

Building meaningful bonds

Students learn to cultivate connections and foster friendships

Missionary work takes more than just a set of technical skills. While it's important to understand pastoral duties and have a solid grasp of theology, the key to thriving in a mission field is connecting with people.



Frt. Nam Duy Nguyen, SVD

One way that Divine Word College students learn to build relationships is by volunteering at area parishes.

Frt. Nam Duy Nguyen, SVD already professed First Vows as a Divine Word Missionary and now he's at DWC learning English, pre-theology and continuing his discernment. On the weekends, he travels to Sacred Heart Cathedral in Davenport, Iowa for his ministry work. Frt. Nam and a few other students meet with the children of the parish during Mass to offer Bible sharing and teach the kids to speak Vietnamese. It's not always an easy task. "These kids were born in the U.S. but they still have Vietnamese culture in their blood," he said. "It's easy for me to connect to the older generation at the church. But for the first two weeks, the kids were kind of afraid of me."

Frt. Nam started by listening to the children. He asked about their hobbies and dreams. It took time for the connections to grow, but after a few weeks, he earned their trust. Since then, he's been trying to help the kids understand the reason behind why their parents want them to learn about their faith and their culture. "I need to be a bridge to connect between the younger generation and their parents," he said. "I understand how Vietnamese people live and think, but I can also be open to the kids and adapt to their Gen Z way of thinking."

Last year, Sr. Francisca Doofan Aorakaa, SON and other DWC students traveled to a parish in Moline, Illinois each week. After Mass, they taught Catechism to the kids at Christ the King Church. Although Sr. Francisca had experience teaching religious education in her home country of Nigeria, she said teaching American kids is different.

"Coming here and teaching Catechism was scary. It was challenging, but I found that all the people at the Moline parish had a welcoming spirit," she said. With a bright smile and open heart, Sr. Francisca developed a strong bond with a Togolese family who hosted the DWC students during their visits to the parish. Despite cultural and language differences, she felt at home with Georgette and Edward Goyito-Mensah and their three children.

The feeling was mutual. Georgette said the parish's children learned a lot from the Divine Word College students. "The children are looking up to these sisters to teach them what they know about God," she said.

As time passed, Sr. Francisca's connection with the Goyito-Mensah family extended outside the church walls. She invited them to cultural events at the college and they celebrated her birthday with her. Sr. Francisca is set to graduate in May, she's confident her connection to the Moline family will remain strong, no matter where she goes next.



(Left to Right) Prince Goyito-Mensah, Edward Goyito-Mensah, Emily Goyito-Mensah, Sr. Francisca Doofan Aorakaa, Georgette Goyito-Mensah, and Michelle Goyito-Mensah.