

# the **DWC** *World*

Educating Tomorrow's Missionaries



## WHAT'S INSIDE



Vocation efforts  
go virtual



# **We are all called.**

*You don't have to be a vocation director to promote religious life.*



## **Does your son, nephew, grandson or family friend have a missionary spirit?**

*An encouraging word from you could confirm a call he hears deep in his heart.*

As Divine Word Missionary priests and brothers, we are men of prayer and faith, serving where the Gospel has not yet been preached, or where the local church is not yet viable.

There are more than 6,000 of us ministering in more than 80 countries. As the largest international missionary congregation in the Church, we believe that His Mission is our Mission.

Our steady growth is a result of our response to the changing needs of the Church and the people we serve. Internationalism, education and professional skills are the foundations of our Society. Our international and multi-cultural communities are a witness to God's Kingdom.

*Learn more at [www.sdvocations.org](http://www.sdvocations.org)*

Contact National Vocation Director Len Uhal

**800-553-3321**

[sdvocations@dwci.edu](mailto:sdvocations@dwci.edu)

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Cover photo contributed by a Divine Word Missionary working in Mozambique

## DEVELOPMENT OFFICE



Dear friends,

It is indeed through the grace of God that we continue to stay in touch with our benefactors and friends. The mission magazine that you are holding in your hands presents one such effort.

Going beyond preserving the lines of communication with those who are interested in supporting the Church's mission, this magazine provides channels for bringing to a new level the missionary partnerships that we have been forming with our friends and benefactors over the years. Through the feature stories, our friends and benefactors are intimately connected to the life of a veteran missionary with many decades of working in Papua New Guinea, to the discernment process of students participating in their initial formation at Divine Word College, to the encounters experienced by a newly ordained Divine Word Missionary priest in his first missionary assignment, as well as to the struggles of Divine Word Missionaries realizing their vocations in far-off lands.

At Divine Word College, we are keenly aware that we are not lone rangers in our missionary journeys. We continue to count on our friends and benefactors as faithful companions in tracing the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. Together with our friends and benefactors, we witness to the Church's mission being lived out daily in many corners of the world as each page of this magazine testifies.

Thank you for continuing your partnership in the mission with us.

In the Divine Word,

*Rev. Linh Duy Pham, S.V.D.*

Rev. Linh Duy Pham, SVD  
Director of Development





*Who spends more hours on the road and racks up more frequent flyer miles each year than a traveling sports team?*

An **SVD vocation director**, that's who!

This spring, when the COVID-19 pandemic led to tight travel restrictions around the world, the vocation directors at Divine Word College found themselves in an unusual circumstance – grounded.

The six vocation directors typically bounce around the United States, Canada and the Caribbean meeting with potential SVD candidates, promoting religious life at vocation events and hosting Come and See visitors at the college. While the school serves as a home base for most of them, the majority of their time is spent off campus. So when it became clear that two vocation directors would be riding out the quarantine in California and the other four would be hunkered down in Epworth, they needed a new approach.

Bravely walking into uncharted territory, they turned to the internet to continue their vocation efforts and make connections. With no precedent for this scenario, they had to put their heads together and look for creative ways to reach people. They started by using Facebook to livestream a video of the group in the DWC chapel offering a socially-distant, multilingual version of the Lord's Prayer

and asking for God to put an end to the coronavirus pandemic. In the weeks that followed, their efforts grew increasingly more interactive. During one session, they took questions via Facebook and answered them in real-time. Another day, the vocation directors shared

personal stories about being called to religious life, as Frs. Emilio Reyes, SVD and Anthony Cong Nguyen, SVD joined the group from California via Zoom.



Go to  
[svdvocations.org/Top10](https://svdvocations.org/Top10)  
to watch a video series  
featuring our  
vocation directors

“Our goal is to have an informational vocation chat with people who might be discerning or just curious about different aspects of religious life,” said National Vocation Director Len Uhal. “We want to provide information for those seeking answers to questions.” The vocation team has also taken to the internet

to share their reflections about what they’ve learned in the midst of the global crisis and offered a prayer service for the victims of COVID-19 with a special reflection by Vocation Director Fr. Francis Rayappan, SVD.

One prospective student was forced to cancel his visit to DWC because of COVID-19, so Vocation Director Fr. Adam MacDonald, SVD worked with Fr. Anthony to film a series of videos that took the young man on a virtual tour of the campus. Uhal said the vocation department plans to develop a more professional video soon but until then, they’ll keep improvising as they navigate during these unusual times.

# From military to seminary

Novice seeks missionary life after converting to Catholicism

*Sometimes you have to travel the world in order to discover exactly where you belong.*

That was the case for novice Sam Lollar.



before Sam was meeting with priests and bishops regularly to learn more about religious life.

“I wanted to be able to work with people more one on one and I wanted to also preside over services. I really admired how they were there during some of the most crucial moments in peoples’ lives,” Sam said.

Raised in the Baptist faith, he’s now on the path to becoming a Catholic Divine Word Missionary priest.

After high school, Sam entered the U.S. Air Force and worked as an avionics technician. His first assignment outside the U.S. was in the United Arab Emirates. Then in 2008, he was sent to Ecuador. Occasionally, Sam was able to leave the base to help local children with their homework and deliver clothes to the needy. A missionary spirit was sparked within him that could not be ignored.

“After I had that experience, I just knew that is what I wanted to do,” Sam said.

Following six years of service in the Air Force, Sam entered the Air National Guard as a chaplain assistant and earned an AA degree in modern languages with an emphasis in Spanish and a Bachelor of Business Administration degree with minors in economics and Spanish.

In 2015, he officially joined the Catholic Church and it wasn’t long

Following a 2017 retreat at Techny Towers Retreat and Conference Center in Chicago, Sam found himself drawn to the intercultural aspect of The Society of the Divine Word. He started classes at DWC in January 2019 and in May 2020, he completed his undergraduate courses. In August, Sam will enter novitiate.

“I’ve never been happier, I can say. I feel like I’m where I’m supposed to be,” Sam said. “I feel a sense of peace and I feel very grateful to be here and to be an SVD candidate.”





# SPREADING THE GOSPEL

Ministry and Mission in Ventanas, Ecuador

Contributed by Fr. Tuan Khoi Hoang, SVD



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*One of the challenges for missionaries working in developing nations is how to bring the Gospel to people. After my Spanish studies in Quito, Ecuador, my provincial superior asked me to be an associate pastor at Parroquia Virgen de Guadalupe in Ventanas, a small town located in the province of Los Rios, Ecuador.*

*This place is the complete opposite of Quito. I moved from the cold sierra climate of Quito to the warm, humid coastal area of Ventanas. I went from a rich, historic city occupied by reserved residents to a poor, remote town where people like to party. There was a lot I had to adjust myself to in this new place.*

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## ***A community divided***

One part of Ventanas is a small town with stores, markets, parks and recreational centers while the other part is made up of rural areas with camps, open fields and farmland. People in the middle and wealthy classes live in the town and the poor people live in the rural areas.

Myself and three other Divine Word Missionaries are serving on mission in Ventanas at two parishes, Parroquia

Virgen de Guadalupe and Parroquia Sagrado Corazón de Jesús. The four of us are from different countries: Indonesia, Ecuador, Madagascar and the United States.

## ***Rural outreach***

Missionaries in developing nations frequently serve several parishes. In Ventanas, we tend to multiple communities and mission stations every day. Many poor people in rural areas don't have a means of transportation so they can't travel to

town to celebrate the liturgy. Public buses can't even access some rural regions.

With no other option, the communities sometimes establish chapels where people can gather to pray, strengthen their devotions and nourish their faith in God. I admire their faith because even though they are economically poor, they are rich in their belief in God as Roman Catholics.

