

Before family heads for African missions

White Christmas needed

By JACK EVANS
Staff Reporter

Some conventional white-Christmas snow right now would be a welcome touch for Bob and Ruth Chapman and their young children.

They're preparing to celebrate what will probably be their last Christmas in Canada--and with their family--for several years. And, because they're bound for Cameroon, in northwest Africa, it will also be their last chance for a snow-whitened Christmas for some seasons.

The Chapmans are off on mission work. While both come from a Salvation Army background (Bob is the son of Maj. Robert Chapman, the Army's Belleville divisional commander, and his wife, Alvina), they will be working in Africa for the Wycliffe Bible Translators agency.

Their term of service is a guaranteed two years. But, it's normal to renew for a second two-year term, said Chapman.

The family--also including Ross, 6, Erin, 4, and one-year-old Timothy--is scheduled to leave in early January, with a tentative flight date of Jan. 4.

While their convictions have led them into the mission field, it is not the sort of work commonly associated with missions.

Wycliffe Bible Translators is an independent agency specializing in studying the world's languages.

The objective is to translate Christian Scripture into all languages, explained Bob.

As a qualified pilot and flight mechanic, his role will be in the support arm of the agency--called Jungle Aviation and Radio Services--which serves translators working in remote areas.

Their work may often require assisting the Cameroon government, he said, in a country where roads are often so poor that flight may be the only practical means of transportation.

While it is Bob's first time out of the country, his wife, Ruth, has already served a three-year stint in Kenya as a missionary teacher.

She says she is looking forward to returning to Africa where she hopes to resume teaching.

A modern mission agency such as Wycliffe--based in California--does not leave much to chance, added Bob. His preparation program included intensive and specialized aircraft training for flight over difficult terrain and short-landing facilities, as well preparation for culture shock, survival and isolation.

Cameroon has a combination of mountain, jungle and desert terrain. The weather forecasting normally available in North America is often

lacking.

And, while those specializing in translating Scriptures into various languages have more advanced courses, even those--like Bob Chapman--in the agency's support arm are requested to study some basic language patterns.

The Chapmans will be based in the Cameroon capital of Yaounde. There is one similarity they will find with Canada. Cameroon is a nation divided between French and English-speaking peoples. The population is around 7 million, but the area of the country is less than half that of Ontario.

Bob's qualification in jungle aviation, mechanics and radio came the hard way--from a number of special courses after he had originally embarked on a career as a municipal planner. He was drawn to the mission field--and the Wycliffe agency--after meeting a missionary who had worked in South America.

"I would not be involved in flying except as it's a need in the mission field," he said.

For the next few days though, they and their children are basking in the warmth of Bob's parents' family Christmas.

So many languages Scriptures still need many translations

After almost 2,000 years of proclaiming the Gospel "unto the ends of the earth," Christianity, it seems, still has a long way to go.

The Wycliffe Bible Translators, a specialized Christian agency, continues to work in remote areas of the globe translating hitherto unwritten languages into the New Testament.

Bob Chapman, visiting his parents in Belleville during the holiday season, is to leave early in January for an assignment with the agency in Cameroon, Africa.

He notes that Wycliffe scholars have identified a total of 5,112 languages in the world of which 3,000, or more than half, are yet to be touched by written scripture.

Wycliffe missionaries live among remote peoples for up to a dozen years, patiently learning the language -- but trying to not disturb the existing local culture, says Chapman. Then the language is processed into a written mode, and the Gospels are printed.

Preaching is important, said he and his wife, Ruth, on the eve of their mission, "but if the word of God is given in writing to a people and in their own language, then some eternal values result," he believe.

Intelligencer
December 19, 1968