



Mission in many forms

Students are back in the halls of Divine Word College, embracing the challenges of college seminary life. Along with classes and formation activities, the students learn about the mission of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD). And as naturally as the leaves change in autumn, our understanding of *mission* continues to deepen and evolve.

In this issue, you’ll meet some special people who represent this evolving mission of the SVD: four freshmen with their own ideas about what it means to be a missionary, an SVD priest who has made the study of mission his life’s work and the 2007 recipient of Divine Word College’s Donaghey Award, Ms. Ramona Smith-Gates.

“To me, a missionary is someone who ensures that the Word of God is heard, even if not accepted,” says David Viet-Trung Cao, a freshman at Divine Word College. Born in San Jose, Calif., David grew up in Bethlehem, Pa., and has four younger brothers. Since second grade, he has thought about the priesthood. But it wasn’t until his junior year in high school that David considered becoming a missionary.

“My parents invited Fr. Binh Nguyen, SVD, for supper,” he says. “He inspired me to think about it. I was already interested in studying languages and cultures.” When Nguyen invited him for a campus visit, David was drawn to Divine Word College. “I felt like this was the school for me,” he says. “There was an air, a magnetism about the college atmosphere, that drew me.” He worried that his high school friends might act differently around him when they learned of his plans. “But they didn’t,” he says. “They just asked me a lot of questions.”

David feels that the seminary college environment offers him a rich spiritual life. “Vespers, Holy Hour and daily Mass help me to affirm my calling,” he says. He’s had no problems in adjusting to life at DWC, although he does admit that high school “was simpler.” A saxophone player and member of the National



DWC students: David Viet-Trung Cao, Thai Quoc Pham, Minh Lien Pham and Jose Silva share a midday walk around campus

Honor Society, David also likes Latin. “My mom always told me I could fit in anywhere and make friends easily,” he adds. “Wherever I go, God and the Blessed Virgin are there, too.”

“Being a missionary is when someone is spreading God’s word and love to others,” says Minh Lien Pham, a DWC freshman from Garden Grove, Calif. “Everyone is a missionary,” he adds, “even my parents!” With two brothers and a sister back home, Minh says he’s learning to reason things out and respect his fellow students better than he did with his siblings. “In high school, we acted before we thought.” In the busy pace of Garden Grove, Minh found no time to think things through. He likes the balance of school, self-discipline and fun that he finds at DWC. “Here,” says Minh, “I have time to think about things; the small college atmosphere is teaching me about where I come from, and how to deal with life while being on my own.”

Minh already knew about DWC through his uncle, Lam Pham, who graduated from Divine Word College in 1988. “He is a role model to me,” Minh adds. Fr. Trung Mai, SVD, helped Minh complete his plans to attend the college. “I’m learning a lot, but asking so many questions, too!” And his search for answers in his philosophy class keeps leading him to more and better questions.

At first, Minh was dismayed by the “weird weather” of Iowa and homesick for the sunny west coast. Getting up early was another adjustment, but now he enjoys the routine of daily Mass and, he adds, “With classes, activities and work, the first month went by so fast. Now I feel very much at home here.”

Thai Quoc Pham feels that **“Being a missionary means living life according to God, sharing it with others, and if they are interested, we welcome them.”** Thai, like his cousin Minh and his three brothers, grew up in Garden Grove, Calif., although he was born in Thailand in a refugee camp when his family fled Vietnam. Though Thai also knew about Divine Word College through Lam Pham, he was inspired by the firefighters of 9/11, and decided to attend Santa Ana College to become one himself. “Before the semester ended,” says Thai, “I wanted to get away from the distractions of the college social scene.” He went online and emailed DWC, and soon found himself on a journey to “question and find my own way,” as a freshman at Divine Word College.

Though Fr. Trung Mai urged Thai to visit the campus, Thai thought he knew all he needed to know about DWC from his uncle. “What a culture shock,” he exclaims, “seeing all the cornfields and very few people!” Though initially he missed the bustle of home, things soon “got much better.” Thai is getting used to the life of schedules now. “Being here makes me realize the preciousness of what I have. I hope to do well in school, to study hard and read more.” Making new friends and following a routine are challenges that Thai, who prides himself on improvisation, is meeting head-on. “In making such a big life change,” he says, “I want to open my mind to new things, new cultures and new people.”

