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# DWC

World

Fall 2024

Educating Tomorrow's Missionaries



## WHAT'S INSIDE



**BRIDGING CULTURES,**  
*Serving Communities*

## Family Feast: Fun, Games and Tradition

There's no better way to kick off the school year than with some friendly competition! Every fall, the formation groups at Divine Word College compete in a series of hilarious games, attempting to claim victory. This year's lineup featured an obstacle course that included spinning contestants around after getting flour thrown in their faces—just to make things extra challenging! It's all part of a beloved tradition called Family Feast. Each year on September 8th, the St. Arnold Janssen spiritual family honors the legacy of the three congregations he founded: the Society of the Divine Word, the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, and the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters. The DWC celebration takes place on a Saturday. It's packed with fun morning games, followed by a more reverent evening with Mass and a banquet, bringing everyone together to reflect and celebrate.



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD



## Celebrating 150 Years of Missionary Service

September 8 marked the beginning of a special year for Divine Word College as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Society of the Divine Word. On that day in 1875, St. Michael's Mission House opened its doors in Steyl, Netherlands, paving the way for our global missionary work. Throughout the coming year, we will reflect on our mission with the theme, "Witnessing to the Light: From Everywhere for Everyone." Here at DWC, that idea is truly coming to life.

St. Arnold, our father and founder, faced enormous challenges as he worked to build up our Arnoldus missionary family. Our global family now includes Divine Word Missionary Priests and Brothers (SVD), Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS), and the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters (SSpSAP). There are also many other Missionary Partners counted in the Arnoldus family, including many DWC alumni, faculty and staff of the College. Our College community really is from EVERYWHERE; the students, faculty and staff hail from more than 20 countries, all united in one mission.

St. Arnold Janssen had a vision of sharing God's light with EVERYONE in all corners of the world. He wanted both men and women missionaries to dedicate themselves in friendship to everyone — especially faith seekers, the poor and marginalized, people of many cultures, and followers of other faith traditions.

I believe the heart of missionary spirituality is the deep hope that everyone fully experiences and participates in God's love. Like St. Arnold, we trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to bless us and guide us to work with greater creativity, faith, and love as we face new challenges. Whether here in North America or around the world, we welcome immigrants, help care for the earth, our common home, and work together for peace.

As we set out on this year-long celebration, we remember that our work is sustained by the generosity of people like you. Together, may we continue to help God's loving LIGHT shine from everywhere for everyone. Thank you for being part of our mission, and may we grow ever closer to God and one another.

Fr. Tom



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## New SVD Candidates Begin at DWC



This fall, Divine Word College welcomed six new SVD candidates! From across the globe, these young men are ready to start their formation journey. Pictured left to right are Tai Van Truong from Vietnam, Joseph Truong Van Nguyen from Vietnam, Nguyen Vo from Vietnam, Joseph Vu from California, Thi Van Nguyen from Vietnam, and Alejandro Gonzalez Cruz from Texas.

We caught up with Tai Van Truong to see how he's settling in. Tai grew up in north-central Vietnam, where he loved going to church to pray as a child. He even dreamed of becoming a priest—until life took him in other directions during high school and college. In 2021, he earned a degree in domestic tourism, but like many of us, the pandemic caused him to rethink things. While staying home, that old dream of priesthood reignited, and Tai joined the SVD postulancy.

"There were so many times I wanted to give up because I felt I wasn't deserving of God," Tai shared. "I prayed a lot, asking, 'Why me? There are so many others who are more talented and holy than I am.'" But each time he struggled, Tai said he heard a voice deep within his soul, reminding him, "Be strong, you can do it." That reassurance kept him going.

Now, Tai's made a big leap—literally! He's moved to the United States to study English at Divine Word College and continue his formation. He says the beauty and peacefulness of the campus took him by surprise. "What really stands out to me is how respectful, patient, kind, and friendly everyone is," Tai said. "I hope to nurture my dreams here and accumulate the necessary experience and knowledge to equip myself for future missionary work."

## Remember the Planters

**“Ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây.”**

This well-treasured Vietnamese proverb means,  
“When you eat the fruit, remember those who planted the tree.”

Looking back on the last 31 years as a member of the Divine Word Missionaries, I’ve come to realize that I have “eaten” the fruits of many trees planted by others in my life. Among them are my family, friends, teachers, formators, confreres, and benefactors. Without their emotional encouragement, spiritual guidance, and financial support, I would not be the person I am today. This is why I have established a habit of waking up each morning to count my blessings and pray for all those who have journeyed with me in my life.

