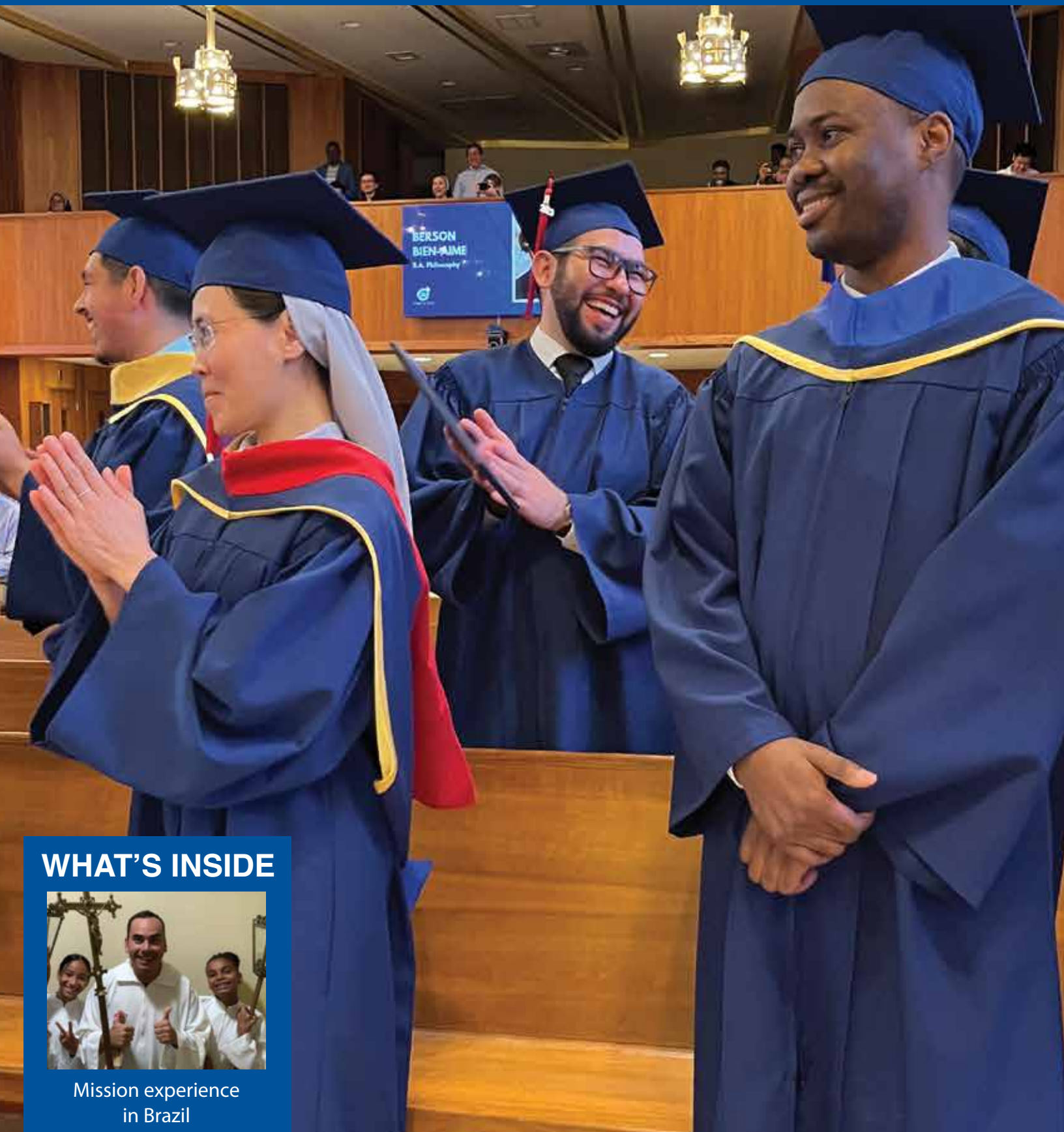


# the **DWC** *World*

Educating Tomorrow's Missionaries



## WHAT'S INSIDE



Mission experience  
in Brazil

# Ordained in 2022 – leading God's people through the streets of Ecuador in 2023



*Like Fr. Derek Nguyen, SVD, each person who considers religious life has a unique story about the path that led him or her to the first step in formation.*

Does your child, nephew, niece, grandchild or family friend  
have a missionary spirit?

***An encouraging word from you could confirm a call deep in his or her heart.***

You could be a part of that story for **SOMEONE**.

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## ***About the Arnoldus Family — A trio of religious congregations***

**Divine Word Missionaries (SVD)** share the Word of God by living, working, teaching and sharing with others in many areas of global ministry. We're the largest international missionary congregation in the Catholic Church. Our emphasis on interculturalism, education and professional skills enables Divine Word Missionaries to minister throughout the world in a variety of ways.

One of our sister congregations, the **Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS)**, is also an international religious community. Empowered by the Holy Spirit,

they collaborate with dedicated laity and clergy, live and proclaim the Gospel of God's love, justice and peace.

The third congregation started by our founder, St. Arnold Janssen, is the **Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters (SSpSAP)**. Commonly called the "Pink Sisters," this cloistered community fulfills the holy purpose of devoted contemplative and prayerful service to the world. By their consecration, simple lifestyle and focus on the Lord, they are committed to making each and every moment of their lives a prayer.

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*Learn more at [www.svdvocations.org](http://www.svdvocations.org)*  
Contact National Vocation Director Len Uhal

**800-553-3321**

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



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Cover photo: (Left to right) Sr. Thom Mai, FMV, Miguel Romo Romo and Franciste Jean Mervil at the 2023 Commencement ceremony at DWC.

## DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

by Fr. Linh Pham, SVD



Catholics often think that missionary life is reserved for “professional” missionaries

dedicated to spreading the Word of God in faraway lands. Accordingly, the rough and tumble nature of missionary life is not for everyone but reserved only for those who are willing to put up with the supposed suffering of living in “exotic” places. Nothing could be further from the truth! As called for in the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, the call to mission belongs to all the Christian faithful. In this sense, the missionary activity encompasses all areas of life in which the Christian faithful are providing their daily presence and respective contribution. All Christians can thus be missionaries in their own workplaces, spheres of human interactions, or realms of daily living.

Over the years, Divine Word Missionaries have been blessed with abundant opportunities for collaborating with our lay partners in the Mission. We have met our collaborators not only in the Eucharistic and sacramental celebrations at local parish churches, or in community activities directly connected to the Church’s evangelization, but anywhere Christians find their presence. From the homes of families grieving the losses of their loved ones to communities recovering from the effects of natural disasters, from the moments of family members bidding farewell to those they love in hospitals, funeral homes and cemeteries to the fundraising events in support of the Church’s charitable needs, Divine Word Missionaries have encountered countless supporters and benefactors.

To those who are reading these lines, please consider joining us in the missionary journey if you have not done so already. If you have been gracing our common efforts at answering the Lord’s call to the Mission with your own participation, please accept our sincere and heartfelt gratitude for your continued support and prayers.

# Overseas experience a time for TEACHING & LEARNING

*Fr. Brian Junkes, SVD learned a lot during his Cross-Cultural Training Program (CTP) in Chad. For the past two years, the Florida native has been living in the central African country and putting his formation lessons into practice. It's one of the last steps in the formation program for men discerning a vocation as a Divine Word Missionary Priest or Brother. The overseas experience is an opportunity for them to get out of the classrooms and really try out the missionary way of life. No two CTP experiences are the same. Each location, each culture and each assignment inherently brings a unique set of challenges. This is Brian's story.*

## CULTURE SHOCK

Men in formation expect certain aspects of culture shock, especially when they go on their first missionary assignment. Even though people in Chad speak more than 100 different indigenous languages, Brian knew that he'd need to start by learning French. It took time, practice and a lot of patience, but he picked it up. There were other aspects of the Chadian culture that were new to Brian, too. One was the stark difference in the way people live in one part of the country compared to others. In the bigger cities, people live similarly to Americans with large buildings, comfortable amenities and access to businesses. However, communities located outside of the cities often lack electricity and even running water. Many of the people in those areas are farmers. They hunt freely with slingshots,

knives or bows and arrows. It's not unusual to see people relieving themselves in the open because there's no plumbing in many areas. Brian said it took time to adjust to these differences, but he got used to the culture as the months passed. He also started to understand and appreciate the people he was serving. "I have found that Chadians are hardworking, willing to help, community oriented, resilient, hopeful and have pride in their culture and the particular ethnic groups they come from," he said.

## HEALTH CHALLENGES

During his two years in Chad, Brian had malaria four times. After the first encounter, he started to recognize the symptoms: fatigue, difficulty concentrating, chills and loss of appetite. Thankfully, he had access to medication and was able to recover relatively quickly most of the time. However, there was one instance when he wasn't as lucky. A nurse treated him for malaria and typhoid because both are very common in the area. About 30 minutes after she left, Brian started having an allergic reaction to the medication. He felt cold and a few minutes later, Brian was convulsing and struggling to breathe. The nurse came back and gave him something to calm his body. Later he learned that the medication he took isn't safe for people like Brian who have asthma. His condition continued to worsen in the days that followed and he eventually went to a bigger community where a doctor confirmed he had malaria and informed him that he also developed bronchitis from the





allergic reaction. The experience could have been deadly. “This was the first time I had an experience where I was certain I could have died and it made me seriously consider and think about it,” he said. “As an SVD, I believe it’s important to think about the possibility of dying in the mission.” Widespread poverty in Chad makes access to healthcare a real challenge for many people who live there. Brian says he knows just how lucky he was to have the opportunity to seek treatment when he was ill. Others aren’t so fortunate. As part of his ministry work, Brian frequently visited the sick and brought them Communion. Many of the people he met were isolated as a result of their illnesses and welcomed the chance to have a visitor. “This really has informed me about how important it is to make sure that the church is accessible to all of God’s people, including the sick and disabled,” he said. “This is how we create community and build the Kingdom of God.”