At the parish where I currently work, we serve 40 communities and mission stations. Normally on weekdays and Saturdays, we visit two or three communities and on Sundays, we visit five or six – and that's just for daily Masses. We also celebrate feast days, funerals, weddings, baptisms and other occasions at the mission stations.

We can only visit each community once a month because there are so many sites. We visit families, join them for a meal, visit the catechism teachers and students, anoint the sick and celebrate Mass for the community. Some of the mission stations are well established, while others just have a roof on top to protect them from the sun and rain. Whether chapels are well-established or not, it does not matter to them. What matters most to these people is that they have a sacred space to gather, pray and share their faith as a community of believers. Moreover, they have a place to educate young children to strengthen their faith and their call as baptized Christians.

### *Finding a way*

While the farthest station is less than 20 miles away, it can take a long time to reach it due to the travel and weather conditions. The unpaved roads are made of rock or dirt so we have to drive with caution when it rains to avoid skidding off the muddy pathways. At some chapels, we have to park outside the main road and walk 10 to 15 minutes up and down hills to reach our destination. In

the end, all of the travel is well worth it to see the joy and smiles on the faces of the people living in these areas. Every time we arrive at mission stations, they welcome us with cheer because they encounter the presence of Christ in their lives through the celebration of the liturgy, the Word of God and the Eucharist.

### *Lessons learned*

Although I still struggle with the language and I'm still learning about parish life and the missions here in Ventanas, as I reflect on the past 10 months of my ministry, I am convinced that these struggles fill my heart with grace and blessings. It is a blessing to serve the people of Ventanas and to enrich their lives with the love of God.

I believe that it's important for me to always put forth my best effort to bring the Word of God to the people of Ventanas because if I do not, they could lose their faith in God. These people only experience the presence of Jesus Christ through listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist once a month, so it's important that I make the best of it. For the young children who are inspired and eager to learn more about their faith in God, it's very important to be present so that they can grow and be enriched in their faith.

Working with the people here has been a great experience so far. They have taught me a lot about their culture, about themselves, and most of all, they have taught me more about myself and who I am as a missionary. They have enriched my life by strengthening my missionary call and revealing the Gospel to me. It's a two-way exchange. All the long hours traveling from one community to another, the time spent in the hot sun and the energy that is drained after a long day – these are blessings and grace received both for the people and for me as we experience how God's love and presence are working in our lives.

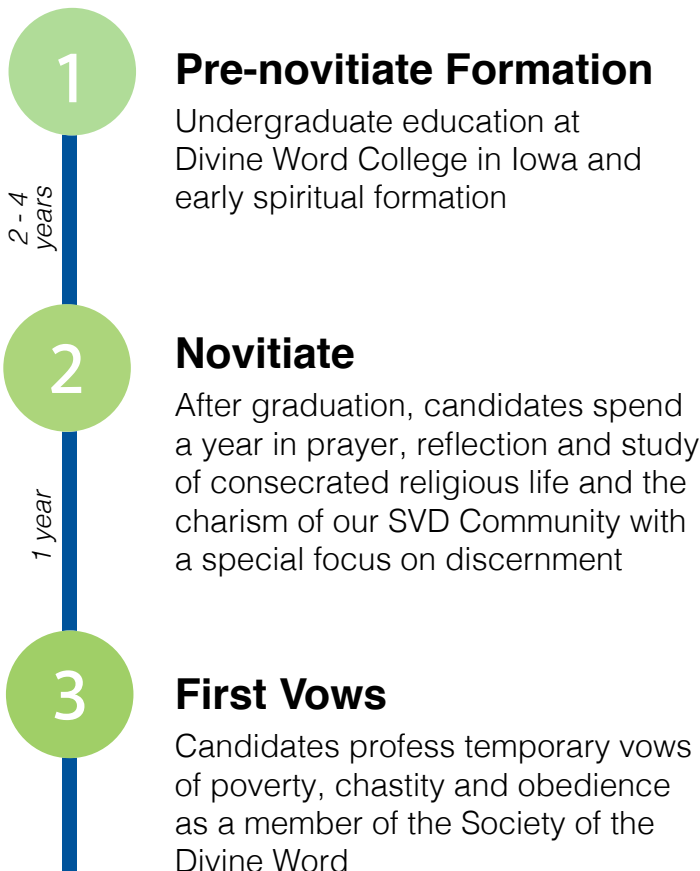




# Path *to the* PRIESTHOOD

*The journey to becoming a **Divine Word Missionary Priest** is designed to provide candidates the spiritual, academic and experiential preparation they'll need for a lifetime of service to God's people.*

*For most men, the process takes between 8 and 13 years. While the steps can vary depending on a candidate's prior educational experience, the pathway depicted here reflects the course that most men follow.*





9

6 months

## Ordained a Deacon

Deacons spend several months serving in a diocese where they gain firsthand experience with parish work

10

## Ordination

Once ordained, new Divine Word Missionary priests begin their first mission assignment, which is chosen based on their strengths and the needs of the Society

6

2 years

## Cross-Cultural Training Program

After completing two years of theological studies, brothers take part in CTP, where they experience missionary life in another culture and engage in a ministry that grounds them in their missionary vocation

7

## Professional Training

After completing CTP, brothers return to Divine Word Theologate in Chicago and begin their specialized studies at a university or technical school

8

## Perpetual Vows

Profess perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Divine Word Missionary Brother and begin their first assignment

# Becoming *a* BROTHER

*The preparation for men who are called to life as a **Divine Word Missionary Brother** starts the same as the formation process for those working toward the priesthood.*

*However, after professing first vows, brother candidates begin a unique path designed to provide an academic foundation and practical training for a specialized trade or occupation.*

4

2 years

## Theology Studies

Brothers live in a house of formation, usually the Divine Word Theologate, and participate in theology education while living together in community

5

## Clinical Pastoral Education

Brothers spend the summer after their first year of theological study participating in a program of Clinical Pastoral Education, which is generally in a hospital setting



# Divine Word Missionaries

To learn more about becoming a Divine Word Missionary, contact an SVD Vocation Director.

[www.svdvocations.org](http://www.svdvocations.org)  
[svdvocations@dwci.edu](mailto:svdvocations@dwci.edu)

**800-553-3321**



Contributed by Fr. Michael Do, SVD

The Amazon, in fact, is a large area of old forest located in South America, covering 2,124,000 square miles and touching nine countries. More than 60 percent of the Amazon forest is located in Brazil. The Amazon is the largest rainforest in the world and home to thousands of large and small rivers. All of these rivers flow into a mother river called the Amazon River, which has the largest waterflow in the world. The Amazon is like two lungs lying on both banks of the Amazon River with the trachea going down the middle and all sorts of smaller rivers spreading to both sides. In the Amazon, there are many indigenous tribes. Some of them are completely isolated and have never had any contact with the outside world.

The Amazon region has been in the news recently because of wildfires, water pollution caused by the exploitation of natural resources and the invasion of outsiders who robbed from the native land. Last year, Pope Francis held a summit to find solutions for the challenges the Church is facing in the Amazon. One major problem is the shortage of priests. Many Catholic communities are scattered deep in the forest

where believers are only able to celebrate the Eucharist with a priest once a year. In addition to pastoral responsibilities, the Church in the Amazon must work to protect the land and promote human rights of ethnic minorities. Church leaders strive to advocate for the preservation of natural resources, as well as the God-given nature in the region.

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**When we hear about "Amazon,"  
we probably think of the  
world-wide company  
specializing in selling products  
on the Internet.**

**I would like to share about  
another Amazon - the first  
and real Amazon.**

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My name is Fr. Michael Do, SVD and that is the Amazon where I'm doing missionary ministry. I live in a village deep in the Amazon, seven hours away from the nearest city by motorboat. The village is along the Arapiuns River, which has an average width of three kilometers and flows into the Amazon River. The main means of transportation here is by motorboat or ship.