Since my ordination in 2004, my only assignment has been Divine Word College. I have served in various capacities, including rector, director of the alumni association, formator, teacher, assistant dean, medical personnel, and even soccer and basketball coach. This year, when Mr. Mark Singsank retired in July, the Divine Word College administration asked me to fill his position. Although I initially felt reluctant due to my limited training in development work, I decided to accept the request. It is because I am deeply indebted to our congregation and especially to Divine Word College. I am excited to embark on this new responsibility of reaching out and establishing a network of friends and supporters for Divine Word College.



I humbly ask for your continued support, and I promise to give my all in serving as a bridge to connect you with all our missionaries, especially those in formation at Divine Word College. Through the intercession of our founder, St. Arnold Janssen, may God bless our labor and grant us an abundance of harvest in the garden of God.

*Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD*



## Faith and Family: A Legacy of Giving

When Quy Le arrived in the U.S. in 1998, he couldn’t speak English, but his parents’ steadfast guidance and strong faith helped him overcome the challenges of adapting to a new life. His family regularly attended monthly Masses at St. Matthew Parish in Cedar Rapids, where Vietnamese Divine Word Missionaries served their community. Quy recalls these moments as pivotal in his journey, feeling the warmth of belonging and the strength of his faith through his family’s participation.

Quy’s parents, both educators in Vietnam, instilled in him the importance of education and faith. Although he admits he wasn’t the top student, their unwavering support and encouragement taught him the value of perseverance.

After graduating from Mount Mercy University, Quy moved to Wisconsin but never lost the deep connection his parents fostered with the Divine Word Missionaries. Their example of faith, dedication, and community involvement shaped Quy’s commitment to supporting missionary work.

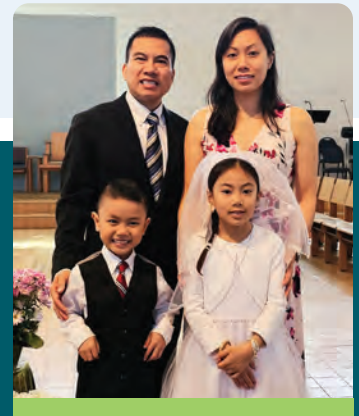
In 2018, Quy and his wife, Mary, began their journey as benefactors of Divine Word College, inspired by

the influence of his parents. After talking with Development Director Fr. Linh Pham, SVD, they decided to contribute.

“God is good! Although we were not in a great financial position to start making a sizable donation, it was the right time and the right call,” Quy said. “We strongly believe that our opportunity to contribute is part of God’s plan, so we will continue to work hard in our lives to successfully complete the plan He has for us.”

Quy and Mary now take advantage of their companies’ Matching Gift Programs, doubling their contributions each year.

“I hope that with great educational programs and initiatives, Divine Word College will be able to help our current and future missionaries gain the knowledge needed to better share and explain the Word of God,” he said.





# BRIDGING CULTURES, *Serving Communities*

Divine Word College's mission goes beyond educating young men discerning religious life with the Divine Word Missionaries. The college also plays an important role in training ordained priests from around the world to learn English and prepare for service in English-speaking communities. In recent years, some of these priests have stayed right here in the Midwest, stepping into parish leadership roles and bringing their unique perspectives to local communities.

One such priest is Fr. Telesphore Dusabe from Rwanda, who was sent to the U.S. at the request of his home

diocese. He enrolled at Divine Word College to gain a deeper understanding of the U.S. Catholic Church, graduating in May 2024 with an associate's degree in Intercultural Studies. Fr. Telesphore now serves as pastor for five parishes in Iowa's Holy Rosary Cluster, which includes the communities of Alta Vista, Lourdes, Elma, Riceville, and New Haven.

"When I first arrived in the U.S., I struggled to understand and communicate in English. It felt as though I was watching a television program in a foreign language, unable to grasp anything being said," he



recalled. “However, Divine Word College took me from a place of confusion to a place of confidence. The college’s rigorous language program played a significant role in this transformation. Divine Word College equipped me with the skills and knowledge to thrive in a multicultural and intercultural community. The college not only improved my language skills but also enriched my understanding of cultural diversity, enabling me to serve my community more effectively.”

Just a few months into his assignment, Fr. Telesphore adapted to rural Iowa life, driving from parish to parish and embracing the close-knit community he serves. He praises the local people for their hospitality and support.

“Their acceptance and encouragement underscore the universal nature of the Catholic Church,” he said. “This assignment has been a blessing, providing me with a rich environment to deepen my understanding of the Church’s practices and to serve a vibrant parish community.”

Fr. Telesphore cherishes the quiet, family-like atmosphere of the towns, where strong bonds of mutual support create a setting ideal for reflection and ministry.