### TEACHING IN THE CLASSROOM

For years, Brian has been interested in teaching. He wanted to do his CTP in Chad because he knew that a fellow DWC graduate, Fr. Huy Tran, SVD, was working at a school there and hoped he could get involved. Fr. Huy asked Brian to help cover English classes from time to time, giving him a chance to get into the classroom and find out if education could be a viable path for him in the future. At first, he says the experience was challenging. He tried lecturing to the best of his ability, but the students lost interest and looked bored. Determined to succeed, he tried a new approach. Brian asked the students to take turns reading the materials. Then he asked their opinions about the content. He tried to include everyone, not just the students who volunteered to participate. He encouraged their efforts. As the children started to get more involved in the lessons, Brian could see a shift in their understanding. “I felt affirmed that I have the capabilities to be a teacher in the future and hope to get more experience to help further God’s mission and to serve God’s people,” he said.

### CREATIVITY AND KARATE

One day in class, some students were joking around. One boy performed a dramatic kick, making his friends laugh. Intrigued, Brian asked if the student knew taekwondo. He didn’t. In fact, the kids told Brian that most people in Chad aren’t familiar with any form of martial arts. Brian demonstrated a roundhouse kick for his class and the kids were immediately fascinated. In no time, there was a group of eager children asking their teacher to train them in karate. Brian started taking karate lessons when he was just 10. He went on to study several forms of martial arts and holds a second-degree black belt. After taking some time to consider his students’ request, Brian decided to go for it. In February, he started meeting weekly with a small group of boys who carefully followed his lead as they kicked, punched and yelled in unison. On a personal level,



Brian says teaching karate helped remind him who he is. Throughout his life, he struggled with identity. As a person diagnosed with a learning disability, Brian says karate was a tool to help him grow as a child. It taught him hand-eye coordination, self-confidence, resilience, perseverance and self-discipline. “It helped me to get through many challenges in my youth. Now it’s like I am returning the favor and passing it on to the youth here in Chad, who do not have a lot available to them,” he said. “I never expected to be doing this as part of my CTP experience. Not in my wildest dreams. I only thought about working in education or in a parish to prepare me for priesthood, not teaching karate. This experience has revealed to me that being creative and doing something different as missionaries is good, that the church needs creativity and difference to bear fruit, breathe new life, and keep the church vibrant. This is how the church can better respond to new challenges, be guided by the Spirit, and be aware of the sign of the times.”

### REFLECTIONS

Brian finished his CTP in Chad at the end of June and returned to Chicago to complete his theology studies and formation. Just a few weeks prior to his departure, he was evacuated from the community where he was working for his safety. There was a violent gang attack in the market that left 14 people dead, including women and children. While Brian was saddened by this reality and disappointed to leave under these circumstances, he was uplifted to know that he had made some positive impacts in the area during his experience. In fact, some of his karate students asked if he could find a way to continue training them even after he returned to the United States. “The experience informed me that I do have what it takes, I have skills to engage people who are from cultures different from my own, and have much to offer people,” he said. “It can be hard at first because entering another culture and living with people in that culture to learn and integrate is difficult and challenging.” He’s still not an expert on Chad, but Brian says his CTP experience helped him realize that cultures are complicated. In order to even begin understanding a new culture, he said a person really needs to learn its political, social, historical and economic situations. He hopes that these lessons will serve him well in future missionary assignments.

# GRADUATES UNITED IN LEADERSHIP, DEDICATION TO SERVICE

*After students leave Divine Word College, they go on to do all sorts of things. Some men continue to discern a religious vocation and eventually take vows as Divine Word Missionary Priests or Brothers. Others take different paths. They become diocesan priests or deacons, they continue as religious sisters or start families and careers.*

*No matter where life leads them, DWC graduates carry the spirit of service and commitment to community that is instilled in them during their time in Epworth. The places they live around the world are shaped, in part, by their leadership and humanitarianism.*



**PAUL C. HOANG**  
2003 graduate - Licensed  
clinical social worker

During his time at DWC, Paul started to uncover how his experience of fleeing Vietnam by boat at age 7 impacted his mental health. He didn't even know what mental illness was until the topic came up during a psychology class at the college. That's when Paul realized that he might be suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress

disorder. The instructors and formation leaders helped him start processing the trauma he endured and gave him the tools he needed to begin healing. Later in his discernment, Paul traveled to Japan and the Philippines. In each place, he stopped to consider how the culture of these places impacted the psychology of the people living there. On the surface, Japan was beautiful, safe, clean and filled with successful people, but he learned that their suicide rate was one of the highest in the world. In the Philippines, he witnessed profound poverty and learned that some people live at an enormous garbage dump. Still, he saw a genuine joy and generosity in them. These contradictory concepts made him curious to learn more.

After seven years in formation with the SVD, Paul discerned out of the program. He attended Loyola University in Chicago and earned his master's in social work. "I feel a true vocation," he said. "I feel that my time in the seminary and in ministry led me to where I am in my calling to serve those who are experiencing mental health challenges or mental illness, specifically those who are contemplating suicide or are experiencing suicidal thoughts."

Today, Paul lives in California with his wife and two kids. For nearly 14 years, he worked for the Orange County Health Care Agency. He specialized in emergency mental health and disaster response services. He also trained people in crisis prevention and intervention. Paul founded and serves as executive director of an organization called Moving Forward Psychological Institute.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, he realized that the government couldn't respond fast enough to the growing need for mental health support, so he took a leap of faith and left his full-time job with the county to dedicate more time to Moving Forward. In addition, Paul also started a nonprofit organization called Viet-CARE several years ago. This group aims to reduce the stigma in the Asian and Pacific Islander communities surrounding mental health disorders. "The spirituality of Fr. Janssen still resonates with me and I carry that with me daily in my work," Paul said. "I believe that this is my ministry, my life's vocation and my calling. I'm grateful for my time with SVD."





*Photo by Chuck Decker*

**FR. RAMON URBINA**  
2014 graduate - Diocesan priest

Fr. Ramon spent three years discerning life as a Divine Word Missionary Priest at Divine Word College and at the Novitiate at Techny before he discovered that missionary life didn't suit him. He says the SVDs he met were all filled with joy for their work, but he longed to have more connection with the sacramental aspect of the priesthood than many missionaries experience.

After leaving, he turned his sights to life as a diocesan priest and was ordained in May 2022. Today, he's the Parochial Vicar of St. Bonaventure Catholic Community in Concord, California. He serves a diverse community of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking members and said the demand for Spanish ministry is increasing.

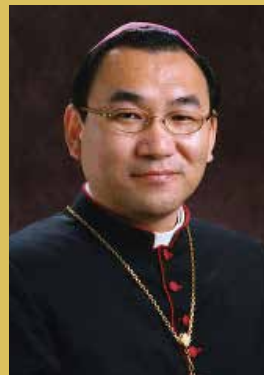
"The most rewarding part about priesthood has been hearing confessions," he said. "It's a beautiful sacrament Jesus left for the Church and the best way to remind people that there is nothing they can do that would separate them from the love of God."

Fr. Ramon says his time at Divine Word College taught him how to treat people, a lesson that serves him well in his role today. "No one person is better than another, and those in authoritative positions are given the task of helping those who are less fortunate," he said. "We all share the equal blessing of being God's children. Under the SVDs, I learned to be honest and straightforward with the people I serve. I am forever grateful for everything the Divine Word Missionaries taught me."



**SR. NU THI NGOC NGUYEN, LHC**  
2015 graduate - Theology educator

Sr. Nu said that before coming to Divine Word College, she never considered teaching Bible in an academic setting because her congregation in Vietnam generally looked to priests to fill that role. "It was Fr. John Szukalski, SVD (now Vice President for Academic Affairs) who encouraged me to convince my superior that women definitely can study and have contributed greatly in the field of Biblical research," she said. She double majored in Theology & Mission and Cross-Cultural Studies at DWC before moving to Belgium and earning an MA in Theology. Today, she's back in her home country of Vietnam and teaching theology and Bible at the Dominican Theological Center in Saigon. She also works with a group of biblical scholars to translate the Bible from its original languages into Vietnamese for academic purposes.



**ARCHBISHOP TARCISIO  
ISAO KIKUCHI, SVD**  
ESL student in 1983 - Leader of  
worldwide aid group

In May, a former Divine Word College student was elected as the new president of Caritas Internationalis, a global confederation of 165 Catholic organizations working in humanitarian emergencies and international development. Archbishop Tarcisio will serve a four-year term as president of the organization, which operates in more than 200 countries and territories. He also serves as the Archbishop of Tokyo in Japan.

Caritas seeks to build a better world, especially for the poor and oppressed. In an interview about his new role, Archbishop Tarcisio said that Caritas Internationalis works to do more than provide shelter, food and aid to people in need. The organization aims to provide hope. "But we cannot bring the hope from outside," he said. "What we can do is to walk along with them to try to create hope in the hearts of those people in difficulties."

