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Divine Word

Missionaries Magazine

Mission Updates from Around the World

Spring 2012

Our Greatest Generation



Missionary service is inherently diverse. Our missionaries work in 70 countries. They preach the Word of God and use their skills as teachers, administrators, pastors, farmers, builders, counselors, artists, and social workers. In all they do, they show common qualities of dedication, commitment, joy, and sacrifice. Each of the missionaries highlighted in this issue exemplifies all of these qualities and many more.

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help future generations
of missionaries**



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to Divine Word Missionaries,
a nonprofit corporation located
in Techny, Illinois."**

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located in Techny, Illinois."**

A residual bequest directs that Divine Word Missionaries will receive all (or a specified portion) of your assets remaining after funeral costs, medical expenses, specific bequests, and administrative costs have been paid.

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**Divine Word Missionaries
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Editorial

Our Greatest Generation

"I began to reflect on the wonders of these ordinary people whose lives are laced with the markings of greatness."

Tom Brokaw penned these words in the introduction to his book *The Greatest Generation* (Brokaw 2004, 21).

This issue of *Divine Word Missionaries Magazine* introduces you to a few of our missionaries from that greatest generation. They, like the women and men portrayed in Brokaw's book, "stayed true to their values of personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith" (ibid., 20).

Our first difficult task was selecting from hundreds of compelling stories. To make our task a bit easier, we focused on the group of greatest generation missionaries living here at Techny, but we were still left with difficult choices. The final selection presented in this issue is something of a sampler. We wish we could have included many more.

The careers of these missionaries were diverse. They served in Africa, India, the Caribbean, the Philippines, and here in the United States. Some were teachers or administrators; some were pastors; others served in different roles. There were also common characteristics: dedication, commitment, joy, and fulfillment.

Included in this issue is Mr. Arthur Pape, who worked at the Mission Center for fifty-seven years. Although Art is not a vowed member of our community, he is, as Father Frank Kamp SVD noted, "the personification of Divine Word Missionary loyalty, love, and dedication."

Father Michael Hutchins SVD, writing from our Iowa farms, pays tribute to Archbishop Leo Arkfeld SVD. Although Archbishop Arkfeld served in faraway Papua New Guinea, he made a lasting impact in western Iowa.

I am sure that each of the featured missionaries considers himself ordinary. For us who have been privileged to know them, they are far from ordinary; indeed, they are outstanding examples from the greatest generation.

Bro. Dennis Newton SVD
Mission Director

Contact me any time; my e-mail address is:
director@svdmissions.org

DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES

AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND BROTHERS

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Divine Word Missionary priests and Brothers are guided by our *Constitutions*, our religious rule. The prologue to the *Constitutions* tells us that the "purpose of the rule is to interpret for us the call of the Divine Word and to prepare us for our missionary service."

We looked at the lives of the missionaries we chose to feature in our magazine and noticed that certain constitutions captured the spirit of their life and ministry. Those constitutions are used to introduce their stories.

Our Greatest Generation

Charles Schneider SVD

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Father Charles Schneider SVD, who spent fifty-five years in Ghana, was given a traditional Ghanaian name upon his arrival: Kwasi Antubam Mensah...

Arthur Pape

6



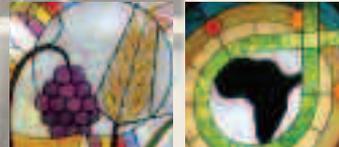
Raymond Quetchbach SVD

8

Faithfulness and joy are words which characterized Ray's life and ministry.

Raymond Albers SVD

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Edward Herberger SVD

13

We consider it our duty to proclaim the word of God to all.

Felix Eckerman

16



Leo Arkfeld SVD:
The Flying Bishop

Michael Hutchins SVD

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In the early years of our formation, we seminary students discovered other heroes. They came from the ranks of the Divine Word Missionaries themselves . . .



Constitution 303

We show interest in the life and work of each confrere and help and encourage him to bring his life and talents to fuller development. We share each other's joy, sorrows, hopes and problems.



Father Charles Schneider SVD, who spent fifty-five years as a missionary in Ghana, was given a traditional Ghanaian name upon his arrival: *Kwasi Antubam Mensah*. This new name denotes three facts about Fr. Charlie. He was born on a Sunday (Kwasi); his father died before Charlie was born (Antubam); and he was the third boy in his family (Mensah). But there is so much more to learn about this humble, deeply spiritual, and joyful nonagenarian.

