

DIOCESAN NEWS

Fr. Charles Erb, 96; noted missionary

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Divine Word Missionary Father Charles G. Erb planted the seeds of a new diocese in Ghana, west Africa; reunited with his seminary classmates in a concentration camp; and organized one of Africa's largest-ever eucharistic congresses.

The storied priest, who grew up attending Holy Family Church and School in Rochester, died Aug. 14, 2002, in Techy, Ill., at the Divine Word Missionary community. He was 96.

A memorial Mass will be celebrated for the priest on Thursday, Aug. 22, at 7 p.m. in Holy Family Church, 415 Ames St., Rochester.

Father Erb came from an extended family that has produced many vocations, and his survivors include his nieces Sister Gertrude Erb, pastoral associate at St. Ambrose Parish, Rochester, and Sister Helen Marie Yockel, a Holy Spirit sister in Techy; his cousin, Father Francis J. Erb of Savona, N.Y.; his nephew, Father Raymond Quetchenbach, SVD, of Techy; and his grandnephew, Deacon John Erb of Community of Hope in Rochester.

"I've been nursing him for the past two years, and I found him a man whose whole heart was in the church," Father Quetchenbach said of his uncle. "One of our men from Ghana said he was the greatest missionary he ever met."

Father Erb harbored a love of missionary life from an early age. As a little boy, Father Erb read *The Little Missionary*, a weekly magazine detailing life in the church's overseas missions and a periodical he grew up to edit as an adult. Father Erb entered the minor seminary of the Society of the Divine Word in Girard, Pa., when he was



14. With ambitions to be an anthropologist, he went to Austria to complete his studies, and was ordained to the priesthood there in May of 1933.

Father Erb was first assigned to Techy, and then East Troy, Wis., where he served as prefect of discipline in the order's houses, and edited *The Little Missionary* and *The Shepherd*, a magazine aimed at future priests.

When World War II began, Father Erb volunteered to be an army chaplain, and served in both Alaska and in Europe, where his command of German proved useful. He was part of the 42nd Division (Rainbow) Artillery that liberated Dachau, one of the most notorious Nazi death camps. It was there he reunited with two Divine Word missionaries who had been ordained with him in Austria. A *Catholic Courier Journal* article from 1945 detailed the feelings of one of the men upon meeting Father Erb.

"What happiness when we recognized our American confrere! We cried and laughed with joy and relief," the Austrian priest said.

A Bronze Star recipient, Father Erb was honorably discharged as a major in 1946, and was assigned to the Gold Coast, a British West Africa colony. The colony was renamed Ghana upon independence in 1957. In 1951, the priest organized an African eucharistic congress that drew 80,000 people to Kumasi, one of the colony's largest cities.

Father Erb served in Africa until 1953, returning to work in the United States to promote his order's missions and do vocations recruitment throughout the country. He then went to Rome in 1958 to be publicity coordinator for his order.

In 1960, Father Erb returned to Ghana where he opened a mission in the Yendi District. This mission grew and grew, and eventually became a diocese in 1999. Along with this, one of his proudest moments was when a Ghanaian Divine Word Missionary priest, Father Vincent Boi-Nai, was named the new diocese's first bishop, according to Sister Erb. In a letter to Father Erb, the bishop credited him with laying the foundations for the diocese.

"What you dreamt long ago has now materialized, and we salute you for a being a prophet of your times!" the bishop wrote.

Father Erb produced several films documenting mission life in Africa, and directed Catholic social communications for all of Ghana from 1970-76. He then entered semi-retirement and assisted in various parishes in the Accra District and at a government hospital. Pope John Paul II awarded him the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Medal in 1987 in recognition of his labors in Ghana.

Father Erb returned to the United States in 1989, and briefly served as parish administrator of St. Monica's Parish in Rochester. He spent most of his later years in Bordentown, N.J., assisting in parishes and working with veterans' groups. Failing health compelled him to move to Techy in 1998.

A Mass of Christian burial was celebrated Aug. 19 in Techy. Interment took place at St. Mary's Cemetery there. Memorial donations may be sent to Father Raymond Quetchenbach, SVD, Divine Word Missionaries, Techy, IL 60082.

Recognizing

Dr. Monica Weis, SSJ, English professor at Rochester's Nazareth College, attended the June 10-14 Thomas Merton Foundation retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Ky. Eighteen guests from around the world were invited to the retreat. Weis has served the International Thomas Merton Society as its vice president (1995-97) and on its board of directors (1998-05, 1999-2001).

St. Augustine University in Rochester, N.Y., has named Dr. Weis as its first female president.

The 2002 National Catholic Book Award for Best Catholic Book has been awarded to *The Way of Zen* by Fr. Thomas Merton, S.J., published by Doubleday. The award is presented annually to the author of the best Catholic book published in the United States during the year.

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Note to readers

"Along the Way" is not available this week due to technical difficulties.



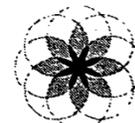
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