# Class of 2023



THIS YEAR AT DIVINE WORD COLLEGE, THERE WERE  
16 MAY GRADUATES AND EIGHT DECEMBER GRADUATES.  
THE CLASS VALEDICTORIAN WAS OMAR PICON GONZALEZ.

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*Congratulations  
to all of our graduates!*



## MAY 2023 GRADUATES



**John-Edeve Augustin**

Hinche, Haiti

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* My plan after graduation is to continue with my studies.
- *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* My experience at

DWC has helped me grow significantly in my spiritual life. I have learned how to listen to God's voice and how God is present in every situation.



**Junior Jean Baptiste**

Jeremie, Haiti

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* I plan to move on to the Novitiate and continue my formation program with the SVD Community.

• *What is the greatest lesson you learned at DWC?* As a future missionary and priest, I will share the Good News where the Holy Spirit guides the congregation to send me. I will put into practice all that I have learned at DWC to benefit those most in need.



**Berson Bien-Aime**

Jeremie, Haiti

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* I am still planning and do not have an active plan right now.
- *What is the greatest lesson you learned*

*at DWC?* To see people as God sees them because sometimes individuals judge others and their situations without knowing who they are or what they've actually gone through. Somehow, I have learned to understand, be compassionate, and forgive others.



**Peterson Forestal**

Delmas, Haiti

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* After graduation, I plan to pursue a master's degree.
- *How has your experience at DWC*

*impacted your faith?* There are two things that impacted my faith. First, the formation program helped me know more about the church's teachings. Secondly, it is clear that ministry plays a significant role in the life of seminarians and priests. Ministry helped me to see how God can work through human beings.



**Omar Picon Gonzalez**

Memphis, Tennessee

- B.A. Philosophy & Intercultural Studies
- *Plans after graduation?* I plan to continue further studies at the University of Memphis to prepare for the LSAT. My end goal is to become an attorney.
- *How has your experience at DWC*

*impacted your faith?* I plan to work with the marginalized, the forgotten, and the needy in the legal field. This is what we are called to do as believers of Christ.



**Wilson Joseph**

Port-au-Prince, Haiti

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* After graduation, I will pursue another study.
- *How do you plan to share your faith with others in the future?* I learned how

to live with people from different backgrounds. The formation program also helped me in my personal growth. I feel like I have become more mature, humble, and straightforward. Daily Mass, prayer and reflections also helped me live out my faith. I will carry all I learned at DWC to help others.



**Sr. Margaret Kissani, SSps**

Madang, Papua New Guinea

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* No plans because of my illness.
- *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* If you are

struggling, take comfort in knowing you are not alone. This was my experience when I was diagnosed with a medical issue. I felt the prayers of Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD and the entire SVD community, as well as the faculty, staff and students. To you all and to God, I am very grateful.



**Sr. Thom Mai, FMV**

Ha Tinh Province, Vietnam

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* I will return to Vietnam to join my sisters in the opening of the Jubilee Year on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of my congregation.

• *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* I have not only grown academically but also spiritually. Through participating in multicultural events, I had a groundbreaking experience with the ways people in different nations worship and portray God in their own customs.



**Cederick Morando**  
Manila, Philippines

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* My main priority is to seek out God's will for my life at the present moment, always remaining open to where the Holy Spirit moves me.

• *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* Taking all of those philosophy classes at DWC really made me question my faith a lot, which I think is a good thing since it helps to bring it to maturity.



**Sr. Isabel Tiago Mula, CPS**  
Xai-Xai, Mozambique

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* I will return back to my country.
- *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* I plan to share my

faith with others through religious education programs in the parishes and in the small Christian communities. I will also be applying what I learned to the formation program for the young girls that are discerning religious life.



**Sr. Diem Hong Ngo, IHM**  
Cam Ranh, Khánh Hòa, Vietnam

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* I will continue to study at another university.
- *How do you plan to share your faith with others in the future?* DWC has

nourished and strengthened my spiritual life in many ways. It has been a precious opportunity for me to live among various cultures and backgrounds but share the same faith and vocation.



**Long Cao Nguyen**  
Dong Nai, Vietnam

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* I plan to continue discerning my vocation and seeking God's will for my life.
- *What is the greatest lesson you learned*

*at DWC?* The importance of cultivating a personal relationship with God and integrating our spiritual beliefs into every aspect of our lives. This comprehensive approach to spiritual development taught me that our relationship with God is not limited to just religious activities. Rather, it should permeate every aspect of our lives, informing our decisions and guiding our interactions with others.



**Sr. Thoa Thi Nguyen, LHC**  
Binh Thuan, Vietnam

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* After graduation, my plan is to pursue a master's degree at Boston College. Once I have earned my degree, I will return to

my country to serve my congregation and diocese.

• *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* My experience at DWC has enriched my understanding of faith, broadened my perspective on different cultures and belief systems, and fostered an inclusive and respectful approach toward people of diverse faith traditions. My experiences here at DWC have prepared me for my future study and ministry.



**Sr. Thuy Thi Tran, LHC**  
Quang Nam Province, Vietnam

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* After graduation, I will return to my country and continue my ministry.
- *How has your experience at DWC*

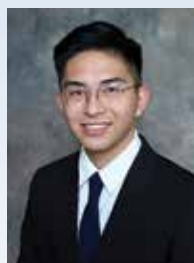
*impacted your faith?* I think each of us is given a mission, and my mission is to bring God to people and people to God with an open heart and mind and embrace all differences in God's love.



**Miguel Romo Romo**  
Jalostotitlán, Jalisco, Mexico

- Certificate in Pre-Theology
- *Plans after graduation?* Continue my discernment in the Society of Divine Word.
- *How do you plan to share your faith*

*with others in the future?* I arrived at DWC as a lay student. My experience here helped me realize that God could be calling me to serve Him as a missionary priest.



**Joseph Simbre**  
Fresno, California

- Certificate in Pre-Theology
- *Plans after graduation?* My plans after graduation are to hopefully enter the SVD Novitiate.
- *How do you plan to share your faith*

*with others in the future?* My experience at DWC tremendously helped my faith as I have been inspired by the charity and hopefulness of the community.



# DECEMBER 2022 GRADUATES



**Sr. Ndigue Formilack  
Magdalene, SST**

Mutengene, Cameroon

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* Currently I am in one of our high schools in Kumba, helping in the bursary and teaching.

• *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* Value people for who they are regardless of where they come from. I have learned to encounter God not just in the routine prayers but in every encounter.



**Franciste Mervil**

Cap-Haitien, Haiti

- B.A. Philosophy
- *Plans after graduation?* After graduation, I plan to continue my vocation with Divine Word Missionaries.

• *What is the greatest lesson you learned at DWC?* I realized that adapting to a new environment or path is not easy, but I did my best and had the best experience of my life. I learned about time management, being more responsible, and strengthening my integrity. Even though sometimes I found myself confused or feeling doubtful, the formation I received at DWC helped me have a better understanding of life itself.



**Sr. An Thuy Thi Ngo, LHC**

Binh Dinh Province, Vietnam

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* I will do ministry with my sisters in Vietnam.
- *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* Living in a diverse

cultural community helped me grow my physical life, spiritual life and community life.



**Sr. Liem Hong Thi Nguyen, IHM**

Ninh Thuan, Vietnam

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* I would like to do ministry for people with special needs through education, career orientation or catechism.

• *How do you plan to share your faith with others in the future?* My faith should be shared with others through my ministry and my life. I want those who I serve and live with to experience God's love and presence through my witness, spiritual life and community life.



**Sr. Nhiem Thi Nguyen, LHC**

Nghe An, Vietnam

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* I am doing my Optional Practical Training program to gain experience in ministry before going to further studies.

• *How has your experience at DWC impacted your faith?* My experience at DWC impacted my faith in many ways, such as building personal relationships with the Lord through Eucharistic celebration, hearing others' vocation stories, and recognizing the love of God in people.



**Sr. Thuong Hoai Thi Phan, FMV**

Danang, Vietnam

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* I am returning to Vietnam to do ministry and prepare my final vows.

• *How do you plan to share your faith with others in the future?* The faith I want to share with others is what I have received and experienced through the DWC community: love, peace, joy, generosity, friendship, serving, and so much more. Indeed, I received many good things from the DWC community. In turn, I will continue carrying and living out these fruits to the places I go and share them with those I meet.



**Sr. Phuong Thu Thi Tran, LHC**

Phu Tho Province, Vietnam

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* I am going back to Vietnam to serve people whom I am sent to serve.
- *What is the greatest lesson you learned*

*at DWC?* The greatest lesson I learned at DWC is an attitude of readiness to adapt and openness to accept differences in living environments, cultures, and ways of thinking to proclaim the Gospel effectively.



**Sr. Duong Y, IMM**

Kontum, Vietnam

- B.A. Theology & Mission
- *Plans after graduation?* Since graduation, I've been in a master of theological studies program.
- *What is the greatest lesson you learned*

*at DWC?* The greatest lesson I learned at DWC is communal life. I found a real community at DWC in the way everyone welcomes others, prays, lives, and shows hospitality. Living within a community of friends and mentors that have walked with me every step of the way helped me to grow more maturely and nurtured my religious life.



# MISSION EXPERIENCE IN BRAZIL

*A man in temporary vows  
with the Divine Word  
Missionaries shares his  
experience working with  
the poor and underserved*

My name is Christian Castro. I am originally from Mexico, but I spent the last 15 years living in the United States.