Charles Schneider SVD

Charlie Schneider was born on the feast of Pentecost in 1919 in Buffalo, New York. He was the youngest of five children. According to Charlie, "Being the 'baby' of the family, I was always given special care and attention. I think that's why I was always smiling throughout my long life. I was particularly a 'Mama's boy,' and I owe my vocation in life to her."

When Charlie was in the eighth grade, he informed his pastor that he wanted to become a missionary priest. The pastor took it upon himself to make all the arrangements for Charlie to enter Divine Word Seminary in Girard, Pennsylvania. After high school, Charlie continued on to



novitiate, college, and then major seminary at Techny. After his ordination to the priesthood in 1946, he was assigned to the Gold Coast, which became Ghana in 1957.

Charlie was one of fifty Divine Word Missionaries commissioned during an impressive departure ceremony at Techny in 1947. From Techny, he and three other Divine Word Missionaries made their way to New Orleans, where they boarded a cargo ship for a fifty-four-day trip to the Gold Coast.



The Gold Coast mission was not yet ten years old and was growing rapidly. Fr. Charlie, in typical fashion, downplays his role in building the mission, while praising his co-workers. He cites Father Adolf Noser SVD first, “Fr. Noser was the right man at the right time to be the superior of the new mission. Being a very spiritual man who amidst all his activities was still able to spend hours in prayer every day. . . . He became the model of the bush missionary, going on treks and opening new mission stations.” He also credits Father Alphonse Elsbernd SVD, from Festina, Iowa, for his role in establishing the Catholic school system in Ghana. Other prominent missionaries were Father Harold Rigney SVD, Father Joseph Bowers SVD (who later became bishop of the Diocese of Accra), Father George Wilson SVD,





Father Aloysius Turbek SVD, Father George Wilson SVD, and Father John Dauphine SVD.



Fr. Charlie's career in Ghana spanned fifty years. Throughout most of that time, Fr. Charlie had dual roles. For many years, he was the treasurer of the mission and the diocese, but also held important pastoral posts. As treasurer, he considered it a duty and an honor to support the many missionaries in the field and to make sure that they had adequate resources for their missionary endeavors.

Because of his administrative abilities, as well as his deep concern for the members, Charlie was elected regional superior of Ghana in 1964. As regional, Charlie was a delegate to the 9th General Chapter of Divine Word Missionaries, which elected American Father John Musinsky SVD as seventh superior general of the order.

Regardless of the job he was given, Charlie remained firmly anchored by his faith and dedicated to his missionary work.



Fr. Adolf Noser SVD

When the superior general was looking for someone to lead the new mission in the Gold Coast, he selected the popular rector of Techny, Father Adolf Noser SVD. During the routine physical examination prior to his departure, the doctor deemed Fr. Noser unfit for life in the tropics. Informed of this bad news, the superior general determined there was only one thing he could do: "Find another doctor."

According to Fr. Charlie Schneider, "Fr. Noser became an indefatigable missionary in the Gold Coast, the first bishop of the Diocese of Accra, and later the archbishop of the Papua New Guinea mission. He labored on as a missionary until his death in New Guinea in 1981 at the age of eighty-one."

Ten years ago, when he was living at the retirement center in Ghana, Charlie wrote an article for this magazine. He described his new apostolate:

Praying is now a fountain of joy. I want to pray for my fellow Christians, for my Divine Word Missionaries, for the dear ones of my family, and for the salvation of the world. I deliberately make my praying an apostolate.

My heart is full of gratitude and joy for our Divine Word Missionaries, which has done so much for me in and in which I have lived so happily for these many years. Prayer keeps me in touch with them—those who are still living and so many of them who have already gone to our home in heaven. I often reflect on how much my friendship and companionship with people has enlivened and enriched my life.

Suffering from a viral lung infection in 2003, Fr. Charlie reluctantly left Ghana to return to the United States. Now at age ninety-two, Charlie continues the apostolate of prayer which he so enthusiastically embraced in Ghana. □

**“Go,
teach all
nations.”**

– Mt. 28:19

**Can you imagine...
every morning
of every day,
searching desperately
for food to eat?**

Our missionaries face these problems daily. Whenever we can provide food and clean water we do. But...the best way to solve these problems is to provide a way for an entire village to grow their own food.

**Divine Word Missionaries’
sustainable life programs
help families—
whole communities
become self-sufficient.**

**A gift
of \$25**

**could help a family
start a farm.**

**Your financial support,
is important to us...
but your prayers mean the world!
Please join us in in praying
for those in need.**

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Constitutions, Prologue

We propose to make the goodness and kindness of God visible in our life and service.

