



# 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."