Since I was a little kid, I knew God was calling me to be a priest. At first, I was afraid to respond, but after participating in a retreat, I discovered that I could not escape God's call.

At the age of 24, I entered the seminary with the Society of the Divine Word. Since then, it has been a great experience.

Today, I am in Brazil doing my cross-cultural training experience. I work in a low-income neighborhood. I serve





annual 2022 parish census, there are about 12,000 faithful Catholic Church members in the parish.

Throughout the year, we have meetings on a variety of topics. Each year, the parish offers more than 3,500 Catholic families help through job training, assistance from psychologists and connections to law experts. This is why your support to our congregation is fundamental for our mission to continue working in the poorest places serving God's people.

This July, I will return to the United States and do my last year of theology. My experience here in Brazil reminds me that what makes a church is not a building – it's a place filled with people of faith.

the Parish Santa Cruz (Holy Cross), which is located in the Archdiocese of Aracaju. It's located in the southern expansion zone of the capital, in the peripheral area.

The majority of the people here live in houses that the government offers to people who are homeless or who have been removed from high-risk areas, like slums. In addition to the land for public housing, there are lands that are invaded and illegally occupied. These places don't have urban infrastructure, like a sewage network, basic sanitation or electrical networks.

The community here lacks a quality public education and a reliable healthcare system, leaving people insecure in many ways.

Most people who live here are considered low-income. In fact, many of them are unemployed. Some people come from the neighboring state or from the interior state of Sergipe because there aren't jobs available. The population suffers from unemployment and a lack of job opportunities. These circumstances leave people with domestic jobs, like collecting and selling recyclable materials. They fight for survival.

The people who I serve live in small, humble, uncomfortable houses. They're made of rammed earth, which is a technique for constructing foundations, floors and walls using natural, raw materials. They also use wood, reused materials and ceramic blocks, often without plaster.

There is a city dump in the territory of the parish. It's been operated here for 20 years. The dump influenced the creation of sub-jobs, including collectors of recyclable waste, a cooperative and recycling groups. According to the







# Community Service

## Priests at Divine Word College offer Masses locally

*These days, some parish priests serve a whole cluster of church communities. Between weekend services, sacraments, funerals and administrative work, it's nearly impossible for one person to do it all.*

*That's why each month, the priests from Divine Word College go out and offer between 40 and 50 Masses at area parishes and nursing homes. College Rector Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD organizes the detailed list of "supply work," as it's commonly known.*

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In the 2022-2023 academic year, about 25 priests were assigned to Divine Word College as faculty, staff and administrators. In addition, there were around 20 ordained priests enrolled at the college as students. While these men

are all very busy with their work and studies, they also have a missionary role to fulfill. "It is the principal responsibility of priests," Fr. Thang said. "Through the Eucharist, the priests can help people experience God's love and His presence in a very special way. We SVDs take this responsibility as an opportunity to promote mission animation, and to educate people about their own missionary vocation."



Fr. Thang Hoang,  
SVD

Priests from the college have been assisting at area nursing homes and offering special language Masses in the region for a long time. In fact, they've been offering Mass in Vietnamese for a community in Cedar Rapids since the 1980s. About seven years ago, they noticed a growing need at local parishes. When invited to help out, they stepped up. Today, Fr. Thang schedules priests to serve at churches in places like Davenport, Cedar Rapids, Elkader, Mineral Point, Wis. and all over Dubuque County.

### PARISH WORK

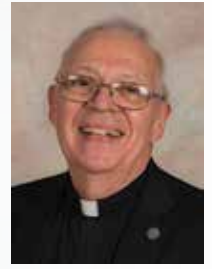
One place with a consistent need is the St. Elizabeth Pastorate. It's made up of five parishes, including St. Patrick's Church in Epworth near the DWC campus. Fr.





### **SERVING THE ELDERLY**

For people who live in nursing homes, it's not always possible to travel to a church for Mass. DWC Spiritual Director Fr. Jim Bergin, SVD is one of the priests from the college who regularly holds services at area nursing homes. "I am convinced that this ministry is very important because it enables people to meet a basic need and desire in their spiritual lives, to attend Mass on a regular basis," he said. "I also enjoy visiting with them and experiencing their wisdom as they reflect on their lives."



*Fr. Jim Bergin, SVD*

Theresa's mother lives at one of the area nursing homes where the priests serve. She said without their help, people like her mom may have to wait weeks or even months to experience the Eucharist.

"It's priceless. I can't say how much it means to those residents in there," she said. "Those are prayer warriors. They're the ones who treasure the Mass more than anyone. Most people, we just take it for granted or it's just their Sunday duty to go to Mass but to the residents, it's just so important."

### **A GLOBAL VIEW**

In addition to bringing the word of God to people in the area, the priests from Divine Word College often bring a unique perspective. Many of them come from countries around the world. Their interaction with people in Iowa allows them to share their own culture while also learning about the local customs.

"Hopefully this internationality can be a reminder to people to be aware of and to pray for people in other parts of the world," Fr. Jim said. "I see this as an opportunity to help people to broaden their vision and to appreciate the rich diversity of cultures among the people who share our faith in Jesus."

### **MUTUAL BENEFITS**

While the supply work is certainly a help to the parishioners and residents who attend the Masses, Fr. Thang said there is a great benefit for the DWC priests, as well. They get to practice their interpersonal skills, gain pastoral experience, encounter the joy of serving God's people, meet new friends and be in touch with the community.

"We consider this a wonderful opportunity for us to live out our charism and evangelize," he said. "We would like to use this opportunity to empower people and encourage them to commit to the mission of Jesus, which is also the mission that every one of us has agreed upon in our baptism."

Michael Schueller is the pastor for the five communities. He and a sacramental priest work together to cover the area's pastoral needs. In addition, priests from Divine Word College help out at three to five Masses in the pastorate each weekend. They also pitch in when the St. Elizabeth priests get sick or need to travel.

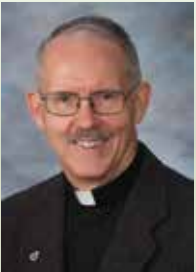
"The priests from Divine Word are essential in bringing the message of the Good News to the people of this area of the world and helping them to see the universal mission of the church," Fr. Michael said. "The many good priests who assist each weekend allow for an enrichment of the celebration of the Eucharist and the global reach of the church into many cultures, as is evidenced by the many priests who are willing to share their talents in the parishes."

Theresa Chapman lives in Epworth and belongs to the nearby St. Clement Church in Bankston, Iowa. As a sacristan, she's had a chance to get to know many of the Divine Word priests who help at her local church. "They always bring such joy to the Mass and that's really encouraging and inspirational to the parishioners," she said. "I don't know if people think about it, but without priests, we wouldn't have the Eucharist. And that's the most precious gift of all."

# President's Annual Report

## SHARING OUR GIFTS MEANS SHARING A PIECE OF OURSELVES

*As believers, we know that our existence is a gift from God.  
The question is, are we willing to share that gift?*



Fr. Tom  
Ascherman, SVD

There is a story of a boy who knew his life was a gift to be given away. His little sister had a rare blood disease, and she needed a blood donor. To complicate things, she also had an unusual blood type. As it turned out, the girl's older brother was a perfect match. He was only about 10 years old, but given the urgent situation, his parents and the doctors asked if he would donate blood to his sister. The boy looked stricken for a moment, but then he found his courage and said he would give whatever was needed to keep his sister alive. The boy was brave as they placed a needle in his arm and he watched his blood flowing out in a tube. A few minutes later, he asked his mother when he would die. The mother was bewildered by the question, but then she realized that her young son was amazingly courageous and generous. He mistakenly thought that his sister would need all of his blood, and not just some. That boy showed he was willing to give himself away for the sake of his sister.

Sometimes, like the boy in the story, we need to be willing to give whatever part of us can serve others. As each of us has received gifts, we must use them to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

This edition of the DWC World is filled with stories about members of the Divine Word College community

who are offering their God-given gifts to help others. On pages 2 and 3, you read about Fr. Brian Junkes, SVD. He shared his karate experience with children in Chad during his Cross-Cultural Training Program. Brian didn't think his personal interest in karate could possibly be part of his ministry work, but he discovered that martial arts helped him connect with young people in the community.

On pages 4 and 5, you were introduced to four DWC graduates who are making a difference by sharing their talents. One is an educator, one is a mental healthcare professional, one is a diocesan priest serving at a parish in California and the other is an archbishop who is leading a worldwide aid group for the Catholic Church. On pages 20 and 21, you'll meet five Divine Word College students who each have unique gifts. They're using those skills to help and serve the people around them.

All of our lives are gifts. We give ourselves away as we reach out in loving friendship.

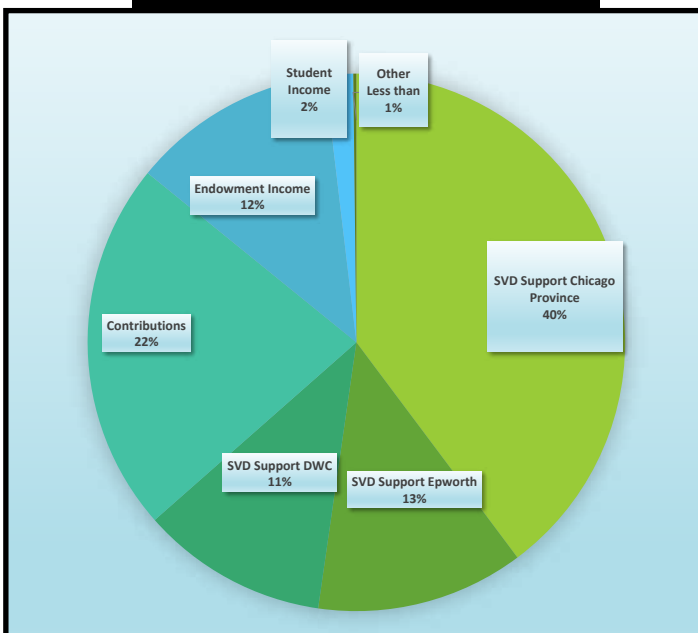
Thank you for the many ways that you have reached out to support the students at Divine Word College, no matter what the method. Whether you tutor students who are learning English, develop friendships with students in your local parish, remember our students in your prayers or make financial contributions to the college, your generosity of gifts makes a difference.



