

the

DWC World

Spring 2026

Educating Tomorrow's Missionaries



WHAT'S INSIDE



FORMATION IN PRACTICE

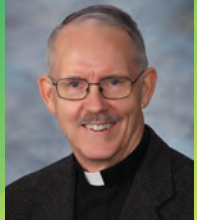
Applying to Novitiate

In January, SVD candidates in their final year of studies at Divine Word College pause to reflect on their vocation. Those who still feel called to religious life as a Divine Word Missionary apply to the SVD novitiate as the next step in their formation.

The application process begins with a letter of intent, in which a candidate freely expresses his desire to move forward. He also submits sacramental records and current health information. There are several layers to the process, including formal evaluations by members of the SVD community. The Provincial Council makes the final decision. If accepted, candidates begin their novitiate year — a time of prayer, reflection, and discernment as they prepare for vows and deeper life in the SVD community, building on the formation they have received from SVDs, faculty, and staff at Divine Word College.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD



GLORY!

In football, a desperate, game-winning touchdown pass is sometimes called a “Hail Mary.” Yet the glory usually goes to the quarterback who threw the ball and the receiver who caught it.

Recently, I heard a story about a defensive lineman — someone who rarely gets glory. Let’s call him Big Joe. In one game, he sacked the opposing quarterback three times, sealing the victory as time ran out. There was no victory dance, just a triumphant fist in the air.

After the game, interviewers rushed to speak with Joe. It was his moment to bask in football glory. But Joe hurriedly declined; his four-year-old son was at the game, and Joe needed to take him to the bathroom! It turned out that Joe’s **real glory** was not found in the spotlight, but in caring for his son.

At Divine Word College, there are also moments of glory: a goal on the soccer field, an intramural win, or students completing the Annual 5K Run/Walk. There are moments of academic glory as well — recognition as a Presidential Scholar, making the Dean’s List, and the celebration of graduation with academic honors.

The College itself has recently experienced a moment of distinction, receiving a full 10-year reaccreditation from the Higher Learning Commission. We are grateful for the recognition, and remain dedicated to developing new initiatives that promote student success.

Still, a greater glory at DWC is found in quieter, everyday acts: reaching across differences of culture or language, welcoming those far from home, and offering forgiveness in moments of impatience or blame.

However, **the greatest glory for DWC** is found in lives dedicated to missionary service with faith seekers, the poor and marginalized, people of other cultures and followers of other religious traditions. Jesus instructs his followers: “Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant... the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20: 26, 28).

Big Joe understood the glory of serving his little boy. Jesus teaches us the very same lesson.

Fr. Tom



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From East Timor to Epworth

In January, Divine Word College welcomed two students from East Timor — Frt. Luis Alvaro, SVD, and Frt. Joanico Sarmento, SVD — who arrived in Epworth to study in the ESL program. Their presence continues DWC’s tradition of forming future missionaries from around the world and reflects the global mission of the Society of the Divine Word.

Both began their formation journey in East Timor in 2018, joining 11 other young men discerning a missionary vocation. After several years of study, they completed a novitiate year in the Philippines, an experience that brought together novices and formators from different cultures while requiring English in daily life. Of the original 13 who entered formation, only three remain today. Frt. Luis and Frt. Joanico were chosen to continue their studies in the United States and are grateful to take this next step together.

Adjusting to life and study in the U.S. has brought both challenges and opportunities. Frt. Luis began learning English through YouTube grammar lessons and finds listening easier than speaking. Frt. Joanico said the first few days at DWC were difficult as he adapted to the college’s use of technology, including online assignments and academic platforms. Still, both men are committed to immersing themselves in U.S. culture.

After completing the ESL program, they will continue their formation in Chicago, carrying gratitude, resilience, and a shared missionary spirit.



Frt. Joanico Sarmento, SVD (left) and
Frt. Luis Alvaro, SVD (right)

Investing in the Future of the Church’s Mission

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

Peace and blessings to you. With gratitude, we extend our thanks for your steadfast faith in the Church and your generous support of the mission of Divine Word College. Your partnership and commitment are a concrete witness to a faith that is lived and made fruitful through generous action.

