

Global priest

Continued from page 9

going to Africa. That dream came true in 1947, when he was assigned to the Gold Coast, a British colony on the west coast of Africa.

Father Erb began teaching at Mount Mary Teachers' Training College in Somalia. He also labored as a pastor and as a traveling publicist for the Gospel. In the Gold Coast, the new missionary used films and records to spread the Word of God.

"I've had four cinema vans throughout the years," he said. "I traveled all over." In

village after village, Father Erb would set up his projector and turntable, mixing Hollywood movies and shorts with educational and religious films to keep his audiences interested.

"These people were seeing films for the first time," he remarked. He recalled one small boy asking: "Father, how did you get those pictures of Jesus, Mary and Joseph?" The missionary replied: "Oh, we Americans, we had a lot of people all over the world in those days."

On the more serious side, Father Erb worked at organizing Catholic Action in the diocese of Accra, the colony's capital, and founding the Accra Catholic Press Bu-

reau. He also produced films on missionary work, which were shown on American television in the 1950s.

Father Erb noted that the Divine Word missionaries worked diligently to move native Catholics into positions of authority within the church. Kumasi, one of the Gold Coast's major cities, was the site of a West African Eucharistic Congress that in 1951 drew 80,000 people.

The African laity played a prominent part in the congress, he said proudly. "Twenty-six lay men and women were lecturing on the Eucharist," he said. "Let the laity talk," was the priest's slogan.

The Gold Coast became the independent country of Ghana in 1957, and Father Erb's work among the nation's Catholic laity reflected a similar drive to establish a native Catholicism. By the time the Second Vatican Council rolled around, the priest's work in training lay Eucharistic ministers and catechists had anticipated the council's pronouncements on the importance of lay participation in the church.

"(People are) always saying the missions are behind the times," he said. "We had the laity involved before Vatican II."

The missionary continued his catechetical and pastoral work throughout the 1960s, returning frequently to the United States to help publicize the Divine Word missionaries' work.

The 1970s saw the missionary expanding his communications efforts through his

position as executive director of Department of Social Communications for the National Catholic Secretariat in Ghana. The highlight of his duties was attending to needs of the 60 foreign journalists who accompanied Pope John Paul II on his trip to Ghana in 1979.

"I've got a picture of the pope and me," he said, spreading his arms wide to show how the pope looked in the photo. "I told him a Polish joke," he added, laughing.

Father Erb also served as chaplain to the government hospital in Korle. While there, he managed to secure donations of as much as to \$35,000 to have a chapel built. The new chapel replaced "a chapel with a sign on it that said 'chapel,' right next to the mortuary," he recalled, noting that he didn't think it was good for his congregation to be contemplating the corpses next door during Mass.

The priest officially retired in 1980, but stayed in Ghana doing pastoral work until earlier this year. He is currently serving as parish administrator at St. Monica's Church.

Although Father Erb said he is "here to stay," the former missionary's African past may crop up from time to time. One day, a woman called the parish and asked for "Father Kofi Duku." The puzzled parish secretary who took the message later told Father Erb what had happened.

"Oh, that's my name — my African name," he told her with a smile.

Drugs

Continued from page 5

In Colombia, Galan's murder followed closely the assassination of Colombian Appeals Court Judge Carlos Ernesto Valencia by suspected drug traffickers. Judge Valencia was shot dead only hours after he upheld an arrest warrant for accused Medellin cartel leader Pablo Escobar.

Valencia is one of more than 50 judges who have been killed in Colombia in the last 10 years for standing up to drug traffickers. Others have given in to the kingpins, refusing to throw them in jail. It is said in Colombia the judges have a choice of "plata o plomo" — silver or lead; that is, accept a bribe or you and your family are dead.

"The incredible quantities of money held by the drug kingpins make it easy for them to buy the consciences of the average Colombian as well as the government official," said Monsignor Alvaro Fandino Franky, undersecretary to the general secretary of the Colombian bishops' conference.

In a telephone interview from Bogota, Monsignor Fandino told Catholic News Service drug traffickers have so much money that they "subvert every kind of value that exists." Some have used their dollars to build health clinics and housing for the poor in an attempt to improve their standing in the eyes of the public, he said.

"They've even tried to give their money to the church ... offering to donate money for the construction of chapels and schools," said Monsignor Fandino, who noted that the Colombian bishops refused to accept the "hot money."

He said most Colombians feel the demand for drugs in the United States is "so great that there is very little one isolated country" like their own can do to stop the trafficking.

More than 2,000 miles to the north in New York, Bohlen concurred, saying there is "a need to attack the supply side, but we can't just do that, we have to take steps to attack the demand."

In the United States the highly addictive form of cocaine known as crack has been blamed for skyrocketing homicide rates. Crack dealers shoot each other in turf disputes. They shoot clients who are late with payments. And they shoot police officers trying to halt their activities.

"You can seal off all the borders you want, but this is a big business involving billions and billions of dollars. People that want the drugs will find them," Bohlen said.

She said she was "a little bit disappointed" that President Bush's proposal seemed to emphasize law enforcement more than education and treatment. "Treatment on demand" to bring drug abusers immediate care is worth consideration nationwide, she said.

Nonetheless she said that "I think it certainly is a good beginning."

In the long run, she said it is essential that more federal funds be allocated to community-based drug education programs at home. Although the effects of drug abuse are more visible in poor city neighborhoods, they are as severe in wealthy suburbs, she said. "I think there's still a tremendous amount of denial within fa-

milies and local communities," she added.

Her program, which operates 12 regional offices within the New York Archdiocese, has trained some 30,000 people to participate in mini-patrols in their neighborhoods, reporting drug deals they see to the police and then following up to make sure action has been taken.

Trainees are also taught to refer members of their communities who need assistance to self-help organizations, including Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous.

Sometimes abusers themselves turn to the program, Bohlen said, because "they feel a bond to the church, and they need that kind of non-threatening group to get them through."

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