

Archbishop Nketsiah says Ghanaian church proud to send priests as missionaries

VICTORIA, Texas – Archbishop Matthias K. Nketsiah of Cape Coast, Ghana, said he is excited that his country can provide Catholic priests to serve as missionaries in other countries facing a priest shortage, because he sees it as a way to repay the West for fostering the church in Ghana.

The church in West is “our mother church because they gave us birth, planted the faith, sacrificed lives,” he said.

“It wasn’t easy. They sacrificed a lot. The first missionary to Ghana died of malaria, then religious sisters came,” the archbishop said. “Some were 19 years old and knew they were going to die.”

“Now it’s time for us to return the compliment. We know the situation, the lack of priests. It’s not that we don’t need them. ... I could open three parishes now, but we make the sacrifice, so that the faith and ministry may go on here (in the United States).”

Archbishop Nketsiah, 69, made the comments in an interview with The Catholic Lighthouse, newspaper of the Victoria Diocese, where 16 of its 64 priests are from Ghana. Many of them have become U.S. citizens and are pastors of parishes.

He has headed the Archdiocese of Cape Coast since 2010. He succeeded Cardinal Peter Turkson, who is now head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Of the archdiocese’s 130 priests, 15 live in the United States and another 10 live in Europe. In the U.S. Cape Coast priests serve in Seattle, New Orleans, New York, Chicago, Albany and Victoria. The archbishop spent May 9 to June 6 traveling to visit his priests.

He said that the Western church can still help the church in Ghana, where there are

four archdioceses, 15 dioceses and one apostolic vicariate.

In the Cape Coast Archdiocese, “we need to continue training people; financial help is essential, so the supply of priests can continue,” he said.

“We need a pastoral center, where we can form priests, laypeople, catechists. We need those structures, such as catechetical centers, for training and forming the faithful,” he explained.

“We feel that now we need to be self-reliant financially, so I intend to get churches to invest in financial, income-generating projects,” he added, emphasizing the word “invest” – “so that it’s a win-win situation.”

“Right now, the response has been muted,” the archbishop said, referring to his efforts to find funding during his travels.

“For me, begging is not pleasant,” he said with a smile.

Archbishop Nketsiah said he realizes it is not easy for his priests to be missionaries or for the Western church in terms of adapting to one another. “We come here as a product of our culture and come to minister in a Western culture, and the two are different.”

He said that it is especially difficult because of the priests’ accent, so he advises his priests to speak slowly when ministering in a different country.

“When one gets excited, he speaks faster and the language gets garbled,” he said. “That may be part of the difficulty when we come to help.”

Back home in Ghana, one of the challenges the Catholic Church as well as the 10 mainline Protestant denominations face is the many Pentecostal churches in Ghana.

“The Pentecostals are a bother; they challenge every practice of our faith,” Archbishop Nketsiah said. “They preach an easy faith, and they get the youth.”

While the church in Ghana is eager to provide missionaries to the U.S., he said, at the same time, “we are praying that your own vocations go up, because it is more effective when one ministers in one’s own country and culture.”