

# THE OTP PROGRAMME IN GHANA

*Date: 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2015*

## 1. Preamble

Ghana province of the Divine Word Missionaries, known for its internationality is blessed with her inter-cultural living. It lays out its intercultural foundation through various programmes in order to promote peaceful and brotherly co-existence between the confreres from various countries and cultural backgrounds.

Considering fully the international charism of our society, the Ghana province welcomes confreres pursuing formation from other countries to come and have the OTP in Ghana in view of preparing and equipping them for future missionary assignments in Ghana in particular, and to any part of the world in general. Constitution 504 says-“the basic formation must be rooted in the cultural and spiritual milieu of the country and derive inspiration from the acceptable religious tradition of the people.” In this regard Ghana province has a lot to offer to the rest of the world through her rich cultural diversity, inspiring religious traditions and above all the well known hospitality of the Ghanaian people. Thus it serves as a second home to the young ones who aspire to be OTP students in Ghana.

## 2. Introduction

The Constitutions 515.3 and 516.4 highly recommend the OTP for brothers and seminarians as a time of supervised social and apostolic ministry. The 14th General Chapter of 1994 recommends "that the OTP should be recognized by all provinces as a valuable experience for students in initial formation." (*Following the Word* No. 5, 1994, p.27).

This document wants to outline the aim, structure and content of the OTP in Ghana. The basic steps, activities and forms of supervision of the OTP in Ghana will be explained. It is hoped that anybody who is interested in the OTP may have a more realistic understanding of how it is done in Ghana. (Cf. *Following the Word* No. 8, 1997, p. 17)

Brothers and seminarians follow the same structure of the OTP. This paper refers to both as "OTP students". The OTP cannot be used to further the professional training of a brother. A confrere who applies for the OTP in Ghana should have the general openness to return to Ghana after perpetual vows.

## 3. The aim of the OTP as a part of formation

The OTP is a part of our basic formation programme. It is a time for learning, practicing and reflecting. It is a time to facilitate a process of growth on the personal, spiritual and missionary levels. The question is not where and how much the student can help in the parish, or how best he can ease the workload of an overburdened confrere. The aim of the OTP is rather to give the young confrere the opportunity to learn missionary skills and to grow personally and religiously.

During the seminary studies or the professional training of a brother there is a strong focus on the academic/professional performance of the student. The OTP is less concerned with academic/professional matters, but focuses more on practical issues that are reflected upon in the local SVD community and are part of a holistic formation.

One can distinguish three different levels, at which we would like to aim (cf. *C. 503*). They could be summarized by the following slogans:

- **ATTITUDINAL DEVELOPMENT** for being happy and genuine (personal reflection and maturation)

When young OTP students come to Ghana to pursue the OTP, they are provided with ample opportunity to learn the basic culture and practices of the people of Ghana in view of opening up one's horizon of understanding and knowledge. As one is brought up in his own cultural background there is a need to understand, accept and appreciate other cultural practices to become a good missionary. The provided time to learn the culture and language certainly brings in attitudinal development in the student without doubt. It helps also to differentiate how a particular culture is different from one's own and try as much as possible to embrace the new culture and practices with humility and openness. Thus, the entire programme helps the student to foster genuine love for the Ghanaian cultural tradition and hence find happiness in the given situation.

- **STRENGTHENING THE VOCATION AND PREPARING FOR FUTURE MINISTRY** to be happy and faithful as a religious (reflection on faith, international community life, religious vows, SVD-identity).

The OTP is completely a formation programme instituted in view of forming students for priesthood and brotherhood in an entirely different cultural set-up with strong emphasis on promoting love and respect for other cultural traditions. Constitution 516.4 emphasizes that, "an extended period of supervised apostolic ministry (regency) is highly encouraged for seminarians, where it is feasible and seems suitable, this period can be spent profitably in another country or culture. In this way, they can strengthen their vocation, test their abilities and become familiar with their future work." Thus OTP in Ghana is an opportunity to strengthen one's missionary commitment and vocation and it introduces the candidate to their future work by letting them be placed in the concrete life situations of the people and by introducing them to the realities of the missionary life. Hence, it surely cultivates faithfulness and genuine happiness for an effective missionary work in the future.