When a mission pilot in Papua New Guinea needed a new propeller for his airplane, to whom could he turn? Where could a missionary in a remote area of Indonesia with no electrical service find a refrigerator that runs on kerosene? What about a missionary in Ghana who needed four Chevy trucks? Or a ribbon for his vintage typewriter? A battery for his hearing aid? New underwear?

I suppose the missionary could turn to Harry Houdini, but if he really wanted those things, there was only one guaranteed source: Arthur Pape.

Arthur Pape

It must have been the Holy Spirit who guided Art Pape to Divine Word Missionaries. Fate or just good luck could never explain such a blessing. From 1947 until 2004, Art Pape was the go-to man at the Techny Mission Center. For decades, he was the personnel manager, accountant, investment manager, head shipping clerk, fundraiser, and the best friend a missionary overseas could ever have.

Father Anthony May SVD hired Art right after World War II. Scores of American missionaries were being sent to missions that needed to be rebuilt. In one year alone, twenty new missionaries from Techny were sent to New Guinea, where ninety percent of the missions had been destroyed.

In the beginning, it was a two-man operation, run from the basement of what is now Techny Towers. In the 1950s, the Mission Center moved to its current three-story building. The operation expanded dramatically and more lay employees were hired. One of the first was Miss Loretta Gore, who, in 1961, became Mrs. Art Pape.

When Father Francis Kamp SVD succeeded Fr. May, the Mission Center became more heavily involved in fundraising and publications. In those early days, Art and the staff labeled, sorted, bundled, and mailed the





magazines from the Mission Center. A gift shop was opened to help raise funds for the missions, and Art also oversaw that development.

Seminarians and Brothers helped Art load large containers of supplies, which were sent by rail to New York or California, where they were put on cargo ships destined for New Guinea, the Philippines, or Ghana. Johnson and Johnson, the large medical supply company, once donated one million bandages for shipment to the missions.

As if the cargo shipments were not enough, Art also took care of all the overseas correspondence and the accounting for the Mission Center. TWA gave Art ticket stock so that he could issue airline tickets for missionaries traveling to and from their missions. If something needed to be done, large or small, Art was the first person on the task. Art frequently interrupted his office work to pick up a missionary from O'Hare Airport, take a missionary to a doctor's appointment or, as happened

more than once, help round up the Techny cows that broke loose from their pens and decided to wander down Waukegan Road. Perhaps the most remarkable thing of all is that Art did these things with grace, calm, and a winning smile. In the Fall 2004 issue of *Divine Word Missionaries Magazine*, Fr. Kamp wrote, "[Art] is the personification of Divine Word Missionary loyalty, love, and dedication."

In 2004, after fifty-seven years at the Mission Center, Art retired from full-time employment. When asked what those years meant to him, Art replied, "It meant everything to me." We wondered how we would get along without his guiding wisdom, complete dedication, and unbelievable memory. Fortunately, we did not have to find that out because Art still comes to the office at least once a week to volunteer his services and to make sure that everything is still running smoothly. Scores of missionaries overseas are certainly relieved to hear that! □



Constitution 123

In our endeavor to live our missionary vocation faithfully we look to Mary, mother of the Incarnate Word and our mother.



Looking back at the life of Father Raymond Quetchenbach SVD, one immediately sees the guiding hands of the Blessed Mother and the great missionary Saint Paul.

Raymond Quetchenbach SVD

Ray was born at St. Mary Hospital in Rochester, New York, on July 30, 1929. In a short reflection written on the occasion of his fiftieth jubilee, Ray honored those who inspired his religious vocation. His list began with the Notre Dame Sisters who taught him at Holy Family School and it included many relatives who also entered religious life. Among those he named were: his beloved uncle, Father Charles Erb SVD, and his cousins, Father Francis Erb, Father Charles Adams OFM, Sister Helen Marie Yockel SSpS, and Sister Gertrude Erb RSM.

Ray entered Divine Word Missionaries in Girard, Pennsylvania, in 1943, and after high school, he came to St. Mary's Mission House at Techny. After perpetual vows in 1956 and ordination in 1957, Ray was given his mission assignment to the Philippines, whose patron is the Blessed Mother, under the title of the Immaculate Conception.

Fr. Ray devoted the next twenty years to education ministry in the Philippines, except for a short time back in the United States, where he earned a master's degree in education from another institution dedicated to the Blessed Mother, Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. Afterward, Ray returned to the Philippines to continue his studies. He earned a doctoral degree in education from San Carlos University in Cebu City.