As we recently celebrated the feast of our founder St. Arnold Janssen on January 15, the Church also proclaimed the Gospel of Mark 1:40-45, recounting the moving encounter between Jesus and the man afflicted with leprosy. Approaching Jesus with humility and trust, the leper professes his faith: “If you wish, you can make me clean.” Moved by compassion, Jesus reaches out, touches him, and restores him to wholeness. This sacred moment reveals the very heart of Christ’s mission – faith that calls forth action, love that transcends boundaries, and mercy that restores human dignity.

This Gospel passage is not merely a story of healing, but a summons to all believers. It challenges us to embrace a faith that is active and transformative, inviting us to participate in God’s ongoing work of healing, hope, and renewal in our world.

Through your generosity, you share directly in this mission. Your support of Divine Word College makes possible the formation of future brothers and priests who will proclaim the Gospel with love, serve the Church with humility, and bring Christ’s compassion to those most in need. We humbly ask for your ongoing partnership, prayers, and financial support, sustaining our mission of forming dedicated missionaries for the Church.

Be assured of our gratitude and our prayers for you and your intentions. May the Lord bless you abundantly for your faith, generosity, and commitment to this sacred mission.



Fr. Linh Pham, SVD

DWC Reaccredited For 10 years

In January, Divine Word College received excellent news! The Higher Learning Commission has reaffirmed the college’s accreditation through the 2035–2036 academic year. This 10-year reaffirmation reflects the strength of DWC’s academic programs and the faithful work being done each day to prepare students for ministry and service.

Dr. Joshua Young, Vice President for Academic Affairs, credited the dedication of faculty and staff for this achievement. He noted that the accreditation review offered an opportunity to reflect on what makes Divine Word College unique. “Our Assurance Argument captured and represented the missionary essence of the college, which accreditors experienced when they came to visit,” he said, “We look forward to continuing our



commitment to the accreditation standards of U.S. higher education and to our students and community.”

Accreditation affirms that Divine Word College meets rigorous academic standards while remaining rooted in its mission to form future priests, brothers, sisters, and lay leaders from around the world. This milestone reflects a shared commitment to excellence and mission that will continue to shape the college for years to come.

FORMATION IN PRACTICE

At Divine Word College, students don't just study the liturgy — they serve it. Through hands-on roles in the chapel, they gain the skills, confidence, and reverence they will carry into missionary ministry around the world. Formation at DWC is practiced, communal, and liturgical — preparing students to serve the Church well, not just understand it. **Each role invites students to step into responsibility, deepen their prayer, and learn how worship comes alive through service.**



Lector

Proclaims the Word clearly and reverently — training students to share the Scripture with confidence and care.



Cantor

Leads the community in sung prayer — helping the assembly lift their voices while learning how music deepens worship and participation.



Musician

Accompanies worship with instrumental music — developing sensitivity to the liturgical moment and the role of music in communal prayer.



Audio Technician

Supports the assembly by ensuring voices are heard clearly — developing attentiveness, technical skill, and a behind-the-scenes spirit of service.



Acolyte

Assists at the altar with attentiveness and reverence — learning the rhythms of the liturgy and the discipline of serving prayerfully.



Media Technician

Manages liturgical displays and visual aids — supporting participation and accessibility while learning how technology serves prayer.



Sacristan

Prepares the sacred space and vessels for worship — learning responsibility, attention to detail, and respect for the Church's liturgical tradition.



Vocation Reflection

One student each month shares their personal story at a Vocation Mass — gaining guided experience in reflecting on faith and speaking prayerfully before the assembly.



Gift Bearers

Carry forward the bread and wine — embodying the offering of the community and the shared responsibility of the liturgy.

These roles form habits of service that follow our students far beyond this chapel — into parishes, missions, and communities across the globe.



Faith Woven with Culture - Two SVD candidates lend their voices to the choir during the Queen of the Americas celebration. The Asian American Hispanic Association (AAHA) organized the event, which commemorates the Marian Apparition to Juan Diego in 1531.



Celebrating Christmas with Neighbors - Senior ESL Instructor Jean Floyd helps a local boy pin the tail on the camel at this year's Epworth Country Christmas. Divine Word College's "birthday party for Jesus" included games, party favors, live music, cake, and nativity characters helping kids learn the story of Jesus' birth.



Culture with Flavor - Spreading joy, one dish at a time! Sr. Ewa Rudzka, SSps (left) and Sr. Retno Yebrink, SSps (right) brought the energy to this year's Taste of DWC international food festival following the Mission Sunday celebration in October. They served smiles, shared culture, and reminded everyone that joy is a key ingredient.



