

Archbishop Fulton Sheen Catholic Academies
Mission Trip
Deacon Joe and John Dockery-Jackson
August 2008

Friday, August 1, 2008 – 7:37 a.m. Ghana time (2:37 a.m. Rock Island time)

We are over Ghana on our way to Accra. We've travelled 5,300 miles from New York. It's been an uneventful flight so far. I started dozing/trying to sleep at about 10:30 p.m. (Rock Island time) last night. I didn't sleep as much as just quiet myself by praying Hail Mary's. A recurrent thought was how thankful to God I am for everything, especially Mary Anne.

Before the flight started, one of the flight attendants was going up and down the aisle asking if a party of two would be willing to change seats. John & I were sitting in almost the exact center of the plane. I volunteered us and we ended up in the very last row (Row 42). The flight attendant explained that the two people who wished to switch said that they would throw up the whole flight if they didn't change seats. That would not have been a pleasant flight. I thought the ride from the back of the plane was great (although there was a constant stream of people the whole flight going back and forth to the restroom which was almost directly behind us.

The plane was packed. There are lots of Africans, but also lots of people who looked like they came from all over the world. While doing our document check in New York, we met a principal of a U.S. school in Accra. He and his wife are both Americans. They come home 4 times per year. His wife was born in Batavia, Illinois.

I'm feeling surprisingly well for it being 3:00 a.m. Rock Island time. We are about to land, so all for now.

Friday, August 1, 2008 – 5:05 p.m. Ghana time

I've changed my watch over to Ghana time. I guess that means I've really arrived. We had no problem at the airport. They unloaded the plane from both ends, so John & I were among the first to get off. We sailed through immigration and then waited about an hour for our luggage. The luggage started arriving on the conveyor belt right away, but with 300+ passengers on the plane, it took a while. Everyone at the baggage claim was very friendly and helpful. We were chatting with a flight attendant after landing while waiting for the plane door to open. We told the flight attendant that it was our first visit to Ghana and that we were going to be working with Fr. Michael. When we were standing at the baggage claim, one of the passengers that had entered our conversation on the plane, a native Ghanaian, approached us and identified himself as a Methodist minister. I explained that I was a Catholic Deacon. He gave us his phone number just in case we needed a ride.

After picking up our luggage, we headed towards Customs. There was a sign, "For Nothing to Declare". I had no idea what was declarable, so we approached the Lost Luggage desk and asked what needed to be declared. It appears that everyone must go

through that door, as the Lost Luggage folks just directed us through that passageway. There were a number of stations set up where they were stopping people and going through luggage, but we were waved right through. I was worried about what they would say about our 20 deflated soccer balls stuffed into John and my luggage. We had all four of our suitcases on a single 'trolley' that we pushed towards the exit. We were stopped before leaving the terminal area and had to show our luggage claim tickets we had received in New York when we checked the luggage. The airport worker carefully matched our bags to the claim tickets. It was lucky for us that we still had the tickets and even luckier that we could find them.

Outside the airport, it was just as Sherri Logan had described. There were barricades set up and a crowd standing behind the barricades. Fr. Michael was energetically waving to us. It seemed like about ½ the people were waiting on someone to arrive and the other half were waiting to 'help' the exiting passengers. Fr. Michael positioned himself so that he was also pushing the trolley and kept the helpers away. At times, he had to be fairly direct and firm with them. It appears that 'helping' was how these young men made their living. It almost seemed like a modified form of begging. Fr. Michael says there's been an exodus from the villages to the large cities and there's work in the villages that's just not getting done for lack of workers while many people in the large cities resort to 'helping' or selling anything and everything to people in cars stuck in the massive traffic jams in the cities.

Fr. Michael's car broke down yesterday, so we are using his cousin's car for now. Fr. Michael left us to go to pay for the parking and we were approached by a 'helper' who wanted a 'tip' for grabbing our empty trolley to bring it back to the airport. It was tough, but I told him he would need to wait and Fr. Michael would take care of it when he got back. The 'helper' went for a friend, maybe a 'helper supervisor' who repeated the request for a 'tip' - \$5 - \$10 would be fine. I told him that Fr. Michael would be back in a minute and he would take care of things. They didn't want to wait around and left. Fr. Michael returned soon after. It's so bad that there are even people waiting by the gate to 'help' you put your receipt in the automated gate box for you.

It's hard to describe the urban area we went through, but we do have pictures. Half-completed block buildings were everywhere. Each seemed to be operating a business. There were a lot of places selling building supplies. It was chaotic – obviously no zoning laws in effect. Barbershops and restaurants right on top of auto repair shops. It seems like there were a fairly large number of barber shops and beauty salons. We also saw a fair number of buildings labeled 'schools'. I later came to understand that there are a fair number of for-profit schools that have popped up recently. The quality of these schools is uneven at best. At every traffic congestion point, there were (literally) street vendors approaching your car to peddle their wares. Sometimes it was the most unlikely merchandise – automobile cell phone chargers or television remotes. Even when we left the urban bustle, there were regularly vendors set up on the side of the highway selling things. The most unusual merchandise for me was a woman standing by the side of the road holding a huge dead rat by the tail. Yes, it was for sale.

There are police and customs checkpoints set up all over. Some are regular and others just seem to pop up. We went through a police checkpoint on our way out of Accra. No

problems, but it does seem a little unusual to see these AK 47 automatic rifles casually slung over the officer's shoulder.

On the way to Winneba, we talked some about the school project and other possible projects. The thinking on the school project has evolved some. There's now talk of a boarding school for which students will pay tuition. Apparently, the government schools are very uneven in quality, so the idea of just building a building and turning it over to the government to run may not solve the educational problems of the village. The interest now is in having a private school, with local control as a way of ensuring that there is accountability for learning. (This sounds a lot like the issues we are facing in the U.S.!) With the evolution of the project, the nature of our commitment seems to have changed. Rather than partnering for bricks and mortar, we're being asked to partner in an educational (ad)venture. This will take lots more communication and planning and clear understanding of the nature of our commitment.

We will be meeting with the bishop during this trip. Fr. Michael explained that the bishop is stuck in the middle of a school construction project of his own. Initially, the diocese partnered with a group in Germany to build a girls boarding school. All of the buildings are about ½ completed and the German partner has pulled out. Fr. Michael gave us a 'heads up' that the bishop may bring up this project in our discussions. This boarding school is about 30 miles from Fr. Michael's village.

It took over an hour to get to our destination, the first provincial house of the SMA order, in Winneba. We met a Dutch priest, Fr. Harrie von Hoof who lives at the house. We also had a chance to take a shower – no hot water, but as Fr. Michael said, it would be our last shower for a while. At the village we will have a cup to pour over our heads.

We had lunch with Fr. Harrie and Sister Mary Magdalene. It was a time for new foods. The only thing I recognized was the chicken. There was enough for each of us to have one piece. In addition to the chicken we had yam balls – a potato-like vegetable. I'm not sure how they fixed it, but it was like mashed potatoes that were formed into little balls and fried. We also had planten (not sure of the spelling of that) – something like a fried green banana. There was a hot sauce that I sampled, and a salad that we stayed away from. There was a bowl on the table that appeared to be filled with large chunks of carrots. We didn't touch it during the meal and I assumed that we had just forgotten to pass it. It was dessert. It was called PawPaw (again not sure of the spelling) and seemed to be a mix between watermelon and cantaloupe. We had it with ice cream. It was great.

We are staying in Winneba (Windy Bay) which is a noisy place. There was singing going on all day which was associated with a funeral. This evening, we've been hearing the Muslim call to prayer every hour.

Tonight for dinner, we had rice and gravy (hot sauce). It was good. For dessert, we had bananas and green oranges. Sunlight is from about 6:00 a.m. to about 6:00 p.m. We ate dinner at about 6 and then took a walk through Winneba. There are open gutters by the side of the road (about 2 feet deep) that can present problems for both cars and pedestrians. There are also very few streetlights and fairly aggressive taxi drivers. I think both John and I got our first mosquito bites tonight.

Fr. Michael lost much of his email when he changed positions within the SMA. He did receive Dan's email on micro-loans and has even identified a group to participate, but he has lost Dan's email. He also received word on Mary Carton's death but has been unable to contact Bob. Fr. Michael says the family has been in his prayers.

Saturday, August 2, 2008 – 8:00 p.m. Ghana time

We have arrived at the village of Ave-Afiadenyiga (I have seen this spelled a few different ways). It's been an action-packed day. Mass was at 7:00 a.m. The community weaves Morning Prayer into the prayers of the Mass. Sr. Mary Magdalene, a Ghanaian sister, always operates behind the scenes to make things run smoothly. Upon entering the Chapel, I was handed a hymnal and prayer book. I had gotten up early to say the Office, but it was good to pray again in community.

Gray Plunkett was at Mass and then breakfast. Gray is a linguist who has been studying a language in Benin for 20 years. He is a lay missionary. He's originally from Atlanta, Ga. He was truly a lingua-geek. He loved all of the finer points of language and the history of language groups. He was a walking encyclopedia of the languages of that part of Africa. He was in town for a linguistics conference and was on his way to present at a linguistics conference in Ho the coming week.

For breakfast we had a piece of toast with peanut butter and scrambled eggs with vegetables and spices. It tasted great. After breakfast, we packed up to leave the provincial house. Fr. Harrie took about 100 rosaries to give to the local parish priest. We left Winneba and headed to a formation house for SMA located on the outskirts of Accra. Fr. Joseph has replaced Fr. Samuel (who was at St. Pius for a couple of summers) as rector of the house. We met Fr. Joseph and got a tour of the house and grounds. We had a chance to meet a few of the seminarians who were still in residence, even though classes for the term were over. The Franciscans have a house next to the SMA house. Adjacent to both of these houses is a diocesan seminary. All three groups have combined for providing instruction in Philosophy 1 & 2. After that seminarians go elsewhere for theology. We were able to tour the seminary which has about 128 seminarians enrolled. Next year the SMA will have 12 seminarians attending this seminary.

Fr. Joseph has grown quite a garden: corn, yams, planten, soya beans. He tried raising sheep, but their guard dogs killed them. He now has cages for raising rabbits which he thinks will be easier to keep from the dogs. Fr. Joseph hosted us for lunch. We had rice and chicken and fried planten. They call the salsa that you put on the rice, 'gravy'. We had watermelon for dessert.

After lunch, Fr. Michael suggested that John & I nap for about ½ hour. I could get used to this lifestyle. A little after 2:00 p.m., we were ready to hit the road. Fr. Michael called me into Fr. Joseph's room. Fr. Michael had arranged to have Fr. Joseph exchange \$200 U.S. for 200 GH Cedi or Ghanaian dollars. I told Fr. Joseph that I would buy the rabbits to get him started so his seminarians would have a supply of locally grown meat to eat. I invested \$150 for six young rabbits. We left one of our soccer balls with Fr. Joseph which put big smiles on the faces of the 5 seminarians still left on campus. During our

trip to the formation house we were able to see the wall, library and chapel that St. Pius funds had supported.

Before heading for the village, we headed to one of the few malls in Ghana. It was a stark contrast to all of the roadside vendors. If it hadn't been for the plane ride, I would have sworn I was in the U.S. (complete with Caucasian mannequins). We went to the Shop-rite grocery store. We probably spent at least an hour getting into and out of the parking lot. The food seemed much more expensive than in the U.S. It seems clear that the mall and the supermarket serve a small segment of the population. The one wonderful thing about the grocery store was that they were bagging bread (large loaves) straight from the oven. Talk about fresh!

Once back on the road, we were flying down a well-paved 2 lane road heading for the village. Fr. Michael was in a hurry because there were a couple of sections of road he wanted to get by before dark. We did get by those sections just as it got to be dusk. We then took a "short cut" or, as Fr. Michael calls it, a 'bush road'. We were on this road for about 18 miles. Aside from being extremely bumpy (I may never complain about potholes in Rock Island again) we only experienced one moment of extreme interest. That was when a large truck approached us from the other direction. This truck took up both sides of this narrow road. We were truly in the bush as we inched past him. Near the end of our short cut, we took a short cut off of the short cut. We were now on a road only about as wide as our sub-compact car. We were on this road for just a couple of miles. Luckily, there was no traffic going in the other direction. The amazing thing about the bush road was all of the people walking on it in the dark. Sometimes it would be women with children strapped to their backs. Fr. Michael told us the area is very safe. On the bush road, we also began seeing thatched roof villages without electricity. At one point, we passed a wall-less building that had two white caskets on a table. I mentioned this to Fr. Michael. He was non-pulsed and indicated that they manufactured caskets there, a casket factory in a small bush road village without electricity.

So far my strongest impressions involve the urban poverty and the heavy emphasis on commercial feminine beauty. There are swarms of people along the road selling anything and everything related to female beauty. It seemed like every third road-side business was a beauty parlor. And just about every third billboard was promoting something for making a woman's hair or skin more appealing.