Constitution 120

As St. Paul, the apostle of the gentiles, identified himself with those he served, so we meet with friendliness and goodwill those among whom we announce the Gospel.



In 1968, Ray was made dean of the graduate school of Divine Word College in Tacloban, which was formerly called St. Paul College. Then in 1978, Ray was called back to the United States to become president of our college seminary in Epworth, Iowa, whose patron saint is also St. Paul.

Always ready to take up any assignment given to him, in 1982, Fr. Ray began to work at our international headquarters in Rome, where he became secretary general.

Coming full circle, Ray came to Techny in 1990 to work in the province office, specifically handling correspondence and visiting annuitants. A few years later, he was made chaplain at Techny Towers, the retreat and conference center here.

During a series of general audiences in 2008, Pope Benedict spoke of the life and ministry of St. Paul. In one session, he said, "As can be seen, Saint Paul gave himself to the Gospel with his entire existence; we could say twenty-four hours a day! And he exercised his ministry with faithfulness and joy." Faithfulness and joy are words which characterized Ray's life and ministry.

In 1958, in a candid letter to his uncle, Fr. Charles Erb SVD, a role model to Ray and a great missionary himself, Ray wrote: "I am doing my very best to make the community happy and cheerful. They all think I'm a pure sanguine whereas in reality I tend towards the opposite. I've tried to make the smile my form of self-conquest and spirituality." He was always upbeat, solicitous of others, a wonderful conversationalist, generous with his time, and a man of many enthusiasms. Living in community with Ray, one would find it hard to believe that his smile took any effort at all. □



Ray combined the gentleness and humility of the Blessed Mother with the missionary zeal of St. Paul. He lived the prayer "Mary the Mother of Missionaries," found in the *Vademecum*, the prayer book of Divine Word Missionaries.

**Virgin Mary of Missions:
We also are missionaries.**

**May the whole Church
be renewed in the Spirit.**

**May we love our Father
and our brothers and sisters.**

**May we be poor and simple,
a living presence of Jesus
and witnesses of Easter.**

**In every house we enter
may we communicate peace,
announce the Reign of God
and console the suffering.**

[Fr. Ray died on November 19, 2011, and was laid to rest in St. Mary's Cemetery at Techny.]



Constitution 520

Changes in the world and in the as well as development in the confrere and community continue lifelong maturing.

It seems hard to believe now, but the teenage Raymond Albers dropped out of high school after his junior year because he was bored. At age eighty-two, Ray is a voracious reader, and probably has not been bored a single day since coming to Techny in 1947.

Raymond Albers SVD

Ray left Cherokee, Iowa, when he was eighteen years old because he knew he wanted to do something special. He was not sure what awaited him when he arrived at Techny, but he left all his anxieties at the door when Brother Alphonse greeted him and said, "Welcome. We have been waiting for you."

Brother Ray was assigned to the tailor shop, where master tailors, Brother Engelbert and Brother Agilbert, taught him their trade. Designing, creating patterns, and producing cassocks and ornate vestments combined the theoretical with the practical, a method of learning which Ray would apply to numerous fields throughout his life.

In the early 1970s, after nearly twenty years of tailoring, his superiors asked him to apply his talents to a new endeavor. Ray was assigned to the Architectural Bureau at the headquarters of Divine Word Missionaries in Italy. There he studied architecture and engineering. At that time, our missionaries from all over the world submitted plans for building projects to the bureau. The experts would study the plans, make modifications and improvements, and then approve the projects for implementation.

Bro. Ray's next assignment was to Ghana, where he was the headmaster of a technical school. Unfortunately, sickness, including malaria and typhoid, necessitated his return to the United States.

While regaining his health, Ray discovered another creative outlet as he took up painting. He also returned to school at Gannon University, located near our seminary in Erie, Pennsylvania, and earned a certificate in counseling. He applied these new skills to youth work with trou-



e church, in the sciences and theology, ifferent phases of one's life, demand of each ual study, development in one's field and



bled teens. Later, Ray became the school counselor at our high school seminary in Perrysburg, Ohio.

When the seminary closed in 1987, Ray was invited by Fr. Melvin James SVD, pastor of St. Anselm Parish in Chicago and a former tailor, to join a team of Divine Word Missionaries working in that inner city parish. The needs of the parish perfectly matched Ray's skills. He became very involved in counseling and also put his design and carpentry skills to use in remodeling the rectory and school building.

