

the

Summer 2025

DWC

World

Educating Tomorrow's Missionaries



WHAT'S INSIDE



SPRING
INTO SERVICE



Is God Calling Someone You Know? **HELP HIM HEAR THE CALL.**

Religious vocations don't begin in isolation — they begin in families, in classrooms, in parishes, and in the quiet encouragement of people like you.

Learn more or make a referral:

[SVDvocations.org](https://svdvocations.org)

The **Divine Word Missionaries** are calling on you to support young men who may be discerning God's call to serve the Church as missionary **priests or brothers**.

We are an international Catholic missionary congregation dedicated to preaching the Gospel and sharing the Word of God. Our missionaries serve in nearly 80 countries through ministries that include education, parish life, social justice, and cross-cultural dialogue.

If you know a young man who is generous, faith-filled, and open to God's will, encourage him to explore the possibility of religious life with the **Divine Word Missionaries**.

Your encouragement could be the spark that leads to a life of joyful service.

Contact National Vocation Director Len Uhal | [800-553-3321](tel:800-553-3321) | svdvocations@dwci.edu

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Cover photo: Frt. Rafael Yescas, SVD, shares a joyful moment with children in Jamaica, where he currently serves.



Development Office

by Fr. Linh Pham, SVD

Dear Esteemed Readers,

We invite you to join us on the missionary journey at Divine Word College. You can be part of this adventure without leaving the comfort of your home — simply by turning the pages of the magazine you hold in your hands.

In this issue, you'll encounter the inspiring story of Bro. Donald Champagne, SVD. Now 88 and retired at Divine Word College, Bro. Don reflects on a lifetime of service filled with memorable experiences. As he puts it, "You never really know where God will take you in life, but if you let the Holy Spirit work through you, the journey is sure to be a memorable one." Despite the challenges he faced in his missionary journey, Bro. Don is deeply grateful for the friendships he has formed and the many fulfilling ministries he has embraced.

You'll also learn about the path of a young Divine Word Missionary — from early formation to first assignment. Fr. Zachary Smith, SVD, an African American and Divine Word College alumnus, was ordained in May 2024. He now returns to Japan, where he completed his Cross-Cultural Training Program (CTP), to begin his first missionary assignment.

This edition also highlights 14 graduates of Divine Word College who were recognized for successfully completing their academic and formation programs during Commencement Exercises on May 16, 2025.

Additionally, Divine Word College recently presented the Donaghey Award for Outstanding Service to three Dubuque-area communities of women religious for their generous support of Vietnamese sisters over the years: The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Sisters of St. Francis. Read about how their collaboration has been instrumental in providing housing and support for the students they welcomed into their communities.

Thank you for your faithful missionary accompaniment through the years.