“My greatest joy comes from being with my parish community, celebrating Mass, visiting the elderly and the sick, and administering the sacraments,” he shared. “These moments allow me to connect deeply with the parishioners, offering spiritual guidance and support. The warmth and openness of the people here make my ministry incredibly fulfilling and meaningful.”

However, his journey hasn’t been without its challenges. Adapting to the English language—especially with his accent—posed a significant hurdle, but he approached it with determination.

“I focused on speaking slowly, clearly, and loudly during my sermons and interactions,” he said. “I sought feedback from my parishioners and colleagues, which helped me identify areas for improvement. By dedicating time and effort to improve my English communication skills, I have been able to connect

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Fr. Telesphore is one of several priests who have found a new spiritual home in the Midwest after studying at Divine Word College. Another is Fr. Frantz Augustin, originally from Haiti, who spent a year learning English in 2019 at DWC before earning a master’s degree in human resources management. Since 2022, he’s been serving three parishes in Greene, Rockford, and Roseville, Iowa.

Fr. Frantz fondly recalls his time at DWC, where he was part of a formation group led by College President Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD. The group, composed of ordained priests, offered mentorship on everything from English pronunciation to parish ministry in the U.S.



Fr. Frantz Augustin

“Divine Word College played a very important role and has become more of a home for me,” Fr. Frantz said. “I am so grateful to the school and to all the staff who showed me great love and support.”

Fr. Frantz’s parishioners have embraced him with warmth, just as they did for Fr. Telesphore.

Other Divine Word alumni are also making their mark in Midwestern parishes. Fr. Milot Frederique, SMM, another Haitian priest, serves as Parochial Vicar at St. Thérèse of Lisieux Pastorate in Wisconsin, while Fr. Kayiranga de Dieu Felix from Rwanda serves as an associate pastor in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Fr. Telesphore says his experience at DWC helped prepare him to serve as a parish priest in Iowa. The diverse environment at the college allowed him to learn and appreciate different cultures. As he looks to the future, he remains optimistic about his ministry in Iowa, eager to learn more about U.S. Catholic traditions and to continue growing his connection with his parish.

“My hopes for my ministry in Iowa are centered on spreading the Good News, improving my language skills, learning from the Catholic Church in the U.S., and fostering spiritual growth within my parish community,” he said. “With God’s grace, I am confident that these aspirations will lead to a fruitful and fulfilling ministry.”



# Campus Connections



Sr. Kim Thi Vo, MCV, found herself in a whirlwind of bubbles as she walked the parade route during Epworth Town and Country Days in August. The DWC float celebrated the college's diverse community and gave students a chance to engage with this vibrant local tradition.



Alejandro Gonzalez Cruz bursts into laughter as he tries to keep the hula hoop in the air! Students joined in a variety of games and activities at the Opening School Picnic, kicking off the year by building community and enjoying some fun before classes began.



Sr. Cecilia Fukah Egho, SUSC, shares a warm greeting with a resident at Harmony in Dubuque, while Frt. Cong Nguyen, SVD, looks on. Through their ministry practicum, the students visit the care center, bringing joy to residents by playing games and spending quality time together.



An impressive 76 golfers teed off at the 10th annual Divine Word College Benefit Golf Outing at Timberline in Peosta this July, raising more than \$11,000 for the Student Scholarship Fund. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who made this event a success!





# FINDING JESUS

*in every heart*

Originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, Frt. Rafa Yescas, SVD grew up in close connection with the Divine Word Missionaries since the congregation ran his home parish. His mother attended Bible-sharing sessions, and his family was deeply involved in their church community. At age 10, he joined the youth group and choir, solidifying his bond with the SVDs. As a teenager, he found support from the SVD Priests and SSPS Sisters when facing personal challenges. “It was amazing,” he said. “As a teenager, you need someone who can help you understand what’s happening in your life.”

By age 15, he began spiritual direction with a vocation director. Three years later, he faced a tough decision: study psychology or join the SVDs. Frt. Rafa chose to continue discerning his call to missionary life. In 2017, he moved to Guadalajara to study philosophy, followed by a novitiate year in Oaxaca during the pandemic. He then studied theology in Mexico City and professed First Vows in 2021.

During his formation, Frt. Rafa worked with young people in a community where drugs and violence were part of their everyday life. He didn’t just want to teach them, but to help them develop a relationship with Jesus. By the end of his time there, several young people told him they had discovered Jesus. This experience confirmed for Frt. Rafa that he wanted to help others in the same way as a Divine Word Missionary Priest.

Now at Divine Word College in Iowa, Frt. Rafa is learning English in preparation for his upcoming Cross-Cultural Training Program in Jamaica. “Being here has helped me learn how to deal with and be patient with people from different cultures and mindsets,” he said.