The village I live in has 34 families, mostly Catholic. The parish where I work has 53 communities in 53 large and small villages that contain between 10 and 250 families. More than half of those are tribal or ethnic minorities. Most of the communities are scattered along the banks of the Arapiuns. Traveling by boat from the beginning of the river to the mouth takes





14 hours. Most villages have no electricity, hospitals or shops, so the villagers travel to the city to purchase their necessities.

People in the Amazon have very simple lifestyles. Most of them work in agriculture and the only food they grow is a root vegetable called cassava. Despite living on the banks of the river, no one seems to live on fishing. Without electricity to run a refrigerator, there's no means to maintain fresh fish. Families use their small boats to catch five to 10 small fish daily to provide just enough for their dinner.

The village where I live is in the middle of the Amazon River, so it takes seven hours by boat to travel to the beginning or the end of the river. Thus, my missionary trips usually last two weeks. Going from village to village, I work, eat and sleep on a 15-meter boat. For each trip, I must bring food, clothing and gasoline for two weeks, plus dry food to help the poor families. When I run out of food, I usually use a net to catch fish. And like other missionaries here, I have learned to sleep in a hammock because there are no beds.

Every two weeks, I travel to different communities to celebrate Mass, administer sacraments, visit Catholic families and bring food to poor families. When I come

upon villages that have electricity, I give computer courses to encourage young people to continue learning more about the world. In the future, if possible, I would like to buy sewing machines to teach the women to sew. I'm also thinking about buying cultivators to plow the land and encourage the farming families to grow various plants, other than cassava.

An interesting fact is that people in the Amazon are not used to eating vegetables or fruit, thus they do not grow them at all. In contrast, I love vegetables and fruit. So, when I am home, I use my little hoe to cultivate my garden and grow vegetables. Now, my garden has all kinds of vegetables: gourds, melons, spinach, sweet potatoes, beans and more. In some small ways, I hope to add some interesting colors to the Amazon world and to help the people here bring out their beautiful colors of diversity in simplicity.

That is my missionary ministry in the Amazon. So, when you make a purchase on Amazon.com, please remember to say a prayer for me, because only with prayer can we be connected with God's transforming power and everlasting joy.

Thank you for your prayers and support. May the Risen Lord bless you with good health and everlasting peace in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic.



## *Seminarian adjusts to taking online classes from home*

# A NEW LANDSCAPE FOR LEARNING



*While most Divine Word College students completed the spring 2020 semester by taking their courses online from the comfort of their dormitories in Epworth, Iowa, a handful of students traveled home to finish the academic year. We asked DWC Senior Nam Nguyen to tell us what it was like “attending” classes online while adjusting to life back at home with his family in Sioux City, Iowa.*

### **Q: What was your initial response to online learning?**

**A:** Initially, I didn’t think online learning would be easy for both students and teachers who were not used to using technology regularly except for their normal daily work. However, things turned out quite the opposite. Everyone seemed to adopt this new way of learning very quickly and well.

### **Q: How did students transition to online classes?**

**A:** At first, many students thought online classes seemed less intimate than studying in class together. I, too, would prefer to be in class and see my friends in person because it makes me feel better. Even though no one (at Divine Word College) has been sick, classes that were previously held in the classrooms had to be moved online for the sake of safety. Despite this new way of learning, many students I know didn’t let it stop them from enjoying online classes. Some of them chose funny backgrounds to make others laugh, which is a perfect way to cheer everyone up.

### **Q: Why did you decide to move back home to complete the semester?**

**A:** I decided to go home because I was afraid of living with so many people (at school) since the disease is contagious.

By going home, I would not be a burden on DWC if I got infected. Another reason was that I wanted to be with my family in this challenging time, since my home is not far away from school.

### **Q: Were there any particular challenges associated with studying at home?**

**A:** So far, I have not had any problems regarding studying or attending class while at home. Everything works well thanks to the help of technology.

### **Q: What were the benefits of being back at home?**

**A:** One obvious benefit was getting to see my family. Secondly, I got to help my parents by doing housework, such as lawn mowing, repainting our house, cleaning up our home, etc.

### **Q: What have you learned about yourself and your faith during this global health crisis?**

**A:** One thing has been reconfirmed: do not lose faith. Faith is what keeps one fighting to live. After the rain, the sun will shine again.



# Adapting to ONLINE LEARNING



**Megan Sutton**  
*Counselor*

I continue to provide support and aid students in managing the stress

and anxiety they are experiencing. Although recently, I have noted that there has been an increase in grief responses among students. There is a sense of loss of control, changes in social connections and ways of seeking support, as well as students beginning to have personal experience with others dealing with the virus. So as the current situation continues, the emotional focus is evolving from one of anxiety and fear to one of a sense of helplessness.



**Sr. Thanh Nguyen, LHC**  
*Student*

For me, it's not quite so different from the actual classroom. The

convenience is that we can access it anywhere on campus. It took the instructors about two days to figure out how to share PowerPoint on the screen but they learned and we learned, too. It's very convenient as we practice social distancing. I thank God for the internet and the scientists who made it so comfortable and convenient for us to continue our program. I had an interview for graduate school this week through Zoom and since I've been using it for the past two weeks, I was used to it. The interviewer said there would be a lot of courses online in the future when I move on to the next stage, so it will be easier for me since I'm already used to it.



**Fr. Ken Anich, SVD**  
*Professor of counseling and psychology*

My experience with

teaching online has been a learning curve. It is something I've never experienced before and I had basically one weekend to adjust my class and figure out how to work with Zoom. I think I earned some days in purgatory in that process! I'm still learning the ins and outs of online teaching. My students seem to be doing much better at it than I am. Still I miss the interaction in a classroom having the students right in front of me where I can experience their reactions and more easily receive their responses.



Read more accounts from students and staff at [www.dwci.edu/OnlineLearning](http://www.dwci.edu/OnlineLearning)



**Tuan Hoang Nguyen**  
*Student*

Overall, learning in an online setting is equally as

effective as learning in a classroom. Studying from a distance is more flexible and there are fewer distractions compared to normal learning. One of the benefits of studying online is when teachers send us video lectures, we can pause and repeat if we don't understand. When studying online, we don't have immediate feedback from teachers. It can be frustrating and confusing to students who aren't comfortable learning in an online setting and are used to having their instructor provide immediate feedback.



**Cederick Morando**  
*Student*

Online classes are running smoothly. We used to have a

problem with the echoing of voices, which made it hard to hear the teacher, as well as connections being disrupted from time to time, but those bugs have been fixed. Overall, I'm adjusting to the online courses just fine. I like how it frees up more time for us to do our homework, I also like the interactive features included in the application such as "share screen" and "virtual backgrounds." There are really no challenges right now, except probably the feeling that we're doing more work than before.



**Dr. Evelyn Dias**  
*Assistant Professor of Music*

Although it is far from perfect, I enjoy seeing my

students during our video conferences. I am adjusting well to the change since I like using technology in my teaching. It gives me a chance to be creative even though it demands that I be much more precise and deliberate in my instruction. I created content on Populi for one of my classes and let them know I would be available in a Zoom meeting if anyone had questions. I didn't expect many to show up, but to my surprise almost the whole class was there! We spent the hour together laughing, talking about this and that and sorting out a few class-related queries. It was a reminder of how much we miss being together in person! I certainly won't take that for granted in the future.

# Class of

**Closed to the public, there was a Divine Word College graduation ceremony but celebrating the impressive**



## **Michelet Boncoeur**

Petit-Goave, Haiti

- AA Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* My main purpose is to join the novitiate and continue with my seminary studies according to God's will.

• *What was it like completing your senior year during a global pandemic:* It was a great, new experience because I could stay in my room or other quiet places to attend class. However, it was sometimes challenging due to the lack of network connection. I am grateful that I could finish with my studies despite the global pandemic.