WE'RE ALL DIFFERENT, AND ALL WONDERFUL

A MISSIONARY'S JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

By Fr. Zachary Smith, SVD

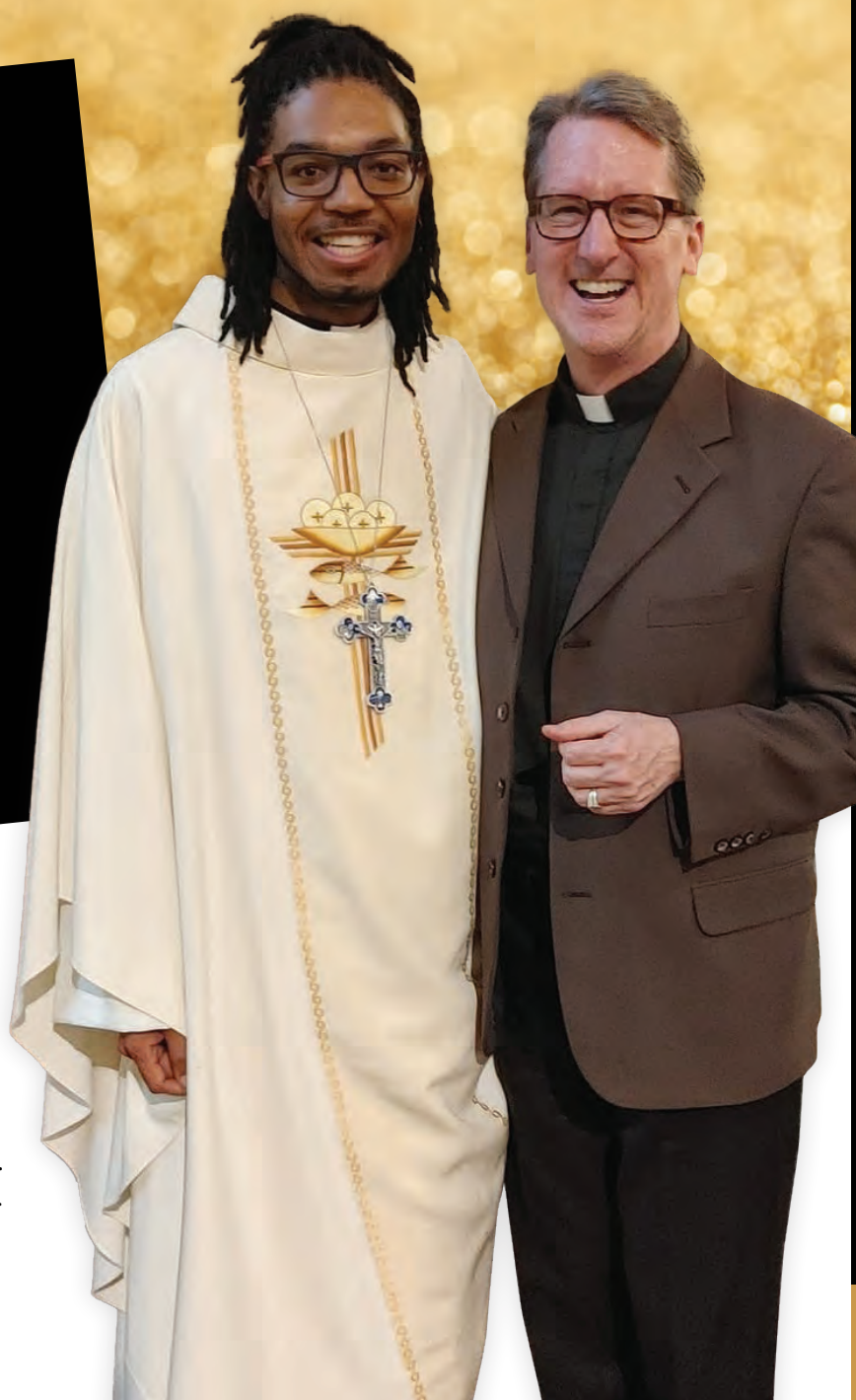
ME,, A BIRD,, AND A BELL

Even if I spread out both my arms,
I can't fly in the sky at all,
But the little bird that can fly
Can't run fast like I can.
Even if I shake my body,
I can't make beautiful sounds,
But that ringing bell, unlike me,
Doesn't know as many songs.
The bell, the bird, and then me —
We're all different, and all wonderful.

- By Misuzu Kaneko

When I first encountered this poem during my CTP in Japan, I was deeply moved. It reminded me that even if there are many things I can't do or don't know, I can still encounter what I can do and discover what I can know. When we are born, we can hardly do anything and know almost nothing — yet, as we slowly gain the ability to do and learn more, it feels as if our world gradually expands. Each small step builds who we are and enriches our lives.

Fr. Zachary with Vocation Director
Fr. Adam MacDonald, SVD



My name is Zachary Smith, and I am currently working in Tokyo. I was born and raised outside Detroit, Michigan. Though not Catholic, my family enrolled me in a Catholic school in kindergarten. I still remember attending Mass for the first time; I felt a physical, whole-body reaction. I thought, “The Lord is calling me.” But I didn’t know what God was calling me for. I was eventually baptized at age 16.

The thought of entering religious life never occurred to me. My grade school, high school, and parish were all staffed by Jesuits, and several suggested that I consider joining them one day. However, I wanted to become a doctor, so I ignored their invitation and went to the University of Pittsburgh to study microbiology. Over time, my interest in lab work faded, and I began to feel lost. I became a licensed EMT-B. Many of the patients I met had physical injuries, but others had wounds that bandages or medicine couldn’t heal. By listening to their worries and simply being present, I could help soothe their emotional pain — even if only a little. This experience prompted me to reconsider religious life. I thought I might be able to listen to people’s stories and explore the emotional wounds of the human heart.