**DEEPENING ONE'S COMMITMENT TO CHRIST** for being happy and skilful as a

a missionary (reflection on missionary work, development of missionary skills in a cross cultural setting). The OTP in Ghana is also a time to recognize the need of following the missionary role of Jesus in one's life. Following Jesus the first missionary, one must

commit oneself to his goal of establishing a kingdom of love. Jesus' entire life was spent with the people and for the people. His life needs to become our life and his mission truly our mission. Thus being with the people and knowing them in their background can be a time to develop true love for God's people and love for Jesus' mission in order to be happy and skillful as a religious missionary priest or brother.

Surely the OTP is not mainly concerned about 'being happy', however, we are called to live our SVD missionary vocation joyfully facing the difficulties it entails. During the years of temporary vows, in which the OTP falls, "each confrere should grow in the assurance that he will find human fulfillment in his vocation as a religious missionary. Thus self-reliance and balance, the capacity for community life and work, lively faith and readiness for mission should continue to grow during these years." (C. 513)

#### **4. Preparation before the arrival in Ghana**

After a confrere has been appointed for the OTP in Ghana, the OTP coordinator writes to welcome him in the name of the province. The Coordinator keeps contact with the OTP student and his prefect. He recommends the renewal of vows for a 2-3 year period prior to the OTP (cf. *Following the Word* No. 5, 1994, p. 62). He also assists in the following:

- The preparation for visa and residence permit for Ghana contacting the Superior Delegatus.
- That the OTP student receives the Ghana Province SVD Newsletter.
- That the OTP student is encouraged to read about Ghana, including the following:
  - Jon P. Kirby, *Ghana Handbook*, TICCS, Tamale 1991
  - Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, Team 1974.
  - For more information click on to [www.ghanaweb.com](http://www.ghanaweb.com)

#### **5. Time of Arrival**

The Province usually organizes the learning of the English language at the Divine Word Language Centre, Nkwatia-Kwahu. Since, it begins the school year in the third week of August: it is good for new students to arrive in the country in the beginning of August if possible. Programme at TICCS usually begins in the first week of September. Hence, OTP students with knowledge in English could arrive at the same time mentioned above. This will give them the chance to know a few places and some general information regarding Ghana before starting their respective programmes.

#### **6. The structure of the OTP in Ghana**

The Ghana Province keeps in mind the call by the Constitution 518. “The introduction of a new missionary into his field of work is an important and critical time that has a decisive influence in his future.” An OTP student in Ghana is in very critical and decisive stage of his formation. Thus it has a lot to do with his future life and ministry. Thus we have come up with well planned programme of activities that will fully prepares a solid ground for the OTP student in Ghana to be an effective missionary anywhere in the world.

**6.1 Initial introduction:** An OTP student who comes to Ghana will have an opportunity to visit different parts of the country where we have communities, especially, when available, to meet confreres from the same country as the OTP student. During this time confreres will take advantage of the time to introduce the OTP student regarding certain Ghanaian cultural beliefs and practices

## **6.2 Introduction into local culture and language**

The OTP student who knows English is expected to arrive in Ghana by the end of August as he is to attend a one month course at the Tamale Institute of Cross Cultural Studies. Those, without the basic knowledge in English will go to the Language Centre for initial English Language learning programme. TICCS programme will only come after the language learning programme.

The TICCS Introduction Course offers the OTP student a cross-cultural orientation and prepares him to learn one of the numerous local Ghanaian languages. The local language is not studied in a language school like in the case for English. Rather, the local language is learned in a village context with the assistance of an individual language helper with the help of the techniques learned at TICCS.

**6.3 Learning of English Language:** Learning of the English Language is a compulsory programme for the OTP students who have no working knowledge in English. Ghana province is blessed to have a reputable language centre where English is taught very systematically with the help of qualified English teachers. The learning of English is for a period of Ten months. It may be shortened or extended depending on the need of the individual. The school year begins in the third week of August.

