

For some students, worldwide health issues can impact their personal lives.

DWC student Sr. Hilda Alonyo, LSMIG, learned in September 2020 that her aunt died of COVID-19 in her home country of Uganda. More than just an aunt, Sr. Irene Onyai, LSMIG, was like a parent to her,



Sr. Hilda Alonyo, LSMIG

stepping in to help raise Sr. Hilda after her father died when she was 11 and serving as the driving force behind her advanced education. Sr. Irene was also a religious sister and a great spiritual inspiration to Sr. Hilda. Her death was nearly too much for Sr. Hilda to process from halfway across the world. It also made her realize just how dangerous the global pandemic was and caused her to fear for the rest of her family in Uganda. In the following months, Sr. Hilda lost her maternal grandmother and two uncles to various health conditions.

She says some days her mind would wander to her beloved family members during class. The sadness was powerful but so was the compassion she was shown from the people around her. Instructors were patient, staff listened and students joined her in prayer or brought food. Sr. Hilda said her formator offered guidance and the school counselor helped her begin to move through the grief. "I felt like everyone reached out to me in some way," she said. "It may have been simple but it helped me to know they were thinking of me." Through it all, Sr. Hilda continued to show up to school celebrations, lending her voice in song, making costumes for a performance or joining in a dance. She says it's still hard to go on some days but she knows that her aunt would want her to find joy and live a full life.

TECHNOLOGY KEEPS VOCATION TEAM CONNECTED



Vocation directors for the Society of the Divine Word continue to find new and innovative methods to reach young men who are interested in pursuing a religious vocation. For much of the past year, their travel plans were canceled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unable to attend conferences, youth groups and even one-on-one meetings with young discerners, the vocation team turned to the internet to reach their audience.

For months they took turns hosting live video sessions that streamed online. The vocation directors discussed different topics each week and viewers could submit questions in real time.

In February, the group reimagined a new way to continue their virtual vocation efforts that would encourage more participation from prospective candidates. They launched a four-part online discussion series called "Discerning the Call to Mission." In the new format, young men interested in learning more about religious life and the Society of the Divine Word could register in advance to attend the live video sessions. This allowed the vocation directors to literally meet them where they're at – in front of their computer screens!

"This program not only presents a specific topic for the month but also

allows for conversations between discerners and vocation directors in a more intimate group setting," said Vocation Director Fr. Think Ngo, SVD. The first series was so successful that a second one launched in July. An average of 10 participants have attended each discussion, month after month. Each one starts with an opening prayer and introductions. There's input from a vocation director or an SVD guest speaker followed by small group discussions. Everyone comes back together in the virtual space to participate in a large group discussion and Q&A session before ending with a closing prayer and blessing.

"The program is unique because it allows discerners from all over to meet and gather in one place," Fr. Think said. "We have participants from California to New York and even from as far away as Thailand."

Vocation directors are beginning to travel again but the pandemic continues to impact in-person meetings. Thankfully, the online discussion series has provided a space for meaningful conversations and an opportunity for discerners to grow in their faith. Several of the participants have already journeyed to DWC for Come and See visits, one is currently enrolled at the College and another has been accepted for admission next semester.