I met my first SVD, Vocation Director Fr. Adam MacDonald, on the steps of the cathedral in Pittsburgh. Maybe it was the bagpipes (there was a memorial Mass for firefighters), or maybe the idea of missionary life, but whatever it was, despite knowing little about the SVD, I transferred to Divine Word College — and the rest is history. DWC was a very interesting place, and I was blessed to meet and interact with people from around the world.

In 2018, I came to Japan for my Cross-Cultural Training Program (CTP). I was somewhat excited but mostly nervous, having never seriously studied a foreign language or lived outside the U.S. Learning Japanese was incredibly difficult, but I managed. After two years of language study, just as I prepared for my pastoral year, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. The CTP director arranged a volunteer opportunity at Nanzan Elementary School, where I taught English and religion. I’ll never forget how the students approached each lesson with joy. Their openness to question and share inspired me to do the same.

After returning to Chicago, I began to question what kind of ministry I should pursue. I understood my weaknesses — but didn’t know my strengths. When I received the news that I would return to Japan, I felt relief, but also



Fr. Zachary (middle) in Kyoto, Japan during his Cross-Cultural Training Program

sadness about leaving loved ones, and anxiety that I had forgotten Japanese.

Those worries vanished thanks to women I met, not in Japan, but during my diaconate. I joined the “Knit Wits,” a group that knits baby blankets and hats for organizations supporting newborns and struggling mothers. Of all the things these women taught me, the words that stuck most were: “Only God is perfect.” Even when my blankets had holes or mistakes, they comforted me with those words. Over time, I realized this didn’t just apply to knitting — it also applied to *my life*.

Until then, I had been a perfectionist, always trying to do everything right. I was afraid of mistakes, chasing perfect grades, trying to be the ideal student. Being a missionary is full of challenges — entering new cultures, learning new languages, realizing how big and small the world is. No matter how hard we try, we make mistakes. We conjugate verbs wrong, use incorrect utensils, or say the wrong greetings. And that’s okay — because only God is perfect.

Now, I have begun a new life as an associate pastor at Kichijoji Church. Everything is a first for me. I still fumble for words, struggle to remember names, and often get lost. But I’m encouraged by the support of those around me — friends I studied with in Epworth and at the Theologate, some of whom have even come as far as Tokyo to reconnect. I think of people like my DWC instructors Dr. Marilyn Taylor and Fr. Bill Shea, SVD, who continue to challenge and inspire me, and so many others who made it possible for me to be here.

I don’t know what work I’ll do in the future, though it’s possible I may pursue higher studies, potentially within the Nanzan School Corporation. Wherever this journey leads and the Spirit guides me, I hope we can build a world where we recognize one another and say, “We’re all different, and all wonderful.”

FAITH, FORMATION, and a Shared Mission

How Lay Educators Help Prepare Missionaries at DWC

As a Catholic seminary, Divine Word College's primary mission is to prepare students for a life of missionary service to the Church. While many of the teaching and formation roles are filled by religious priests, brothers, and sisters, the college also relies on the dedication and expertise of lay professionals who serve in collaboration with the Society of the Divine Word.

These lay educators do more than hold jobs — they offer their time, talent, and faith to help shape students for the challenges of religious life and ministry. They bring a diverse range of experiences that enrich the college community and model how formation is a shared responsibility among all members of the Church.

Dr. Joshua Young, Vice President for Academic Affairs and a communication instructor, says teaching at a Catholic college has long been a personal goal. During his five years, he's found the experience fulfilling and inspiring.

A classroom moment during his early years at DWC shaped his approach to equitable education: a student challenged a grade for eye contact in a speech, highlighting how cultural norms influence public speaking. That experience deepened his commitment to inclusive communication education and assessment.



Dr. Joshua Young shares a proud moment with his student, Hung Cong Nguyen, at the 2024 graduation ceremony.

As a layperson, Dr. Joshua says his vocation to serve the Church takes a different form than religious life — but it is no less essential.

“Students often say I should have been a priest, and I did consider it,” he said. “I found that God was calling me to teaching as a layperson. To be an authentic Church and community, we must recognize that formation is an ongoing process for both religious and laypeople. We help to form each other, just in different ways.”