## **Pierre Solivert**

Saint Louis du Nord, Haiti

- AA Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* I am open to what God wants for me.
- *How has your experience at DWC changed you:* I would say that DWC

has helped me to listen more and talk less. For me, that's wisdom!



## **Ngan Tran Ngoc Vu**

Saigon, Vietnam

- AA Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* I'm looking for a job to apply what I studied and to allow me to practice my English.
- *How has your experience at DWC*

*changed you:* The experiences at DWC have changed my thinking, changed my behavior to be more mature and helped me become a better person.



## **Mark Julio Varghese**

Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

- BA Philosophy, Minor Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* My plan is to continue in discernment.
- *Greatest lesson that I learned at DWC:*

I still remember the struggle I went through when I first came to DWC since I was a timid person lacking confidence. Life at DWC taught me that struggles and situations change if you are determined to follow the rules and advice of your teachers and formators. With gratitude, I can say that I am not the same person who I was four years ago.



## **Sr. Van Ngoc Nguyen, OP-RL**

Saigon, Vietnam

- BA Theology & Religious Studies, Minor Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation:* There are many unknown challenges and changes waiting for me, so I humbly ask for your

prayers and support. Wherever I go and whoever I am to be, I will always remember you, DWC.

• *Greatest lesson you learned at DWC:* I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Divine Word College community for giving me an opportunity to study and live in an intercultural environment. I have gone through many beautiful and precious experiences, which are worthy lessons for me to live out my future life.



## **Wisvel Joseph**

Anse d'Hainault, Grand'Anse, Haiti

- BA Intercultural Studies, Minor Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation:* If God is permitting, I will go on vacation before entering novitiate.

• *How has your experience at DWC changed you:* The DWC community, especially my ESL teachers, college professors, tutors, Fan Club family, the staff, and my formators all enriched my life and my vocation by helping me to become a more loving person and a better minister for the future.



## **Tu Dinh Anh Nguyen**

Vietnam

- BA Philosophy, Minor Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* I will join the novices house in Techny.
- *How has your experience at DWC*

*changed you:* My experience helped me to have a bigger picture about the world. My mind and my heart seem open to have compassion and sympathy toward the needs of others, especially the poor and marginalized.



# 2020

**smaller crowd than usual at this year's that didn't stop those in attendance from achievements of the 14 graduates.**



**Tomerot Tadesse Lambert**

Manitowoc, Wisconsin

- BA Philosophy, Minor Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* I plan on entering postulancy with the religious order known as the Orders of Friars

Minor in Silver Spring, Maryland in August 2020 (God willing).

• *How has your experience at DWC changed you:* The intellectual life is a process in which the mind and heart try to ascent to a contemplation of the Divine in all its modes. In the words of Newman, "To be perfect is to have changed often."



**Sr. Kim Tuyen Thi Nguyen, LHC-TD**

Binh Duong Province, Vietnam

- BA Theology & Religious Studies, Minor Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* I am looking forward to experiencing a good beginning of my further study at Saint

John's School of Theology and Seminary for an MA degree in Liturgy.

• *How has your experience at DWC changed you:* Living at DWC for six years, I have experienced a big change in my life. When I first arrived, I was like a child and kept asking questions. The school has prepared me with skills that help enrich my religious life and support my future journey.



**Fr. Martin Tin Vu, SVD**

Bien Hoa City, Vietnam

- AA Interdisciplinary Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* I will move to the Theologate after graduation
- *Greatest lesson learned at DWC:* Being part of an international community, I

learned that being open is the most valuable lesson and it will help me as a missionary in the future.



**Sr. Thanh Thu Thi Nguyen, LHC-GV**

Vietnam

- BA Theology & Religious Studies, Minor Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation:* I will continue with my graduate work.

• *What it's been like completing your senior year using online learning during a global pandemic:* I adapted and enjoyed virtual online classes, which are not so much different from the classroom. I am grateful for those who created Zoom and other technological means so that I can still have classes during this difficult time.



**Baruch Zinthe Maoudjlo Zinsou**

Benin, West Africa

- AA in Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* My plan is to continue my religious, priesthood, and missionary formation.
- *How did your experience at DWC*

*change you:* Living among people from many countries across the world with different cultural backgrounds taught me to not only be a Beninese, but a world citizen. The Intercultural Studies Program helped me realize that there is no excuse for racism and abuse.



**Joubert Felix**

Les Cayes, Haiti

- BA Intercultural Studies, Minor Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation:* Now I am looking forward to novitiate, where I will continue to discern my vocation.

• *The greatest lesson you learned at DWC:* Each academic year, my formator encouraged me to do self-evaluations, which helped me see what I needed to improve more.



**Fr. Antonius Waget, SVD**

Flores, Indonesia

- AA Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation:* Going back to Seminary Mataloko (High School) to teach English and serve as a member of the formation staff at the seminary.

• *How has your experience at DWC changed you:* I plan to keep being a responsible formator and teacher by preparing young men to be future missionaries, just as the staff at DWC does.

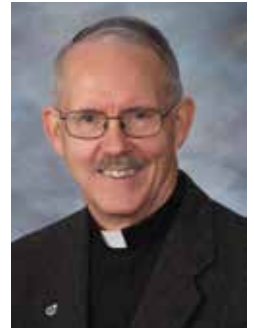
# President's Annual Report

## GENEROSITY OF MANY MAKES THE MISSION POSSIBLE

One day, a large crowd came to hear Jesus speak. He urged them to be generous. He said, "Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."

I had that message in mind while reviewing the financial picture of DWC for the past year. I am overwhelmed by the generosity of so many benefactors. Some from nearby and many more from across the country have donated more than \$2 million to the college to educate missionaries. Others have left bequests to DWC's endowment that continue to earn nearly \$1 million dollars every year.

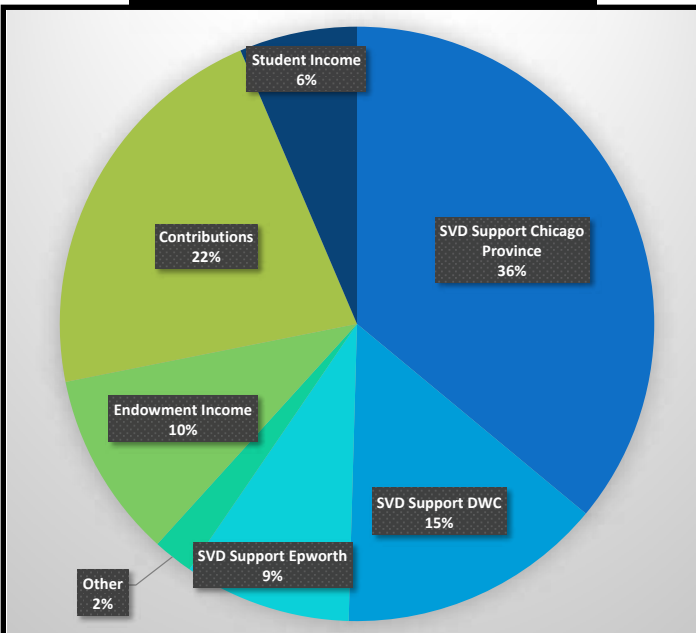
Then, as I look to our student body; I see young people of many races, nations, and languages gathered here to prepare themselves for a life of missionary service. They are pouring out their lives, giving themselves away to people on the margins of Church and society. By building up friendships with faith-seekers, with people of many cultures, with the poor, and with followers of other religions, they will be powerful witnesses to the coming of the Kingdom of God.