“Being a missionary, to me, means sacrifice,” says Jose Edwin Silva. **“We are responsible for carrying the Word of God to all humanity. This means withstanding any obstacles and putting our faith in God.”** Jose, our last featured freshman, comes from Herndon, Va., where his parents settled to raise him, his brother and his two sisters after moving from Ecuador in the late 1970s. “I felt different in high school,” says Jose. “I was looking for something more important, more valuable. I knew if I stayed where I was, my spiritual life would suffer.” Jose responded to a postcard he received from DWC, and visited the college in March of 2007.

Jose wanted to become independent and responsible in a spiritual sense. “I needed to get out by myself and see what God wants me to do, without any distractions.” He feels that in a “regular” college, this would be more difficult. “I like the environment here,” he says. “It takes the students out of their comfort level to strive for spiritual growth.”

Though he feels that he’s very accepting of others and easy to talk to, Jose was nervous at first. He wondered whether he’d fit in, wondered if he’d make new friends. His fears have been unfounded; he’s made friends, feels more at home and likes the beauty and peace of the countryside. “Here,” says Jose, “I realize the impact

that prayer can have – to lead you to better places and to grow and mature spiritually. I’ve made a personal commitment,” he adds, “to develop a sense of purpose, value and appreciation. I’m here to perceive and discern.”



DWC students: David Viet-Trung Cao, Thai Quoc Pham, Minh Lien Pham and Jose Silva

These four DWC freshmen believe that living and sharing the Word of God can make each of us a unique missionary. And though the mission of the Society of the Divine Word continues to grow and evolve, it will always reflect “Many Faces – One Heart.”

What is a missionary? Someone who spreads the word of God in far-off places, in a culture not one's own? Are missionaries made up of only ordained religious? Or...could a missionary be you?

Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD, a 1976 graduate of Divine Word College, is on a year's sabbatical at DWC, writing and engaged in work for the Hispanic Apostolate in the Archdiocese of Dubuque. To start off the school year at the college, he spoke with the administration, faculty and staff about the "new" mission of the Society of the Divine Word.

"One of my large concerns in my current writing is how to do missionary outreach from parishes. By this I mean not just the outreach of pastoral staff, but the parish members themselves. A parish is supposed to serve all people in the area, whether Christian or not, parish members or not."

Fr. Ascheman says that "prophetic dialogue" is the means to this end. But dialogue, more than just words, is a fundamental attitude of solidarity, respect and love – focusing on everyone, but especially those seeking faith, those who are poor and on the margins of society and those of different cultures and faiths.

After earning his Master's degree in theology, Fr. Ascheman was ordained in 1982, and came back to Divine Word College to teach theology and serve as chaplain from 1983-1984. Then he went to Washington, D.C., where he earned



*Fr. Tom
Ascheman, SVD*

his doctorate in religion and cultures. "After that," he says, "I spent four years in Mexico, as pastor in a very poor area, and I also taught seminary and university studies."

The Mexican people and their culture are close to Fr. Ascheman's heart. "I've spent 11 years in the U.S. working with Hispanics," he says, "and my life has become entwined with theirs. What they want are the same things that we want." He adds that we have no reason to fear people who are different from us, saying, "The Kingdom of God has room for everyone in it."

But central to Fr. Ascheman's missionary calling has been to "keep the idea of mission lively." As Mission Secretary to the Generalate in Rome for 12 years, his role was to find answers to the question: "What is our SVD mission now?" He feels that we don't have to travel across continents in order to witness God and His reign to others. "We can reach out, invite and welcome everyone that we meet in our daily lives. No one should be excluded; our goal should be one heart, with many diverse faces."

Of his return to Iowa, Fr. Ascheman says, "I am profoundly grateful to be back in the U.S. and in Iowa in particular. There is so much prosperity, change and openness to share here now, and this is one of the most beautiful places that I've seen."

