

Serving God's people

Priest is a member of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles

by Mark Jahne
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The Rev. Edward Przygocki has been a Roman Catholic priest for 43 years. His next birthday will be his 70th but he has no intention of slowing down, even while battling health issues.

The world-traveling missionary is rarely home. Southeast Asia, South America, and other locations around the world occupy a great deal of his time and energy.



Home these days is Holy Apostles College and Seminary on Prospect Hill Road in Cromwell. He returned from his latest overseas journey just in time for the holidays.

“I just got back from Honduras,” he said. “We’ve built over 200 houses” for needy families.

That country is undergoing difficulties because the people are either rich or poor; there is no middle class, he added. Parents give their children up for adoption because they do not have the means to feed them.

Przygocki joined the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles in 1977. Born in 1954, he is a 1972 graduate of St. Paul Catholic High School in Bristol and returned to teach there in 2002. He began his studies of philosophy in Rome, Italy, and his theology studies in Washington, D.C., earning a master of divinity degree.

He then attended the International Center of Culture and Diplomacy at the Pontifical Javeriana University in Bogota, Colombia. On Dec. 8, 1980, he was ordained to the diaconate in the village of Ricardo Palma, Peru, where he dedicated his ministry to serving in the Hogar San Pedro home for abandoned children, elderly and the sick, and the rural mountain pueblos in the foot of the Andes mountains.



Children living in an orphanage in Honduras are all smiles for the visiting missionary. He is wearing a T-shirt promoting a faith-based charity called Food for the Poor.

He attributed his vocational call to Saint Francis of Assisi and to the Franciscan founder of his missionary community, the Rev. Eusebe Menard, whom he had the privilege of personally knowing for several years.

Przygocki was ordained to the priesthood Oct. 1, 1981, the Feast of St. Therese, by Bishop Peter Rosazza in his home parish of St. Stanislaus Church in Bristol. He celebrated his first Mass on the Feast of St. Francis.

“I was ordained a deacon at 25 and a priest at 26,” he said. “I came from an average Catholic family” that was filled with faith. “I was ordained in my home parish.”

He recalled that his first job after graduating from high school was in the kitchen at Bristol Hospital. He eventually was assigned to bring

the meals to the rooms and enjoyed interacting with the patients. “I felt a lot of empathy for them,” he said. That started his journey toward a religious vocation. He sensed God’s call. “My parents never pushed me and never stopped me,” he recalled.

Another career interest was becoming an airline pilot. Maybe that’s why he enjoys flying to far-flung lands so much.

“I love traveling,” Przygocki said. “I had two cousins who were also interested in becoming priests. We studied together in Rome for several years.”

One of them followed through and was ordained. “I was interested in being a Franciscan” but that changed when he came to study in Cromwell and met Menard. The elder



Missionary work often involves one-to-one relationships.

priest and mentor Przygocki describes as a mystic encouraged him to join the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles. “He had a mystical gift about him,” he said.

The first stop for Przygocki was as a novitiate in West Virginia. This experience had a major impact on his future.

“I started to work with people in humble conditions. They taught me simplicity of life,” he said. Those humble conditions include slum communities.

“Father Menard was looking for volunteers to go to Peru” and so he went. Przygocki lived with a local family and learned Spanish by immersion into the culture. Menard told him that he had a special zeal.



Przygocki meets with a group of indigenous men in Borneo.

He was assigned as vice rector of the Holy Apostles Seminary in Bogota, where he served for several years along with missions in Cartagena. In 1985 he served as chaplain of St. Raphael Hospital in New Haven and then at Bristol Hospital.

“My time in Bogota was very interesting,” he said. Times were tumultuous because of political and civic unrest. He dedicated his energy to evangelizing youth and people who lived on the streets.

He also worked with families whose children were kidnapped by the drug cartels. All the children were eventually reunited with the families but only after the parents paid a hefty ransom.

“I really love and admire the Colombian people,” he said. “I never lost my love for those who touched my heart. I’ve done a lot of work with blind children” in South America and acquired numerous Braille machines for them.

He described them as family oriented, hardworking and deeply religious.

“All of my missions experience were always linked with promoting vocations to the priesthood” as well as encouraging other Catholics to take on roles in lay ministry.

Przygocki was elected to the General Council of the Congregation while in Peru and eventually became the vicar of the Cathedral of Los Teques, near Caracas, Venezuela, where he assisted in founding the first MSA Missionary community in Venezuela.

For several years he ministered in the Diocese of Venice, Fla., serving in both Fort Myers and Cape Coral. In 1996 he began to study fine art under the direction of Nina Connors and eventually painted close to 50 works, winning awards and gaining the affectionate title of the “Painting Padre.”



The Rev. Edward Przygocki travels to Vietnam often to encourage young Catholic men to become priests.

He sold much of his art to patrons and galleries to raise funds for scholarships and missionary projects. He continued his training in the Academy of Bellas Artes in Lima, Peru and under nationally renowned master artist Ramon Pavon in Colombia.

Przygocki returned to Connecticut in 2000 and resided and assisted at St. Casimir's Church in Terryville. He also helped in many parishes in

the Archdiocese of Hartford. During these years he continued as an itinerant catechist with the Neo Catechumenal Way in New Orleans, Miami, Louisiana, Cleveland and Belize. Several of his personal projects included spiritual leadership and fund raising for orphanages in South America, Haiti and Bosnia. He led special building projects for the cloistered nuns of the Visitation Monastery in Bogota, Colombia, the Poor Claire Sisters in Tarma, Peru, and the Dominican Monastery of Nuns in Miranda, Venezuela.

In 2005, Przygocki initiated the Epiphany Center of Art and Culture in Lima, Peru, with a team of fellow artists, educators and professionals who accompanied and evangelized many at-risk inner-city youths through the arts.

Soon after, in conjunction with the Pere Menard Foundation in Canada, he assisted a fellow Bristol native, Nancy Santullo, founder of the “Rain Forest Flow Foundation,” with projects for indigenous tribes in the Amazonian Rain Forest of the Manu Jungle near Cusco, Peru. It provides humanitarian aid, education and water filtration systems to produce clean water from previously contaminated rivers.



The missionary priest has collected and donated hundreds of braille typewriters to blind children in South America.

Over the years, Przygocki has led at least 12 pilgrimages and group travels throughout Lima, Cusco and Machu Picchu, as well as to Cartagena. He also assisted travel groups to Poland, Italy, Croatia and the Holy Land and mission trips to Haiti.

In 2011, he was elected to serve for five years on the General Council of the Missionaries in Montreal, Canada. He traveled five times to Asia and helped open local MSA communities in Vietnam and Indonesia.

In February 2016, Przygocki was recognized by the Vatican as the international chaplain for the Federation of Blind Catholics by Cardinal Stanislaus Rylko, president of the former Vatican Pontifical Council of the Laity.

He continues to assist with international projects for those with visual disabilities by providing many Braille typewriters and white canes and has helped publish the Catechism of the Catholic Church in Braille for blind people throughout Latin America.!

Przygocki was named temporary administrator of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Plainville and was elected as the provincial animator (superior) of the Society of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles of the United States and Vietnam, as well as chancellor of Holy Apostles College and Seminary.

He continues to assist at Holy Apostles Seminary as an instructor of homiletics and spiritual director of seminarians. He has been an itinerant speaker with Food for the Poor and has preached in more than 25 parishes nationwide.

He soldiers even as he fights a long battle against stage-four cancer. It cost him a kidney four years ago, but he undergoes chemotherapy and continues to travel round the globe doing God's work.



Helping the poorest of the poor sometimes means finding ways to provide them with upgraded housing.