We are staying at Fr. Michael's sister's house (compound) just outside the village. It's where Fr. Michael stays when he's in town. His sister lives somewhere else but has come to the village for our arrival. It's a very nice house, almost like a retreat center. There's a large main room and then a couple of wings housing bedrooms. The kitchen is across a small courtyard. In preparation for John & me coming, a bathroom was added to each of our bedrooms. We do not have running water yet, but with a large plastic garbage can filled with rain water and a bucket, we make do nicely. There is a shower stall which we can use to pour water over our heads to clean up. There's electricity in each of the rooms. My suite has a sitting room, bedroom and bathroom. There are screens on all the windows and doors and mosquito net over the bed. Except for the lack of hot water, it's almost nicer than some of the cabins we used to stay at in Michigan. They are preparing dinner for us now and we'll eat in a little while. All for now.

Sunday, August 3, 2008 – 2:30 p.m. Ghana time

We just finished lunch, so it's time for our afternoon rest. Fr. Michael is going to Togo for supplies and will return later this afternoon. We are just a couple of miles from the Togo border which is the reason for the large number of customs checkpoints along most of the roads we travel. Breakfast this morning was oatmeal and fried eggs. It was good. After breakfast, we went to 9:30 a.m. Mass in the village. Fr. Michael asked me yesterday if I would like to preach and I said 'sure'. English may be the national language, but that does not mean that everyone speaks it. The Mass readings, as well as the Mass itself, were in the local language (ewe). They had a great choir, using only percussion instruments. Fr. Michael was the celebrant and I deaconed for him. The choir processed (danced) in with us. When it came time for the gospel, it was proclaimed in the native language and then I read it in English. Fr. Michael translated my homily as I gave it. I told the story of how I came to say 'yes' to Fr. Michael's invitation to "Come and See" just as Jesus said to those who asked, "Master, where are you staying?" That's because some things, like God's love must be seen and experienced, not just talked about. I was coming to Ghana to see and experience God's love. I talked about the readings being related to being fed, but more than just our stomachs. We are fed by the Eucharist and we are also fed by each other through our love and actions. I talked about the possibility of our parishes working together and the possibility of a Catholic school in the village.

There was a second collection which lasted about 30 minutes. For collections, the baskets are not passed but remain stationary at the front of the church. The people process (dance) up to make their offering. The second collection was supposed to be only for those people born on certain days of the week (which is different each week). The choir plays a very upbeat song and people come forward with their offerings. I think there were some girls who enjoyed processing (dancing) so much they came up about 3 or 4 times during the second collection. During the second collection, I asked Fr. Michael if John could video tape the end of Mass. He said it was fine. John started filming just as the announcements started. The announcements last about 25 minutes and are given by a number of parishioners. At one point a recently married couple was introduced. Some parishioners insisted on dancing with the newly weds. John got some video of that.

One of the last announcements was from a member of the choir who announced that they were going to teach me to dance before the recessional. I don't know what to say except the place went wild and John has the video. I think we need to reserve that video for when we make our fundraising goal.

After Mass, we returned to the house and discussed the plans with the Emmanuel who had drawn them up. We talked about whether we should start as a day school and progress into a boarding school. Emmanuel was very knowledgeable about construction and the plans looked well done to me.

Members of the school committee from the church also stopped by to welcome us. The president of the church council (they are not a parish) is a very engaging man named Andreas. Before he left he had outlined a plan for me to learn ewe and for someone to

donate land and build us a vacation house so we could come every year for holiday. This project will have plenty of energy! All for now, I'm going to try to call home.

Monday, August 4, 2008 – 9:30 a.m. Ghana time

We're about to start out on a journey to get Fr. Michael's new glasses. Last night before dinner we had a nice conversation with a couple of the young men who were at the compound. There are lots of young men and women always around. The young men, Emmanuel (who drew up the plans) and Jonathon are nephews of Fr. Michael. Emmanuel is very articulate and has studied construction in college. He has returned to college to become a teacher of industrial arts. His program allows him to teach (be a technical assistant) and then to take classes during the breaks. Jonathon is preparing to be a nurse. He has finished the first of three years of training. He will soon be doing a one-month clinical at a local hospital.

Before leaving to get the glasses, we said good-bye to Emmanuel who was returning to school to begin one of his intersession classes. He has been working all weekend doing some cement work around the compound. It really looks nice. Emmanuel asked for a soccer ball to take back to his school. As he was traveling by mini-bus to his class, he also needed a pump to re-inflate the ball at the end of his journey. Two soccer balls down and 18 to go.

Monday, August 4, 2008 – 2:15 p.m. Ghana time

We are back from getting Fr. Michael's glasses. We went to Zjelu Kope, a suburb or Keta. There's a Catholic church that was started by SMA that serves as the hub of a small industrial center. The eye shop is there. It was started by a Dutch priest who still lives at the complex although we did not meet him because he was away on holiday. The priest knew nothing about optometry when he started; he just recognized a need. In the beginning, he just collected glasses and when someone would come in he would just keep on trying on glasses until they said that they could see better. Now it's a full-fledged optometrist operation. They have 11 old train boxcars, all cataloged, sorted and filled with lenses and frames. It takes less than an hour to get your glasses. All of the lenses and frames have been donated from Europe. People come from all over because the service is good and the glasses are cheap. They begin by measuring your eyes and then custom grind your prescription. They can even tint the lenses. Equipment for the operation was donated/purchased from Europe.

In addition to the optometrist, there is also a shop that sews mosquito netting into tents to fit over beds. A tent for a large bed costs about \$5. Finally in this complex, there is a liturgical seamstress shop run by sisters. I ordered 3 stoles (green, red, & white). There is a symbol in twi (another language spoken in Ghana) "Gy Name" that translates "God Only." Each of the stoles will have a cross with Gy Name above and below the cross. The stoles are about \$25 each. Fr. Michael also ordered a green chasuble for Fr. Schaab. It will also have the Gy Name symbol on it.

After leaving the complex with the optometrist shop, we went to the original diocesan cathedral right on the Atlantic Ocean. Fr. Michael indicated that the people of the area

believe that the cathedral is a sight of a miracle. All of the land around the cathedral was eroded and houses destroyed, but the cathedral remained untouched. In order to get to the cathedral, you had to go through the middle of a combination junk yard, car repair shop.

As I am writing this, I'm sitting under a thatched roof patio outside the house. There's a little (about 1 foot long including tail) lizard running around. We first saw it yesterday. It has a yellow head and a charcoal grey body. I guess they are as common as squirrels are for us. We've also seen a large number of small geckos.

This morning as I got up, there was a meeting going on between Fr. Michael and the school committee. I sat in, but most of the conversation was in ewe. The committee is coming back at 4:00 this afternoon to meet with me. All for now.

Tuesday, August 5, 2008 – 9:15 a.m. Ghana time

The meeting with the school committee was great. There were approximately 10 people present. We discussed the need for the school as well as its mission. There are a number of other schools in the area, some public and some public/private schools. The Healy's have given support to one such school. In addition, the Carton's have given money for a library that adjoins one of the school buildings. Some of the improvements to the existing schools have been supported with fund from St. Pius and other parishes in the Peoria diocese. Providing support for physical improvements has provided benefits to the community. I think the initial conception of the current project was to continue along these lines of providing bricks and mortar and turning the school over to the government to run. In both public and private/public (a private organization builds and turns over to the government to run) schools are operated by the government. The government supplies the teacher, but you take what they send you. There appears to be little accountability or oversight for the teachers and even for the head masters. One of the teachers lives by Fr. Michael. Fr. Michael regularly sees him going down the lane toward school at 9:30 or 10:00 a.m., even though the school day starts at 8:00 a.m. As the school day typically ends around noon, there is little teaching going on in some of the classrooms. There are examples of dedicated teachers. Lawrence is a member of the school committee who works in a local junior high. He is passionate about educating the children. Unfortunately, by the time they reach the junior high, many of the students are far behind where they should be. Andreas, head of the church council and member of the school committee, is also passionate about providing children a quality education. Andreas was formerly diocesan director of education for the local diocese. Emmanuel, the architect, is also passionate about education as is another member of the school committee who teaches in the room supported by the Healy's. It appears that despite some dedicated teachers, the system is broken. There is a test after junior high to determine whether a student qualifies to continue to high school. In some schools, the pass rates for these tests have become dismal. The school committee believes that the solution is local control and finding external partners also committed to quality education.

But it appears that the school committee wants more than just a quality education. They appear passionate about an authentically Catholic education. Veronica, one of the

members of the school committee, was emphatic that she wants a school that draws children into their faith and prepares them to be life-long Catholics. It appears that religion is much more openly displayed in Ghana than in the U.S. You will see businesses named “Good Redeemer Beauty Salon” or taxi cabs with “God is my shepherd” across the back of their windows. But religious does not automatically translate to Catholic. Other Christian denominations are highly visible in Ghana. In addition, most towns of any size have a mosque (as does our village).

A final advantage that the committee identified for a high quality, locally controlled school is to ‘raise the bar’ for the other schools in the area. The proposed school could not meet the total needs of the village. A number of members of the school committee are trying to make a difference in the existing schools. There appears to be a willingness to use this school to try to positively impact the other schools in the area.

Through our discussion, there appeared to be a consensus that it would be too much to begin with a boarding school. The plan is to start with a day school and to consider a boarding school if the need and opportunity presents itself in the future. The anticipated start date for the school is September 2009. At this point the thinking is to start the school with one class of kindergarten and one class of 1st grade (P1). The target is 15 – 20 students in each grade (the state maximum is 46 students per classroom which is exceeded regularly). The school would serve both boys and girls. I talked about the multi-grade experience of our children at Horace Mann, but it seemed clear that there are advantages to having separate classrooms as we get underway. I expressed concerns about all the other kids I saw at church last Sunday (100+). I guess I have “No Child Left Behind” imprinted on my brain. The school committee is showing real wisdom in starting on a manageable scale.

We talked about fundraising. I told the group that our parish and community had been generous in the past and I felt that there was support from the people I had talked to about the project. We also talked about the partially completed girl’s school that the bishop had begun. We are tentatively set to meet the bishop this week and I told the group that, if asked, I would take his project back to the diocese to see if there might be a parish or group that would be willing to support it.

We also talked about the need for accountability. We considered a number of options. The SMA has a process in place that we could use. The diocese may also have a process in place that we could (or could be required to) use. In addition, the committee has set up a local bank account that requires the signature of the parish priest (from Dzodze) to access. The group understands the importance of the need to account for funds taken in and expended.

I brought up the question of what would happen to the students we successfully educated. There was a sense that there are not jobs for them in this community. In the broader picture, we may need to also think about economic development. One of the women present was a part of a venture, possibly a weaving cooperative. We will meet with her on Sunday afternoon.

We discussed the curriculum for the school. The department of education has a standard syllabus that must be followed. There is also an association of private schools that we must join that also has curriculum guidelines. One of the required curriculum areas is

Information Technology. They would like computers at the school. There are probably a few challenges. The current construction plans call for open block windows. This allows dust and heat into the room where the computers are. It will be interesting to see how other schools are handling this. We ended the meeting affirming that we had made a great deal of progress and that we would meet again soon.

After dinner, John, Fr. Michael and I talked more about economic development. Mango, palm, and Plantens (the green banana things) are current assets to the area. We talked about not just growing mangos, but doing some value-added processing to them locally. (Mangos are becoming one of my favorite fruits. They are delicious.) Mango jam is very popular as is mango juice. Just about every part of the palm tree can be used commercially. The village is on a main route so it would be feasible to get the product to market. The village is not even that far from a seaport.

This has been a quiet morning. Fr. Michael is away running errands. We have been using a borrowed car. Each time it sits, it becomes harder to start. I hope Fr. Michael makes it back safely from his errands. All for now.

Tuesday, August 5, 2008 – 4:05 p.m. Ghana time

This morning the boys came and asked John and I for any dirty clothes that needed washing. I thought we were going to the village today, so when they asked for the clothes, I assumed the field trip was off. For lunch we had a fried egg submarine sandwich. It will filled with veggies. I think it could be the next big thing at Subway. We also had boiled potatoes and ‘gravy’ with pineapple for dessert. It sounds like Fr. Michael will not be back until this evening. After lunch, Jonathon asked John if he would like to go to the village. It was good to know that the field trip was still on. I decided to tag along. Not knowing my geography, I thought we were going to the local village, so I told John not to take any money and did not take any myself. We went to the side of the road and Jonathon explained he was going to talk to some people about his clinical. I assumed that they were going to meet us by the side of the road and he would have that discussion before we walked into the village. What we were really doing was flagging down a mini-bus for a trip to Dzodze, about 10 or 15 miles down the road. In Ghana, commercial mini-buses are a common form of transportation. There don’t appear to be formal bus stops, you just flag a bus down by the side of the road. It looks like the mini-buses are designed to hold about 12 passengers. Our bus was full – before we got on. At one point I think that there were at least 19 or 20 people on the bus. I wasn’t sure because John and I were not in the last row and I didn’t want to turn around and be seen to be counting heads. Just from what I could see in our row and the rows in front of us, there were 15 people. There was also a bunch of luggage and a tire in the passenger compartment.