**6.4 Language and culture learning:** During the approximately six month’s language learning time, the OTP student will as far as possible stay with a Ghanaian family in a village. During the language-learning period, the OTP student belongs to an SVD community. This community, together with the OTP coordinator, keeps contact with the student and monitors the learning process.

**6.5 In the place of ministry:** After the language learning time, the OTP student is assigned to a place where SVD confreres are working. During the first four to six weeks, the OTP student acquaints himself with the place. He then writes a "Situation Profile". This will assist him to formulate his own learning objectives. The local supervisor and the OTP student sign a "Learning and Working Agreement". This agreement clearly states where and in what kind of

ministry the OTP would be involved. It also indicates when the student and the supervisor would meet for sharing and evaluation/reflection.

At the end of the OTP, the student writes an evaluation of the "Learning and Working Agreement". This report should look at each item of the learning objectives and the corresponding missionary experience. The report should also mention insights that the OTP student gained for his personal and religious missionary life. The student's report would be discussed with the co-coordinator and the local supervisor.

Before returning to his own country, the coordinator and local supervisor writes a confidential report regarding the OTP student for the Prefect of the sending Province.

## **7. Resource persons and supervision**

The success of the OTP depends to a great extent on the student himself. Other people are however designated to assist the young confrere in his process of growth in the OTP experience.

- The OTP coordinator has the following functions:
  - He is the link between the sending and the receiving provinces
  - He assists the provincial to choose a suitable place for the OTP student.
  - He introduces the local supervisor into his role.
  - He visits the OTP students individually and regularly.
  - He organizes meetings with all OTP students and the supervisors.
- The local supervisor is frequently the parish priest or the priest in charge. He takes the OTP student through community life, missionary supervision and reflection. At least, once in two weeks, a formal meeting of supervisor and student is encouraged to take place.
- It is very helpful if there is always a group of OTP students in the province so that all OTP/CCME students can come together for sharing, reflection and mutual support.
- Each OTP student should select a spiritual director.
- For his own good, the OTP student is encouraged to keep a personal journal.

## **8. Cross Cultural reflection on ministry**

Twice in a year the OTP coordinator lets the OTP students participate in CCROM (Cross Cultural reflection On Ministry) in order to reflect on important aspects of the local culture and the respective missionary response. The following topics are included:

- Marriage and Polygamy
- Sickness and healing
- Bereavement and funerals
- The pastoral challenge of HIV/AIDS
- Traditional beliefs and Christian faith
- Witchcraft and dreams
- Any other topics of relevance

During these seminars, each student presents a case study from his own missionary experience. In the discussion of these case studies, the OTP student gains deeper understanding of the local culture. He is also made aware of his own cultural biases and is led to find culturally appropriate missionary responses.

To increase the cultural and missionary sensitivity of the student, he is encouraged to do a research into one aspect of the culture of the people he is living with. The OTP student can later reflect on his research during his theological/professional studies back in his home province.

## **9. Annual Retreat and Recollections**

The OTP students get the opportunity to participate in the Annual retreat and recollections of the district and the province as genuine steps to foster spiritual growth and maturity.

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## **FAQ's**

1. Contact: [otpghapro@gmail.com](mailto:otpghapro@gmail.com)
2. Expected duration of the Programme: Two (2) years for those with the working knowledge in English. Those without English have to go through three (3) years as they have to spend an extra year for English at the beginning.
3. Language requirements/length of Language and cultural orientation period: Our programme requires language and cultural orientation. The students take part in the Tamale Institute of Cross Cultural Studies if their arrival coincides with the course being offered there and have English already. We advise this very much. The period for language and cultural orientation lasts at least six (6) months and at most one (1) year.
4. Placements: Parish (mostly). It is possible to offer other Ministries, if they are asked for.
5. How do you accompany the OTP student? With Spiritual Direction, group dynamics and seminars as well as personal contacts with the Province and Local Directors.
6. What is the process of application to your programme? We expect that the candidate gets in touch with the province through the Directors or the Provincial to find out about the possibilities. If he is satisfied, he would link up with his home Provincial or the OTP director as the case may be. We expect the final application to come officially from the province. We will then answer officially. Then, immigration process will also begin.
7. The contact of the OTP Directors:

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