One day, while reading the province newsletter, Ray learned that he would be going to Bordentown, New Jersey, where a seminary school building was being completely renovated to serve as the community residence. When Ray expressed his surprise about learning of this new assignment through the newsletter, the provincial told him he just assumed Ray would be willing to undertake this important project. He was right, of course, and the new residence turned out beautifully.

Ray returned to St. Anselm's in Chicago and requested permission to begin new studies. At age sixty, he enrolled in an interdisciplinary program that led to a bachelor's degree in gerontology from DePaul University. Ray found inspiration in a quote from Vinita Hampton Wright: "Creativity is a playful spirit. It is a magician, a prophet, a shape changer. You'll think you got the plot figured out. Then, in retirement you are brought to a closed door that you're fool enough to open, and there's a whole room of unforeseen stuff that you must deal with now."

Bro. Ray was assigned to the Techny residence, where he used his creativity, imagination, energy, and commitment to learning by providing



services to the retired priests and Brothers. Once again, however, the provincial turned to Ray when the Western Province needed him to supervise the construction of a new retirement facility in Riverside, California. Upon completion of that project, he returned to Techny.

Around this time, Ray found yet another outlet for his creativity. He began to make beautiful stained glass windows. In a way, he was returning to his first career of tailoring, but this time he was creating tapestries with the very unforgiving medium of glass. His stunning glass windows adorn the residence chapel at Techny; the African Chapel in Techny Towers; the dining room at Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa; and a private convalescent home in Northbrook, Illinois. A beautiful piece modeled on one of Frank Lloyd Wright's designs is mounted at our Mission Center.

In 2006, Bro. Ray returned again to St. Anselm Parish in Chicago. His role this time was director of Brother formation for three young Brothers in temporary vows who were doing graduate studies. One would be hard-pressed to find a better model for young religious: a seasoned missionary who had devoted his life to service wherever he was needed; a man of deep spirituality who dealt honestly with his own challenges and gently guided others; and a life-long student who discovered his God-given talents and developed them to benefit others.

Ray is back at Techny now, where he spends much of his time in a new, open studio that he created. It is a place where novices and other members of the community can develop their own artistic talents. The studio has space for drawing, stained glass creation, and many other crafts. Most importantly, it is a place where a friend and mentor will teach, encourage, and accompany anyone who wishes to learn and explore his own creative gifts and talents. □

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Give hope to a mission community

\$25 will assist our missionary programs in 70 countries around the world

In addition to your financial support, we earnestly need your prayers! Together, let us pray for the needs of our missionaries and those they serve.

Share your prayer requests with us at:
www.svdmissions.org



Constitution 102
We consider it our duty to proclaim the word of God to all.

Constitution 217
Our obedience serves to unit us and coordinates our efforts, focusing them on the Society's missionary goals. To attain these we are ready to go anywhere the Society sends us. We work at our assignments conscientiously but are prepared to hand them over to others, even after years of service.



Edward Herberger SVD

When the young Edward Herberger made his first communion, he received a holy card with a prayer to St. Therese of Lisieux, the patroness of the missions. He is sure he said that prayer thousands of times. Perhaps the prayer sparked his missionary vocation.

Father Ed, along with thirty classmates, was ordained at Techny in 1960. This class of 1960 is famous, remembered for its large size and abundance of talent. Fr. Ed was quite sure he would receive his first assignment to the Philippines since a number of American Divine Word Missionaries already working there had requested him for that mission. He was shocked when he learned that he was being sent to Rome to continue his studies in theology. It would be the first of many surprises and quick transitions.

After just six months in Rome, Fr. Ed was recalled to Techny to assist the provincial treasurer, Father Arthur Melcher SVD, and to begin studies in business administration at DePaul University.



That might have led to a career in financial administration, but another critical need arose and Ed was slotted into a new position, the formation of Brothers in temporary vows.

The 1960s was a tumultuous time in the United States and change was also coming to religious orders. Fr. Ed took over a training program for Brothers that was long on tradition, but in serious need of updating. Young Brothers at Techny, indeed all over the world, were given professional training in many trades, from carpentry and plumbing to farming and office work. Ed soon realized that the training was deficient in some areas, especially theology and anthropology, key disciplines for a religious, missionary Brother. In 1970, he broke with years of tradition and began directing young Brothers to Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa, where they pursued college degrees.