"Mission is always interpersonal," concludes Fr. Ascheman. "The work of Christ is friendship – often



Fr. Tom spent four years ministering in Mexico. The experience brought the Hispanic culture close to his heart.

difficult, unusual friendships – which show that His mission is our mission. Even if we remain here in Iowa, we need to live in the truth that people far away are also our brothers and sisters – every one, believer or non-believer, Africans, Muslims, Buddhist, poor, rich – all are our family."

On Sunday, September 30, 2007, Mrs. Ramona Smith-Gates was honored as this year's recipient of the Donaghey Award at Divine Word College, with a special ceremony held during the 10:00 Mass, followed by a brunch. The Donaghey Award is given in honor of Rev. John Donaghey, SVD, whose dedication and support of the college spanned over 30 years. Donaghey fulfilled his roles of teacher, dean, chairman of the board of trustees and president of the college with enthusiasm, energy and tireless support of the SVD mission. Each year since 1999, one or more supporters of Divine Word College have been awarded this special distinction.

Mrs. Smith-Gates is a long-time friend of DWC. Originally from Lawler, Iowa, she married Clemens Smith in 1946. A homemaker, she has spent most of her life in New Hampton, where she and her husband raised their three sons and a daughter. "Our relationship with Divine Word College began when Clemens became friends with Fr. Alphonse Elsbernd, SVD, who was the chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital in New Hampton," says Mrs. Smith-Gates. "He acquainted us with the mission of the SVD."



Mrs. Ramona Smith-Gates

The couple provided funds for the Elsbernd Travel Grant for many years, enabling priests or Brothers at DWC to travel to a mission country if they had not had the opportunity to do so. When Fr. Elsbernd retired, it was Clemens and Ramona Smith who brought him back to Divine Word College. Later, Fr. Jim Heiar became a good friend of Mrs. Smith-Gates, continuing the family's relationship with the college. "He visited us often," she says, adding that "Fr. Heiar's sister, a nun, teaches kindergarten here in New Hampton."

Mr. Smith passed away in 1983. Today, their son Mark helps to oversee the Clemens J. Smith Charitable Foundation. Since the travel grant program ended, Mrs. Smith-Gates has continued to remember the college through her endowment gifts for the Matthew 25 Award. Married to Dale Gates for the past fifteen years, she and her husband enjoy traveling and have just returned from a trip to Italy.



Fr. James Heiar, SVD, congratulates Mrs. Smith-Gates at the award presentation.

On receiving the Donaghey Award, Mrs. Smith-Gates says, "I'm thrilled and excited to receive the award from the college. I'm glad to be able to contribute to such a worthy cause, and we hope that we'll be able to continue our support of Divine Word College in the future."

DWC president, Rev. Michael Hutchins, SVD, says, "The Fr. John Donaghey Award is Divine Word College's way of recognizing good friends who have supported us over the years, who have maintained a strong belief in the importance of our mission. With the friendship and help of many good friends, we would not be able to carry out the work entrusted to us by the Society of the Divine Word and the Church. This is our small way of saying thank you."



As a reader of the DWC World, you probably recognize Fr. James Heiar, SVD. Maybe you've read about him in the newsletter or perhaps you've had the opportunity to visit with him in person.

For over six years, Fr. Heiar served as Vice-President for Development at Divine Word College, and he was Director for Planned Giving for more than eight years. "The endowment has been growing and this provides me with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction," says Fr. Heiar. "And I've gotten to know northeast Iowa pretty well."

This past spring has been a time of reflection for him. A time to look back at his years of service, and forward, to what lies on the road ahead. In September of 2007, Fr. Heiar began a new ministry in Massachusetts. His new path takes him into retreat ministry, at the Miramar Retreat Center in Duxbury.

"At this point, I am hoping to give a new expression to my missionary ministry and priesthood. I would like to face new challenges and enter new pastoral relationships...perhaps I may once again express the teaching role that has been a part of my life for many years."



Mr. Mark Singsank
VP for Development

Out with the old, in with the new. That could be the theme for our 2007 Annual Appeal campaign.

As with each of the previous Annual Appeals, this year's appeal focuses on areas of the college that we feel will enhance the living and learning environment of our seminarians. First and foremost will be the replacement of dorm room furniture, much of which has been in the rooms since Divine Word opened in 1964.

