

**Memorial Service for Fr. Joe Anyindana**  
**10 July 2011**  
**By The Reverend Barkley Thompson**

In 1994, the per capita income for the nation of Ghana was \$800. However, for the country as a whole, this number is skewed, as income in the urban centers such as Accra will be astronomically higher than in the dusty, rural areas of the north such as Binaba and Zebilla. There, \$800 is a treasure.

Also in 1994, Fr. Joe Anyindana made his first trip to the Roanoke Valley. While here, Fr. Joe was given gifts and offerings, including some cash. By the end of his visit, he had accumulated \$100 in cash. At the time, he estimated this to be the equivalent of 10 month's salary. With that much money in his pocket, upon his return to Ghana Fr. Joe's life could change appreciably.

When he left St. John's for the last time, he left behind an envelope. Inside it was a note, wrapped around \$100 in cash. This is what Fr. Joe's note said:

"In Ghana...it is customary for people to give thanks to God...for blessings...in whatever situation they may find themselves in. Thanksgiving whilst in labor or after childbirth, or recovery from sickness or in sickbed, for God's travelling mercies or for safe arrival, for success in business or a new house or for a new marriage or for anything either bad or good.

I am therefore going to give thanks to God with my widow-mite offering of one hundred U.S. dollars for three reasons: for safe arrival here in Roanoke, for God's travelling mercies back to Ghana, and for finding a second home in Roanoke especially for meeting a wonderful parish family and for a very nice, enjoyable, wonderful, unique and memorable as well as historical time; and finally for friends and fellowship. I feel so lucky and blessed to be here...What a family! What a friend I have found in Jesus! Thanks be to God."

We talk of stewardship. We speak of tithing and giving sacrificially as a reflection of our love of God and appreciation of God's blessings. But Fr. Joe's gesture is scarcely believable to us. Being handed a virtual year's income—like winning the lottery—and then giving not a small portion, not even a tithe, but *all* of it back to God, loosing hold in faith that God's work would be done.

Scarcely believable for most people we know, perhaps, but for those of us blessed to know Fr. Joe it isn't surprising at all. Because, after all, it wasn't really Fr. Joe at all. For in him the words of St. Paul to the Galatians rang true: "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me!"

Consistently in his life, the light of Jesus Christ shone brightly, molding and forming his actions, directing him in faith to be a witness to a darkened world, both in Ghana and, all too briefly, here in Roanoke.

Charlene Fisher was gracious enough to share with me correspondences from the late 90s between Fr. Joe and Charlene's late husband Bud. In them, Fr. Joe mentions the struggles with weather, poverty, and ministry in Ghana only in passing. His emphasis is on St. John's and the ministry occurring here. He is solicitous of Bud's well-being, and his concern is always for the other

I was blessed to spend some time with Fr. Joe when he last visited us in early 2008. There are three images of him that are indelibly imprinted on my memory: The first is of shared fellowship at our Shrove Tuesday pancake supper; the second if of Fr. Joe's public joy, dancing on stage with abandon at the Jefferson Center Kimoyo event; and the third is private care and prayer as the two of us broke bread together over lunch. The common mark of all three memories is Fr. Joe's smile, ever-present. It was Christ's smile, and I've rarely seen it so unguarded and true.

The Rev. Tom O'Dell, former rector here and cherished friend of Fr. Joe, was unable to be with us today, but Tom sent this reflection:

"The first time Fr. Joe ever left Ghana was to come to Roanoke in 1994. It was in February, and the region had just been hit with a devastating ice storm. Joe wanted okra for dinner, so the two of us slid down my driveway on the seats of our pants and slipped our way to Tinnell's Market. I picked up two boxes of frozen okra from the case and handed them to Joe so I could select some other items for our dinner. Joe stared at the boxes in disbelief, held them to his cheek, and exclaimed, 'Oh my goodness, everything in America is frozen!'

That was the only time I ever knew Joe to be mistaken. Where Joe was, nothing could be cold and frozen. He warmed the hearts of the people of St. John's with his humble, authentic Christian spirit. There are rare persons whose genuine, guileless love for his brothers and sisters changes everything. Here was such a person!"

Indeed. Father of all, grant to Fr. Joe your peace, and let light perpetual shine upon him.  
*Amen.*