In the same year, a new personnel crisis led to yet another assignment to a position he never sought. Fr. Ed was appointed dean of students at Divine Word College. Looking back at those years, Ed shakes his head and simply describes them as “difficult.” Besides serving as dean, Ed was also appointed vice-provincial, a job which required frequent trips between Epworth and Techny. After completing his term as dean and after years of work in formation, Ed again asked for a pastoral missionary assignment. That was again delayed when his superiors asked him to lead the vocation team. Like every other position given to him, Fr. Ed answered the call to duty and took up vocation work with great energy and one hundred percent dedication.



Finally, in 1984, Ed was assigned to pastoral work in the Caribbean District where he became pastor on the island of Antigua. Almost immediately, his fellow Divine Word Missionaries elected him district superior, another administrative position, although not full-time. This new assignment began a twenty-three-year, second career of very rewarding pastoral ministry on the islands of Antigua, Montserrat, St. Kitts, Jamaica, and Anguilla.

When Divine Word Missionaries was considering a request by the archbishop of Kingston, Jamaica, to send a team of missionaries to that island, Fr. Ed was chosen to go there as a “scout” for a year of pastoral work. During that time, he was to study the situation and make a recommendation to the provincial. After four months, it was clear to Ed that Jamaica needed Divine Word



Missionaries. A team of missionaries was sent to the civil parish of St. Thomas, one of the poorest areas of Jamaica.

Of all his assignments in the Caribbean District, Fr. Ed describes his last ten years on the island of Anguilla as his golden years. They were not the golden years of sitting in a rocking chair on a porch. Ed was fully engaged in a wide range of pastoral ministries and even managed to guide the parish community through the process of building a new church.

After leaving his assignment on Anguilla and returning to Techny for a period of active retirement, Fr. Ed recalled his thoughts during the return flight to the United States:

My mind and heart returned to the people of St. Gerard's. One after another their names and faces flowed through my mind and heart. As their pastor, I came to know many of them in more than just a passing way, and felt a special bond with them. They had become "family" to me. Some were like

fathers and mothers to me, others were like brothers and sisters, and still others were like sons and daughters. That brought to mind the passage in Scripture (Mk. 10:30) where Jesus tells the disciples that for leaving home, mother and father, brothers and sisters, they would receive a hundred times as many fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. That was what I had received during my twenty-three years in the Caribbean, not only in terms of numbers, but in the quality of the relationship. What a gift!

It has been nearly five years since Fr. Ed has been back at Techny and he is now facing some very serious medical problems. Recently, while sitting in the parlor of the Techny residence, he recalled the prayer to St. Therese that he offered so many times so many years ago. Like St. Therese, his new ministry is a ministry of prayer for missionaries and for those whom they serve. ◻

[Fr. Ed died on February 9, 2012, and was laid to rest in St. Mary's Cemetery at Techny.]



Constitution 507

One aim of our formation is to cultivate a listening ear for God's voice in the world, its history and happenings.

Father Felix Eckerman SVD had been working in India for less than three years when he received a letter from Superior General John Schutte SVD, asking him to become novice master. In his reply to Father Schutte, Felix claimed he was unprepared for the task of replacing the current novice master, Father Stanislaus Wald SVD, whom Felix described as a “good and holy man.” Evidently, those were exactly the qualities that the superior general saw in Felix, and the appointment was made.



Felix Eckerman SVD

When Fr. Felix arrived in India in 1948, shortly after his perpetual vows and ordination at Techny, he was assigned to a remote and very poor tribal village. This is where he cut his teeth as a new missionary. When he became novice master, he convinced the provincial leadership to move the two-year novitiate to a similar site, a very isolated area in Khurdi in the Diocese of Indore.

Twenty novices, along with Fr. Felix and his assistant, took over a closed mission station. The first order of business was to evict the snakes and scorpions that had taken up residence there. The next task was to form a community of young religious who were from many different cultural backgrounds and language groups. Felix also became pastor of the local parish and established good relationships with Christians and Hindus alike.

Fr. Felix remained novice master for twelve years and had a tremendous impact on the young religious who were introduced to religious life in the quiet, remote jungle. Fr. Richard Vaz SVD, an Indian Divine Word Missionary who works at the Mission Center at Techny, said, “Fr. Felix’s decision to move the novitiate to Khurdi was an outstanding choice. It provided just the atmos-



phere needed to bring the community together and to focus on spiritual development. The fact that decades later the novitiate remains in Khurdi shows the wisdom of that decision.”

The late 1960s was a turbulent time in the Church, and the major seminary community in Pune needed a calm, steady leader. Felix’s superiors appointed him rector of the seminary in 1968. He helped to move the community toward local leadership, so when his term was finished, an Indian Divine Word Missionary became rector for the first time. During those years, the government restricted the arrival of new foreign missionaries into India and did not renew residency permits for veteran foreign missionaries; however, Fr. Felix was allowed to remain at the seminary as spiritual director for nearly thirty years.