Fr. Tom Ascherman, SVD

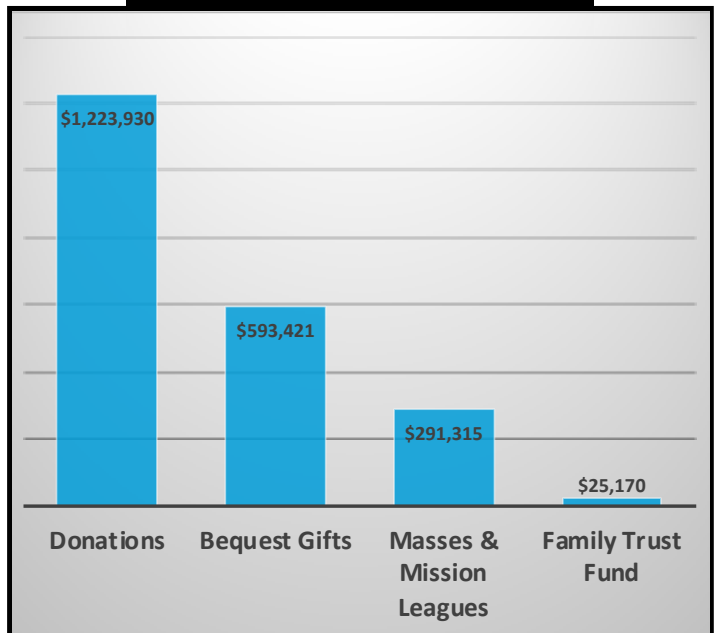
Indeed, God's graces are packed together, overflowing, pouring into our laps.

### Divine Word College Income 2019 Fiscal Year



SVD Support Chicago Province	\$3,539,000
Contributions	\$2,134,000
SVD Support DWC	\$1,418,000
Endowment Income	\$997,000
SVD Support Epworth	\$893,000
Student Income	\$630,000
Other	\$215,000

### Benefactor Contributions 2019 Fiscal Year



Most DWC students have limited financial means, but no one who is seriously considering religious life is turned away for lack of money.

Last year, DWC students received more than \$1.5 million in scholarship assistance.



# PRAY FOR OUR MEN IN FORMATION

— *Growing in community with the Divine Word* —

The men pictured here were in discernment during the 2019-2020 academic year. The goal of formation for Divine Word Missionaries is to grow into a missionary community of members from many countries and cultures. Through the power of the *Holy Spirit* and in unity with the *Incarnate Word of the Father*, we aim to cultivate a listening ear for *God's* voice in the world and a generous heart to respond to our missionary calling.



Novice Ryan  
Agbim



Frt. Edoh Adolphe  
Anato, SVD



Mr. John-Edeve  
Augustin



Frt. Betenora  
Bako Liba, SVD



Mr. Justin Ballengee



Mr. Junior  
Jean Baptiste



Mr. Berson Bien-Aime



Mr. Michelet  
Boncoeur



Mr. Antz-Carly Cadet



Frt. Thinh Cao, SVD



Deacon Trieu  
Thien Cao, SVD



Frt. Christian  
Castro, SVD



Frt. John Cho, SVD



Mr. Jaehyeok Choi



Frt. Cruz  
Colunga, SVD



Mr. An Thien  
Truong Dang



Novice Marc Declama



Mr. Mongle Destine



Frt. Minh  
Anh Dinh, SVD



Mr. Hoang Do

## EDUCATING MISSIONARIES



Mr. Wisno Elie



Novice Kodjo Emon



Frt. Giresse-Mecene  
Etung, SVD



Mr. Joubert Felix



Mr. Peterson  
Forestal



Frt. Arnold Formbi, SVD



Frt. Carl  
Gales, SVD



Mr. Omar  
Gonzalez



Deacon Khanh  
Ha, SVD



Frt. Martin  
Herrera, SVD



Mr. Nhat Hoang



Mr. Wilson Joseph



Mr. Wisvel Joseph



Frt. Brian  
Junkes, SVD



Frt. Akizou  
Kamina, SVD



Frt. Roger  
Kyaw Thu, SVD



Mr. Tomerot Lambert



Mr. Dat Le



Mr. Phong Le



Mr. Mingyo Lee



Mr. Samuel Lollar



Bro. Hoc  
Mai, SVD



Frt. Manie  
Manuel, SVD



Mr. Franciste Mervil



## EDUCATING MISSIONARIES



Frt. Joao Manuel  
Neto, SVD



Deacon Thinh Cuong  
Ngo, SVD



Frt. An Nguyen, SVD



Mr. Anh-Tuong  
Nguyen



Frt. Derek  
Nguyen, SVD



Mr. Ha Si Bao  
Nguyen



Mr. Hoang  
Nguyen



Frt. Hoang Quang  
Nguyen, SVD



Mr. Hung Duc  
Nguyen



Mr. Hung Nguyen



Novice Huy Nguyen



Mr. Lam Nguyen



Mr. Long Nguyen



Mr. Nam Nguyen



Mr. Quoc Nguyen



Mr. Tho Nguyen



Mr. Truong An  
Nguyen



Mr. Tu Nguyen



Mr. Tuan Hoang  
Nguyen



Bro. Vincent  
Nguyen, SVD



Frt. John Kofi  
Nkum, SVD



Mr. Friday Onoja



Bro. Luis  
Panuco-Carmona, SVD



Frt. Hai  
Pham, SVD

## EDUCATING MISSIONARIES



Frt. Quang Ngoc Pham, SVD



Frt. Raimundo Ribeiro, SVD



Frt. Fransiskus Santoso, SVD



Frt. Pedro Saveia, SVD



Mr. Nay Kaw Sho



Frt. Boromeo Shwe Pyi Soe, SVD



Frt. Zachary Smith, SVD



Mr. Pierre Solivert



Novice Thong Tran



Mr. Phuc Truong



Mr. Do Tuang



Deacon Marlon Vargas, SVD



Mr. Mark Varghese



Mr. Marc Anderson Vaval



Frt. Tin Vu, SVD



Mr. Tung Vu



Mr. Duc Vuong



Frt. Andrew Wang, SVD



Frt. Jorge Zetino, SVD



Mr. Baruch Zinsou



**Divine Word  
Missionaries**

### Formation Houses:

Divine Word College - Epworth, Iowa  
Divine Word Novitiate - Techny, Illinois  
Divine Word Brother Formation - Chicago, Illinois  
Divine Word Theologate - Chicago, Illinois

### Contact Us:

800.553.3321

[svdvocations@dwci.edu](mailto:svdvocations@dwci.edu)  
[www.svdvocations.org](http://www.svdvocations.org)



## 2020 DWC Intercultural Snapshot

Number of students	Religious Affiliation
50	SVD Candidates
5	SVD students in temporary vows
6	SVD students in perpetual vows
46	Religious women
6	Ordained non-SVD priests
2	Non-SVD seminarians
2	Other religious men
4	Laypeople
4	Auditors

### DID YOU KNOW?

Twenty-nine students call the USA home, though only 8 were born in the USA. Nine more are naturalized US citizens and another 12 are U.S. permanent residents.

Number of students	Nation of Birth
2	Angola
2	Cameroon
3	China
1	Columbia
1	Ethiopia
1	Germany
18	Haiti
4	Indonesia
2	Myanmar
3	Nigeria
1	Philippines
1	Papua New Guinea
1	Saudi Arabia
3	South Korea
1	Togo
1	United Arab Emirates
2	Uganda
8	USA
70	Vietnam

There were 125 students at DWC last year.

## 2020 DWC Enrollment Snapshot

thank you!

Their missionary *contributions* are made possible through the generous *contributions* of supporters like you, who help fund the education and training of all Divine Word College students. Your support ensures that ministries, like the ones shared in the pages of this magazine, can continue.