Teaching is an integral part of the mission of the Church. At DWC, this is especially unique because students are learning academics while simultaneously participating in the formation program. While academics and formation have different methods and goals, Dr. Joshua says instructors and formators collaboratively create ways to assess each program's learning outcomes and identify ways to support each program's needs.

“I think of my work at DWC as training the future leaders of the Church,” he said. “Jesus reminds us that He is sending us as sheep amongst wolves. My job is preparing missionaries to go into that world and change it. Teaching reminds me to constantly love as Christ did; I'm trying to help feed the sheep.”

Like Dr. Joshua, other lay educators at DWC find deep purpose in walking alongside students as they grow in faith and formation.

Assistant Professor Emeritus of Philosophy Dr. Ron Condon retired in May after 26 years at the college. Reflecting on his time at DWC, he says supporting the formation of young missionaries was deeply meaningful — and that lay educators can offer a unique perspective.



Dr. Ron Condon

“Not being so involved in the formal formation process can give one a bit more perspective at times,” he said.

Dr. Evelyn Dias, Assistant Professor of Music and Liturgical Music Coordinator, is closely involved with students through class instruction, individual lessons, and preparing music for liturgical celebrations.

She sees her work as a deeply personal contribution to students’ spiritual and ministerial growth.

“It has been a privilege to support the formation of students who will enter religious life or are already in vows,” she said. “Music is such a significant part of church services. I believe that many religious students receive my instruction in a deeply personal way. When we work to express sentiments through music, it is especially prayerful and moving.”

Like her students, Dr. Evelyn remembers professors who

shaped her not just academically but personally. She hopes to do the same, teaching them patience, preparedness, and professionalism as they grow in confidence with their music education.

“I could never have imagined that I would have this opportunity to spread the love of music and the understanding of how hard one must work to achieve excellence,” she said. “I hope that my students take these lessons with them and share them with others in service of the Church’s mission.”

In his commencement speech, Dr. Ron said teaching at DWC was unlike any other experience in his career.

“I often reflected in my early years at Divine Word College how my students at another college I worked for had been given everything, but were grateful for nothing; while my students here had been given nothing, but were grateful for everything,” he said. “Divine Word College students were committed to a life of service to others, and not just to themselves. They fervently hoped, and prayed, to make the world a better place for all of us.”

Through their commitment and example, the lay professionals at Divine Word College contribute powerfully to the formation of the next generation of missionary leaders — helping students grow not only in knowledge and skill, but also in spirit, humility, and hope. Their partnership with the Society of the Divine Word embodies the unity of lay and religious vocations — each distinct, yet deeply connected in service to the Church’s mission.



Dr. Evelyn Dias accompanies students on piano as they sing during the Family Feast liturgy.



CLASS OF

2025

In May, Divine Word College honored the graduating class of 2025. Dr. Ron Condon, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, received emeritus status and gave the commencement address. Sr. Ozioma Okpara, SST, served as valedictorian. As they step into the future, we pray these graduates carry their faith with purpose, strength, and a spirit of service.



DECEMBER 2024 GRADUATES



Sr. Jesca Lucy Alitubeera, IHMR
Entebbe, Uganda

**B.A. Theology & Mission and
B.A. Intercultural Studies**

- *What have you been up to since graduation?* I am teaching at an elementary school in Uganda.
- *What are you most excited about as you move forward?* What excites me most is putting what I've learned into practice while working at an elementary school. I use my English skills daily with the students, and I try to teach with love — a lesson I took to heart during my time at Divine Word College.



Vuong Minh Vu
Saigon, Vietnam

**B.A. Philosophy and B.A.
Intercultural Studies**

- *What have you been up to since graduation?* I am taking the next step in discerning God's call by joining the Divine Word Novitiate.
- *What is one lesson you learned at DWC that you will carry with you into the future?* At DWC, I learned that true leadership is rooted in service, cultural humility, and listening. Leading with compassion and collaboration across cultures is a lesson I will carry with me into every future mission and ministry.

MAY 2025 GRADUATES



Ladouceur Flarissaint
Petit-Goâve, Haiti

B.A. Philosophy

- *Plans after graduation?* I will study theology.

- *How has your time at DWC prepared you to serve people from*

diverse backgrounds? It has prepared me by immersing me in a multicultural community where I learned to value and respect different cultures, languages, and traditions. Through formation, academics, and ministry experiences, I developed the skills and sensitivity needed to serve with compassion and cultural awareness.



