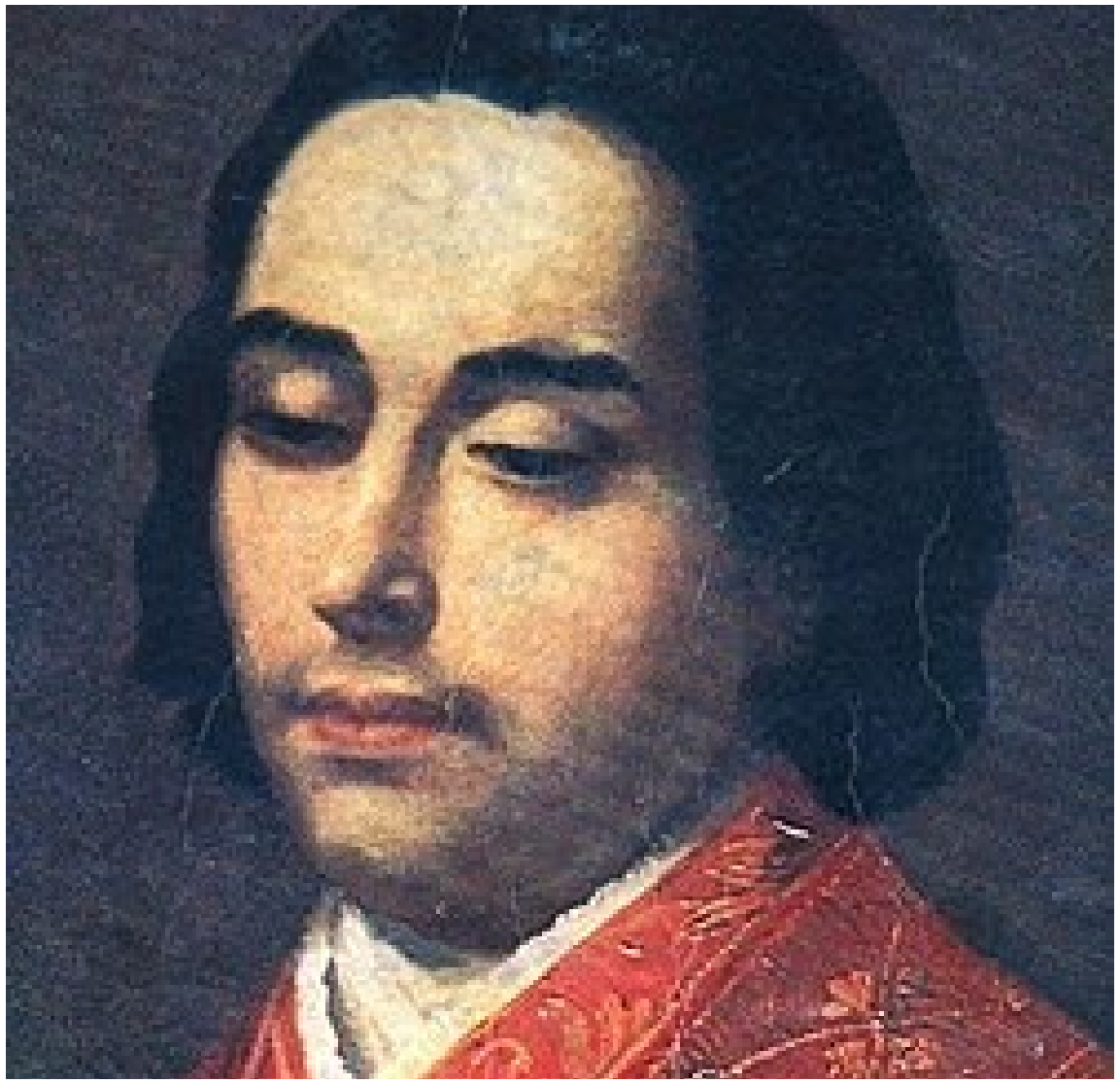
Claude Poullart des Places

How a Young Man Became a Founder

- Claude Poullart des Places transformed a simple act of generosity toward poor students into a lasting missionary congregation. His legacy is rooted in faith, service to the poor, humility, community, and the conviction that education and holiness should go hand in hand.



26 February 1679 – 2 October 1709

The Spiritan Congregation began from a simple response to need.

- Poullart des Places and a small group of theology students sought to support poor seminarians and respond to the Church's most urgent needs. What began as mutual assistance evolved into the foundation of the Holy Spirit Seminary that later became the Holy Ghost Congregation, or simply the Spiritans.

Compassion for the poor was at the heart of the mission.

- Poullart des Places shared his own money, food, and resources with students who could not afford to continue their studies. His concern went beyond charity to providing formation, community, and future vocations.

Leadership emerged through service.

- Rather than seeking authority, Poullart des Places became the leader because he lived alongside the poor students, supported them materially and spiritually, and took responsibility for their formation.

The foundation was built on faith, sacrifice, and trust in God.

- Despite financial difficulties, uncertainty, and personal hardship, Poullart des Places trusted God's providence and continued the mission. His work became a "pilgrimage of poverty.
  Prayer and discernment guided every major decision.

Influenced by the Jesuits, Poullart des Places regularly reflected on God's will and sought spiritual direction before making important decisions.

The Holy Spirit Seminary was innovative for its time.

- It specifically welcomed poor students preparing for priesthood, provided free education and housing, and combined academic excellence with spiritual and moral formation.

Knowledge and virtue were equally important.

- Poullart des Places believed that effective ministry required both intellectual competence and deep personal holiness. Neither learning without virtue nor zeal without knowledge was sufficient.