# FAITH ON FACEBOOK

## DWC STUDENTS BRING MASS TO BURMESE COMMUNITY

*While churches across the world closed their doors in an effort to protect the faithful from the coronavirus, many churchgoers turned to the internet to “attend” online services.*



A community of people in Rock Island, Ill. who speak Burmese found themselves in an especially difficult position because they couldn't find Mass online in their native language. Parish organizers reached out to the staff at Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa to ask if anyone at the school could be of assistance. Luckily, help arrived just in time.

Fr. Polycarp Thawng was scheduled to start taking ESL classes in mid-March. He arrived from his home country of Myanmar on March 15, just before airport restrictions tightened and some borders closed. The diocesan priest took four separate flights to complete the journey and was relieved to reach his final destination at the college, but his school year didn't exactly go as planned. In an effort to keep the students and staff at the school safe from the virus, administrators decided to move all classes online. Fr. Polycarp already needed to adjust to life in a new country, adapt to a new language and navigate distance

learning but he offered to extend himself even further by volunteering to say Mass for the Rock Island community in Myanmar's official language, Burmese.

On March 29, he celebrated Mass live on Facebook as more than 800 people watched. Fr. Polycarp used the social media platform to continue bringing the liturgy to the Burmese community each week during the academic year while churches remained closed. DWC students Fr. Tin Vu, SVD and Vuong Minh Vu served as the audio and visual technicians for the weekly broadcasts.



Celebrating Mass while staring into a camera instead of the faces of parishioners felt strange but Fr. Polycarp wasn't the only one adjusting. “For some people, this is awkward since they cannot receive Holy Communion,” he said. “It is for us, too. To celebrate Mass in video and livestream – it's not an easy thing but I want to encourage them to participate prayerfully.” DWC student Leo Tuang served as lector during the services. Originally from Myanmar, he is in the formation program at DWC and hopes to become a Divine Word Missionary priest someday. “I get to practice preaching and standing in front of people,” he said. “This is my dream. It's helped me improve the way I present, the way I read the Bible and the way I prepare, so it's all very good.” Growing up in a remote village, Fr. Polycarp recalls waiting anxiously for the two occasions each year that his parish priest would walk 12 miles to visit his community and offer Mass. This spring, Fr. Polycarp helped bring the Word of God to people who craved it, just as he did as a boy.



# A TRIED AND TRUE MISSIONARY

*At first sight, Brother Kevin Diederich could have been mistaken for a daily Mass attendee at Divine Word College. With sharp but friendly eyes and casual attire, he blended in with the locals of Epworth. Yet SVD confreres are proud to count him as one of their distinguished veterans, a tried and true missionary of the Divine Word.*

## Child of God

Raised in a small Missouri town, Bro. Kevin received his early education in the parochial school system. In 1954, his eighth-grade teacher introduced the idea of joining the SVD Brotherhood Candidate Program. At first, he wasn't too warm to the idea but it turned out to be a providential decision that shaped the direction of his life. Several months after moving to Techny, Ill. for high school, Bro. Kevin felt at home among other brother candidates in training.

## Industrious pupil

He went on to participate in the postulancy program and later Bro. Kevin entered the two-year novitiate, where he learned how to live and work as a member of the Society of the Divine Word. In May 1961, he professed first vows at St. Mary's Mission House in Techny.

As a newly professed SVD in the juniorate program, Bro. Kevin worked in the Mission Gardens in Techny under the supervision of Bro. Charles Reckamp, SVD, a renowned horticulturist.

Before professing perpetual vows in 1967, the young brother was sent to Epworth to work on landscaping for the newly constructed Divine Word College campus. More than 50 years later, visitors can still see the imprints of Bro. Kevin along the back-lawn walkways lined with grown birch, hackberry and oak trees, which

serve as a testimony to his passion and hard work.

## Worldly missionary

Bro. Kevin's first mission assignment took him halfway around the globe to Papua New Guinea. As a tried and true man for the Church's mission, he worked to build up the Church in both figurative and literal senses for more than 28 years. From constructing schools and churches to building houses, erecting health clinics and training locals in the construction trade, Bro. Kevin was on the front line. He was there for, in his words, "whatever was needed." For both its joys and challenges, Bro. Kevin regards his time in Papua New Guinea as the most rewarding period of his life as a missionary brother. Working with the people in the island nation afforded him countless opportunities to encounter life's true meaning. It was difficult for Bro. Kevin to bid goodbye to the Papua New Guinean people in 1995 and readjust to the realities of life in the United States. Yet, this veteran missionary took the new experience with grace and humble acceptance, saying, "That is something all returning missionaries must go through."

Bro. Kevin does not anticipate the completion of his missionary journey anytime soon. Today, it continues as he gives continued witness to the vision laid out by St. Arnold Janssen almost 150 years ago.



The Divine Word College Development Department is responsible for advancing the college's mission through strategic planning, fundraising and partnerships with donors whose contributions make the mission a reality. The vision demonstrated by development leaders throughout the college's history has helped shape Divine Word College into the thriving institution that it is today.

# — developing the mission —



**FR. JOSEPH D. SIMON, SVD**

As the first director of development for Divine Word College, Fr. Joseph worked from 1975 to 1980 building a solid foundation that continues to serve the department today. During his 27 years at DWC, he held a number of positions and from 1987 to 1993, served as college president. In addition to his duties at the college, Fr. Joseph made many civic contributions,

including serving for 10 years on the Epworth City Council. He also helped out as a softball umpire in the area. In 1984, he received the Service Recognition Award from the National Association of Regional Councils. Fr. Joseph passed away in 2007.



**BRO. LEONARD BAUER, SVD**

Soft spoken and filled with faith, Bro. Leonard moved out of his role in the business office in 1988 to focus more exclusively on development work. On average, Business Office Director Marlene Decker said Bro. Leonard wrote 40 letters each day. "He nurtured the benefactors by his personal letters and kind gestures," she said. In the evenings, Bro. Leonard

visited people in the community and helped the elderly. "I could honestly say he loved working for the Lord," she said. "He was a role model for all of us working at Divine Word." Bro. Leonard retired to Techny, Ill. in 1998 and passed away in 2004.

**FR. JOE MCDERMOTT, SVD**

Born and raised in Dubuque County, Fr. Joe spent 23 years serving the people of Papua New Guinea as a missionary before Bro. Leonard convinced him to return to Iowa and take a position in the Development Office at DWC in the 1970s. For nearly 25 years, Fr. Joe worked as a dedicated and valuable member of the team. Development Office Secretary Phyllis Urbain said he left a lasting impression on everyone he met, both in the college and the community. "Fr. Joe became the first person you wanted to call to share your good news but also the first person you wanted to call when the news was bad," she said. He spent his days meeting with friends and benefactors of the college, building genuine connections that still remain today. Whether serving in a remote corner of Papua New Guinea or at a parish hall in Dubuque County, Fr. Joe had a unique way of reaching people. In 1999, he retired but he still resides at Divine Word College where he continues to share his missionary spirit with the DWC community and holds the fitting title of "patriarch."



**FR. ROBERT JONES, SVD**

In 1982, Fr. Bob, as he was known to many, was named vice president for financial and development matters. He told the Board of Trustees when he started that the department needed a leader who could set goals, inspire others and communicate effectively. Development Office Secretary Amy Hartman said Fr. Bob was a great asset to the office and worked hard to achieve those goals. He was responsible for starting the original 2000 Club Raffle, which was later replaced with the Lunar New Year Raffle. "Fr. Bob was well known throughout Epworth and the surrounding communities, which was great not only for the community but also for relationships with our college donors," Hartman said. He also served as chaplain for the Epworth Fire Department and was involved with the Tri-State Area Marriage Encounter. Fr. Bob passed away in 2019.







