

Call to Service

CATHOLIC REGISTER SPECIAL FEATURE

Sharing God's love with the world

Reflection of a priest on his ministry

BY FR. YAW ACHEAMPONG
Catholic Register Special

On the spring morning of Saturday, May 8, 2004, I was ordained a priest. Just after the spirit-filled and joyful ceremony at St. Michael's Cathedral, the Director of Priest Personnel gave me my letter of appointment from the archbishop. The letter reminded me of the motto that my classmates had chosen for our ordination: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). After a few weeks of vacation, I reported to my pastor at St. Rose of Lima Parish on Canada Day to begin my new faith journey.

As a newly ordained priest I was both excited and nervous. On my first day, I quickly learned that the parish was busy. I was unpacking when I was called by a nursing home to come and celebrate the Anointing of the Sick for one of the residents who was dying.

As the associate pastor, I took instructions from my pastor. However, he encouraged me to use my own gifts to serve the community in the way that worked for me. I needed to learn quickly to cope with the pace of the activities in the parish life. I became familiar with the rhythm of the parish: celebration of the sacraments, funerals, weddings, visits to five nursing homes, visits to the four schools within the parish and a day off in every week.

What I enjoyed most was my visits to the Scarborough General Hospital community. There, I made use of my experience from the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program to minister to the community. I developed a keen interest in the ministry. After two years in the parish ministry, and with further CPE training, I was sent to the communities of St. Michael's Hospital and the neighbouring hospitals for several years.

After experiencing ministry in both parish and hospital settings, I see my ministry as being sent by the Lord to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and to bring His love to others. Personally I see the gifts from my work life prior to



Fr. Yaw Acheampong understands that his priesthood is about using his God-given gifts to serve others. (Register file photo)

the seminary and the CPE courses as contributing to my understanding of the priesthood: that my priesthood is about serving others with my God-given gifts.

I have experienced that offering myself for the service of others comes with challenges, uncertainties, pain and temptations. In the fourth year of my priesthood, there was one Christmas morning, while I was riding in the streetcar on my way to the hospital to serve, I felt sad and frustrated. I reminisced on what I used to do on Christmas Day in my previous work life. I would travel and visit friends.

At the hospital entrance, I dragged my feet through the doors. That Christmas Day was very busy. I found it difficult to start, but I managed to visit patients to listen to their needs: to bring them the Eucharist, celebrate the Anointing of the Sick. Most of the patients were lonely. I spent some time with two different families who had just lost their loved ones and some time with the staff. At the end of the day I felt tired.

Like I did everyday, I went to sit down quietly in the chapel to reflect on what had happened on that day. Suddenly I was filled with joy. I was joyful that the Lord

had brought me to the hospital to bring His love to the suffering on Christmas Day. I came to work feeling miserable and yet I ended the day filled with joy and life from what God had done for me. I considered this experience of spiritual transformation as a form of growth and it made me look at the priesthood with new eyes of faith. I became more aware of my call to commitment and selflessness for the sake of others.

During my priesthood, the four most common questions that I have been asked are where do I come from; what made me become a priest; what is it like for me to be a priest and what is the most challenging to me? Why was I asked these questions? The archdiocese has become more diverse than ever before and it is reflected in the priests in the archdiocese. I recognized that coming from a different background — having been raised in Ghana — I have become a source of inspiration and hope to the faithful who share the same background with me.

I remember an encounter I had with a family who started to encourage their young son to consider becoming a priest like me. I find preaching the most chal-

lenging. I have come to realize that preaching in a parish or a hospital is different from the preaching I experienced in the seminary. Bringing out the message of hope from a harsh and difficult biblical passage is a continuing challenge for me.

Looking back to the beginning

of my priesthood, I consider the first five years as a unique period in my faith journey. During this time I met many clergy and people from across God's communities who supported me. It was in this period that I learned to open up to the working of the Spirit. I feel I am called to do many things and something new always comes up. During this pandemic, I am responsible for keeping everybody safe in the church.

However, I realize I cannot do everything that the parish requires by myself. The recent renewal of stewardship spirit in our parishes has reminded me that I am also a steward sharing the gift of my priesthood with the community of faith. Every day I am inspired by the stewardship of the faithful. Every day I see faith in action reflecting the love of God and His goodness in our communities.

At this stage of my priesthood, I have come to realize that it is God who brings into completion whatever we do. This brings me hope. This is the hope that I have for the Church. At the end of every day I join the Blessed Mother in singing "the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name" in joyful gratitude to God for the gift of my priesthood.

(Fr. Acheampong is pastor at Our Lady of Peace Parish in Toronto.)

**TRANQUILITY
STABILITY
PEACE**

Is God calling you to a monastic vocation?

Spend one - two weeks in a Benedictine monastery

**Peter Novecosky, OSB, Vocation Director
St. Peter's Abbey**

Box 10, Muenster, SK S0K 2Y0
Ph. 306-682-1788 • peternovecosky@gmail.com
Check out our website: www.stpetersabbey.ca