Dzodze is about 20 – 30 minutes from the village. It’s where the local hospital is. St. Anthony’s was started in 1961 by Dutch priests who petitioned the bishop for a hospital. Women were dying in childbirth and children were dying of malaria. This is where Jonathon will do his clinical experience. Jonathon took us to meet Christian, the hospital administrator. Apparently some of Jonathon’s classmates started their clinicals yesterday. There was an extended discussion between Jonathon and Christian on this

topic. Christian was a classmate of Fr. Michael's through high school and the first few years of seminary. Christian did not complete the seminary and is now married. He works as administrator of the hospital 3 days a week and works 2 days a week for the bishop on health care matters. The hospital has 160 beds and sees about 4,000 inpatients per year. They also have an outpatient effort that receives over 40,000 outpatient visits per year. There is an outpatient facility on the hospital grounds and they have clinics in numerous villages in the bush. They have a Land Rover to go to the bush clinics and if there is anyone they see in need of inpatient care, they can transport them using the Land Rover. During the rainy season, the Land Rover will not reach all the clinics, so they use motor bikes to make the visits. Right now the Land Rover is giving them troubles (it's 16 years old). There are so many needs here.

There are 6 nurses that work in the outpatient side of the operation. The hospital itself has 4 resident doctors and 13 visiting doctors (mostly from Europe). Christian arranged for Florence from the business office to give us a tour. They have an adult building with a men's ward and a women's ward (two large rooms). They have a building for children and a building which houses maternity, surgery, and private wards. We passed on the chance to visit the mortuary. They also have a building which serves as an outpatient clinic. Theresa runs the clinic program and is a family friend of Fr. Michael. Fr. Michael is remembered fondly wherever we go.

After our visit, we went to the roadside to flag down a mini-bus. I had been told that the mini-buses were very safe – at least before dark (I think that some the danger after dark is related to the increased risk of accidents after dark). A number of buses stopped, but even they realized that they were too full to take on three additional passengers. I was beginning to get mildly curious about whether we would experience an after dark mini-bus experience. I was tempted to suggest that we start walking, (it was only 10 or 15 miles) but resisted the temptation. Finally a bus with only the driver and assistant stopped. (The assistant collects the money and lets the driver know when to stop to let someone off.) We waited a few minutes for additional passengers and took off. There were only 11 of us! It was a much more enjoyable ride home. As we were pulling up to the house, Jonathon remarked, "You will have something to write about today." How true. All for now.

Wednesday, August 6, 2008 – 8:00 a.m. Ghana time

We are waiting for Fr. Michael who is visiting someone who has been awaiting his coming for a long time. When he comes back, we will head for Ho. We're going to get some material for clothing. We had a quiet night last night. Supper was vegetable soup with fish and cus-cus which tastes like very small grain rice, but is actually made with wheat. This morning for breakfast we had corn flakes and a vegetable plate made up of potatoes, carrots, onions, and hard boiled eggs.

Yesterday, Fr. Michael exchanged cars. We now have a car that looks like a Ford Escort (I think it's an Opel). It's a station wagon and seems to start better. It's rather cool and breezy this morning. I'd guess it's in the high 60's or lower 70's with a nice breeze. Fr. Michael is back so all for now.

Wednesday, August 6, 2008 – 3:40 p.m. Ghana time

We just returned from Ho. Fr. Michael, John, Jonathon and I made the journey. On the way up to Ho, we stopped at a weaving ‘factory’. It was basically open-air, with only a roof providing relief from the sun for the workers. They have an ingenious system of stretching their cords out and tying them to a rock sledge. As they weave, they drag the sledge closer to themselves. About ½ dozen boys and men were weaving bands of cloth. These bands are sewn together and make the traditional African wrap around clothing that both men and women wear. Jonathon was used to model the clothing. He had never worn it so was not sure how to put it on. I offered to model the clothing. John has pictures.

Like so many things on this trip, we had some divine assistance. As we entered town, we stopped by the regional education office. We were able to meet with Veronica’s husband who is a regional administrator within the education department. We talked briefly about the school and he said he would see us this weekend in the village. We got directions to Mater Ecclesia which is a couple of villages beyond Ho. This is a Catholic boarding school that seems to be the model for what we are attempting to do in the village. We were able to find the school and spoke to a sister who was tending a garden. Fr. Michael asked if we could speak with the head mistress or any of the teachers, but was told that would not be possible. The sister welcomed us into the community room and offered us some water. Fr. Michael checked to make sure it was safe for us to drink which the sister understood. Fr. Michael explained that it is custom to offer visitors water when they first arrive. The sister asked the purpose of our visit. Fr. Michael explained that we were trying to learn about this school as we wanted to start a Catholic school in our village. We learned that the school started in 1993 and began with just kindergarten the first year. The school was started in response to the falling standards in the public schools and the inability to do anything about it. Presently the school serves about 450 students through junior high. There is currently a waiting list to get in and students come from all over. There are plans for a Senior High to be added to the facility. All but about 6 of the students are boarding students.

The sister gave us a tour. As we began, we heard a loud “Fr. Michael”. It was Sister Elizabeth, the nurse for the school. She had worked with Fr. Michael in a previous assignment. With her were Sister Catherine and a priest that the two had been talking to. Sister Elizabeth’s warmth for Fr. Michael seemed to warm up our host. It also helped that the older priest that they were talking with, remembered Fr. Michael. We continued our tour with renewed energy on the part of our host. The school complex is very impressive – some of the buildings are multi-floor. There are buildings for primary and junior high. One of the buildings was built with funds donated by an Italian family. The building bears the name of the benefactors. They have lots of land and grow some of their own food. They also raise pigs and students have meat once a week. They are in the process of building a dining hall that will seat 1,000. It will cost about \$350,000 and is being funded by the parent-teacher association. In addition to planning the high school and building the dining center, the other major project right now is building a block wall around the property for the safety of the students. Due to the size of the complex, the

wall will be an expensive project. The school is in the Ho diocese, but is not a diocesan school. It is run by an order of Sisters.

Our tour guide was very knowledgeable about the facility and programs and finally, Fr. Michael said, "You are the head mistress." Sister admitted she was. She had neglected to give us her name. I told her that I had forgotten her name and she told me she was Sister Peace Omega. Sister Peace explained that they don't use certified teachers but find intelligent young people and provide them with some background and orientation to teaching. If I understand things correctly, teachers are paid about \$60 per month under their regular contract, but many parents pay additional money for extra classes. This extra money is added to the teacher's base pay. It costs about \$270 per term for a boarding student and \$60 per term for a day student. The biggest problem is parents failing to pay their tuition bills. This last term the amount of uncollected tuition was \$9,000. They do use computers at the school and hope to eventually get connected to the Internet. I asked whether the heat and dust were problems for the equipment. Both are problems. Right now they use a large number of ceiling fans to try to at least get air in the room moving. The long term solution is to air condition the computer center.

While on the tour, John got a really bad case of the hiccups. Fr. Michael took a twig that is used in making brooms and put it in John's hair. The hiccups stopped immediately. Fr. Michael explained that this is a traditional African cure for hiccups. We ended the tour with an exchange of phone numbers between Fr. Michael and Sister Peace. They also exchanged phone numbers of mutual friends with whom they had lost contact. It sounds like we will be able to get advice and guidance from them in the future if we need it.

After visiting the school, we had lunch at the Golden Finger just outside of Ho. We had French fries and chicken (on the bone). We then went to one of the stalls by the market. John bought some material and I bought a shirt. We then entered the market. It was a sea of people, but everyone was polite. Fr. Michael got some yams and chicken. We also bought more minutes for the cell phones. It's amazing how cell phone technology has leap-frogged so many other advances, like indoor plumbing. It seems like every collection of at least 3 huts has a sign that indicates you can buy minutes for your cell phone. Fr. Michael has advised us to get minutes in 7.5 GH which are only carried in the larger cities. On the way back from Ho, we stopped by a roadside tomato vendor. Fr. Michael was able to talk them into letting us go into the fields to take pictures of them harvesting and also for him to be able to pick just the tomatoes he wanted (he doesn't want to get them too ripe as they won't last as long at home). Right now, tomatoes are going for \$60 per crate. Later in the season, they will be going for \$10 per crate. This grower had 25 crates ready to be picked up and more tomatoes in the field. The grower explained that he didn't have enough money to buy fertilizer which would have improved his yields.

Wednesday, August 6, 2008 – 6:00 p.m. Ghana time

We just got back from the local market in the village. Jonathon took John and me. A number of people from church recognized us and greeted us warmly. There were lots of folks selling fish and vegetables as well as others selling jewelry and material. We took a

picture of a display of fish which created a clamor for us to take the pictures of other vendors. We bought some material and some jewelry. All for now.

Thursday, August 7, 2008 – 8:20 a.m. Ghana time

We are awaiting the arrival of teachers from the various local schools. Lawrence has set up the meeting. One of the purposes of the meeting is to give away some of the soccer balls...

Three teachers came to visit (Lawrence and two teachers named John, one a teacher and the other a principal) and we had an hour-long conversation on the local schools. The government is supposed to pay 3GH Cedi (about \$3) per child per year. This year they have received only 2GH Cedi and the year is over. That funding is to cover just about everything except the teacher salaries. This per-student allotment covers sports, extra curricular activities, building maintenance, copying of exams etc. This year they had to write their exams on the black board as they had no money to print the exams. In the past, parents and teachers have been sanctioned for trying to raise money on their own to cover the shortfall.

The schools face a number of challenges. A number of parents are away earning a living and the children are being raised by grandparents who may not have the energy to adequately supervise and support the children. Lawrence is the head teacher for a junior high and last year 7 of his girls (out of a school population of about 130) became pregnant. One of the girls entered junior high pregnant. Usually when a girl becomes pregnant, she will drop out of school and find a way to support herself. At times these girls will abandon their children with a grandparent and head for the city.

There are also children who do not have adequate clothes to come to school and some students come to school without having received proper nutrition at home. There was to be a pilot program of providing food at school, but to this point nothing has happened. The government requires all students in a grade use the same textbook which is to be supplied by the government. It is common for the books to never arrive. In one school, there are 2 teachers for 6 grades. In one area junior high this year, none of the students passed the end of year exam to qualify them to go on to high school. Although Information Technology is a required part of the curriculum, none of the schools have computers. Discussions about computing are abstract. John the teacher took a distance education course on computing and fared little better. They were shown a laptop computer, but that was about it. Any use of computers in the school will require a computer literacy effort for the teachers.

Things are not totally bleak. The three teachers appeared to be very dedicated. John the teacher took his students down to Keta last Sunday (about an hour's drive from the village. It's where we went to get Fr. Michael's glasses fixed.) It sounds like they were performing on some kind of radio amateur hour. They did very well. For many of the students, it was the first time they saw the ocean. They also learned some local history through their field trip. Lawrence and John the principal have conducted special classes on their own time to prepare students for their exams. Lawrence's students had the

highest pass rate in the area. Lawrence feels that his top students can compete with students who are going to private schools.

I asked about adult education efforts. It appeared that adult education had been a priority in the past and a number of programs formerly existed. It was funded by the government. When the government funding ended, so did the adult education efforts. All for now as we are going to Dzodze to see the tailor and St. Peter and Paul church and school and a number of projects that Fr. Tony Favio has been supporting.

Thursday, August 7 – 1:00 p.m. Ghana time

We are back from Dzodze. We brought the material we purchased at Ho as well as what we bought at the local market to the tailor. We are having outfits made for about \$12 each. I'm getting one for myself and John is getting an outfit for himself as well as one for April. They are to be ready for us to pick up on August 15. From the tailors we went to see Fr. Peter at St. Peter and Paul parish. Fr. Peter was a classmate with Fr. Michael and they have worked together on a number of projects. St. Peter and Paul church is in the midst of building a new church. The church will have a capacity of 2,000 parishioners. They are also in the process of building a library and computer facility – an Internet Café. It will be the first Internet access in the city. We saw a number of buildings that Fr. Tony had helped restore within the church/school compound. We then went to Fr. Tony's family home. It's actually a complex of attached homes. It began with a home built by the mother and then each of the children added their homes to the complex. The houses are arranged in a rectangular format leaving an enclosed common area in the middle of the complex. I met Fr. Tony this summer at St. Anne's in East Moline as I prepared for the trip and he was instrumental in walking me through the visa process. At Fr. Tony's house we met his brother John and one of his sisters. John is going to take us to another of Fr. Tony's projects. We are delayed by a big rainstorm. We lost power and waited about an hour for the rain to subside. Once the storm subsided, we went to see Fr. Tony's school construction project. The streets on the way were very bumpy and had running streams from the storm water. As the streets were made of sandy earth, there was some concern that we would get stuck. We made it and saw 3 classrooms that Fr. Tony was constructing. It was well worth the wait and the perilous journey. We dropped off Fr. Tony's brother John and, after getting some fuel, headed back home. I will be returning to Dzodze on Sunday to preach and then next Wednesday evening for a meeting with Fr. Peter. Once home we had a lunch of rice and 'gravy', some boiled vegetables and mangos for dessert. John skipped lunch for a nap. I'm not sure his internal clock has been reset yet. All for now.

