

A LIFE OF SERVICE AND FULFILLMENT

As a young boy, Fr. Fred Timp, SVD was intrigued by the idea of religious life, but the daily schedule of parish priests seemed too boring and predictable for him. Young Fred wanted to serve God in a more exciting and adventurous way. With a little guidance from his uncle, who happened to be a Divine Word Missionary Priest, the young boy was able to connect with a Vocation Director and begin learning about how he could go out into the world to serve with the missionary congregation. He entered formation, starting in the minor seminary in 1959. He dreamed about being assigned to China someday.

“I was hoping for primary evangelization and wanted to avoid teaching in a school,” Fr. Fred said. “My first assignment was to the minor seminary at Bordentown where I was teaching and working as assistant Dean of Students!” It wasn’t exactly the overseas ministry he was hoping for, but Fr. Fred says he enjoyed seeing the formation process up close. Two years later, he jumped into vocation work and helped out at area parishes. He looked at it as a chance to gain some pastoral experience and make lasting friendships in the community.

In 1983, the Minnesota native finally got exactly what he was looking for when he first set out to be a Divine Word Missionary Priest – an assignment to a place overseas where there was great need. He moved to Ghana and started what would turn into a 40-year appointment.

A NEW LAND

Fr. Fred’s first assignment in Ghana was in an isolated, rural area called the Afram Plains. The people there were mostly farmers and they came from all over the country, representing numerous tribes. Many of them were already Christians, but there was still a good deal of primary evangelization to be done. Fr. Fred enjoyed his role and didn’t plan to leave, but about five years after his arrival, he was asked to serve as the dean of the SVD major seminarians in Tamale.

He found his role at the seminary to be both challenging and rewarding. At that time, there were about 25 seminarians. Roughly half of them were preparing for novitiate and taking philosophy while the others were already in temporary vows and taking theology classes. “I saw the seminarians grow and mature to become good missionaries themselves,” he said. Five or six of the seminarians who he worked with during that time have become provincials for the Society of the Divine Word and one became a bishop.

TRANSLATING THE WORD

Five years later, Fr. Fred was asked to shift his focus again. This time, he was assigned to a parish in Chereponi, which is also in the Archdiocese of Tamale. He stayed in this location for 10 years. Unlike his first two posts in Ghana, this one focused on the primary

evangelization that the young priest always longed for.

“There were four different tribes in the parish, each with a different language. Fortunately, most of the people belonged to just two tribes. I had an assistant who worked with one of the major language groups and I worked with the other,” Fr. Fred recalls. “We both worked with the minority language communities.”

He focused on the Komba language. At the time, very little of the Bible, prayers for Mass and common Catholic prayers had been translated to this language, so Fr. Fred got to work preparing these important writings to make them accessible to the local people. His assistant did much of the same work for the Anufo tribe. When his assistant was transferred after a few years, Fr. Fred found an Anufo catechist to continue that work. It took 10 years, but together they managed to translate the readings for Sundays and Solemnities, as well as the most used prayers in the Missal for Mass. In addition, they continued the evangelization work that other missionaries started in the area. Those days were filled with many joyful baptisms in villages where no one had been baptized previously.

“I think the years I spent in Chereponi and Saboba were the most fulfilling,” he said. “They were the years I did the kind of work I always wanted to do, the kind of work I felt called to do when I felt the call to be a missionary. They were also the years where I developed my deepest friendships and relationships with the people.”

Ten years after his arrival in Chereponi, Fr. Fred was relocated to Saboba. “The Church in Saboba was more developed than it was in Chereponi, but

we continued the evangelizing there, as well. I had many baptisms in Saboba because my predecessors had done most of the work and I was harvesting the ripe fruit of their efforts,” he said. The people in this region spoke a language that was related to Komba and most of the Bible had already been translated, but the Missal was incomplete. Again, Fr. Fred gathered a team and set out to translate the documents so the people in the community could read it. Just as they finished their work and prepared to print the documents, Fr. Fred got another assignment.

ADMINISTRATIVE WORK ———

During his time in Chereponi, the Yendi District was split off from the Archdiocese of Tamale and a new Diocese of Yendi was created. The bishop asked Fr. Fred to take the role of Chancellor of the new diocese while also continuing his work as a parish priest. At that time, he was added to nearly every committee, commission and board in the diocese and served as secretary to about half of them.

In 2008, a new provincial was elected and he asked Fr. Fred to take over as the Province Secretary.

“Doing so was probably the hardest decision I ever had to make,” he said. “I really didn’t want to leave the primary evangelization work I was doing, but I also didn’t see how I could say ‘no’ to a need of the Society to which I owed so much. The Society

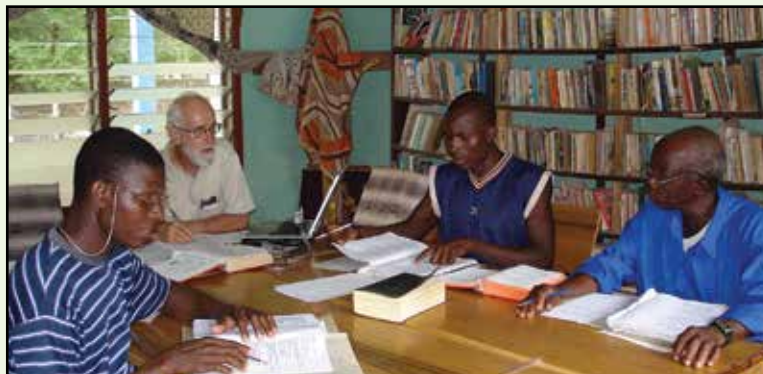
had been educating me and taking care of me for almost 50 years already and I would not have had the opportunity to do all the primary evangelization work and many other things I had done if it were not for the Society.”

He accepted the role and served as Province Secretary for eight years until he was asked to take over as Province Treasurer. Fr. Fred felt ill-equipped to take on the new position and was reluctant again, but stepped up to the task, nonetheless. Again, he found himself faced with challenges, but was pleased to overcome them. Next, he stepped into the role of Province Archivist and later became the treasurer for the Ghanaian community where he still considers home today at age 78.

REFLECTIONS ———

Looking back, Fr. Fred says all of his roles were fulfilling in one way or another but the relationships he formed with people who he served and worked alongside were perhaps the greatest achievements of his life. It wasn’t always easy, but he treasures the experiences that life as an SVD has afforded him. “The most challenging aspect of being a missionary has been to let go of my own cultural ways and customs and accept those of the people I was working with,” he said. “Letting go of one’s sense of cultural superiority is not easy, but unless people can live the Gospel according to the best of their own cultural values, they will never become the best Christians they can be.”

This spring, Fr. Fred went to Chicago to receive some medical treatments but he is hopeful that he’ll return to the west side of Accra in Ghana soon. “I am ready to continue in these positions as long as I am able to handle them competently,” he said.



The translation team at work.