A spirit of poverty and humility defined the community.

- The Seminary emphasized simplicity, detachment from wealth, and solidarity with the poor. Poullart des Places himself lived these values and even refused personal benefits and legacies.

Community and family spirit were central values.

- Members developed strong bonds of mutual support, creating a lasting culture of fraternity that influenced their future ministries.

Claude's life exemplified self-giving service.

- His dedication to caring for others during the famine of 1709 contributed to the illness that led to his death at the age of thirty. He is remembered as a founder who gave himself completely for God and the poor.

Libermann's Spirituality

A Spirituality of Presence



12 April 1802 – 2 February 1852

A snippet, introducing Libermann as a co-founder of the Spiritans

Libermann's spirituality is fundamentally "A spirituality of presence."	• The central goal is living in continual awareness of God's presence while being fully present to others, especially those who are poor, marginalized, and suffering.
Availability to the Holy Spirit is the foundation of spiritual life.	• Libermann taught that believers should remain open and attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the concrete realities of daily life. • This availability has two dimensions: openness to God and service to others.
Prayer and action are inseparable.	• Genuine prayer must overflow into service, justice, and evangelization. • Spiritual life is not an escape from the world but a commitment to transforming it through love and service.
Abandonment (releasement) is essential for spiritual freedom.	• Abandonment means surrendering self-will and trusting God's providence. • It frees people from attachments, rigid ideologies, and excessive self-centeredness, creating openness to God's guidance.
"God is all; man is nothing" reflects humility, not self-negation.	• Libermann did not diminish human dignity. • Rather, he emphasized dependence on God and the need to decenter the ego so God can work through us.

The Holy Spirit leads believers back into the world.

- Spirituality is not merely contemplative.
- The Holy Spirit directs individuals toward healing, service, advocacy, and solidarity with those in need.

Practical Union with God is living faith in action.

- Union with God is achieved not only through formal prayer but through actions, decisions, relationships, and everyday responsibilities carried out in God's spirit.

Service to the poor is a defining expression of God's presence.

- Libermann emphasized justice, charity, and advocacy for the oppressed.
- The poor are not objects of charity but persons whose dignity reveals Christ's presence.

Openness to experience and change is important.

- Libermann encouraged engagement with contemporary realities rather than clinging to past structures.
- He valued learning from lived experience and adapting mission to changing circumstances.

Libermann teaches that authentic Christian spirituality is a life of continual openness to the Holy Spirit, humble self-surrender, deep union with God, and active service to the poor, making God's presence visible in the world.

- **The four pillars of Libermann's spirituality are:**
  - **Availability to the Holy Spirit** (Evangelical Availability)
  - **Abandonment** (Releasement)
  - **God is all; Man is nothing** (Decentered Ego)
  - **Practical Union with God** (Union in Action)

What Activities Do Spiritan Friends Take Part In?

- **1. Spiritual and Faith-Building Activities**
- Organizing prayer meetings and Bible-sharing sessions.
- Celebrating Mass together and praying for Spiritan missionaries.
- Holding retreats, recollections, and days of reflection.
- Praying the Rosary and offering special prayers for the poor and people in need.
- Purpose: To deepen faith and strengthen the spiritual life of members.





- **2. Charity and Outreach**
- Collecting food, clothing, and essential supplies for people in need.
- Visiting the sick, elderly, and people who are lonely.
- Supporting homeless people and vulnerable families.
- Organizing fundraising activities for Spiritan missions and charitable projects.
- Purpose: To put the Gospel into action through compassion and practical service.

- **3. Fellowship and Community Building**
- Organising social gatherings, shared meals, and parish celebrations.
- Welcoming new parishioners and helping them feel part of the community.
- Holding talks and discussions on faith, family, and Christian living.
- Encouraging friendship, mutual support, and cooperation among members.
- Purpose: To build unity, friendship, and a stronger sense of belonging.



- **4. Missionary Awareness and Formation**
- Learning about the history of the Spiritans and their founders, Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann.
- Inviting Spiritan priests, brothers, or missionaries to share their experiences.
- Organising talks about missionary work in Africa, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world.
- Promoting awareness of the needs of poor and marginalised communities.
- Purpose: To understand the Spiritan charism and encourage greater participation in its mission.



- **5. Family Activities and youth involvement**
- Organising family prayer days and intergenerational gatherings.
- Encouraging young people to volunteer in community outreach.
- Supporting youth ministry and mentoring young people.
- Promoting vocations to priesthood, religious life, and missionary service.
- Purpose: To help young people discover their gifts and become active members of the Church.



6. Care for Creation and Social Justice

- Organizing parish clean-up days, tree planting, and environmental awareness activities.
- Supporting refugees, newcomers, and families experiencing hardship.
- Promoting peace, justice, reconciliation, and respect for human dignity.
- Advocating for people who are excluded or treated unfairly.

These activities reflect the wider Spiritan commitment to serving people in need and responding to the challenges facing society.



Internal

A Simple Monthly Programme for Spiritan Friends

Here is an example of how we could organize our activities.

Suggested activity
Prayer, Scripture reflection, and fellowship
Visit to a sick or elderly parishioner
Food collection or community outreach
Talk on Spiritan spirituality or missionary work
Fundraising for a chosen mission project
Retreat, parish mission day, or special celebration

The main message

Spiritan Friends bring together prayer, friendship, and practical service.
Members do not all need to do everything. Some may contribute through prayer, others through visiting the sick, helping young people, supporting missions, or organizing charitable activities.

The important thing is that each member uses their gifts to support the Spiritan mission and bring Christ's love to others.