Friday, August 8, 2008 – 7:00 a.m. Ghana time

Today is our meeting with the bishop. We will meet with him at 10:30 a.m. It's our plan to take the 'short cut'. We were without power when we returned from Dzodze yesterday. I spent most of the afternoon working on the retreat I will be giving August 13 – 15 "Jesus through the eyes of Mary".

At 4:00 p.m. yesterday, we went to the Healy school for a presentation by the students. Before the presentation, we toured the school grounds and saw a number of projects that have been receiving funding from St. Pius. A few parishioners have made regular sustaining contributions to specific projects. Some of the funds went to restore existing structures – new roofs, floors – but there were also additions and new structures built with our support. We got to see a library/post office that is underway. The walls are up and Fr. Michael has ordered the wood for the beams for the roof. I think they use a non-local source for the wood to get a better price. It is my understanding that they will have computers at this facility and eventually Internet access.

The presentation was very nice. I'm a little confused as to whether the schools involved were public or private, but the program began with a student leading those present in praying a Hail Mary and ended with another student leading an Our Father. There was a head table set up where John and I as well as Fr. Michael and a number of teachers sat. They made Lawrence the 'chairman' of the event. There were a few speeches and then the dancing started. The boys drummed and the girls danced. There were quite a few parents and students watching. I had been warned that John and I would be invited to join in on the dancing, and I was not disappointed. John went first to the delight of the crowd. When it was my turn, I brought the house down, but I think the hoots and hollers were of laughter. I have been looking for God on this trip and I'm sure that the first step to finding God is a humble heart. Thank you God! After the dancing, there were a number of speeches. I was asked to say something so I explained that I was a friend of Fr. Michael's and was here to meet his friends. And see how we could work together. I mentioned that the need for education is world-wide and that in America, just like Ghana, if you do not have an education it is very hard to get a good job. I think it was a good bridge-building event and Fr. Michael and others used it as an opportunity to promote the possibility of a new school.

Friday, August 8, 2008 – 3:40 p.m. Ghana time

As I was writing the last post, we received some visitors. It was a welcoming committee from the Muslim community. The imam as well as three of his brothers arrived to officially welcome us on behalf of the Muslim community. They are all relatives of Fr. Michael. A couple of generations ago, one of Fr. Michael's ancestors had a child who was very sick so they took the child to the fetish (voodoo) priest. The fetish priest told the parents that the reason that the child was sick was that the child wanted to be Muslim. So the parents brought the child to the Muslim faith and with that the Islamic faith entered Fr. Michael's lineage. The Muslim representatives offered their support for the school project. One of the visitors is the local assemblyman who represents the village at the district legislature. They also wanted to offer us land upon which to build the school. They said that it would be the best plot of land for us. Before they left, we took a picture with them. It appeared that the Imam had never seen a digital camera and was tickled to see his image immediately after the picture was taken.

Soon after the Muslim delegation left, two other visitors arrived. They were tribal chiefs. One was the Paramount Chief and the other was his Right Hand Chief. (In this system, there is a Paramount Chief and then sub-chiefs of Right Hand Chief, Left Hand Chief,

Forward Chief, and Back Chief.) Apparently they had been at the school assembly and had seen John and I dance. (Talk about forming a good first impression!) They were both delightful men. They explained some Ghanaian customs of a visit. I had noticed that when people would come to visit Fr. Michael, there would be an initial greeting after which all would be seated. Then there would be a formal, structured dialogue that never seemed to vary. The dialogue almost seemed to be a two-part prayer. Then they would get up and greet each other again. The chiefs explained that it is not enough to ask, “How are you?”, you must also ask about the mother, father, wife, and children. You not only want to know how the person is, but also how their world is. The visit is also somewhat structured. After the greeting, the host asks the mission or purpose of the visit. The visitors explain. The host can ask questions of clarification. As the chiefs were explaining this, I recalled that was exactly the question that Sister Peace Omega asked on our visit to Mater Ecclesia. I thought it was a rather direct question, but now understood that it is part of the standard dialogue for a visit. As I understand it, the purpose of the visit of the chiefs was to welcome me to the community and to invite me to a tribal meeting on Sunday afternoon where I can explain the purpose of my visit.

We left for our 10:30 a.m. visit with the bishop at about 9:00 a.m. Fr. Peter, the parish priest from Dzodze and Lawrence joined John, Fr. Michael and me. We again took the shortcut. I have some pictures, but I’m not sure that they do the road justice. We arrived at about 10:00 a.m. and took a quick tour of the diocesan pastoral center. Bishop Anthony Adanti welcomed us into his office at about 10:30 a.m. From the bishop, we learned another facet of protocol for meetings. When greeting a group of people, always start from your right and greet people in order, even if this means that you are not greeting the most important person first. That way you greet no one with the back of your hand.

The bishop offered his support for the project and was very open and candid about the various roles the diocese could play. Projects such as these can be operated by the community, the local parish or the diocese. Bishop Adanti was willing to support the project no matter which way it was organized. Fr. Michael indicated that we would talk with the local committee about which form of organization they wanted. The bishop was also very supportive of our interest in naming the school after Archbishop Fulton Sheen. When Bishop Adanti was a young priest, he was once in a bookstore in Rome. He looked up and saw Archbishop Sheen in the bookstore. He recognized the archbishop from reading his works in seminary. When he introduced himself, Archbishop Sheen told the bishop to pick any two books and the archbishop would buy them for him. It made a lasting impression on the bishop.

We talked about St. Catherine’s, a boarding school for girls that the Keta-Akatsi diocese has begun. The school was initially funded by a German organization, but funding has dried up and construction has ceased about mid-way through the first phase of the project. They are currently planning to begin the school next year using the diocese pastoral center. The bishop explained that it was his intention to eventually give the school over to the government to run. The way the process works is that the sponsoring organization needs to get the school up and running and up to government standards. Once that happens, the sponsoring organization can request a government inspection. If the school passes inspection, it can be turned over to the government who will then pay

the salaries of the teachers. It usually takes 3-4 years of operation to get to the point where a school is ready to turn over. We asked about the issue of relinquishing control to the government with the condition of the public schools. The bishop acknowledged the serious problems with the public school system, but indicated that, as bishop, he could have a role in the selection of the head mistress. He would not have a role in the selection of teachers, but felt that he would be able to have an unacceptable teacher removed.

We had an extended discussion of who the school would serve as a private school. There was a sense that a good Catholic private school would attract students, but that it may be too expensive for many in the village to participate. It was recognized that even if only a small proportion of the students attending the school were local, it would still have a dramatic impact on the village. The bishop agreed that it was best to start small, both in terms of the grades offered and not initially starting the school as a boarding school. The bishop suggested that we may need to consider transportation in lieu of boarding, to be able to attract students initially. I expressed an interest in being able to structure the school so as many local residents as possible could participate. I also shared with the group that our discussion seemed reminiscent of the discussions in America after the Civil War. Booker T. Washington advocated a program that extended broadly to the former slave population while W.E.B. Dubois advocated investing intensely in the brightest and most capable students. Once these students had experienced success, they could give back to the broader community. We may need to have programs that do both. I expressed that I wanted to make things better, not worse and that I didn't want to leave the community with a school that they could not ultimately afford to run. I also indicated that although this was not my project, my dreams for our partnership was that we would create the best school in all of Ghana and that everything we did or developed, we would freely share with others. There was enthusiastic agreement for that vision.

The Bishop also expressed the desire to see a vocational high school in that area of the diocese. We indicated that was the initial focus of this project, but that it was decided that the basis system was so bad that we lacked the pool of potential junior high students to benefit from the vocational school. We all agreed that once the basic and junior high school were fully functioning, we should revisit the need for a vocational high school.

We also talked about the possibility of investigating whether it made sense for our two dioceses to work together on projects. I told the bishop I would bring information back to our diocese.

As the meeting finished, Fr. Peter and Fr. Michael had additional items to talk for the bishop, so Lawrence, John and I waited outside on the veranda. I showed Lawrence one of the MP3 players we brought which had the book on tape "What's so Great about Christianity." Lawrence was intrigued, not only by the technology but also by the contents of the book. I was showing it to Lawrence in terms of what might be possible in technology for the school. Unfortunately, Lawrence does not have a computer, so I don't know how he could recharge the MP3 player if we left it for him as a gift.

As we began our return trip, the car began giving us problems. We didn't even make it down the driveway of the bishop's complex. The car would rev fine, but the engine would stall under any load. (It appears that just about everyone drives a stick shift car.

No matter how much gas Fr. Michael gave the car, it would lurch and nearly die whenever he put it in gear.) We were able to get the car to a roadside repair shop. The shop was rather interesting. We talk about shade tree mechanics. That's what this shop was – literally. As we drove up we saw parts of engine blocks and other car parts under the tree in the front yard of the shop. The shop immediately diagnosed the problem as overheating. They attempted to do a quick radiator flush and the water coming out of the radiator was rust colored. They were able to make enough of a difference that we were able to make it home along our now familiar short cut.

When we returned to the village, we had fish and French fries for lunch. A representative of each of the surrounding village soccer teams was to come at 4:00 p.m. to collect a soccer ball. It was raining pretty hard, so no one arrived until a little after 6:00 p.m. There were two men from one of the teams. They agreed to take and distribute the balls to the rest of the teams. Fr. Michael explained that we may need some help on the school project and we might ask the soccer teams to help us in the construction at some point. They took 5 soccer balls, leaving us with a single soccer ball.

Saturday, August 9, 2008 – 5:30 p.m. Ghana time

We went to bed early last night. Yesterday was a very busy day. We had initially planned to travel today and visit some other regions of Ghana, but with the car problems, we decided to stick close to home. We had a nice leisurely breakfast of cornflakes; peanut butter and guava (jam) on toast; and sliced mangos. After breakfast, Lawrence stopped by. He lives on the next lane. We chatted for a while. Lawrence's younger children are visiting their brother who just got married and Lawrence's wife is out of town.

Fr. Michael and I left to visit an old man the Fr. Michael regularly checks in on, dropping Lawrence off at the end of his lane. On the way to the meeting we saw Veronica's husband, the school official that we had met with at Ho on Wednesday. He was in the village square. We took him to his house and the three of us went inside and chatted for a while about the school project. It seems that all of the energy around this project is for a private Catholic school. Here was a public school official enthusiastically supporting our efforts to create a private school as opposed to creating a school which would eventually come under the umbrella of the government. There was a strong sense that people would come from all over for a quality Catholic education. One of the things that the education official expressed was the inability of the public school system to retain quality teachers. The pay for public school teachers is so bad that turnover among public school teachers is very high, making it difficult to staff the public schools with quality faculty. I think that this is where 'helping' can get tricky. I don't want to come in from the outside, knowing virtually nothing about the community, the culture and dynamics of a situation and push for a solution that makes sense for me. On the other hand, I don't want to set the community up for failure and disappointment. If we don't have the right model, the school will not be sustainable long term. The one saving grace to this whole thing, is that the ultimate governance is a future decision. Any school we would start, would begin as a private school and only become public 3-4 years down the road once it was up and running. The ultimate governance of the school can be something that we can all

continue to study. I think my role is to ask questions and seek clarity for all of us on these issues, but to ultimately trust in the judgment of the people who are the local experts.

After the visit to the education official, we went to visit Fr. Michael's old friend. The car was acting up again, but we managed to make it to the old man's house. The man had been bedridden, but had improved dramatically. We arrived to find him sitting on a chair on his veranda. He was very glad to see Fr. Michael. The old man commented on how light my skin was. He said he thought he was light-skinned, but I was really light skinned. The old man has a complexion similar to Fr. Michael's (not what I would consider light-skinned). It's amazing how we all see the world.