**FR. JAMES HEIAR, SVD**

Fr. Jim, who took over as vice president for development in 1992, is remembered for his personal approach in the role. Former DWC President Fr. Mike Hutchins, SVD, said Fr. Jim's legacy is one of humble, dependable service. He remembers Fr. Jim forming relationships

with benefactors by sending them personal notes to celebrate various occasions in their lives and visiting them at their homes. "He faithfully supported them in their hours of sorrow, at wake services and funerals of their loved ones," Fr. Mike said. "He maintained confidences religiously, so people trusted him. He seemed most comfortable with those donors who preferred to keep lower profiles. He represented the college well." Fr. Jim's long-term impact can be measured by the number of friends who maintained their lasting and loyal support for Divine Word College as a direct result of his efforts.



**MARK SINGSANK**

In June 2005, Singsank was hired as vice president for development. In 2010, the office was restructured and he took on his current role as Associate Development Director. "Our primary goal in the development office is to help our benefactors help others. Many people believe strongly in the mission of Divine Word College.

Our responsibility is to help them make their gifts, express our gratitude and show them the positive impact they have on Divine Word students," he said. A true supporter of the college's mission, Singsank is proud to be a part of the DWC community. "I'm always happy when someone I meet asks me what I do, because I am then able to share with them the many great ministries the Society of the Divine Word brothers and priests carry out to help God's people," he said.

**TERRY SYKORA**

During the restructuring in 2010, Sykora joined the team as vice president for development, holding the position until 2017. With experience from other Catholic institutions of higher learning, he was determined to advance the DWC mission. In 2010, Terry wrote in the college newsletter that he witnessed benefactors of the college answering their own call to vocations through their philanthropy and support of a school dedicated to preparing missionaries. "Some people say that giving comes from the heart," he wrote. "I believe that's true, but I also believe that giving comes from the mind and spirit. Your support is not accidental; I believe you give because this college holds a special place in your heart, mind and spirit."



**DR. ROBERT MORRISSEY**

From 1999 to 2005, Morrissey served as the first layperson to lead the college's development team. With 28 years of experience in the field, he brought a fresh perspective. What struck him most when he first arrived was the unique nature of the college's mission. He started adding a line to all appeal letters to be sure that the public knew it was a "very special place with a very special mission." Hartman said Morrissey initiated the Community Relations Council, a group that helped with the Spring Brunch and other efforts to raise funds for the school. "He had a charming way of making friends with everyone he met," she said. "He was a great leader to the development staff and made everyone feel needed." Under his leadership, the development team thrived and kicked off new initiatives, including the Donaghey Award for Outstanding Service and an annual internal appeal. "The most rewarding part was that we really were able to put together a team effort that included every member of the team and they really became empowered in what they were doing," Bob said. "It was very rewarding and something I'd never forget in a million years."



**FR. LINH PHAM, SVD**

Current Development Director Fr. Linh started in the department in 2009. He counts himself lucky to be part of the experienced team and said he loves spending time with benefactors while sharing meals and listening to their stories. Fr. Linh considers it a privilege that the Divine Word College community trusts him and the development team to make financial decisions in pursuit of the college's goals and mission.



# Cave of wonders

## A HISTORY OF THE FORMER GROTTA AT DIVINE WORD COLLEGE

*For decades, the grotto situated on the campus of Divine Word College Seminary in Epworth, Iowa was among the top attractions in the small town. The structure was built with such masterful, artistic skill and devotion that it appeared to rise naturally from its surroundings. Most people in the area referred to it simply as the “Epworth Grotto.”*

Commenced in 1934, the building process was spearheaded by Bro. Fridolin Iten, a Divine Word Missionary from Switzerland and the creator of many religious grottos at other schools run by the Society of the Divine Word.

Unlike other Catholic grottos, whose depictions usually center around the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Lourdes in France or at Fatima in Portugal, the one built by Bro. Fridolin in Epworth was oriented toward the Passion of Jesus Christ. Officially named the “Agony in the Garden Grotto,” the main room depicted the scene from the Garden of Gethsemane, with almost life-size statues of Christ, sleeping apostles and the angel taking center stage. Made to seem larger than it actually was, the main cavern appeared to contain many crevices and throughways, one of which



other side, where the scene of Christ’s crucifixion came into full view.

With cement and concrete used as the primary building materials, the Epworth grotto was designed to blend in with native plants and geological formations of northeast Iowa. So much so that it became an integral part of the religious imaginations and sentiments of Catholics from surrounding areas. It also became home to those who used the caverns for “non-religious” purposes.

The grotto suffered from repeated vandalism as early as the 1940s and underwent several subsequent restoration and rebuilding efforts. The last one took place in the late 1970s under the direction of Bro. Leonard Bauer, SVD and was completed in time for the centennial celebrations of the Epworth township in 1980.

Unfortunately, vandalism to the grotto resumed soon thereafter and questions about the legal liability of the structure started to surface. The executive committee was thus forced to analyze the legal aspects related to the use of the grotto. Eventually, the group decided to demolish the entire structure to ensure public safety and protect the college from potential liability issues.



led to an adjacent cave, where a striking sight of the Sorrowful Mother holding the lifeless body of Christ greeted visitors. Outside the cave, there was a huge mural depicting Christ’s triumphant procession into Jerusalem on one side. Concrete steps made to look like real stones led visitors to a cave-like structure on the



# Finite Disappointments and Infinite Hope

Indeed, we are quite disappointed that after much time spent planning, we have decided to cancel or postpone many of the alumni events scheduled for this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They include the SVD Heritage Tour to Europe, the Annual Divine Word Companions Gathering in Orange County, Calif., the Annual East Troy Alumni Gathering, the All-Alumni Divine Word Reunion at Divine Word College, and The Rev. William Shea, SVD Scholarship Gathering at Techny, Ill.



Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD  
Director

## Find out more about the Divine Word Alumni Association

please connect with us at

[dwalumni@dwci.edu](mailto:dwalumni@dwci.edu)

**888.276.6536**

[facebook.com/DivineWordAlumniAssociation](https://facebook.com/DivineWordAlumniAssociation)

I imagine that many of you will also be disappointed because you will miss the chance to catch up with your classmates and share memories with your friends at these gatherings.

Yet, our friendships continue because as one of the old proverbs says, "Friends are connected heart to heart. Distance and time can't break them apart." In fact, although we are apart, we are connected in prayer and united in the common mission of making our world a better place for all. Thus, as missionary companions on the journey, we learn to embrace our disappointments and await the next opportunity to gather and renew our friendships in the near future, just as Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." Let us continue to support one another through prayer and via social media.

Please also consider supporting the Rev. William Shea, SVD Scholarship fund, which will benefit our candidates and students in their training to be missionaries for God. We are currently at 20% of our \$100,000 goal. It would be a wonderful gift for Fr. Bill to reach this goal in time for the celebration event, which we hope to reschedule later this year or next summer!

*The mission continues...*

The **Rev. William Shea, SVD Scholarship** is an endowed fund, established in honor of Fr. Bill, and aims to provide financial support to students in need of assistance for their undergraduate, cross-cultural, or language studies at Divine Word College, Epworth, Iowa. The Scholarship is made possible through the generosity and support of people like you.



To contribute, go to [dwci.edu/sheascholarship](http://dwci.edu/sheascholarship) or send contributions to:  
**SHEA SCHOLARSHIP**  
Divine Word College  
102 Jacoby Dr. SW  
Epworth, Iowa 52045-0380



**DEACON BINH-YEN NGUYEN**  
Instructor  
Monroe Community College

*"The spirit of serving people, regardless of their backgrounds, remains as one of the principles in my ministry."*

- Lives in New York
- 1993-1998 Divine Word College  
2000-2002 Catholic Theological Union  
2002-2005 Nanzan University
- Ordained as a deacon in 2018
- Married for 11 years and has two daughters
- Fondly remembers Fr. Bill Shea, SVD's motto, "Busy bee, happy bee."

In 2007, Deacon Binh-Yen started a career in information technology and today he teaches introduction to cybersecurity, introduction to network, advanced networking concepts, WAN systems and applied computer security concepts.