# President's Financial Report

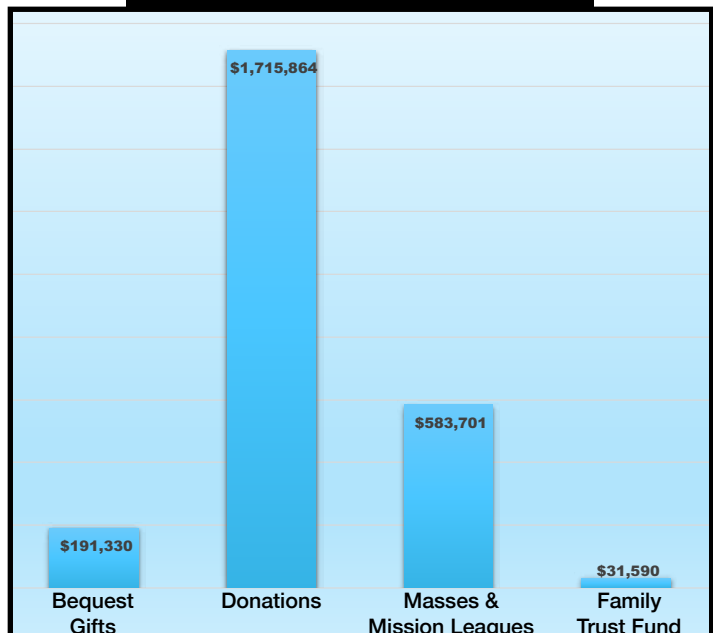


## Divine Word College Income 2022 Fiscal Year



SVD Support Chicago Province	\$3,383,594
Contributions	\$1,900,695
Endowment Income	\$1,044,217
SVD Support Epworth	\$1,063,492
SVD Support DWC	\$955,294
Student Income	\$144,195
Other	\$15,618

## Benefactor Contributions 2022 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 \$1.7 million in scholarship assistance.

# PRAY FOR OUR MEN IN FORMATION

These are the men who were in formation at Divine Word College Seminary in Epworth, Iowa; the Divine Word Novitiate in Techny, Illinois; and the Brother Formation Program and Divine Word Theologate in Chicago during the 2022-2023 academic year.

The Divine Word Missionary formation program is designed to guide young men as they discern their call to religious life. Pray that God continues to strengthen the vocation in our seminarians and in all who He has called to religious life.

*Growing in community with the Divine Word*



Frt. Ryan  
Agbim, SVD



Mr. John-Edeve  
Augustin



Frt. Betenora  
Bako Liba, SVD



Mr. Junior  
Jean Baptiste



Mr. Berson Bien-Aime



Frt. Michelet  
Boncoeur, SVD



Mr. Uriel Rhys  
Briones



Mr. Antz-Carly Cadet



Frt. Christian  
Castro, SVD



Frt. John Cho, SVD



Frt. Cruz  
Colunga, SVD



Frt. Marc  
Declama, SVD



Frt. Hoang Do, SVD



Frt. Juntang  
Duan, SVD



Frt. Wisno Elie, SVD





Bro. Vincent  
Nguyen, SVD



Frt. John Kofi  
Nkum, SVD



Frt. Friday  
Onoja, SVD



Mr. Chinh  
Cong Pham



Mr. Kim Hoa Pham



Deacon Quang  
Ngoc Pham, SVD



Mr. Kentory Philippe



Mr. Miguel  
Toribio Romo Romo



Frt. Engelbert  
Salmon, SVD



Frt. Pedro  
Saveia, SVD



Frt. Joseph  
Xuekai Shi, SVD



Mr. Joseph  
Lucas Simbre



Frt. Boromeo  
Shwe Pyi Soe, SVD



Frt. Zachary  
Smith, SVD



Mr. Steve Telisma



Frt. Thong Tran, SVD



Mr. Do Tuang



Mr. Marc  
Anderson Vaval



Frt. Tin Vu, SVD



Frt. Tung Vu, SVD



Mr. Hoang Son Vu



Mr. Vuong Minh Vu



Frt. Andrew  
Wang, SVD



Deacon Jorge  
Zetino, SVD



Frt. Baruch  
Zinsou, SVD

#### 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  
www.svdvocations.org



Frt. Kodjo  
Emon, SVD



Bro. Joubert  
Felix, SVD



Mr. Ladouceur  
Flarissaint



Mr. Peterson Forestal



Frt. Arnold  
Formbi, SVD



Mr. Omar Gonzalez



Frt. Martin  
Herrera, SVD



Mr. Wilson Joseph



Frt. Brian  
Junkes, SVD



Frt. Roger  
Kyaw Thu, SVD



Frt. Samuel  
Lollar, SVD



Deacon Manie  
Manuel, SVD



Mr. Franciste Mervil



Mr. Cederick  
Morando



Frt. Joao Pinda  
Neto, SVD



Frt. Cong Van  
Nquyen, SVD



Mr. Hai Ho Nguyen



Novice Hoang  
Huy Nguyen



Mr. Hung Cong  
Nguyen



Mr. Long Cao  
Nguyen



Mr. Long Hai  
Ngoc Nguyen



Frt. Nam  
Nguyen, SVD



Novice Quoc Nguyen



Frt. Truong  
An Nguyen, SVD



Frt. Tuan Hoang  
Nguyen, SVD



A close-up, profile shot of a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a white clerical shirt. He is looking down at a small, dark object he is holding in his hands. The background is blurred, showing another person in similar attire.

# FINDING HOME

The journey of a seminarian  
in search of his place  
in the world

*Like many people, Cederick Morando spent years looking for the place where he belonged.*

At 6, he and his family moved to California from the Philippines. They lived with his faith-filled extended family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. He loved Japanese animation, playing video games and taking care of animals.

At 14, Cederick started exploring his personal relationship with God and religion. He quickly discovered a new sense of purpose. After high school, he went to college for elementary education, but felt restless. He just wasn't in the right place.

As time passed, Cederick started thinking more and more about religious life. He discerned with the Claretians, but that didn't feel like the right fit, either.

Someone from his parish connected Cederick with an SVD Vocation Director and in no time, he was in Epworth, Iowa for a Come and See Visit at Divine Word College. That's where things shifted. Cederick said he still can't quite explain it, but he felt like he finally found where he belonged.

It wasn't until he enrolled and started settling into his role as an SVD candidate that Cederick started recognizing a number of signs that perhaps this is where God had been calling him to serve all along.

"My main priority is to seek out God's will for my life at the present moment, always remaining open to where the Holy Spirit moves me," he said. "God knows us more than we do and God loves us more than we could ever love ourselves, so it stands to reason that following His path is the best way to go."

Cederick is interested in teaching, social work or maybe even serving as a counselor in the future. In May, he graduated from Divine Word College. Cederick expected to continue discerning with the SVDs but a sudden, unexpected shift changed his plans. Still, his faith remains steady.

"God takes us in unexpected directions sometimes, the most important thing is to keep yourself open to the will of God," he said.

# students share their gifts from God

*The men and women who study at Divine Word College all possess incredible gifts from God. Many of their skills are expected – like public speaking, the ability to engage in meaningful conversation with the people around them, and the critical thinking skills needed to digest philosophy.*

*But there are some students who have truly unique, and sometimes unexpected talents. No matter what the ability, DWC students look for ways to use those gifts to serve the community and help others.*



## **Long Cao Nguyen, Sound supervisor**

When Long arrived at DWC, he already had an associate's degree in Information Security. He started helping Information Systems Technician Fr. Son Le, SVD with a few computer-related tasks for the college, including installing a new sound system for the chapel. It sparked a new interest in him. Long started learning more about audio systems and when he ran into road blocks, he turned to Fr. Son or Google for guidance. Soon, he was operating the chapel's sound system for daily Masses, as well as major public celebrations like World Mission

Sunday. "Each time I set up the sound system, I learn something new, as I constantly encounter different problems that need to be resolved," Long said. "I take pleasure in listening to the musicians as they play and practice, as it helps me understand how to make their music sound even better. One of the most gratifying aspects of my work is witnessing people enjoying the music during Mass."

In the future, Long hopes to continue learning about audio systems and applying his skills in whatever ministry he does. "It warms my heart to know that the music I help produce brings people closer to God and enhances their spiritual experience," he said.



## **Sr. Hilda Alonyo, LSMIG, Pottery artist**

This Ugandan student developed a relationship with a Missouri artist after moving to Epworth to study at DWC in 2020. The woman owns an art studio and taught Sr. Hilda and another Ugandan student the basics of pottery. After squishing her fingers into the clay and toying around with the wheel a bit, Sr. Hilda quickly discovered a passion for the artform. She said she feels peaceful when she's in the studio.

