

**PRESS STATEMENT READ BY VERY REV. FR. ANDREW CAMPBELL, SVD, PARISH PRIEST OF CHRIST THE KING CATHOLIC CHURCH AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN CONNECTION WITH THE 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES (SVD) IN GHANA – 9<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2013**

Very Rev. Fr. George Angmor, Acting Provincial Superior, Ghana Province,

My Confreres and other members of the Arnoldus family ,

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Media, Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

On behalf of the Ghana Province of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) and the Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS), I bid you all a very good morning and welcome to this Press Conference. We are grateful to you all, especially, to our ladies and gentlemen of the Press for accepting our invitation.

Unfortunately, our Provincial Superior, Very Rev. Fr. Thomas D’Mello is unable to be with us because of ill health. You, however, can be sure that he also extends his warm sentiments and is following what we are doing now. Let me request all of you to keep him in your prayers for God’s healing mercies so that he can join us soon.

This Press Conference is not only to herald the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the coming of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), but also to invite you Ladies and Gentlemen of the media to help make known what by the grace of God we have been able to achieve not only through the support of our foreign benefactors but also and especially, through the support of the many Ghanaians among whom we have worked in the past 75 years. Most of all however, this press conference is to ask you to help us solicit support for the realization of some very important projects that we have for the future.

#### **WHO ARE THE DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES (SVD)?**

The Divine Word Missionaries, also known as The Society of the Divine Word or by its acronym SVD was founded by a German Diocesan Priest, St. Arnold Janssen on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1875 in Steyl, in the Netherlands where its first house was opened. Its acronym, SVD comes out of the Latin name ‘Societas Verbi Domini’.

The Divine Word Missionaries are members of an International Catholic Religious Missionary Congregation. We work first and foremost where the gospel has not been preached at all or only insufficiently and where the local church is not viable on its own. The Congregation therefore has as its slogan, **“The World is our Parish”**. Our numerical strength today stands at 5,986, including Bishops, Priests, Brothers and Seminarians spread over 70 countries in all the continents.

Our counterparts (from the same founder) the Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS) also number 3,103, of 47 nationalities working in 55 countries in all the 5 continents and the Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration who number about 600.

#### **COMING TO THE GOLD COAST**

Our Congregation came to the help of the Society of African Missions (SMA) who had arrived in the Gold Coast earlier but were then encountering personnel shortage as a result of tropical diseases. Rev. Fr. August Gehring and Rev. Fr. Alphonse Elsbernd, the first SVD Missionaries to the Gold Coast, landed on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1938. Fr. Elsbernd was alone as an SVD for some months after Fr. Gehring left due to illness on 14 December 1938. The next one to come was Fr. Harold Rigney in July 1939. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1939, Fr. Adolf Noser and Fr. John Dauphine, the first African American SVD Priest to come to the Gold Coast arrived. In 1939 Rev. Fr. Noser became the first Mission Superior of the SVD in Accra.

A little more than two years after the arrival of these pioneering SVD Missionaries, the SMA ceded the eastern portion of the Vicariate of Cape Coast to our Congregation. The territory placed under the care of the SVD stretched from Accra to Ada, through the whole of the Eastern Region including the Afram Plains to even some parts of the present day Volta Region.

The above situation called for more missionaries. January 1940 saw the coming of another SVD Priest of African descent, Rev. Fr. Joseph Oliver Bowers, a British subject of the Dominica Islands in West Indies and Fr. Anthony Bauer. In January 1941, Rev. Bro. James Doerfler, the first SVD Brother to the Gold Coast arrived with Fr. Cletus Hodapp.

## **WHY ARE WE HERE?**

After the above historical sketch of the SVD Missionaries and our coming to the Gold Coast, one may want to know what we are doing here.

Our slogan “**The World is Our Parish**”, and our objective as stated earlier, may perhaps explain why we are here. We are here simply to bring the Divine Word made Flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, to this vineyard of God. As Divine Word Missionaries, we allow the example of our Lord Jesus Himself to guide us in our mission.

## **SVD AT WORK**

From the above, the work of the SVD can be summed up as follows:

***Primary evangelization which includes intensive pastoral care in rural areas as well as urban apostolate:***

From a beginning in Accra, the Society can now be found in seven out of the nineteen dioceses in Ghana namely, Accra, Koforidua, the Apostolic Vicariate of Donkorkrom, Techiman, Tamale, Yendi and Cape Coast, working alongside other missionary priests and religious to proclaim the divine word to the world.

- ❖ Biblical apostolate
- ❖ Pastoral, liturgical and music ministry
- ❖ Care for the marginalized
- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Formation of the local people for the priestly and religious missionary life, etc.

**Youth Apostolate:** - We are vigorously engaged in youth Apostolate work through many youth organizations such as the Tarcisians and the Catholic Youth Organisation (CYO) started by our congregation.