We were just barely able to get the car home. When we arrived, John was in an animated conversation with a guest. Mawuli Akpenyo was up for the funeral from Accra and had stopped in to see Fr. Michael. Mawuli runs an exporting business that focuses on crafts and agricultural products. We had an extended discussion about economic development for the village area. The two projects that Mawuli was most excited about were mangos and grass cutters. Mawuli thought that mangos were a good idea because there is a market for fresh mangos and those that cannot be sold fresh can be processed for juice or dried. He was especially excited about dried mangos. Mawuli explained that when he was younger he would get excited about a project and just jump right in. Now that he is older, he conducts research to verify that what he's excited about can really provide the opportunity for a commercial venture. I can understand the excitement about the mangos. They taste great fresh and mango juice is also very good. The best mangos are grafted and it would be easy to distribute mango trees to various people in the village for them to raise. It seems to make more sense to distribute the mango trees throughout the village (most people have enough land for at least a few mangos and other crops, such as corn can be planted around them) rather than creating a large mango farm that would require hiring people to tend it. Families could bring the mangos to a central point for processing. It takes 3-4 years before the mangos bear fruit and they must be watered during the dry season for the first few years. But once the mangos start producing, they are fairly low maintenance. We discussed a recently opened mango farm that appeared to be struggling. Mawuli explained that sometimes people don't look at the big picture when they start a project and this farmer only focused on producing the mangos and not marketing them. Mawuli will do some research on potential markets for mangos and get back to us.

The grass cutter project is a little harder for me to get excited about. Grass cutters are basically huge rats. I think that the woman holding the dead rat by the side of the road when we first arrived in Ghana was selling a grass cutter. Grass cutters grow very fast and may not require special feed. They are considered a delicacy in Ghana and Togo. Mawuli will also research possibilities with grass cutters and if and how they should be processed before sale. (The market for fresh or live grass cutters will be more geographically restricted than for processed grass cutters. Mawuli is just not sure about what the market would accept in terms of processed grass cutters.)

After Mawuli left, Lawrence came over with some syllabuses for the subjects in the primary school. I want to look these over and possibly take them back to the states so we can see where we might be able to develop materials that would support the curriculum.

We talked for a while. Lawrence thinks that he may experiment with raising grass cutters to see what it's like.

Sunday, August 10, 2008 – 9:35 p.m. Ghana time

It's been a very busy Sunday. Last night, just before dark, Jonathon was leaving for Dzodze to make final arrangements for his clinical. He wanted John to go with. I had some moderate misgivings about John being on the mini-bus transit system after dark, but agreed that he could go. Just as John and Jonathon were heading down the lane from the house to the road, a large contingent (50 – 100) of people from the funeral arrived. Because of the difficulties of travel, the main time for families to get together is at funerals. That makes funerals a major celebration for the community. Most of the folks who came to see us were from the Accra area. Fr. Michael was still out working on getting the car repaired so I greeted the visitors. John, the leader of the group who came to visit asked Jonathon if John could remain for the discussion. The group wanted to know the purpose of my visit. I expressed condolences for the loss of a loved one and explained the now-familiar story of how I was a friend of Fr. Michael's and I was responding to his invitation to come and visit Ghana. When I asked Fr. Michael if there was anything I could do, Fr. Michael checked with the community and learned that they wanted a private Catholic school. I was here to learn about the needs of the community for a school and whether there was a way we could work together. I also suggested that people would need money to send their children to a private Catholic school so we were discussing economic development ideas. Economic development might also mean that their children could find good jobs near home once they had an education. Because I was here to listen, I was interesting in listening to hear what ideas they had. John, the group's leader, said that the community would talk with the elders and bring back their ideas rather than presenting ideas that went all over the place. They indicated that they would return early Sunday morning to let us know what they had decided.

Fr. Michael returned after the visitors had left. He said that the car was somewhat better and that more work had been done on cleaning the radiator. At dinner Saturday evening, Fr. Michael and I discussed that the group who had visited from the funeral party seemed to be folks who had made something of themselves in Accra and the surrounding communities. We talked about the importance of local ownership of whatever projects we got into. Fr. Michael agreed and said that this group has contributed to a number of community improvement efforts such as bringing electricity to the village and the current effort to bring a level of running water to the village. We didn't want our efforts to be seen as something the 'American's did', but something which they did and we supported.

Early this morning (Sunday), before breakfast, we received 4 visitors with the results of discussion from the funeral party. John and the Muslim assemblyman were among the group, as was Mawuli's brother. Their discussion focused around economic development. They supported a distributed mango growing operation and experimenting with grass cutters. Fr. Michael joined the discussion and suggested that for the mangos we would need to retain a technical expert who could teach people in the village how to graft and care for the mango trees for one year. He estimated the cost to be about \$2,500. Fr. Michael also raised the issue of security for the grass cutter operation. Fr. Michael

was concerned that the grass cutters would be a tempting target for theft and that we would need to consider that. It was suggested that we could create a communal area where each family could have their grass cutter pens. This area could be walled in and even have a guard if needed. We would have to consider the risk of contagious infections wiping out the grass cutter community if we adopted this approach. It's additional information to put into the research mix. Fr. Michael summarized the discussion we had on Saturday evening on how there must be local ownership on whatever happens and that this group would be asked for their 'widow's mite'.

We left for church in Dzodze at about 8:30 a.m. Mass was at 9:30, so we had plenty of time. We met Fr. Peter in the rectory and had a soda. Both Fr. Peter and Fr. Michael warned John and me that it would be a long Mass. We were not disappointed. Mass ended at about 1:00 p.m. It took about ½ hour for Fr. Peter to welcome John and me at the beginning of Mass. St. Peter and Paul in Dzodze used the same system for offertory of allowing people to process for the collection and drop their money at the baskets in the front of church. Announcements at the end of Mass were probably at least ½ hour. Following announcements handkerchiefs and eggs were sold for about ½ hour as a fundraiser within the church. (This was before dismissal and recessional.) Despite the length of the Mass, it was a wonderful celebration. The people are passionate about their faith and very willing to share it. The choir was exceptional with lots of 4 part harmony. They actually had 4 choirs at this Mass. John has some video that I hope captures the essence of the experience. After Mass, we had dinner at the rectory. I think people are figuring out that chicken and rice is fairly safe to give the Americans. The head of the parish council joined us for lunch. It turns out that he is also a regional school official. He too strongly supported the idea of a private Catholic school and committed to doing what he could to help us with any interactions with the government. Fr. Michael later remarked on how this was just one more example of God putting someone in our path who could help and support us.

After dinner, we headed back to the village. We were scheduled to meet with the chiefs (as a follow-up to the visit from the Paramount Chief and his Right Hand Chief). The meeting was in the old village. We arrived at 3:30 p.m. and were told that they were still awaiting the arrival of more members of their group. This gave us a chance to meet Fr. Michael's aunt and uncle (who is in his 90's). We also got to see Fr. Michael's house where he lets his uncle stay. We got a sense of the more primitive side of life in seeing the communal bathing area (not that everybody washes at once, there's just a spot where everybody goes to wash themselves. It's modestly surrounded by corrugated metal.) We also saw the communal latrine. There's one place in the village where they still have a shrine to offer sacrifices to the fetish gods.

We started our meeting with the tribal chiefs and elders at about 4:00 p.m. All but one of those present were men. I once again explained how I was a friend of Fr. Michael, etc. etc. The tribal chiefs and elders expressed their strong support for anything we could do to bring a private Catholic school to the village. Fr. Michael talked about the need for local investment and ownership in anything that was done and also accountability and transparency with the money. All agreed this was essential. This group also saw the need for the educational effort to be matched with economic development efforts. They saw mangos, palm trees and possibly bee keeping as possibilities as well as pine apples

and pau pau. There was also a lot of interest in having a tractor in the community. There are two primary uses for a tractor, to automate the process of plowing and to haul sand and materials for making blocks. We discussed the need for a tractor (which can be obtained used for between \$5,000 - \$10,000). We also looked at our overall goals for economic development as encompassing projects that would have the potential to impact a large number of families in the village. It was decided that the tractor was not a top priority project for this reason. It seems like everywhere we go there is support for our efforts. I will need to spend time next week getting things nailed down in terms of contacts and who does what by when.

On the way back from the meeting with the chiefs, we stopped at a local school and took some pictures. A number of 13-15 year old girls were passing by and began giggling while looking at John. They told Fr. Michael that they liked his hair. Fr. Michael asked if they wanted to marry him and they all shouted 'yes'.

As soon as we arrived back at the house we packed to go to Lome, Togo. Dzodze is on the way, so we dropped Jonathon off at the hospital where he will be doing his clinical on our way. It was dark by the time we got to the border. The car was misbehaving a little, but we were able to make it without incident. It took about 15 minutes on the Ghana side of the border to process us out of the country. It took about 45 minutes on the Togo side. On the Ghana side, the activity takes place within a building. On the Togo side, there is a table and counter outside the building where all the action takes place. Once we filled out our visa request, we handed it to Fr. Michael along with our passports. He told us to wait in the car and not talk with anyone. For the next 45 minutes, Fr. Michael was shuffling back and forth and talking to various officials and leaning over the desk where the officials were sitting. The scene at the Togo side of the border reminded me of a scene from a Star Wars movie. The most amazing thing I saw was a woman with a child who looked to be about 6 months old strapped to her back. The child was crying because it was hungry. The woman was carrying a huge basket, probably about 3 feet in diameter and 4 feet long. When she bent down to unload the basket, it hit the ground with a powerful thud. The woman sat down and nursed the baby for a little while. When she was ready to resume her journey, it took 4 people to get the load back on her head. I think it has been the saddest thing I have seen on this trip thus far.

We eventually got our passports and headed for the SMA house in Lome. Lome is the town you enter as you enter Togo, so it was merely a case of getting to the section of town where the house is. I've become convinced that over here, the primary purpose of the steering wheel is to have a convenient place for locating the horn for easy and constant use. I'm also convinced that the 'right' side of the road is whichever side has the roadside shop that you are interested in visiting. We arrived at the SMA house about 8:30 p.m. We had dinner waiting for us. It was rice, French bread and fish in a white sauce (I swear I tasted sliced almonds in the white sauce). It was lovely. We got a chance to meet Fr. Fabian who is the bursar for the community. We also met a Nigerian priest who is a part of this community who seems very joyful. Our rooms have running water (hot and cold) as well as showers. We are scheduled to be here till about Tuesday noon. All for now.

Monday, August 11, 2008 – 3:40 p.m. Togo time

It's been a very quiet day. It was great to have a shower and even better to have a shower with hot water. I've spent most of the day getting the journal typed into the computer for sending out. Everyone here seems very nice. At 11:00 a.m. we had a private Mass, just John, Fr. Michael and me. There was a time for personal sharing and it's safe to say that this trip has changed all of us. Fr. Michael has again taken the car in for repairs before our trip back to the village tomorrow. God willing, the car will be more road-worthy when we get it back.

Fr. Michael and I met with Fr. Fabian this morning. When I was planning this trip, I wasn't sure how much money to take, so John and I brought along a couple of thousand dollars. It was immediately clear that we were Fr. Michael's guests and that our need for spending money would be minimal. I talked with Mary Anne and she agreed that we could leave some money to get the project started. I felt this is important, because to this point, all folks have seen is talk. Talk can be inspiring, but talk is different than action. I gave Fr. Michael \$2,000 last week to put toward the project. Today we turned the money into SMA. They will deposit the money for us. Fr. Fabian will give us a receipt. Fr. Michael has mentioned the donation to a number of the groups we've met with and I think it has helped tremendously with our credibility and the level of excitement for the effort. I'm closing out Part 1 of the Journal so I can email it while in Lome. Part 2 of the Journal won't go out until I'm back in the states and have recovered from jet lag and the backlog of projects I left to make this journey. Thanks to all who have sacrificed and have been praying for us. Your prayers have made all the difference.

Joe

Tuesday, August 12, 2008 – 5:35 p.m. Ghana time

We are back in Ghana and back in the village of Ave-Afiniadenyigba. Just as Fr. Michael promised, the time in Lome, Togo was relaxing, at least for us. Fr. Michael spent nearly all of Monday trying to get the car repaired. Some progress was made, but the car was still misbehaving on Monday when Fr. Michael returned. I spent most of the day Monday and Tuesday morning working on material for the Marian retreat to be delivered on Wednesday – Friday. Dinner Monday night was pizza, rice, and spaghetti. Both John and I focused on the delicious home-made pizza. After dinner, John and I watched a little of the international version of CNN. It presents a different focus on the news – not so US-centric.

