

# COLLABORATION KEY TO SUCCESS FOR MISSION IN MOZAMBIQUE

*For the past five years, Fr. Giang Tien Nguyen, SVD and the other Divine Word Missionaries serving in the southern African nation of Mozambique have been working alongside residents in the community to help feed their bodies and nourish their faith. Hoping to create long-lasting, sustained change, the missionary team developed a relief model that includes the people in the community so they can be a part of the solution.*

*Originally from Vietnam, Fr. Giang moved to the United States with his family in 1991 when he was 8 years old. He graduated from Divine Word College in 2006 and professed perpetual vows in 2014. During his formation, Fr. Giang spent three years in Mozambique learning the language and doing pastoral studies. After his ordination in 2015, he moved back to Mozambique for his first missionary assignment.*



### *Stronger together*

Since September, Fr. Giang said Divine Word Missionaries in Mozambique have focused most of their efforts on hunger relief. Farming is the main source of income for people in the village of Liupo where he was working. In the past two years, poor weather conditions crippled crop production, which is devastating since families rely on the food they grow for survival. When crops are destroyed by drought or other natural disasters, there's not enough food like corn, beans and peanuts, to last through the year. There's not even cassava, a popular and cheap starchy root vegetable, for the Macua people. The Divine Word priests, a brother and three Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters look for ways to improve life all around them. Women, especially young mothers, were quick to reach out and ask for a job working on the farm operated by the missionaries. Fr. Giang said the women proved to be dedicated and hard-working. By inviting the local people to join the mission efforts, it allows the missionaries to stretch their aid farther and reach more people. It also teaches the workers valuable skills and gives them a sense of dignity because the assistance is not a hand-out. Many of the mothers join the missionaries in the fields, working the land and preparing it for planting. In return, they earn money or food for their service. Everyone involved benefits.

### *Creative solutions*

The Society of the Divine Word first established a mission in Mozambique in 1911 but it ended due to World War I. The order returned to the country 24 years ago. Missionaries have been trying to find ways to minimize the burden on the community during seasons when food is scarce. One initiative they started is a seed bank. Since the price for planting supplies climbs each year when demand is high, the seed bank ensures that the missionaries and many locals can access affordable seeds when they need



them. They also lend the seeds to those who can't afford them, and ask them to return them at harvest time to maintain the seed bank. The missionaries partner with representatives from Caritas Internationalis in the Diocese of Nacala to get information about where to find the best supplies at the lowest prices. Caritas is a confederation of Catholic relief, development and social service organizations. By networking, Fr. Giang said they're able to maximize all available resources and ensure that nothing goes to waste. They're also constantly finding ways to preserve local foods, like mangos and fish, so they may be eaten months later. When Divine Word Missionaries have money from donations, Mass stipends and other sources, Fr. Giang said they use it to buy additional food. Then they sell it to residents for a lower price than the markets, which is especially helpful in remote communities far from the main village. Working with others locally and abroad ensures that the missionaries and farmers not only store, spread and plant the seeds to produce food, but they're also constantly spreading and planting the seeds of hope in difficult times together.

### *Accepting limitations*

Sometimes, even despite their best efforts to prepare for all scenarios, Fr. Giang said they find themselves in difficult times. He's learned from the people of Mozambique that it's important to help one another when times get tough. He's also understanding the value of finding a sense of balance in life. "I'm learning to celebrate in the moment," he said. "I'm there with the people. It's not about what I'm giving, what I'm teaching in the homily but the presence of being there with one another. That's

the greatest gift that the people can offer to me. To share the moments together instead of worrying about what needs to be done." Fr. Giang frequently travels with other missionaries to celebrate Mass and teach the Bible to children in communities throughout the region. He hopes that by working with the youth of the community, he can develop future leaders who will share their knowledge, serve as missionary partners and be active in finding their own solutions to the challenges surrounding them. Other recent mission projects include the construction of a small kindergarten in Maputo, installation of two solar pumps in Nampula to bring water to a community run by the Missionary Brothers of Charity and a major seminary, and the development of several small business initiatives that they hope will bring income to the families involved. "Only God knows the impact of our work and whether it will continue to bear the fruits of our efforts," he said.

### *Giving thanks*

When asked what motivates him in his mission work, Fr. Giang said the answer is simple – gratitude. He's thankful to all who help support the mission and his religious vocation. "I look at how much money was invested in me to be formed as a missionary, as a person of the Church, how much the benefactors have invested at the college so I could study there and at the Novitiate and the Theologate," he said. "There are people who made sacrifices and I'm the recipient of those sacrifices. Now I have the opportunity to be that bridge, to be that hand, to be that presence, to be in solidarity with those people." He's also thankful for the lessons he's learned from the people in Mozambique. Even when they face hunger and difficult circumstances, Fr. Giang said they still find joy in life and never give up. "We helped them with seeds for food, and they helped us in spreading the seeds of hope," he said. "It's a win-win for all."