**Catechesis:** - We lay emphasis on catechesis as a means for the basic formation of the lay faithful. For the past fifty years, we have managed the St. Martin’s Catechetical Training Centre in Sunson, near Yendi in the north which is now known as St. Martin’s Pastoral Centre.

iii **Building of Churches:** - Many church buildings in many dioceses stand to the credit of many Divine Word Missionaries who served there. A special mention may be made of the Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra. The land for this was acquired and solemnly blessed by Bishop Adolf Noser, SVD in 1951. It was designed by an Architect Rev. Fr. Joseph Jud SVD, and built under the supervision of Brother Baldericus, SVD and others.

iv **Education:** - Apart from hundreds of basic schools dotted all over the country, the following second cycle institutions started by various SVD confreres may be mentioned:

- ❖ St. Thomas Aquinas SHS, Cantonments, Accra
- ❖ Mount Mary Training College, Somanya
- ❖ Pope John’s Seminary/ SHS, Koforidua
- ❖ St. Peter’s SHS, Kwahu – Nkwatia
- ❖ St. Paul’s Technical, Kukurantumi
- ❖ St. Martin’s SHS, Adoagyiri – Nsawam
- ❖ St. Joseph Technical, Saboba
- ❖ Sacred Heart Vocational, James Town Accra
- ❖ St. Margaret Mary Secondary/ Technical, Dansoman Accra
- ❖ St. Paul’s Senior High School, Kwahu-Asakraka
- ❖ St. Joseph Technical, Kwahu Tafo
- ❖ St. Mary’s Vocational, Adeemmra, Afram Plains

## ❖ St. Fidelis Secondary/Technical, Tease, Afram Plains

The SVDs did not only build these schools, but also taught and staffed them to ensure quality education. Among the missionaries were highly qualified academics. A good example is Rev. Fr. John Koster, SVD, who lectured in physics at the University of Ghana. In 1959, he became the first non-Soviet to track the Soviet Sputnik through Radio Astronomy.

One legacy the SVD has left for the Church and the country is the Orthopedic Training Centre which was started by our confrere Brother Tarcisius de Ruyter, SVD in 1961. Today, it is the only Orthopedic Training Centre in West Africa.

In addition many of our confreres are engaged in various human development programmes in the various places where we work:

For example, Fr. Campbell is involved in the Lepers Aid Committee and Children Hospital. Bro. Paul Ayitey is involved in caring for the prisoners at Nsawam.

Other confreres like Bro. Pius Agyemang SVD and Bro. Stephen Domelevo SVD have contributed to sacred music and culture in Ghana as well as the propagation of the catholic faith and teaching through the media respectively.

### **Priestly and Religious Formation of Local People**

Out of the 5,986 SVDs worldwide, 155 are presently in Ghana. It is with pride that we report that Ghana is blessed with a total of 115 local Missionaries – 3 Bishops, 92 Priests and 20 brothers. They are spread as follows;

	Ghana	Abroad
Bishops	2	1
Priests	37	55
Brothers	13	7

The 2 Bishops in Ghana are Most Rev. Vincent Boi-Nai, Bishop of Yendi and Most Rev. Gabriel Kumordji, Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Donkorkrom. The one abroad is Most Rev. Franklin Nubuasah, Bishop of Francistown, Botswana. It will be noticed that we have more Ghanaian SVD confreres serving abroad than we have in Ghana. They can be found in various faraway countries across the world.

In fact, there are 63 Ghanaian born-SVDs abroad and 52 in Ghana. They are indeed “Ghana’s religious ambassadors” in their mission countries.

Ghana, as it were, is now paying back to the world, what earlier foreign missionaries did for her in bringing the Divine Word made Flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ to our shores. Those in Ghana are serving in various dioceses across the country together with their 55 expatriate confreres made up of 48 priests and 7 brothers.

It needs be put on record that the first African to profess vows as an SVD was Bro. James Djadoo a Togolese national. Bro. James, who professed his first vows in 1958 in the USA, has worked in Ghana since then and is now on retirement at our residence at McCarthy Hill, Accra. Six years later, in September 1964, Bro. Pius Agyemang became the first Ghanaian to profess his vows.

In 1970 the first two Ghanaian SVD priests were ordained in Techny, USA. They are Very Rev. Frs. Patrick Ofori and Frank Ankrah. Fr. Ofori is currently the Parish Priest of St. Margaret Mary Parish, Dansoman, Accra.

### **Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS)**

There are 31 Ghanaian Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS). Five (5) are serving outside Ghana and the other 26 are here together with 35 expatriate Sisters. This brings the number of Holy Spirit Sisters in Ghana to a total of 61.

### **Collaboration**

We have worked with other Religious Congregations and the Diocesan Clergy to spread the message of the Divine Word here under the guidance and direction of our Bishops and Archbishops. It is worth noting that our confrere Bishop Joseph Oliver Bowers, SVD founded the Sisters of the Handmaids of the Divine Redeemer who are engaged in various ministries in Ghana. The role of the lay faithful cannot be overlooked. If any success has been achieved then it is due to the collaborative efforts of all.

