

# New York doctor hopes to create orthopedic surgery center in Ghana

ALBANY, N.Y. – An Albany-area Catholic couple's plan to bring orthopedic surgery where it is sorely needed – the Cape Coast area of the West African country of Ghana – has ballooned into a charitable organization with 15 directors, countless donors and support from the Vatican and the Archdiocese of Cape Coast.

Only 12 physicians practice orthopedic surgery in Ghana, a country of 24 million people. Families sometimes need to drive injured loved ones – if they have a car – for three to six hours to see a surgeon for a broken leg.

Otherwise, open fractures could get infected and lead to amputations or worse. There are no ambulances or emergency call systems.

Through the organization *Medicus in Christi* (Doctor in Christ), Dr. Joe Marotta and his wife, Kathleen, a nurse, aim not only to launch an orthopedic and rehabilitation center in Ghana, but to partner with teaching hospitals to create a network of bone and joint centers and teach African physicians to perform orthopedic surgery.

Accomplishing that may take a decade, hundreds of volunteers and a budget of millions of dollars.

But “there's no limit to what the possibilities are,” said Marotta, an orthopedic surgeon who works at Burdett Orthopedics and is chief of surgery at Samaritan Hospital, both in Troy. “It takes a certain amount of faith, and it takes a certain amount of prayer.”

Marotta's idea started crystallizing during Mass one Sunday at St. Joan of Arc Parish in Menands, when a visiting priest from Italy delivered a stirring homily about service.

“He really struck me. From that moment on, I had a new calling,” the doctor told *The Evangelist*, Albany diocesan newspaper, adding that he has been blessed with good fortune, a wife and two children. “I've never really suffered from anything. It

struck me that, ‘Hey, it’s time to do something for somebody other than myself.’”

He approached his pastor, Father Kofi Ntsiful-Amissah, a native of the central region of Ghana, where the priest’s family still resides. Father Ntsiful-Amissah grew up with Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson, now president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Currently, Medicus in Christi’s leaders are concentrating on fundraising: applying for grants from the Knights of Columbus, the Knights of Malta, Catholic Relief Services, USAID and Arthrex, an orthopedic products company.

Already, money has poured in from St. Joan of Arc parishioners; from Marotta’s former and current colleagues; from alumni of his alma mater, Siena College in Loudonville; and from alumni of schools where he studied medicine, was trained in orthopedics and completed a fellowship.

In recent weeks, the organization has approached more orthopedic equipment manufacturers and Catholic organizations. The board hopes to raise \$75,000 to send its first working team to Ghana next year.

“When I started two years ago, I knew nothing about this stuff,” Marotta said. “I’ve really been re-energized by this. It was a big boost for me emotionally.”

And if creating an orthopedic surgery center in Ghana works out, it could inspire others. “If we can do it in orthopedic surgery, we can do it in ... other medical specialties in any country,” he said.

With Marotta’s confidence comes a grain of humility. If Medicus in Christi doesn’t take off as he plans, he still wants to use his own time and resources to travel to Ghana and perform surgeries.

“If that was all it ever amounted to,” he said, “that would be good, too.”

*For more information or to donate, visit <https://medicusinchristi.org>.*