"As I shaped and played with the clay, somehow it also shaped me and the way I saw things or perceived how God holds me in His arms," Sr. Hilda said. "And He could choose to do anything with me if He wants to. I'm just like that clay – I have no power over the one who has me in His hands."

Before long, Sr. Hilda had a small collection of bowls, platters, ceramic crosses and figurines. Her artist friend knew that she was looking for ways to raise money to help her three cousins back in Uganda pay for their school tuition, so they held an art sale. In one afternoon, Sr. Hilda and the other student raised \$1,400. Her cut was enough to pay off nearly all of the remaining tuition due for her oldest cousin, helping the young woman secure her degree as a medical lab tech.



### Bro. Quoc Bao Le, OCist, Groundsman and gardener

At 7 a.m. on summer days, Bro. Quoc is well into his daily tasks. He likes to start early tending to the plants on campus. He plants flowers, mows the lawn, cares for trees and trims bushes. When Bro. Quoc arrived at DWC, he was already very skilled with plant care. That's because he started learning in 2010 when he joined his monastery in Nha Trang, Vietnam. The space is used for retreats, so the brothers work to develop a tranquil and peaceful environment for attendees.

At first, Bro. Quoc didn't like working in the gardens. He said it was boring and the work was slow. He even considered leaving the formation program at his monastery because the tasks seemed so dull. Then as time passed, he started to realize that the work helped him slow down and accept a new pace. Growing cannot be rushed.

"It teaches you how to be patient with yourself and how to be patient with others," he said. "When I see the flowers in bloom, I feel so happy and satisfied." College President Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD has been teaching Bro. Quoc about the plants that grow in Iowa's climate. Bro. Quoc said a few plants and trees are familiar to him, but he's had to learn how to plant and care for them differently in the United States in order to ensure their success with colder temperatures.

After three years in Epworth, Bro. Quoc sometimes longs for home but he knows how to feel connected to his roots. "That's why I work in the garden – I miss my monastery," he said.



### Sr. Tram Thuy Thi Nguyen, MSC, Chapel decorator

As a sacristan, Sr. Tram helps prepare for Mass in a number of ways, but she has developed a real knack for decorating. Under the careful guidance of the sisters in her Vietnamese congregation, she learned to arrange flowers, utilize recycled materials and depend on the beauty of nature to guide her work.

For the past three years, she's been sharing those talents in the Divine Word College chapel. Sr. Tram oversees the decorations that adorn the altar and surrounding spaces for regular services, as well as major celebrations at the college.

She watches videos on YouTube to find inspiration and learn new techniques. Whenever possible, she aims to use materials that are already available at the college or that she can collect for free. "I love to decorate in a way that looks natural," she said.



### Miguel Toribio Romo Romo, Sewing enthusiast

Growing up in Mexico, Miguel watched his mom work at the sewing machine as she transformed fabrics into fashion. She ran the business out of her home, so he and his siblings were always around her work. It's no wonder that he picked up a thing or two about sewing, but it wasn't until DWC students were preparing to dramatize the Stations of the Cross this Lent that they learned just how much the SVD candidate knows about creating garments.

The old costumes for the performance were getting worn, so Miguel decided to lend his services by creating a whole new set of outfits. From a long-sleeve A-line dress for one of the women to shawls with trim and faux armor for the guards, Miguel outfitted the whole cast for this year's Stations of the Cross. He even equipped several of the garments with multiple fasteners so they will fit actors in the future.





Donna and Joe Daly

## Dalys help with IRA donations

### *Supporting Divine Word mission always a priority for Dalys*

Joe and Donna Daly have been donating to Divine Word College longer than they can remember, but it has for sure been more than 30 years. A Divine Word priest was a family friend, so they heard many stories about the ministries of the SVD and decided they wanted to help with the education of future priests and brothers.

The Dalys, who live in Farley, Iowa, have always counted Divine Word as one of their favorite charities because they believe it's important to have more priests, brothers and sisters serving the Catholic Church around the world. "It has always been a priority for us to donate to Divine Word," they said. "We felt it was a good place and needed our help. We were both brought up to give back."

Now, they continue to help because Divine Word Priests celebrate so many Masses in the parishes and senior care centers in the Epworth area. "Without Divine Word Priests,

we wouldn't have as many Masses as we do, we're thankful for that," Joe said.

In 2020, Joe and Donna learned they could help the college and save themselves income taxes, if they donated from their Traditional IRA. At that time, everyone over 70 ½ (now the minimum age is 73) was required to take an annual Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from their IRA. Joe said the process is easy, just make a call to the company where you have your IRA and ask them to send a donation (this is called a Qualified Charitable Donation or QCD) in the amount you want, to your favorite charities.

We are grateful to Joe and Donna and all of you who help Divine Word College with donations from your IRA. Your generosity will make a difference for future Divine Word students!

If you have any questions about IRA donations, contact your IRA custodian, your tax advisor or call Associate Development Director Mark Singsank at 563-876-0097.

#### **To complete a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) from a Traditional IRA to a charity, the IRA owner must:**

1. Already be age 73 on the date of distribution
2. Submit a distribution form to the IRA custodian, requesting that the check be made payable directly to the charity
3. Ensure that no tax withholding is being done from the

QCD to the charity, as the money must actually go to the charity to qualify

#### **Benefits of making donations from your Traditional IRA:**

- Saves income taxes • Easy to do, just call the company where you have your IRA and ask them to send the donations to your favorite charities



# Who should I be and what should I do?

*"If we worry too much about ourselves,  
we won't have time for others."  
- Mother Teresa of Calcutta*



Fr. Thang  
Hoang, SVD  
Alumni Director

While summer is for relaxation and recharging our energy, it can also be an intense time for some of our candidates who continually discern their vocations. They have to decide to continue with their religious missionary vocation or to choose another vocation or option.

Each person uses different criteria or principles to discern. Some might ask the popular question, "Will I find happiness in religious life?" Or others, "Will I find myself and be able to live truly as who I am?" Still others, "Will I be able to achieve all my goals and fulfill all my desires in religious life?" For me, as a priest who has been living in missionary religious life for many years, I still discern, not so much about vocation but rather upon the important decisions I have to make. That can include the kinds of ministries I do, the locations I visit, the communities I encounter, the degrees of responsibilities I accept, and so on. I find the most helpful principle for discernment in the question once asked by Frederick Buechner, "At what point do my talents and deep gladness meet the world's deepest needs?" This question helps me to move beyond my individual universe and personal desires, in order to enter into the world that God has created for me and all my brothers and sisters. If our discernment is held captive by our personal gratification and individual fascination, we can't see the big



*The Divine Word Alumni Association hosted its annual welcome picnic for the Divine Word College graduates and students who completed their studies at the end of the academic year.*

picture. And it is the big picture that leads us to the vocation in which we can develop and use all our talents for the service of others, and receive that deep gladness and lasting joy. Furthermore, the fundamental principle for all discernments should be "sacrifices." All meaningful decisions require sacrifices, just as Jesus had sacrificed and emptied himself to become one of us for the salvation of the world (Phil 2:6-11).

May our discernment not imprison us in our individual universe but lead us to the life that contributes to the building of a world of love, peace, and justice for all.

To learn more about the Divine Word Alumni Association, visit [www.svdalumni.org](http://www.svdalumni.org)

## LET'S GET TOGETHER AT TECHNY ONE LAST TIME.

Plan to attend a one-day,  
**ALL ALUMNI** gathering on:  
**Saturday, September 9, 2023**

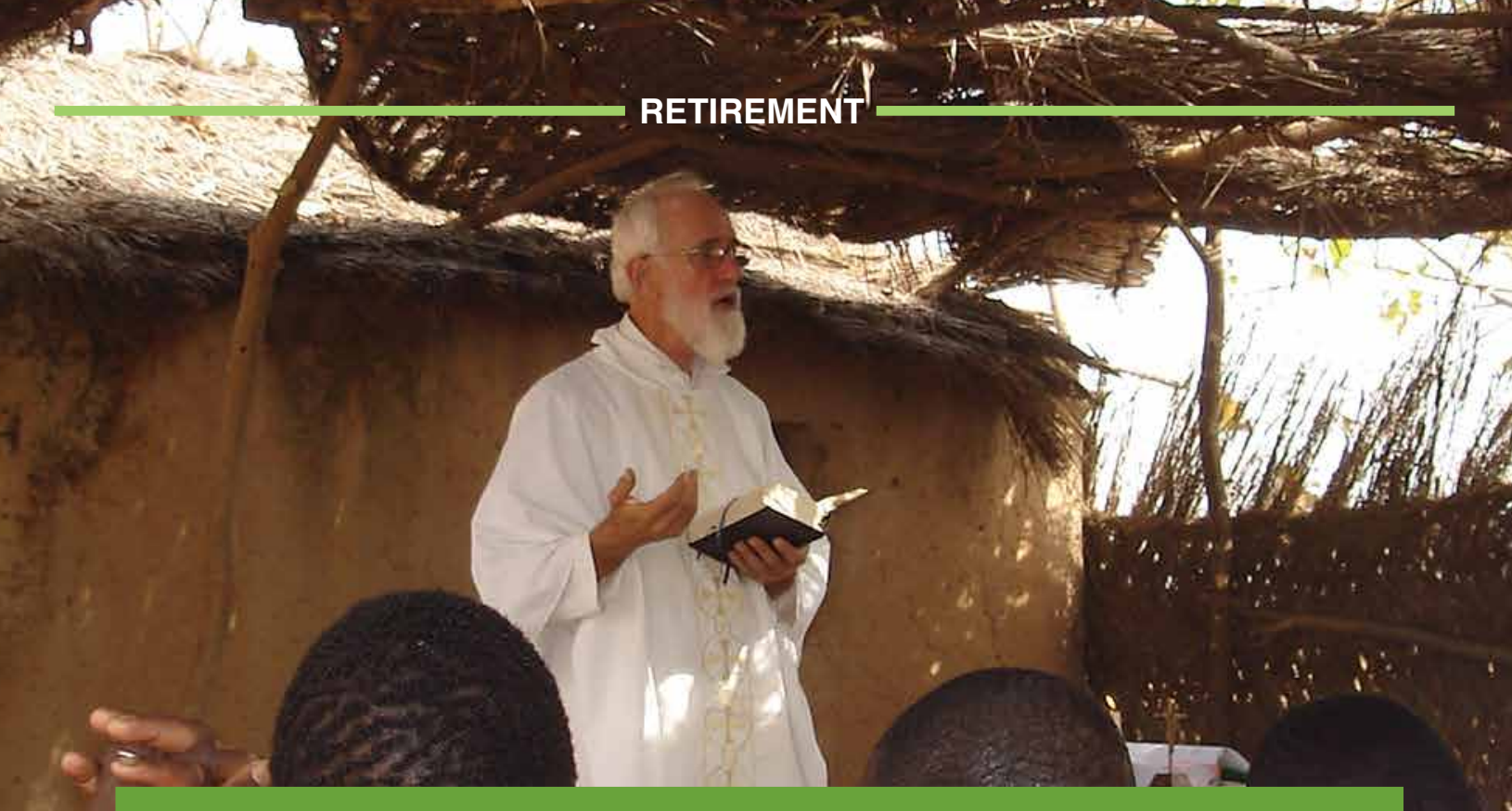
*More details - including a  
schedule and registration  
will be coming soon.*

