

From Ghana with love

Fr Gervase Moo has been taking care of the Catholic parish of Danbury and South Woodham Ferrers for several months now, while parish priest Fr James McShane is on sabbatical. The 44-year-old is a Spiritan Father from Ghana, who has been working in Guinea for the last five years. As a result, he was more fluent in French than in English when he arrived in the UK.

“When I returned home from Guinea, I was looking for some non-African experience. Travelling and meeting people opens your mind.” So when a colleague in Scotland saw Fr James’ advert asking for someone to cover his sabbatical, Fr Gervase made contact. After his superiors gave him permission to delay his studies for six months, the matter was decided. The Diocese of Brentwood organised a visa and Fr Gervase arrived on 19 October.

The contrast between the very rural area he had ministered to in Guinea and his new posting could not have been more pronounced. And he was ill-prepared on the clothing front. “I had decided that it would be easier to buy winter clothes in the UK rather than in Ghana, so that was a priority.”

He had one concern when he arrived, he says. “I was worried that people would not understand my English – but I felt immediately at home because of the warm welcome I received. Everyone has been very kind – and I have been inspired by the lovely cards and messages I received at Christmas from parishioners.”

He will take some good memories home with him, he says. At Christmas he spent three days in London with other members of his order, seeing landmarks such as Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament. “In London it is easy to get hold of Ghanaian ingredients too so we ate traditional food such as kenky, banku and fufu for Christmas dinner!”

A visit to the chapel of St Peter at Bradwell and a walk along the coast was another recent highlight. But before he goes home, he has one keen ambition. “I really want to see and touch snow,” he says, smiling. He may well get his wish.

Since this article was written, Fr James has decided not to return from sabbatical and Bishop Alan Williams has asked Fr Gervase to stay on until September.