

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.