Whether you are a new alum, or your connection with the SVD spans several decades, Techny is a special place. Techny, with its rich legacy and architectural significance, stands as a testament to the values we hold dear. However, as the world evolves, the fate of this beloved structure remains uncertain.

*Feel free to contact our Midwest Region Coordinators:*

**Art Roche** - [rocheart3@msn.com](mailto:rocheart3@msn.com) 563-581-6521  
**Jim Kelly** - [jmkelly05@yahoo.com](mailto:jmkelly05@yahoo.com) 630-346-5819  
**Jay Canastra** - [JayCanastra@svdmissions.org](mailto:JayCanastra@svdmissions.org) 847-909-6598





## A LIFE OF SERVICE AND FULFILLMENT

As a young boy, Fr. Fred Timp, SVD was intrigued by the idea of religious life, but the daily schedule of parish priests seemed too boring and predictable for him. Young Fred wanted to serve God in a more exciting and adventurous way. With a little guidance from his uncle, who happened to be a Divine Word Missionary Priest, the young boy was able to connect with a Vocation Director and begin learning about how he could go out into the world to serve with the missionary congregation. He entered formation, starting in the minor seminary in 1959. He dreamed about being assigned to China someday.

“I was hoping for primary evangelization and wanted to avoid teaching in a school,” Fr. Fred said. “My first assignment was to the minor seminary at Bordentown where I was teaching and working as assistant Dean of Students!” It wasn’t exactly the overseas ministry he was hoping for, but Fr. Fred says he enjoyed seeing the formation process up close. Two years later, he jumped into vocation work and helped out at area parishes. He looked at it as a chance to gain some pastoral experience and make lasting friendships in the community.

In 1983, the Minnesota native finally got exactly what he was looking for when he first set out to be a Divine Word Missionary Priest – an assignment to a place overseas where there was great need. He moved to Ghana and started what would turn into a 40-year appointment.

### A NEW LAND

Fr. Fred’s first assignment in Ghana was in an isolated, rural area called the Afram Plains. The people there were mostly farmers and they came from all over the country, representing numerous tribes. Many of them were already Christians, but there was still a good deal of primary evangelization to be done. Fr. Fred enjoyed his role and didn’t plan to leave, but about five years after his arrival, he was asked to serve as the dean of the SVD major seminarians in Tamale.

He found his role at the seminary to be both challenging and rewarding. At that time, there were about 25 seminarians. Roughly half of them were preparing for novitiate and taking philosophy while the others were already in temporary vows and taking theology classes. “I saw the seminarians grow and mature to become good missionaries themselves,” he said. Five or six of the seminarians who he worked with during that time have become provincials for the Society of the Divine Word and one became a bishop.

### TRANSLATING THE WORD

Five years later, Fr. Fred was asked to shift his focus again. This time, he was assigned to a parish in Chereponi, which is also in the Archdiocese of Tamale. He stayed in this location for 10 years. Unlike his first two posts in Ghana, this one focused on the primary



evangelization that the young priest always longed for.

“There were four different tribes in the parish, each with a different language. Fortunately, most of the people belonged to just two tribes. I had an assistant who worked with one of the major language groups and I worked with the other,” Fr. Fred recalls. “We both worked with the minority language communities.”

He focused on the Komba language. At the time, very little of the Bible, prayers for Mass and common Catholic prayers had been translated to this language, so Fr. Fred got to work preparing these important writings to make them accessible to the local people. His assistant did much of the same work for the Anufo tribe. When his assistant was transferred after a few years, Fr. Fred found an Anufo catechist to continue that work. It took 10 years, but together they managed to translate the readings for Sundays and Solemnities, as well as the most used prayers in the Missal for Mass. In addition, they continued the evangelization work that other missionaries started in the area. Those days were filled with many joyful baptisms in villages where no one had been baptized previously.

“I think the years I spent in Chereponi and Saboba were the most fulfilling,” he said. “They were the years I did the kind of work I always wanted to do, the kind of work I felt called to do when I felt the call to be a missionary. They were also the years where I developed my deepest friendships and relationships with the people.”

Ten years after his arrival in Chereponi, Fr. Fred was relocated to Saboba. “The Church in Saboba was more developed than it was in Chereponi, but

we continued the evangelizing there, as well. I had many baptisms in Saboba because my predecessors had done most of the work and I was harvesting the ripe fruit of their efforts,” he said. The people in this region spoke a language that was related to Komba and most of the Bible had already been translated, but the Missal was incomplete. Again, Fr. Fred gathered a team and set out to translate the documents so the people in the community could read it. Just as they finished their work and prepared to print the documents, Fr. Fred got another assignment.

### ADMINISTRATIVE WORK

During his time in Chereponi, the Yendi District was split off from the Archdiocese of Tamale and a new Diocese of Yendi was created. The bishop asked Fr. Fred to take the role of Chancellor of the new diocese while also continuing his work as a parish priest. At that time, he was added to nearly every committee, commission and board in the diocese and served as secretary to about half of them.

In 2008, a new provincial was elected and he asked Fr. Fred to take over as the Province Secretary.

“Doing so was probably the hardest decision I ever had to make,” he said. “I really didn’t want to leave the primary evangelization work I was doing, but I also didn’t see how I could say ‘no’ to a need of the Society to which I owed so much. The Society

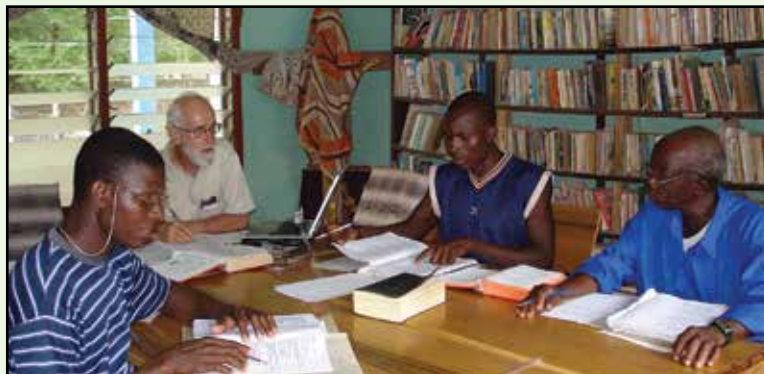
had been educating me and taking care of me for almost 50 years already and I would not have had the opportunity to do all the primary evangelization work and many other things I had done if it were not for the Society.”

He accepted the role and served as Province Secretary for eight years until he was asked to take over as Province Treasurer. Fr. Fred felt ill-equipped to take on the new position and was reluctant again, but stepped up to the task, nonetheless. Again, he found himself faced with challenges, but was pleased to overcome them. Next, he stepped into the role of Province Archivist and later became the treasurer for the Ghanaian community where he still considers home today at age 78.

### REFLECTIONS

Looking back, Fr. Fred says all of his roles were fulfilling in one way or another but the relationships he formed with people who he served and worked alongside were perhaps the greatest achievements of his life. It wasn’t always easy, but he treasures the experiences that life as an SVD has afforded him. “The most challenging aspect of being a missionary has been to let go of my own cultural ways and customs and accept those of the people I was working with,” he said. “Letting go of one’s sense of cultural superiority is not easy, but unless people can live the Gospel according to the best of their own cultural values, they will never become the best Christians they can be.”

This spring, Fr. Fred went to Chicago to receive some medical treatments but he is hopeful that he’ll return to the west side of Accra in Ghana soon. “I am ready to continue in these positions as long as I am able to handle them competently,” he said.