In 1998, Fr. Felix marked the golden jubilee of his ordination. The anniversary Mass was a joyous occasion. It gave many of the Indian Divine Word Missionaries who had learned so much from this “good and holy man” the opportunity to pay tribute to his decades of service. Fr. Felix, who Fr. Richie refers to as a wise guru, was ceremoniously fitted with a turban, a sign of respect and honor.

After fifty years of service in India, Fr. Felix decided to return to the United States. He looked forward to spending time with four of his sisters and hoped to do some ministry in an active retirement.

Felix became chaplain to the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters, often called the Pink Sisters, in St. Louis, Missouri. For the next four years, he brought his gentle ways and deep spirituality to the daily routine at Mt. Grace Convent.

Now, Fr. Felix lives in retirement at Techny, where, at age ninety-two, he still delights confreres and visitors with his wit, charm, wisdom, and good-natured presence. ▣

GURU

The syllable *gu* means shadows.

The syllable *ru*, he who disperses them.

Because of the power to disperse darkness, the guru is thus named.

Advayataraka Upanishad 14-18, verse 5



Leo Arkfeld SVD: The Flying Bishop

Michael Hutchins SVD



In fall 1963, at the tender age of fourteen, I entered Divine Word Seminary High School, East Troy, Wisconsin. A sizeable cohort and I set out enthusiastically on the thirteen-year course of formation as Divine Word Missionaries. Our enthusiasm reflected the temper of the times and the optimism of the early sixties before the jarring upheavals that would soon follow. It was a time of heroes. The youthful John F. Kennedy, our first Catholic president, had captured our imaginations and inspired a new national idealism. Astronaut John Glen had successfully orbited the earth and set in motion a new age of space exploration.

In the early years of our formation, we seminary students discovered other heroes. They came from the ranks of the Divine Word Missionaries themselves: Father Willie Ross SVD, pioneer missionary in the western highlands of Papua New Guinea; Father Harold Rigney SVD, imprisoned for four years by the communist Chinese; Father John Koster SVD, first physicist outside the Soviet Union to detect the Sputnik space capsule; Father Charles Erb SVD, Ghana storyteller and evangelist extraordinaire; Bishop Leo Arkfeld SVD, “The Flying Bishop” of Papua New Guinea.



We learned of their achievements in our classes and spiritual conferences. We heard of their exploits from older members who knew them personally. We met them when they came to the seminary during home leave and vacation times. These were larger-than-life characters, pioneers and innovators, men of competence and courage, romantics too, all in love with the people they had been sent to serve. They bolstered our youthful aspirations.

These characters were reawakened in my imagination recently, nearly fifty years since the time of my initial formation. Last October, I participated in the annual four-day convocation of priests of the Diocese of Des Moines. During the convocation, I had the opportunity to meet the priests and learn about the diocese. I introduced myself as a Divine Word Missionary and communicated informally about our Divine Word Farms ministry. I was received warmly.

The reception I enjoyed was due, in large part, I discovered, to the positive experience of several Des Moines priests with the late Divine Word Missionary, Archbishop Leo Arkfeld SVD. The archbishop grew up on a farm in western Iowa and never lost his connection. During his home leaves, as he sought support for the growing Church in Papua New Guinea, he readily assisted in area parishes and frequently administered the sacrament of confirmation. Local Catholics were attracted by his missionary idealism and



practical, “can do” attitude. Two priests credited the archbishop for influencing their decisions to enter the seminary. Four others traveled at different times to Papua New Guinea to observe first-hand his work and that of other dedicated missionaries.

The title “Flying Bishop” sounds exotic, but it derives from a ministry grounded in practical concerns. In a 1959 article, the well-known periodical, *Time*, described it this way:

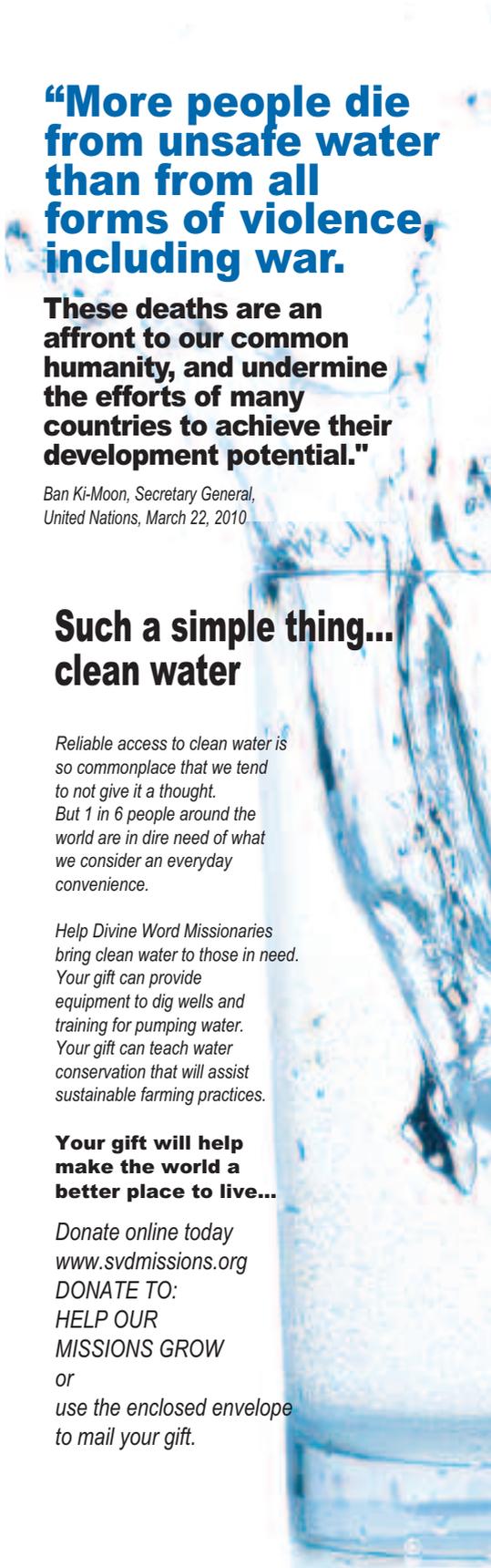
To Airman Arkfeld, this trip from the coastal town of Wewak to one of the vicariate’s 38 inland stations was routine; he logs an average of 30 flights a week, carries such diverse cargo as day-old chicks, bull calves, building material, engine parts, Australian beer, food, nuns, priests and mission helpers. Now and then he flies armed patrols, native cops or doctors to trouble spots, and he is always available to transport the sick or injured to the nearest hospital. Furthermore, says he, by plane “I am able to make many of my confirmation trips with less effort than a bishop in the U.S. or England.”

Air transport over the dense jungles of Papua New Guinea was an innovative tool in the reconstruction of the missions devastated during World War II. The archbishop adapted a commercial and military instrument for pastoral purposes, namely, the proclamation of the Gospel and ministry to God’s People.

The respect and affection Archbishop Arkfeld enjoyed both in Papua New Guinea, Shelby County, Iowa, and beyond attest to the genuineness of his missionary and pastoral service. Father David Polich of the Diocese of Des Moines visited Papua New Guinea in 1992 and left impressed by the simplicity of the Archbishop’s living situation:

He had a couple of small rooms to himself. Although he had an air conditioner, much of the compound was not so blessed; and it sat between the jungle and the ocean. The humidity was constant and the temperature high. He could have retired back in the States, but he chose to remain in his adopted land.

This year, Archbishop Arkfeld would have celebrated his one hundredth birthday on February 4. Creighton University honored him with an exhibit of Papua New Guinean art works on March 22, 2012. The convocation of priests of the Diocese of Des Moines rekindled in me an interest in the life of the “Flying Bishop” and an appreciation for other heroes of my own Divine Word Missionary congregation. Recognizing the good through others’ eyes is an interesting dynamic. ■



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Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General, United Nations, March 22, 2010

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Seminarian Samuel Balkono SVD had the chance to visit Father John Hung Le SVD, who is the pastor of an isolated mission station in the Papua New Guinea highlands. The way to the village is a narrow, winding road through the mountains. This terrified Samuel, "I believe some of the scenery was probably beautiful, but for most of the journey my hands covered my eyes."

Similar missionary stories have been told for centuries. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul describes one of his own missionary journeys: "As for myself, when I came to you I did not come proclaiming God's testimony with any particular eloquence or wisdom. No, I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. When I came among you, it was in weakness and fear and with much trepidation."

Our seminarian Samuel might have said the same thing. He had not yet mastered the local language; he was still not fully at home in his surroundings; and he was filled with fear and anxiety. Yet he was there to witness to Christ.



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