Fr. Michael was up early Tuesday morning to take the car back to the repair shop for one last attempt to fix the car in Lome before leaving Togo for a luncheon meeting with Fr. Tony Asinyo in Denu, Ghana. After dropping off the car on Tuesday, Fr. Michael joined us for 8:00 a.m. Mass in the chapel. As in Winneba, morning prayer was woven into the Mass. Fr. Fabian was the celebrant and Fr. Michael, John and I were joined by the delightful Nigerian priest we had first met upon arriving Sunday night. After Mass, we all had breakfast together. John and I had oatmeal. We left Fr. Fabian about 50 of the rosaries that Karen Manning's grandfather had made. About 10:30 a.m., Fr. Michael returned with the car and we packed up to head out. The car was still misbehaving, but at least now the symptoms were different. The car was no longer overheating; now it was jerking and stalling. The chief suspect was the fuel pump which had already been replaced multiple times. With our car sputtering, we headed for the Togo – Ghana border.

The crossing was as busy and animated during the day as it had been when we first crossed into Togo Sunday after dark. In the daylight, we were more clearly a target for those wanting a 'gift' from the Americans. As we first approached the Togo side of the border, an older woman approached and just kept saying "American, American." It was clear that she was looking for a handout from us. Fr. Michael explained that he is not against giving to the poor, but he wants to know who he is giving money to and that the really do need the money. Processing on the Togo side of the border entails standing outside and filling out the form for exiting Togo and showing your passport. It was always a little nerve-wracking to let go of my passport. Because the Togo side of the border is not computerized, it takes a little while for the border officials to record everything on a big ledger. After about ½ hour, we were cleared to leave Togo and returned to the car. As we were heading out of Togo, an official stopped us and asked us to roll down the window. He told Fr. Michael that he was looking for a 'gift'. Fr. Michael said he had nothing to give him. The official was unconcerned and said, "I'm sure your white friends will help you out." I took my lead from Fr. Michael and didn't make a move for my wallet. Fr. Michael told the official that he would return later, rolled up the window, and took off for the Ghana side of the border. Luckily, that was the end of the incident. We were quickly processed on the Ghana side of the border, which has a computer and inside offices for processing visa requests. As we returned to the car, the same woman who first approached us on the Togo side of the border was again at the door of our car saying, "American, American." What a tough way to try to get by in life.

We were safely back in Ghana. It's somewhat comforting to be in the country where your plane will depart for home. However, the problems with the car were intensifying. The car stalled soon after we crossed into Ghana and it took Fr. Michael about 5 minutes of coaxing to get the car started again. Beeping horns is the universal form of communication and there were a number of drivers who thought that beeping their horns would help us get the car started. Maybe it worked, because the car did finally start. The car had no power and was stalling regularly. Fr. Michael thought that the problem might be low fuel, so we limped into a gas station, only to discover after turning the car off, that the station had no fuel. Again, the car refused to start. Fr. Michael called Fr. Tony, our lunch host and asked Fr. Tony to bring us some fuel. While waiting for Fr. Tony, Fr. Michael was able to get the car started again. We found another gas station and were able to get some fuel. Unfortunately, that did not solve the problem. We were able to make it (coughing and sputtering) to Fr. Tony's parish complex in time for lunch.

Fr. Tony spent 3 months at St. Anne's in East Moline. He has met Karen Manning's rosary-making grandfather. Fr. Tony is the son of Andreas, one of the members of the school committee back in Ave-Afiniadenyigba. We talked about the project and Fr. Tony agreed to be the go-between between whatever we set up in America and the village. Fr. Tony has access to the Internet and is about 30 miles from the village. So what we have in place to this point is Fr. Tony serving as the point of contact with the committee and Fr. Fabian serving as the point of contact for the funds. I think this will be workable and will provide adequate checks and balances for the project.

Lunch was rice, shell noodles, chicken and 'gravy'. Fr. Tony had heard that I would drink white wine so there was a carafe of Paul Mason wine. After lunch, Fr. Tony and Fr. Michael left to try and get the car repaired. They returned a little after 3:30 p.m. They were not able to get the car repaired, although they tried a number of things. We decided to try to get home before dark. Fr. Tony arranged for a vehicle to be available to come and rescue us if we became stranded on the road home. Before we left, Fr. Tony showed us the sound system he bought with funds donated by a parishioner of St. Anne's. There are additional things he has done with donations from East Moline, but they were not close by so we passed up the chance to see them.

The car was now backfiring regularly. In the past, the car ran roughly at low speeds, but ran smoothly on the open highway. Now, unless we were coasting, the car was jerking and backfiring. I was saying, or at least trying to say Hail Mary's constantly on the journey. Every checkpoint became an adventure. Fr. Michael was very talented in getting the car to actually go forward after stopping at a checkpoint and not just stalling and dying. There was a pineapple stand by one of the checkpoints. Fr. Michael figured as long as we needed to stop for the checkpoint, we might as well stop and shop for some pineapples to take home. That's when Fr. Michael realized that he had lost his wallet. After a quick search of the car, I gave Fr. Michael some Ghanaian currency for our pineapples. After a few minutes and a few Hail Mary's, we were sputtering our way down the highway. There was no need to use our horn. Typically, there are no shoulders along the highways and people walk on the edge of the highway as cars whiz by. It's common courtesy to honk your horn so folks can step into the bush as you pass and not get hit. But now the horn was totally unnecessary. People could hear us from about a quarter of a mile away and were quickly heading for the ditches by the side of the road as

they heard us approaching. I'm sure that more than one pedestrian had an initial thought that they were avoiding gunfire by heading to the ditch, not just our misbehaving car. The trip took about twice as long as normal, but we did manage to make it home. A quick call to Fr. Tony turned up some good news. Fr. Michael had left his wallet at Fr. Tony's. We're getting ready to eat dinner, so all for now.

Wednesday, August 13, 2008 – 4:45 p.m. Ghana time

The highlight for today was the first day of the retreat. I think it went very well. Last night, we had the opportunity to meet one of Fr. Michael's half brothers. (Fr. Michael's mother died when Fr. Michael was a youth and Fr. Michael's father remarried.) Emmanuel is in his fourth year at the university. He is studying computer science in Accra. John's stomach was a little upset, so he skipped dinner and turned in early. After dinner, I was in the great room reviewing the syllabuses that Lawrence had brought over to give us an idea of the kinds of things that are taught at each grade level. Emmanuel came in and we had quite a conversation about technology. Emmanuel explained that his program at the university covered a little bit of everything – programming, networks, security, etc. He was wondering if that was a better program than one that focused on a single area. I suggested that a good overall understanding of computers is good before specializing. Emmanuel talked about the challenges of doing a computer science program without proper equipment. In some areas they can only read about the topics and have no option to actually interact with the application. He also explained that the computer he was using only had 64 meg of memory (I'm sure cell phones have more). He also talked about the challenges he faced in going to school. He was interested in science, but felt that 'he was a small person with a small head' so he would not be smart enough to pursue a career in science. We talked about the importance of building the basic skills in students as well as instilling in students a sense of self confidence.

I went to bed last night thinking I would have a nice leisurely morning before the retreat began at 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. At about 7:30 a.m. as I was just finishing my 'shower' (standing in the shower stall and pouring cold water over myself), Fr. Michael called in and said, "Deacon Joe, you have visitors." I thought that by now I must have met everyone in the village at least twice. I was greeted by more of Fr. Michael's relatives. I was introduced to one of Fr. Michael's uncles, the younger brother of the old man we met when we met with the tribal chiefs and elders. Fr. Michael explained that, although he was not the eldest, he was the spokesperson for the family. He had been serving as the chairman of the funeral that was conducted over the last weekend and so had been unable to meet me. I learned a little of the history of the area. Initially, Fr. Michael's ancestors settled in both sides of what is now the Togo-Ghana border. The area where we are staying is called "traditional lands" and it extends almost to Dzodze to the south and up to where tomato farming begins to the north. There are 5 clans in the tribe that Fr. Michael's family belongs to. His clan was the first to settle in these traditional lands and they see themselves as senior guardians of the land. They have a plot of land that they want to donate to the school and came to meet me and tell me that. I expressed happiness that there was so much support for the school that so many people were offering land for the project.

After saying goodbye to Fr. Michael's family, we headed to the church for the retreat. Fr. Michael drove us and then took the car to see if it could be repaired. Lawrence translated for me and did a great job. The theme of the three-day retreat was, "Jesus through the eyes of Mary". Today's topic was "The Love of a Mother". My basic point was that a mother's love for her child is written in her heart. No one has to teach a mother to love her child. It has been put in her heart so that we know something of God's love for us. We looked at how God has used the gift of fertility to show His love and His power. We looked at Abraham and Sarah, Elkanah and Hanna, Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Joseph and Mary. In each case, God use fertility to bring forth life outside the natural order. We also compared Hannah's Magnificat with Mary's Magnificat. Hannah's Magnificat was in thanksgiving for her prayer for a child being answered, but Mary, committed to remain a virgin, could not have been praying for a child. She was praying for a savior. So Mary saw Jesus both as a mother sees her child and as a devout Jew sees her savior.

I talked about sacrificial love and about the woman with her child crossing from Ghana into Togo on Sunday night. Laying down your load to take care of the needs of your baby, when you are dead tired yourself, was for me a very powerful example of sacrificial love. I also talked about Mary Anne's sacrificial love in taking care of Catherine when Catherine was gravely ill as an infant. After the presentation, we had about 20 minutes for silent prayer. Then I asked if anyone wanted to share any reflections. It was kind of a risk. I wasn't sure whether they would feel comfortable sharing with me. But we did have a wonderful sharing, mostly by women who really resonated with the love of a mother. One of the most powerful and touching stories was about a mother and her infant child. The child became gravely ill. The child's father believed that the child would die and had a casket built. The child was put into the casket by the aunts and everyone headed to the graveyard with the casket. When they reached the graveyard, one of the aunts reached into the casket and touched the baby. The baby still had a pulse. The mother took the baby from the casket and brought the baby home. The baby's father was not pleased and said that if the baby was there in the morning, he would kill it as he was sure that the baby was going to die anyway. The mother escaped with the baby in the middle of the night. With the help of friends and medical care, she was able to nurse the baby back to health. It took 3 months. That baby is now 42 and the father of seven children. But that was not the end of the story. As an adult, the child wanted to meet his father. When the son tracked him down, he found the father gravely ill. The son took the father around to try to get care for him. When it became clear that the father was not going to make it, the son ministered to his dying father's needs and made all the arrangements that a family must make for a burial. There's enough in that one story for a whole retreat in itself.

Another woman brought forward a young child (5 or 6). The woman explained that this girl had lost both her father and her mother. She was being raised by a grandmother, but the grandmother had now died. The child was on her own and had resorted to stealing to eat. This woman had adopted this child. As the woman told this story, a murmur went through the congregation. They were asking if the child had been baptized yet. (Talk about warriors for the faith.) The woman said that the child had not yet been baptized, but was attending church every week and would be baptized next year.

After the reflections, we distributed the rosaries and the materials that Sue Pemp and Sr. Ruth had put together. Everyone was very appreciative of receiving a rosary. However, it became quickly clear that the supply of cards, metals and books was far less than the demand for them. It seems like there's a very sophisticated sense of fairness in this community, and "first come, first served" did not meet their standards of fairness. Lawrence came to the rescue by organizing the material and distributing it systematically. Bigger items like small devotional prayer books went to representatives of various church choirs and prayer groups (Lawrence was astute enough to recognize that we had visitors from other congregations and wanted to make sure that they were treated fairly too.) Other material was reserved for catechists. Some of the materials were saved to be distributed in school. Finally, prayer cards and other smaller items were distributed to the school children present (who had the greatest chances of being able to read English).

After the retreat we walked home and had lunch. John and I had a chance to talk about our trip and how we were doing. We both have gained a lot from the trip, but we are eager to see everyone we left at home. I'm also beginning to get a little more focused on the work that awaits me when I return to the states. The son of Fr. Michael's cousin (the Technical High School Principal) came by to meet John and me. He wants to pursue a master's degree in finance at a U.S. school. We also heard a tractor go by and went to take pictures of it. It was in the neighborhood delivering sand for a construction project.

Thursday, August 14, 2008 – 4:40 p.m. Ghana time

We had the second day of the retreat today. It went well and the numbers were up a little from yesterday. Last night we went to Dzodze for dinner. Fr. Michael had contacted a friend who has a mini-van for the trip, but just as we were getting in the mini-van, Paul, a young man who is one of Fr. Michael's friends, arrived with the car. It now had yet another fuel pump. The mechanic indicated that more work was needed and that we should bring the car back in the morning. Fr. Michael felt that the car was better enough to take it to Dzodze, so he dismissed the mini-van. Just before leaving, Fr. Michael asked us if we had mosquito repellent as we were going to be eating at an outdoor restaurant in Dzodze. The car does seem to be some better, although it is hard to start and does not seem to have much power. We made it to Dzodze without incident. Fr. Michael has taken his elderly uncle to live with him for a few days at his sister's house. He arrived a few days ago. I think he brings him over to make sure he's getting enough to eat. He affectionately calls his uncle "old man". Fr. Michael truly has a love for the elderly. The old man joined us on our journey to Dzodze.