*The translation team at work.*



# The heart of a MISSIONARY

On the first day of her senior year of high school in 1975, Marlene Decker started working at Divine Word College as part of her school's office education program. This fall, Marlene plans to retire after 48 years of service.

During her career, she worked primarily in the business office doing clerical tasks and later accounting. Seven years ago, she was named Business Office Director. Since then,

Marlene standardized systems, streamlined procedures and ensured that the college received a clean annual audit. But her impact on the college goes far beyond crunching numbers and balancing books. Marlene is a person who makes connections. "She takes time with everyone she meets. So many people know the college because of her," said Fr. Joe McDermott, SVD, who has been friends with Marlene and her family for more than 40 years.



Marlene and her husband, Jay, are dairy farmers. In 1984, their first daughter was born and diagnosed with a rare genetic condition that causes mental and physical disabilities. The young couple was blindsided by the news. Marlene felt overwhelmed and figured she'd never be able to return to work. One day, about a month after Rachel was born, she got a visit from her boss, Bro. Leonard Bauer, SVD.

"He said, 'Marlene, I want you back in the office Monday morning. We need you and you need us,'" she recalls. "It was the best thing that ever happened to me, because I probably would still be ... well, I don't know where I would be. I was depressed. He said, 'You can call the doctors during your work day, but I just think it would be best for you to get out of here and get with people.' And he was so right."

Rachel spent most of her life in nearby group homes so she could receive the care she needed until her death in 2014. Marlene and Jay had six more children: Renee, Richard, Teresa, Johnna, Katelyn and Robert.

As their household grew, so did their farm. Their herd of 50 cows grew to 500. When milk prices were down, Marlene said she was always grateful for her steady job at the college.

For many years, Marlene woke up at 4:30 a.m. to help milk the cows. Then she returned to the house, got ready for work and prepared the kids for the day before heading to the college. At night, the cows needed to be milked again, dinner needed to be made and the piles of laundry were no

small feat. The kids all had chores and were expected to do their part.

The Decker children learned a lot from their mom, including what it means to be a missionary. "As young

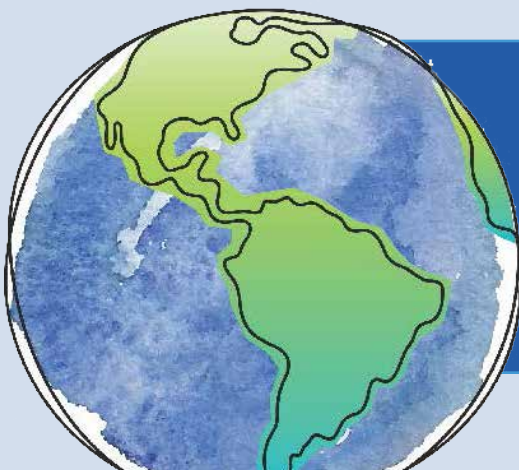
kids, they grew up with students and SVD members coming into the house all the time," Marlene said. "They would come to see the farm, so the kids were very accustomed to it. I have a guest book at home and when people would stop by, I had them all sign it."

As it turned out, Marlene is a natural missionary. Her deep roots in the community and the SVD world helped her foster genuine connections. One day, a local woman who sews was looking for an outlet for her creations. Marlene asked her to make blankets for the college's students. Soon, there was a whole crew of people making blankets for the students and for Divine Word Missionaries to distribute to the homeless. Marlene also coordinates an initiative that collects donated chalices. She ensures that the sacred vessels are hand-delivered to priests serving in poor parishes and villages that can't afford to purchase them.

From big gestures to small ones, like leaving a cookie or loaf of bread in Fr. Joe's mailbox, Marlene leaves a lasting impact on people. Those connections don't just fade away when students and SVDs leave Divine Word College. Marlene has a knack for maintaining friendships. "She's just a person who has so much charisma, so much influence over all of us in this place," Fr. Joe said. "Her presence here at the college, I think it can't be measured."



*Marlene enjoys clownin' around in support of a local fundraising event.*



**SAVE THE DATE!**

World Mission Sunday

**Sunday, October 22**

starting at 1pm

*All are welcome to join the  
public celebration at  
Divine Word College*



**1** DWC student Hung Cong Nguyen was one of many members of the college community who participated in this year's Easter Vigil service. The crowd gathered outside around an Easter fire at sunset before processing inside by candlelight.

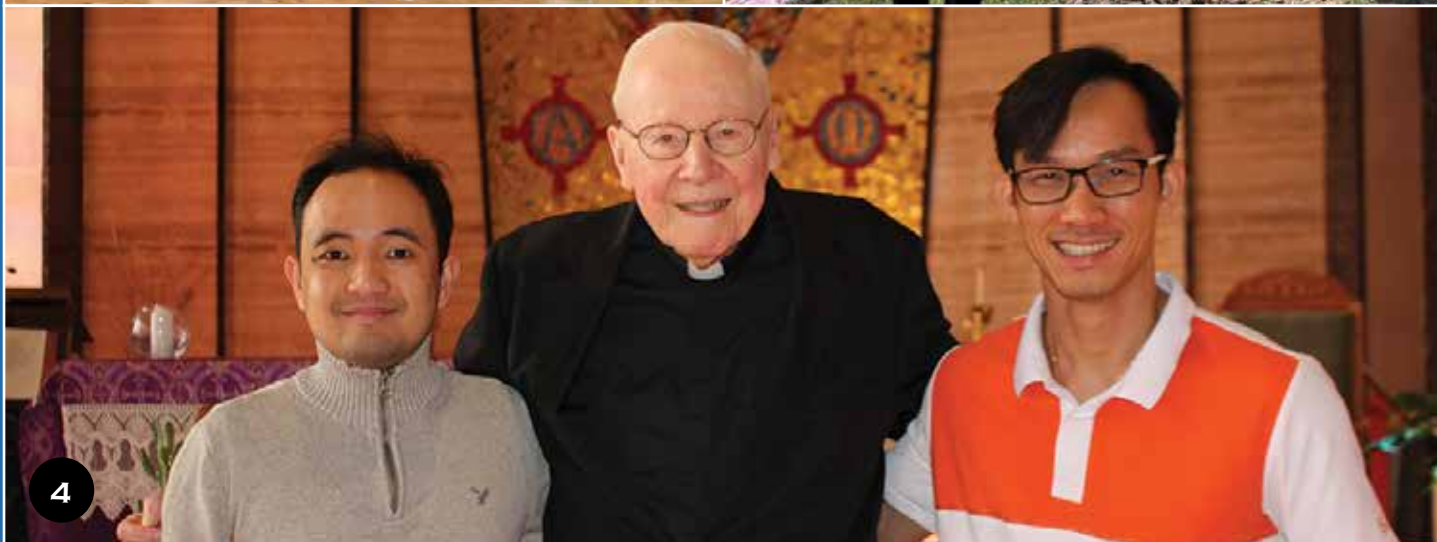


**2** Yahtzee! Learning is always easier when it's fun. That's why these ESL students were playing Word Yahtzee to practice spelling and English pronunciation. The classroom was filled with laughs as they scrambled to find the next word!

**3** DWC was recently recognized by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree Campus and honored with the 2022 Tree Campus USA Award. On Arbor Day, the college community planted three new trees that were a gift from the graduating class.



**4** Thanks to the generosity of people like you, the Rev. William Shea, SVD Scholarship has reached more than \$200,000! DWC students and SVD candidates Cederick Morando (left) and Hoang Son Vu (right) were recently selected as the first scholarship recipients.





**5** In honor of Mardi Gras, the DWC kitchen staff prepared a whole, roasted alligator on Fat Tuesday. Nothing prepares missionaries for cultural acceptance quite like trying exotic and unusual dishes!

**6** Sr. Comfort Nguyongo, SON and Sr. Thuy Thi Tran, LHC were just two of the students from a public witness class who shared reflections on the women of the Old Testament in March. The performance was in celebration of Women's History Month.

**7** This year, Divine Word College presented MercyOne Dubuque and MercyOne Dyersville Medical Centers with the 2023 Donaghey Award for Outstanding Service. Kay Takes, president of MercyOne's eastern Iowa region, accepted the award on behalf of the organization.

**8** Men from the three SVD formation houses comprising Divine Word College in Epworth, Divine Word Theologate in Chicago, and Divine Word Novitiate in Techny, gathered at DWC in March for the second annual SVD Formation Day.



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# Join the 2nd Annual **VIRTUAL**

## Miles for Missionaries Challenge!

**NEW THIS YEAR!**

You decide whether you  
— **Walk, Run or Bike** —

throughout the month of  
September 2023

Ask friends and family to sponsor your participation in the challenge by donating online.  
The money you raise will make a difference in the lives of DWC students!

Go to [www.bikereg.com/milesformissionaries](http://www.bikereg.com/milesformissionaries) to sign up **TODAY!** No registration fee.

*In Memory of Bud McGovern — Long-Time Friend of Divine Word College*



9th annual

## **Benefit Golf Outing**

18 hole four-person Best Shot  
Timberline Golf Course, Peosta, Iowa

**Friday, July 21, 2023**

1pm Shotgun Start

**\$25,000** prize for a hole-in-one on #3

\$80 per person — Golf, cart, dinner & prizes  
\$25 dinner only

*All proceeds support the Divine Word College  
Student Scholarship Fund*

To register your foursome, sponsor our event or for more  
information, contact: Mark Singsank at Divine Word College  
563-876-0097 or [singsank@dwci.edu](mailto:singsank@dwci.edu)