We wish to express our gratitude to the civil authorities of the country for their assistance and honours done many of our Confreres, especially, Most Rev. Joseph Oliver Bowers, Bro. Tarcisius de Ruyter and Rev. Fr. Andrew Campbell, by bestowing on them various national awards. We also wish to thank the Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference for the support they have given to our congregation all these years and for recognizing the work of some of our confreres namely; Bro. James Djadoo SVD who founded Our Lady of Perpetual Help Confraternity in Ghana, Bro. Rudy Chamenyi SVD, Bro. Stephen Domelevo SVD and indeed many others.

### **DIAMOND JUBILEE**

Ebenezer, yes again, Ebenezer, this is how far the Lord has brought the Ghana Province of the Divine Word Missionaries. This is what we want to mark with a one year celebration starting from 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 when we launch the celebration of our Diamond Jubilee in Ghana with an Enthronement of the Word of God here at Christ the King Parish Hall. The climax will be on 22 November, 2014.

The theme and slogan for our Diamond Jubilee are:

**Theme: “75 years of SVD Evangelisation in Ghana: Knowing, Living and Sharing  
The Word of God”**

**Slogan: “Living the Divine Word ..... We Change our World”**

### **MEMORIAL**

We shall continue to pursue, as a cardinal obligation of our mission, the spiritual growth as well as to attend to the well-being of the people, especially the marginalized, that God has entrusted to our care. It is in this regard that as a memorial to our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary we propose to undertake a two-legged project to be known as the St. Arnold Janssen Spiritual and Social Centre with its twin centre to be called the Rev. Fr. Martin Wels, SVD Refuge Centre.

The St. Arnold Janssen Spirituality Centre will be at Tuba, and work on this, I am happy to announce, has already started. This Centre is meant to provide the following:

- ❖ Spiritual Renewal
- ❖ Biblical Apostolate
- ❖ Liturgical, Pastoral and Musical Formation, among others
- ❖ Pre-marital catechesis targeting young people in view of their future marriage.
- ❖ The Rev. Fr. Martin Wels SVD Refuge Centre, on the other hand, will be located at a place easily accessible to abused children and youth, especially those in their teens and are so vulnerable. This Centre is meant to give solace and the opportunity for rehabilitation to many children, who through no fault of their own, are subjected to constant abuse and are living in fear and hopelessness. These children stand in danger of losing their God-given happy childhood. You see them every day in our streets, lorry stations and under the traffic lights. Some may be hawking wares, often heavier than they should carry. At night you may see some of them sleeping behind their wares at the traffic lights and other obscure and dangerous places. There are many others we even do not see at all. Just

stop and talk to those you may see and you will hear their heart rending stories. These children are walking not only with pain in their hearts but more terrifyingly with no hope for their future.

The total cost of the anniversary project is GHc 5.4m (approximately \$2.7m). The Arnold Janssen Spiritual Centre will cost GHc3m (approximately \$1.5m) while the Rev. Fr. Martin Wels SVD Refuge Centre will be GHc2.4m (approximately \$ 1.2m). We consequently come to you in the name of our Ever Merciful God to partner us to solicit financial help for this project. Many people in Ghana stand in urgent need of this Spiritual Centre as our world is being overtaken by materialism and decadence. Our Youth stand in urgent need of this Refuge Centre so as to wipe their tears and take away their pains. We implore you ladies and gentlemen of the media to help spread the news of our project to people who can help us restore hope in our otherwise doomed youth; else we only will stand by as we witness a generation of lost childhood slip by.

## CONCLUSION

The world today stands in greater need of re-evangelization. We the Divine Word Missionaries need to rekindle the Divine Word in us first and then help spread it to all people. We give thanks to God for Rev. Fr. August Gehring SVD and Rev. Fr. Alphonse Elsbernd SVD, all the earlier Divine Word Missionaries and other collaborators who first brought the Divine Word to the Gold Coast. We thank God also for all the other missionaries who followed them and for those of us presently here.

The Divine Word Missionaries are also thankful to the people of this country for the warm welcome you gave and continue to give to our confreres who come from other countries. Your hospitality has endeared this country so much to them that many of our non-Ghanaian confreres have adopted Ghana as their home. It is no wonder that many are buried here, and some of those alive today also wish to live the rest of their lives here and be buried in Ghana.

The Divine Word Missionaries today recommit themselves to redouble their efforts in doing the work of evangelization with more love and enthusiasm in Ghana for the Lord. We will also work harder to bring solace and hope to the many marginalized people of Ghana. The Divine Word Missionaries invite all people to join our crusade in this vineyard of the Lord: **Living the Divine Word we change the world.**

May the Darkness of sin and the night of unbelief vanish before the light of the word and the Spirit of grace and may the heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people. Amen.

Thank you for your attention.

God bless you.