He serves his parish as an ordained deacon.



# Through the eyes of a missionary

*The history and evolution of Papua New Guinea as told by an SVD priest with more than 25 years of mission experience*

By Guy Vaccaro, Ph.D., Executive Director of Development, Chicago Province

Located in the South Pacific, less than 100 miles off the northern coast of Australia, Papua New Guinea (PNG) is only a few degrees south of the equator. The first humans arrived there almost 45,000 years ago but it remained relatively isolated until the mid-1800s. Retired Divine Word Missionary Fr. Bill Halvey, who arrived in PNG in 1961 and spent 26 years serving the people there, explains why. “New Guinea had been avoided because there were all kinds of rumors about cannibals,” he said.

## A fragmented nation

There were more than 700 languages, not dialects, on the main island and the surrounding smaller islands. Fr. Bill explained the relationship between the many languages of Papua New Guinea and the geography.

“The great diversity was a result of the geography. Most of the island is mountainous and, in addition, there are rain forests and swampy rivers. These natural barriers served to divide and isolate the people in small groups,” he said. “A group of people on one side of a river could have one language, while just across the river, another group could have an entirely different one.”

## System of beliefs

During the decades that Fr. Bill served in PNG, he learned about the beliefs of the local people. “They had a spirit world. I would not call it a spirituality or even a religion. Like many people in the past, they believed in their ancestors. Their ancestors made up their spirit world.”

“They honored their ancestors by building what we would call ‘house tomerons,’ or a house of their ancestors. It was only for men. Women were absolutely forbidden. They made beautiful masks to keep the memory of their ancestors alive. Inside the house tomerons, on the grass walls, they hung their masks.” A person’s name was believed to exercise power over the person. “I will give you an example of how the spirit world figured in their lives. I was out in the bush, teaching in the school. Until the kids got to know me, they would be afraid, especially the girls, to give me their name. The idea was that if they give me their name, I would somehow have a kind of power over them. That was a holdover from earlier days.”

## A uniting language

Pointing to PNG on the world map on the wall next to him, Fr. Halvey said, “They started trading back in the 1800s. Little by little, over time, mostly on just a small part of the coast, a trade language grew up that today is called pidgin English. It is now a language in itself with its own dictionary.”



A mask on display at the Retirement Residence in Techmy, Ill. where Fr. Halvey lives



“Today they have pidgin English newspapers. Books are written in pidgin English. A missionary arriving on the coast might encounter four or five different languages. If he did not speak any of these, but knew pidgin English, he could get by,” he said. “Up in the mountains, pidgin English came much, much later. A missionary had to learn that language up there and that was hard going. There were no written books, no written history, only a tradition in which stories were handed down orally.”

### **Missionaries arrive**

SVD missionaries have been in PNG for more than 100 years. “Our first Divine Word Missionaries went there in the late 1800s. The first missionaries went for life. They were not given a leave to return home to visit their families. This was due to the fact that, at that time, the only form of transportation for international travel was by boat. There were no airplanes. That meant that once you got there, you stayed there,” Fr. Bill said. “Sadly, a great many of the early missionaries died at a young age from what is called ‘blackwater fever.’ It is a severe complication of malaria.”

The local culture was not like any other they had ever encountered. “Missionaries who went there in the late 1930s said the people had never seen a radio or a mirror. They wore bush clothing,” he said. “The culture was completely foreign to European and American missionaries. For example, we are a very independent group of people. We often express it in terms of everyone being for himself or herself. The French philosopher taught us, ‘I think, therefore, I am.’ The New Guinea people say, ‘I am because we are.’ That is a different outlook all together. Think about that, ‘I am because we are.’ You have a village life where little boys and girls could run around and go into any house they wanted.”

### **Picking up the pieces**

World War II had a devastating impact on Papua New Guinea.

“During World War II, the Japanese came into the islands and inflicted considerable damage,” Fr. Bill explained. “Many of the natives fled into the mountains. The Americans and the Australians bombed the island. After World War II and through the 1940s and 1950s, the missionaries spent their time rebuilding the damage



that was done by the war. “The houses, chapels and clinics were all destroyed. The missionaries had to start over. To make things worse, much of the military ordnance in the form of unexploded grenades, rockets and bombs were left behind. They had to deal with a people who had been traumatized by what had been inflicted upon them.

“In order to rebuild, the missionaries had to raise funds. They often did it by forming Mission Clubs and writing home for support. We could not talk about converting the natives to Christianity. What we had to do was start with a kind of evangelizing that consisted mainly of building bush schools. Most of the local buildings were constructed of bush material. Nevertheless, little by little, they built schools that were permanent. This took a lot of hard work. Years of it.”

### **Introduction to Catholicism**

Religious dialogue with the indigenous population was not without its challenges. “How do you talk about

the Holy Spirit, for example? How do you talk about the Trinity? How do you talk about Jesus Christ and His life and what it meant? How do you get that over to a people who have no idea? It took years and years to try to get something like that across,” Fr. Bill said.

Seeds were planted that yielded a rich harvest. “Today we have a good number of native New Guinea priests and brothers and certainly a good number of native New Guinea sisters. They have their own superiors now,” he said. “It has been an amazing transformation. When I left there, I was a chaplain in a teacher-training college. That is how far we have come. We have a university in the capital, Port Moresby. “I ran a clinic and a school and was glad for what I could do for the kids. I was glad I could

help people with malaria, and the other kinds of infections that needed penicillin. It was a daily thing.”

### **Missionary reflections**

The mission experience had a deep personal impact on Fr. Halvey. “After having lived in the bush for 26 years, their culture had a deep impact on me because I came from the big city of Chicago,” he said.

“I lived in a small village, green all around, with bush houses and simple people. Their lifestyle trickled down somehow and it affected me. I didn’t know it was happening. It was another way of life that was closer to the earth. The way they looked at the earth, and the way they looked at creatures was very different. For me, it was another kind of knowing I could not put into words, another kind of seeing that I cannot describe.

“I am deeply grateful to those people for what they gave me. It was much more than I ever gave them.”



# Graduation day festivities



DWC's graduating class of 2020 was blessed with sunshine and an abundance of blooming flowers in the campus courtyard on the day of their commencement ceremony.

This year, 14 graduates experienced a unique graduation experience as friends and family watched the festivities online and sent their well wishes in short video clips that were played in the chapel.



## DID YOU KNOW?

*This year's Commencement Address was also unique!*

Archbishop Michael Jackels of the Archdiocese of Dubuque videotaped his speech, which was shown on screens that were installed in the chapel earlier this year.



While many American college students flock to beaches each year to unwind during spring break, DWC students spend their time off doing ministry work. This year, one group traveled to St. Thomas Catholic Church in Gassaway, W.Va.

Another group went to St. Anselm Church in Chicago, Ill.

The students helped with a variety of projects at both parishes and took in the local sights and landscapes along the way.

## Development Office:

Fr. Linh Pham, SVD  
Director of Development

563.876.3353  
x243  
lpham@dwci.edu

102 Jacoby Drive SW  
PO Box 380  
Epworth, Iowa  
52045-0380



Spring break service trips





# Sew Far, **SEW GOOD**

Even a global health crisis couldn't stop DWC students from helping the local community.

Since March, students have sewn more than 1,000 face masks to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. Laura Bergfeld, who works in housekeeping, also contributed to the effort.

Once they produced enough to protect the DWC community, the remaining protective face coverings were donated to area religious communities and Dubuque social services organization Hills and Dales. They were also made available to the public at Epworth City Hall and the local general store, Silkers.

Some local businesses even reached out to request masks, as they were difficult to obtain early in the COVID-19 pandemic. One Dubuque orthodontist offered them to patients who arrived without their own mask, then laundered and reused them.