Old desks, desk chairs, wardrobes and bookshelves will be replaced. The old furniture is metal and has become very rusty over the years. New oak furniture will be made by a local craftsman, with some pieces attached to the wall to give students more room. And because it will not be movable, this will help keep it like new for a longer time. We are planning to upgrade at least half of the dorm rooms this year. Depending on the success of the Annual Appeal, we may be able to complete all of the rooms.

In the college library, the metal blinds have also been in place for many years. Today there are many sections that cannot be opened because of broken parts that cannot be replaced. The blinds open to the side so they have to be opened all the way in order to open the windows. That in turn allows the sun and heat to enter.

To help solve these problems, new sun-reflective shades will be hung. The upper sections will be permanent, and the bottom sections retractable. They can be opened from bottom to top, which will allow the windows to be opened without letting in all of the sun and heat.

The final area of the Annual Appeal campaign is the establishment of a fund to help with future developments and upgrades to the college website. As young men consider a vocation to religious life, their primary source of information has become the internet. In order to have Divine Word in a prominent position on the internet, our website will be redesigned. This fund will help in future years to continually keep the site up-to-date with a fresh look and information.

Over the past seven years, more than \$620,000 has been raised through the Annual Appeal for a variety of projects at Divine Word. The Annual Appeal continues to be a very important aspect of the fundraising efforts. With your continued support, this year will be no exception.

Thank you to everyone who has already supported our Annual Appeal. Your belief in Divine Word is appreciated. If you would like more information about this year's Annual Appeal, please contact me at 563-876-3057 ext. 208 or singsank@dwci.edu

Memorials

Memorial and tribute gifts offer an opportunity to honor a relative, a friend or a business associate for any special occasion – birthday, anniversary, promotion or some particular accomplishment. The memorial gift also provides a thoughtful and appropriate way to express sympathy at the moment and remembrance in the future. You may send memorial gifts to Divine Word College, P.O. Box 380, Epworth, Iowa, 52045-0380.

Memorials have recently been received in honor of:

Pat Connolly	Wilfred & Goldie Konzen, Sr.	Dr. Richard V. McKay	Emma Trenkamp
David J. Decker	Betty R. Kuhle	Mary Rue Nicklaus Memorial	Rev. Joseph Simon, SVD
James Downey	John A. Larkin	Mary M. Neiers	Joseph E. Williams
John Hanley	Melvin M. Mazure	Raymond Rosemeyer	The Williams-Specht Family
Dorothy Kies	Phil McClean	Melita Ross	Cyril Woerdehoff



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Divine Word College President Fr. Michael Hutchins, SVD, recently hosted a group of SVD alumni and benefactors on a tour of historically significant Society of the Divine Word (SVD) sites in Holland, Germany, and Italy. Highlights of the tour included visits to Goch, Germany, the birthplace of Saint Arnold Janssen, SVD, founder of the Society of the Divine Word; Steyl, Holland, where he founded the order; Oies, Italy, the birthplace of Saint Joseph Freinademetz, SVD, and the SVD world headquarters in Rome.

Visiting the historically significant sites had an impact on DWC faculty member Marilyn Taylor. She says, "Arnold Janssen's small bed at Steyl, his rough custom-made desk, the mist over the River Maas through his windows showed me how something as simple as one man's steady faithful work in a quiet place can still transform lives all over the world."



Traveling with Fr. Hutchins were June Brandenburg, Epworth, Iowa, Pat and David Ernest, New Liskeard Ontario, Veronic Galey, Spanish Fort, Ala., Dan Jankowski, Orlando, Fla., Jason Jankowski and Paul Mantura, Melbourne, Fla., Nancy and Dr. Jim Pearson, East Dubuque, Ill., Shirley and Mark Singsank, Dyersville, Iowa, Mary Ann and Phil Serafino, Owego, NY, Marilyn Taylor, Dubuque, Iowa, Amy Tjoa, Springfield, Mo., Dolores Witherspoon, Sun City, Ariz., and Scott Zwiebel, Celebration, Fla.

Heritage Tour 2007