Language Meets Lunch - ESL students enjoyed a field trip to Convivium Urban Farmstead in nearby Dubuque, where learning came with full bowls and lessons in growing food. The day included a soup-making class and garden tour, offering plenty of chances to practice English through food, laughter, and conversation.



When Truong Nguyen became sick while living in an SVD community in Vietnam, he stayed quietly in his room, not expecting much attention. But after lunch, his fellow SVD candidates began to notice his absence. One by one, they came to check on him — bringing milk, cake, and simple gestures of care.

"That moment taught me a lot," Truong recalls. "I saw the beauty of community life." It was more than kindness; it was a confirmation. Life as a Divine Word Missionary, he realized, is meant to be lived in community — praying, working, and supporting one another.

That sense of belonging has been central to Truong's formation journey, but his desire to pursue religious life began much earlier. Raised in a small Catholic village in central Vietnam, Truong grew up in a family and community shaped by faith. As a child, he attended Mass with his mother and grandmother, and he still prays the simple bedtime prayer his mother taught him.

At age 13, while serving as an altar server, Truong first imagined himself as a priest. That sense of calling stayed with him through high school, where he made his intention visible in a quiet but deliberate way — choosing to dress simply in black and white,

AVOCATION STRENGTHENED By Community

reflecting the life he hoped for. His classmates noticed, affectionately calling him Thầy, a title used for seminarians in Vietnam.

When Truong encountered the Society of the Divine Word at a parish event, he was drawn to the congregation's missionary spirit and international community. But joining the SVD required passing an English exam — an intimidating challenge for someone who could barely speak the language. Determined to follow his calling, Truong enrolled in a university English program. The first year was difficult, but he persevered, eventually graduating with confidence and earning acceptance into SVD formation in Vietnam.

After completing his initial years of formation, Truong was selected as one of two candidates chosen to continue formation in the United States. Today, he is in his second year at Divine Word College, immersed in an international community that mirrors the global mission of the SVD. He serves in liturgical ministry, prepares worship resources, and lives simply in the pre-novitiate house — always ready for the next step.

As he applies for novitiate, Truong says he feels at peace. "Community life is what attracts me most," he shares. "We are brothers. We take care of one another." It is a vision of religious life that has shaped him — and continues to call him forward.

Where Language Learning Becomes

FRIENDSHIP

Confidence is often the missing piece in language learning — and for students in DWC's Intensive English Language Institute (IELI), it's built one conversation at a time. That's why the college's English Conversation Partner Program pairs some students with local volunteers for informal, low-pressure weekly conversations that complement classroom instruction. IELI Director Dr. Seo Hyun Park says this structure offers students opportunities they don't always receive in traditional classroom settings: personalized practice that feels natural and immediately relevant. By meeting consistently over a semester or two, students take risks with language, ask questions freely, and explore vocabulary and cultural nuances — strengthening both classroom learning and confidence in daily life.

Even though many IELI students come from linguistic and cultural backgrounds that may be unfamiliar to community members, Seo Hyun says volunteers approach conversations with openness and generosity. "Watching students realize that their stories, experiences, and cultures are valued — and seeing volunteers discover how much they gain in return — is a deeply rewarding part of this program," she said.

That spirit of mutual exchange is reflected in volunteers like Art Roche, who began serving as a conversation partner earlier this academic year after learning about the program at an alumni reunion. A former DWC student and longtime supporter of the college, Art lives in nearby Dubuque and has long been involved with immigrant communities in the area.

"I especially enjoy learning about all the things that my conversation partner and I have in common. Sometimes we talk about abstract ideas, like happiness and personal power," he said. "The vocabulary for that kind of conversation is more complicated, but also more satisfying."

For students, the impact can be transformative. One student told Seo Hyun that their conversation partner was the first person in the U.S. with whom they felt comfortable speaking freely without fear of making mistakes. Over the semester, that student moved from short, hesitant sentences to full, confident conversations both in and out of class.

"These weekly conversations model the kind of reciprocal learning and bridge building that is at the heart of Divine Word College's commitment to mission, community, and intercultural understanding," Seo Hyun said.



Art Roche (left) and
Fr. Antoine Malonga
Iyemangebe, SVD (right)