Fr. Peter asked us to meet him at the rectory and not the restaurant. The reason for this soon became clear. Fr. Peter's car had broken down and he, and his guests, needed a ride to the restaurant. With him were Theresa and Thomas, two parishioners. Thomas had been to a suburb of Boston a few years ago as a part of an exchange program with a Boston-area parish. I think Thomas is a teacher in a school at Dzodze and the Boston parish had a school project with the Dzodze parish. Before going to the restaurant, Fr. Peter wanted a picture of all of us. It was then we learned how hard it is to start the car when it is warm. A Hail Mary did the trick and the first of two groups set off for the restaurant. Soon we were all together at the White Dove. The only light was a distant

street light as we settled in at dusk into the courtyard restaurant. We ordered drinks at about 6:30 p.m. and our meals soon after. We got to know Thomas better. He is a very animated man. He has a diploma in Ewe and was explaining some of the basics of the language to John and me.

There was only one other party at the restaurant. They were finishing up as we arrived. As they were eating, they were surrounded by 5 – 6 cats. As soon as the diners stood up to leave, the cats were on the table licking the plates and eating the leftovers. I thought it was a very efficient cleaning crew until I realized that the plates that my food was coming on were probably ‘pre-washed’ by cat tongues. We had plenty of time to chat as our food had still not arrived at 8:00 p.m. I began to think that a simple meal at Fr. Peter’s rectory would have been fine with me. Food finally arrived at about 8:40 p.m. We finished dinner a little after 9:00 p.m. Fr. Michael had discreetly called for a mini-van which arrived as we were completing dinner. Fr. Peter, Thomas and Theresa took the mini-van to Dzodze while we loaded up the car to head for home. After a few prayers, the car started and we arrived home without incident.

At today’s retreat, we began by again passing out rosaries. The choir leader led the rosary in Ewe. We prayed the Joyful mysteries. Today’s retreat topic was “Obedience”. I explained that obedience is a gift God wants most from each of us. It is also the gift that each of us can give, whether young or old or rich or poor. We looked at the Wedding Feast at Cana and Mary’s command to “do whatever he tells you to do.” Mary likewise says that to each of us. What Jesus tells each of us to do is, love God, love our neighbors, and keep His commands. I explained that it was our mutual love of God that had brought John and I to Ghana and that we were neighbors.

I talked about how Mary was at the foot of the cross when Jesus died. She knows sadness and pain and we can bring our sadness and pain to her. Mary became our mother when Jesus told John at the foot of the Cross, “Behold your mother.” I shared the story of Carol Stratton, one of Mary Anne’s friends from Black Hawk College who struggled with cancer. Years ago, Mary Anne came upon her upset in the break room after learning her cancer had returned. Mary Anne knew that Carol’s mother had died when Carol was just a girl. The next day, Mary Anne brought Carol a statue of Mary and told her that Mary was her mother in heaven. Carol left the college and we lost track of her. Recently, we received word that the Carol’s cancer was in its final stages and then the Carol had died. We talked with Carol’s husband at the wake service after Carol’s death. He explained that as the end drew near, Carol gathered those things most precious to her into a meditation room in her house. The statue of Mary was among those precious possessions.

Finally, I explained that we can bring our struggles with obedience to Mary. I told the story of how, when we got married, no one had explained that artificial birth control abused God’s gift of fertility. Then one day, Mary Anne heard the Pope preach about it on a trip to Iowa. Mary Anne was immediately convinced of the truth of the Pope’s message, but I struggled. It became a point of contention in our marriage, but even during the roughest times, we continued to pray together. One day I decided to go to the track and run until I either dropped dead or understood what to me had been an unsolvable problem. I was extremely out of shape, but ran non-stop. All the while I was panting “Hail Mary’s”. After about 11 miles, I heard a voice that I believe was Mary’s.

The voice simply said, “Mary Anne is right.” That was all. Those were the last words I wanted to hear. I ran for another two miles to see if there was more, something to soften the message. But there was nothing else. When I dragged myself home and told Mary Anne, she just smiled. That afternoon was the beginning of my understanding of God’s gift of human fertility and a deeper and more joyful marriage.

We had a period of silent prayer and then sharing. A number of people described the private prayer as a time of release. One woman talked about having a ‘heavy head’ and that heaviness was taken from her in prayer. A teenage girl said that when she was at prayer, she saw a twinkle and then an image of someone tied up and put in a basket. The cords came loose and the person was released from the basket. The most moving reflection came from a middle-aged woman. She said that some people may have come to the retreat thinking that the man from America was going to give them money. But she said that I was giving them something more valuable than money – rosaries. She told the story of how when she was younger, her baby was very sick. Her aunt gave her a rosary and taught her how to pray it. They prayed for her child who recovered. I was astounded by the faith of the people I met in Ghana. It was a fervent, lived faith. It was also a well-formed faith. That’s not to say there’s no work to do. I’m sure that there are many who I didn’t see in church who still need to hear the Gospel. It just seemed that there was an intrinsic connection between faith and their lived experience. One of the first things John and I noticed in coming to Ghana, was how many of the businesses had religious names (things like “God’s Power Beauty Salon” or “Heavenly Mini-Bus”). It would be easy with western eyes to see this as a crass attempt to use religion to market a product or service. But I think it’s more likely that the business names are just a reflection of the role that religion plays in their lives.

After the retreat, we met with a number of the women of the church. About 6 years ago, some funds were donated for the creation of a credit union. These women run the credit union. They get together once a month and review applications and outstanding loans. A number of people have used the credit union as seed money for small scale commercial ventures. Fr. Michael says that the credit union has a very good track record with only a few people defaulting on their loans. They do charge some interest on their loans as a way of increasing the capital available for loans. Their biggest problem is that the demand for loans far exceeds the amount of money they have to loan out. I told the group that I would get information about micro-loans to them through Lawrence. The credit union would benefit from at least another \$5,000 available to lend out. On the way home we were able to see the results of the credit union’s work. It appeared that a couple of families had gone together and are doing some kind of oil processing (palm oil, I believe). They use the credit union for funds to buy the nuts which are heated and processed. At the end of the process, the oil rises to the top and is skimmed off for sale for use in soap and other products. The residue can be burned as fuel. Also on the way home, we stopped by a house of someone who was attempting to raise grass cutters. Unfortunately, he only had a male grass cutter. We attempted to get some pictures, but grass cutters are very shy.

Friday, August 15, 2008 – 1:30 p.m. Ghana time

We ended the retreat this morning with a Mass celebrating the feast of the Assumption. Yesterday afternoon, Lawrence stopped by at about 5:00 p.m. to see if I wanted to visit his junior high. It is a little way outside the village, but it provides convenient access for students from a number of neighboring villages. Due to the academic success of the students, the school has seen a growth in students while other schools in the area have lost enrollment. Lawrence mentioned earlier that at one of the junior high schools in the area none of the students had passed the exam to go on to high school. For these students, their education is effectively over. It's easy to see why people would gravitate to those schools that are producing results. Earlier in the trip there was discussion of Lawrence's school moving into the buildings of one of the schools that was losing enrollment. I had mentioned that if Lawrence's building became available, it might make sense to start our school in that building. That would enable our fundraising to go toward equipment and supplies and not initially bricks and mortar. I think that part of the reason Lawrence wanted me to see the school was for me to see firsthand the challenges that would be involved in that approach. I told John that he didn't need to make the journey, so he stayed behind at the house to relax. Lawrence and I took off on foot to visit the school. We took the back path to visit the school. Lawrence asked me if I would like to stop by to see where the dam had washed out. The dam provided wetlands for growing crops during the lean season. This was an effective source of economic development as the wetlands provided a competitive advantage in being able to improve yields during the lean season. Because the lean season is less productive, there is less competition for produce in this season and the crops can bring a higher price. It was easy to see why the damage to the dam was seen as a huge loss to the area. As we approached the dam, I could see the remnants of the wetlands farming the dam had supported. The hole in the levy is huge (I estimate it was 30 feet deep and 30 feet wide). A few years ago, the dam was overrun during the rainy season and a big chunk of the dam was washed away. The government has promised to fix the dam but nothing has happened yet. The path to the dam was 'in the bush'. The closer we got to the dam, the more overgrown the path became. I was desperately trying to remember what I had read about snakes in Ghana. All I could remember was a documentary I once saw about how silent snakes are and how they can sneak up on you before you know it. I was so focused on not being surprised by a snake, that I forgot something else that Fr. Michael told us when we first arrived in Ghana. Local people do not have the same sense of privacy as Americans. It is not uncommon for people to answer the call of nature without the benefit of a bathroom. I'm not sure what Lawrence was thinking about, but we both found evidence of the lack of privacy as someone had used the path as a bathroom. I think Lawrence got the worst of it as he was wearing flip-flops; at least I had tennis shoes on. Lawrence felt bad and apologized for the incident. I just kept thinking, 'at least it wasn't a snake.'

Lawrence's school is very close to the dam and was built on the flood plain. Lawrence explained that there were a number of problems with the school being built in the flood plain. In addition, the initial construction did not take proper account of the soil type in laying the footings. Thus the building is settling and they are constantly repairing cracks in the walls and foundation. Although electrical wires pass by outside, the school is still awaiting electricity. Lawrence said an order has been put in, but no one has ever come to install the service. Lawrence opened up one of the rooms for me to see. Even with all the shutters open, the room seemed hot and dark. (We were there about 5:30 p.m. so I

expect that when school is in session – 8:00 a.m. to noon – the rooms are brighter and hotter.) We did not take the back path home and instead took that went through the center of the village. It was again Market Day (I believe that every 5th day is Market Day). I shot some video of the market. When we got home, there was a small group on the patio. We joined them. Fr. Michael's uncle was with us on the patio. He wanted to know if John and I had to learn everything we knew or if it just came to us in dreams. I think the question says something profound about the intersection of our two cultures and how we appear to the people of the bush.

Sometime in the middle of the night, I heard the car return. It sounded like it was running rougher than when they took it in. We had a leisurely breakfast this morning before Mass. We were able to use the car to get to Mass. Paul, one of Fr. Michael's friends, took the car while we were at Mass to again try and get it fixed. I gave my last talk of the retreat as the homily at Mass. I summarized the first two days talks and then talked about Mary seeing Jesus in all his glory in heaven. Mary wants to share that vision with us. I also suggested that the feast of the Assumption is a feast for all of us. God's promise to us is that if we do what Jesus tells us to do; we will someday be like Mary in heaven. Before Mass ended, Fr. Michael addressed the people in Ewe. I think he was summarizing our visit and letting people know that it was up to them if anything was to come as a result of our visit. Fr. Michael asked me to say a few words. I explained that I wanted to come back to Ghana, but that was in God's hands. I described the difficulty we had in planning the trip and then the serious diagnoses that Mary Anne had received last winter. I told the congregation that I had contacted Fr. Michael and told him it looked like Mary Anne was seriously ill and that I might not be able to make the trip. Fr. Michael replied that we must take it to God in prayer. All of the serious diagnoses proved wrong so I was able to travel this year to Ghana. I was going to leave any future trips back in God's hands.

Saturday, August 16, 2008 – 9:20 a.m. Ghana time

We had a quiet lunch on Friday and spent some time relaxing. A new diagnosis was made on the problem with the car while we were at Mass. The magneto was loose, being held in place by a single bolt. A couple of the fellows had taken the car to see if they could find additional bolts to correctly attach the part. Unfortunately, the situation with the car deteriorated before they were able to find the bolts and the car had broken down on the road. About mid-afternoon, the car was towed home. The mini-buses that are used to transport people can double as tow trucks. The mini-bus arrived at the complex with the car being pulled behind with a rope. Once the car was safely in the compound, the young men left on a motorcycle in search of the bolts.

At a little after 5:00 p.m. we went back to look at the land that had been volunteered for the school. Four plots had been identified. Three of the plots were along the main highway and one was off the main road and closer to the original settlement. We took off on foot to see the two parcels of land that were on the north side of town along the main highway. Each of the plots was extensive. Fr. Michael indicated that these were the plots that had been offered and we would take only what we needed out of what was offered. The plots were less than a mile north of the village. Additional settlements

further north along the main road could easily be served from either of these two sites. The third plot along the main highway was south of the village. Fr. Michael was able to flag down a mini-van with two open seats that allowed Awudu (the Assemblyman) and me to go to the third site. This site is about a mile south of the village and on the way to Dzodze. This third site is also expansive. After viewing this site, Awudu was able to flag down a mini-bus to take us back to the village. The mini-bus was filled with the aroma of fish. Africa is a cacophony of sights, smells, and sounds.