Frt. Rafa hopes to blend spirituality and psychology in his missionary work, helping people understand themselves and find healing. In Jamaica, he plans to assist with a food pantry, teach Spanish, and attend Bible-sharing sessions. He also hopes to inspire young people to consider religious life by showing them how to bring Jesus to others through their faith.

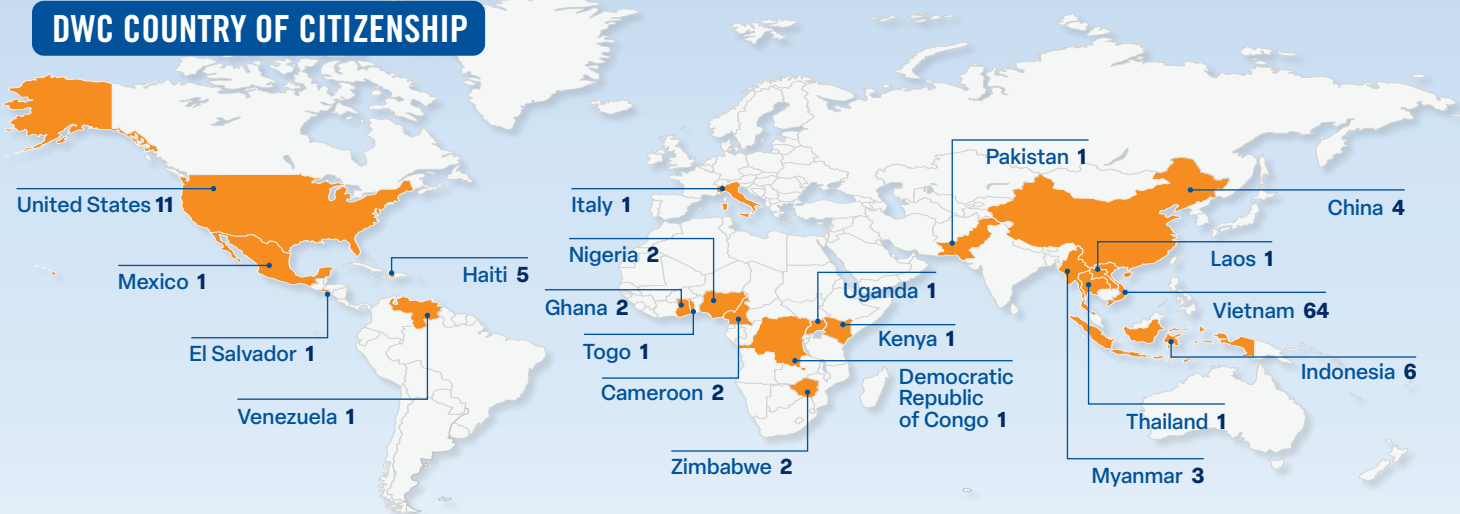
“People need someone to listen to them, especially now when the world is changing so much,” he said. “We need priests, sisters and brothers who are able to accompany people, see their wounds, help them heal and be the presence of Jesus in their lives.”

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DWC COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP



## Global Community United in Mission

This year, Divine Word College is proud to welcome 112 students from 21 countries around the world. Our diverse student body includes 17 SVD candidates, 12 SVD members, four SSps sisters, one SSps candidate, six diocesan seminarians, 51 religious sisters, three religious seminarians, four religious brothers, eight diocesan priests, four religious priests, and two laypeople.

While the primary mission of DWC is to prepare young men discerning a vocation with the Divine Word Missionaries, we are blessed to offer our fully accredited, four-year undergraduate program and Intensive English Language Institute to individuals from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds. Together, they are united in the common goal of serving God's people across the globe.

Thank you for your continued support of Divine Word College, which allows these dedicated individuals to pursue their call to be servants of God.

**112**  
STUDENTS

**21 COUNTRIES**

## Celebrating Vocational Milestones

### Former Students Advance in Religious Formation

As our 112 students immerse themselves in both academic studies and religious formation at Divine Word College, we are filled with pride watching former students take the next steps in their vocational journeys.

This summer, four young men entered the year-long novitiate program with the Divine Word Missionaries in Chicago. This phase of formation is an important time for reflection and growth, allowing the novices to further understand their calling, deepen their relationship with God, and learn about the history and charism of the SVD community.

Another group of four men completed their own year of novitiate this summer and took the next step in affirming their commitment to missionary service in the Church when they professed First Vows as Divine Word Missionaries.

Finally, September marked a momentous occasion as six young men professed their Perpetual Vows, followed by ordination to the diaconate. These men now eagerly prepare for their ordination to the priesthood, which is planned for May 2025.

We are deeply grateful for your continued support of the men in formation with the Society of the Divine Word. Thank you for walking alongside them as they seek to answer God's call.