We arrive home a little before 6:00 p.m. The party was scheduled to begin at 5:00 p.m., but few people had arrived. A group continued working on the car. Fr. Michael joined the group. Before long, we heard the sound of an engine starting followed by exuberant laughter. The car was working again. The car left to get the DJ and the sound system for the party. People began arriving for the party. A car arrived from Dzodze with Emmanuel, the president of the Parish Council (and also an education minister for the district), Thomas and Theresa. Eventually we heard the now familiar sound of someone trying, unsuccessfully, trying to start a car. Soon our car arrived at the compound, being pushed by the DJ and his assistants.

Andreas served as the chairman for the event. Drinks were served and there was a little dancing. John was given a bracelet and asked to dance by one of the women of the village. I wasn't asked to dance (except by John who wanted to share his experience). They must have had pity on me. It appears to be a sign of high etiquette to serve drinks with a straw, including beer. My mom always told me that drinking beer with a straw was a cheap buzz. I didn't have the courage to try it. There were about 30 – 35 people in attendance. John and I had boiled salad and boiled potato for dinner. It hit the spot. The others had a more traditional African meal. We received a number of gifts. I received a shirt/dress from the tribal leaders and a nice wood carving from the parish in Dzodze. I also received two weavings. John got a 'Welcome to Ghana' and a weaving. We then had a series of speeches where folks from the community expressed their appreciation for what we were attempting to do and committing to work to make it a reality. Fr. Michael stressed that it will now be up to the community to take the next steps toward making the school and the economic development projects a reality. One theme of the evening was that this was a family gathering and that John and I were part of their family. I told the gathering that I was returning to my family, but in doing so I was leaving a family behind.

Our plan was to rise early and be on the road to Accra by 8:00 a.m. Somewhere in the middle of the night, I vaguely heard the sound of our car starting and leaving the complex. It was not there when we woke up. Fr. Michael had arranged for us to rent a mini-bus for our trip to Accra. We were renting the mini-bus from Awudu's brother. Awudu was at the compound, but not the mini-bus or the driver. The women who did the cooking for us had noticed that John and I liked the fresh roasted peanuts that they had prepared for us. One of the cooks approached me and gave me a bottle of peanuts and in well-rehearsed English said, "This is for Mary Anne." She had been at the retreat every day and had heard all my stories about Mary Anne. I could tell that her words were heart-felt and I was deeply touched. Soon after, the other cook approached John and gave him a bottle of peanuts and told him it was for his brothers and sisters. The mini-bus has arrived and they have begun washing it. All for now.

Sunday, August 17, 2008 – 9:45 Ghana time

We are sitting on our plane awaiting takeoff on our flight from Accra to New York. The plane is scheduled to depart in about 20 minutes. Yesterday, I was initially puzzled as to why we were taking the time to wash the mini-bus before the trip to Accra. The reason soon became apparent. We had the van, but not the driver. The driver arrived a little after 10:30 a.m. and we were soon on our way. Awudu and Fr. Michael's uncle joined us on the trip to Accra. Fr. Michael had initially wanted to take us on a little sight-seeing, but that was abandoned due to the late start. Even so, the landscape was impressive, with small mountains occasionally rising out of the plains. Shortly after crossing the Volta River, we stopped for lunch at a 'picnic beach'. It was very beautiful and seemed a little out of place amid the roadside huts and businesses. Except for a busload of young adults, the place was practically empty. Fr. Michael, John and I all had French fries and chicken-kabob. The rest of our group went next door to eat a more traditional African meal. This was the first time on the trip I recall seeing a girl in an outfit that was in any way revealing. The reason soon became clear. The young people were with "Star Modeling Agency". Shortly after getting back on the road after lunch, Fr. Michael asked the driver to stop the mini-bus. We stopped by the side of the road and Fr. Michael asked us if we wanted to see the cocoa farms. They were very interesting. The cocoa trees are somewhat small trees that live under the canopy of larger trees. We entered the cocoa forest and went down a well-worn path. Most of the cocoa had been harvested, but we did see some cocoa still on the tree. I'm not sure if it's considered a nut or a fruit, but when it's ripe it looks like a small yellow football, about 6 inches long and about 3 inches in diameter. The actual cocoa beans are inside this pod. We took a sample. Fr. Michael explained that it would be a problem to take our sample back to the U.S. If the customs agents found it in our bags, they would throw it away. In addition, because customs couldn't be sure that the cocoa hadn't contaminated other things in the suitcase, the whole suitcase would be destroyed.

We arrived in Accra at about 4:00 p.m. We immediately went to a huge arts and crafts market. The driver waited with Fr. Michael's uncle while the rest of us went to buy gifts for the folks at home. This was one of the few times while on the trip that we saw any concentration at all of white people (maybe 1% of the customers at the market). There are no posted prices and any of the goods at the market. All prices are subject to negotiation. I let Fr. Michael do the negotiating. He seemed to enjoy it. It was a process of asking the price of everything and adding it up as he went along, reaching the end, and then starting all over again. After about the fourth time of adding everything up, Fr. Michael announced he had gotten the best possible price. John tried his hand at negotiating on some small gifts for his friends. I'm not sure how successful he was; what I do know was that he asked me for some more money. I think he wanted the experience of negotiating at the craft market.

After the craft market, we traveled to the formation house for Fr. Michael's order. We had visited the house earlier in the trip and had met Fr. Joseph. In the evening traffic, it took about an hour and a half to get to the house from the craft market. We had a nice, but simple meal of rice and chicken. We decided to have Mass at 6:00 a.m. and to leave as soon as we finished Mass and grabbed a bite to eat. Having experienced the traffic

Saturday night getting to the formation house, I was worried about getting caught in a traffic jam and missing our flight. We turned in early. Recently a night club opened next to the formation house. Basically the night club consists of a roof and a very loud sound system. I fell asleep to the sounds of African disco and woke up at about 4:00 a.m. to the Muslim call to prayer. John, Fr. Michael and I were the only ones at Mass. The seminarians who had hosted us the night before were planning to go to Mass at the seminary later. It was nice to pray one last time with Fr. Michael. I think we were all a little weary – but it was a good kind of weary.

I had seen the mini-bus before going to Mass, but after Mass it was nowhere to be found. Fr. Michael asked one of the seminarians for the keys to the house van and another potential disaster was averted. Soon we were on our way to the airport. All throughout the trip I had a healthy concern for the deep gutters that line the streets within the cities and villages. On our way to the airport, I got confirmation that my concerns were not without cause. We saw a mini-bus with two wheels in the gutter and two wheels about 4 feet in the air. Apparently the driver had gone too close to the edge of the road and that was the result. It would have been interesting to see how they got the bus out, but I kept my curiosity under control as I was still worried about a traffic jam popping up and us missing our plane home. We had a 10:15 a.m. flight and airport regulations required us to complete check in at least 2 hours before the flight's scheduled departure time. Fr. Michael constantly reassured me that on Sunday morning it would take us only about 35 minutes to get from the formation house to the airport. I don't think I did a very good job of hiding my concern about making it to the airport on time. Fr. Michael was right; it only took us a little while to get to the airport. We arrived at about 7:15 a.m. Fr. Michael, his uncle, and Awudu were not allowed to enter the terminal which is reserved for ticketed passengers. Fr. Michael told us to come back outside when we had checked in as his cousin was coming to see us off. This was the cousin who had lent us the first car. John and I headed into the terminal to check in. Going inside the terminal without Fr. Michael, I was struck with how much I had been dependent upon him to run interference and make things happen on our trip. Now he wasn't around to point us in the right direction and give us tips on what to do and where to go. I immediately went to the information desk and asked where we needed to start. The response was a vague – over there. John and I watched other passengers and headed over to a table staffed with customs officials. We had to put each bag on the table to be searched. After searching each bag, the official would mark the outside of the bag with a piece of chalk. After customs, we had to get in line for our bags to be weighed. From there we finally went to the airline check in desk. We managed to get checked in with about 30 minutes to spare. I'm laid back about many things, but checking in at airports isn't one of them. I try to get to even the Quad City Airport about an hour and a half before departure and always give myself at least 2 hours for connecting flights. So making it with 30 minutes to spare was a little out of my comfort zone. After checking in at the airline desk, we had to take our bags to once again be searched, this time by airport security.

Once we checked in, we went back outside to find Fr. Michael and his cousin. We found Fr. Michael. His cousin had not yet arrived. Fr. Michael suggested that we wait at a sidewalk café about two blocks from the entrance to the airport. I tried to set aside my nervousness about making the flight (I could just imagine being two blocks from the airport and missing the 45 minute deadline to be at the gate – we hadn't been through

immigration or airport security yet). We sat at the sidewalk café to wait for Fr. Michael's cousin. We waited for about 20 minutes, but still no cousin. I finally told Fr. Michael that we needed to finish getting checked in and that I would meet his cousin on my next trip to Ghana. Fr. Michael walked us back to the entrance to the airport entrance and we said our good-byes.

We were able to pass through immigration without much delay. I was beginning to relax. It was good to know that Ghana was willing to let us go home. John was beginning to notice that I was beginning to relax. We made it through security without too much problem (they did confiscate my AAA batteries) although the security was much more stringent than in the U.S. Everyone was patted down. We got to the boarding area with about 40 minutes to spare. Finally, I'm beginning to relax.

Epilogue

Thursday, September 4, 2008 – 9:00 a.m. Rock Island time

We've been home just over two weeks. It may take us at least a couple more weeks to get caught up. The flight from Accra to New York was long, but uneventful. John and I read and rested on the plane. They showed the Prince Caspian movie which was a nice distraction. I was a little concerned about getting through U.S. customs. Fr. Michael had indicated that bringing raw peanuts back to the U.S. would raise the same problem as the cocoa fruit – our luggage would be confiscated and destroyed. However, roasted peanuts would be fine. As soon as we boarded the plane, we were given a customs declaration form to fill out. The first question was something about "Are you bringing any seed, soil, food, etc. into the country?" It didn't say anything about raw vs. prepared food. I checked the box for Yes and circled food. Both John and I had packed our bottles of peanuts in our largest suitcases, the suitcases that also had most of the other gifts we were bringing home. The thought crossed my mind that most of our clothes and gifts could be confiscated if they found a problem with the peanuts. When we arrived in New York, we had to claim our bags, go through customs and then re-check our bags for the flight to Chicago. We claimed our bags and got through immigration without incident. We then had to file past the customs agent and hand him our declaration form. There was a long line and few workers. I handed the agent our form that clearly marked that we were bringing food into the country and took a deep breath. He waved us right on through – no questions asked. We quickly rechecked our bags and waited for our flight to Chicago.

Kennedy Airport in New York seems to be a bustling, busy, and not to friendly place. Both John and I were eager for some meat that was not chicken. We found a restaurant and both of us ordered hamburgers. Fr. Michael had steered us away from beef in Ghana so this was a welcome change of pace. We didn't take too much time with dinner (my concern about being to the gate with plenty of time to make the flight was kicking in). We found our gate and settled in. I made a quick trip to the bookstore for some reading material for the trip between New York and Chicago and John called some friends on my cell phone. John had a premonition to check the video screen for information about our flight. It was now listing a different gate in a different terminal. Neither of us had heard a gate change announcement. We scrambled to get to the reassigned gate only to find that the plane had been delayed. I think we took off about two hours late and landed in

Chicago about an hour late. My brother-in-law Steve who had taken us to the airport was waiting in the cell phone lot. To my surprise, my brother Jack was with him. We talked about the trip on the way back to Wheaton where our car was parked. I'm not sure we made much sense as it was now after midnight. We had a very quick visit with my sister Pat, at whose house our car had been parked, and then left for Rock Island. We arrived home at about 3:30 a.m. on Monday August 18th. It was great to be home.

In the just over two weeks that we have been home, we've had some time to reflect, but mostly both John and I had to hit the ground running. John started back to college on August 25th. I had about one day to recover and then began preparing and teaching a two day course in Waterloo, Iowa. The next week I was in three days Georgia teaching a different class. This week I've taught one day in the Quad Cities. In addition, we have a big instructional design project for another client that is on a very short timeframe that has consumed most of my other time. But both John and I have found time to reflect on our trip. I think that the impact of the trip on both of us will grow over time. My most powerful memories are of the people that I met in Ghana. I feel that I am connected to their dreams and aspirations. Although I am back in the middle of a very active family and work life here, it's not 'business as usual'. The people of Ghana are on my mind. I feel that we are at the beginning of a very long and very important journey. I think that there is much we can do for the people in Ave-Afiniadenyigba. But I think that there's much that they can do for us. I think we can learn from their unabashed love of God and the joy they find in their faith in the midst of their struggles. I think that Fr. Michael served as a window that allowed John and me to see into a very beautiful world where our sharing our gifts can make a tremendous difference. I think that now John and I have become that window for others in our parish and community. We will need your help, your prayers and your support. God Bless.