Sr. Nhi Thi Thao Nguyen, LHC-GV
Bien Hoa, Vietnam

B.A. Theology & Mission

- *Plans after graduation?* I will continue pursuing a master's in elementary education at the University of Saint Francis in Joliet, Illinois.

- *How has your time at DWC prepared you to serve people from diverse backgrounds?* My time at Divine Word College taught me to understand and serve people from different backgrounds with respect, kindness, and a strong sense of community.



Sr. Tram Thuy Thi Nguyen, MSC
Binh Thuan, Vietnam

B.A. Theology & Mission

- *Plans after graduation?* I will apply to another school for my master's degree.

- *How has your time at DWC*

prepared you to serve people from diverse backgrounds? Living at DWC was an excellent opportunity for me to gain a lot of experience. In the DWC environment, I encountered many people from around the world, learned, and adapted to many cultures. These experiences will be meaningful as I prepare for my future ministry.



Sr. Ozioma Maurine Okpara, SST
Kumba, Cameroon

**B.A. Philosophy and
B.A. Theology & Mission**

- *Plans after graduation?* I will return to my home country for active ministry.

- *What is one lesson you learned at DWC that you will carry with you into the future?* Diversity is not disunity. Rather, it brings a unique dynamism to every group. The good makes us appreciate our talents, and the bad serves as a reminder to never stop striving to grow.



Ae Pa You Paw
Saint Paul, Minnesota

B.A. Theology & Mission

- *Plans after graduation?* I will work at a Catholic elementary school and do ministry with the youth and children at my parish in Minnesota.

- *What is one lesson you learned at DWC that you will carry with you into the future?* One of the lessons I learned at DWC is that God's mission is our mission—so everyone is called to do a mission, whether as a religious missionary or as a lay missionary.



Sr. Nhung Hong Thi Tran, LHC-TD
Lam Dong, Vietnam

B.A. Theology & Mission

- *Plans after graduation?* I plan to pursue a master's degree in the U.S., either in early childhood education or pastoral theology.

- *What is one lesson you learned at DWC that you will carry with you into the future?* The lesson I'll carry from DWC is that when members treat each other as family, we create a welcoming environment where others feel at home, and I'll apply this approach in my future communities by working as a family member to build and strengthen the places where I live.

MAY 2025 GRADUATES



Fr. Julienord Clervil, ST
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

A.A. Intercultural Studies

- *Plans after graduation?* I will serve at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Georgia.

- *What is one lesson you learned at DWC that you will carry with you into the future?* We are all different because of our own stories. Everyone is trying to grow and become better in their own way. So, we cannot look at others the same way we look at ourselves because they have different experiences and struggles. To live and work together, we need to cultivate empathy.



Fr. Georges Mukangu Midiangu
Limete, Democratic Republic of Congo

A.A. Intercultural Studies

- *Plans after graduation?* I will begin employment with the Archdiocese of Dubuque.

- *How has your time at DWC prepared you to serve people from diverse backgrounds?* I had a rewarding experience at DWC, gaining knowledge and intercultural insights that will enhance my effectiveness as a missionary beyond my time here.



Frt. Nam Duy Nguyen, SVD
Dong Nai, Vietnam

A.A. Interdisciplinary Studies

- *Plans after graduation?* I am beginning a new chapter at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago to pursue a Master of Divinity.

- *What are you most excited about as you move forward?* I am completing a stage of my life journey to move forward to a new one. What makes me most excited is that I do not know what God is guiding me to do or where He is leading me to go, but I know I am always in His plan.



Kim Hoa Pham
Qui Nhon, Vietnam

A.A. Interdisciplinary Studies

- *Plans after graduation?* I'm heading to Mexico for a mission experience with Fr. Anthony Cong Nguyen, SVD, then off to Houston for my sister's

wedding. Finally, I'll go back to Vietnam to hug my grandma and reunite with extended family and friends — if they still remember me after eight years!

- *How has your time at DWC prepared you to serve people from diverse backgrounds?* DWC taught me that living in an intercultural community is like being part of a giant, crazy, wonderful family — you learn, you laugh, you sometimes get confused... but most of all, you grow in love, patience, and understanding.



Peter Mathias Brungardt
Atlanta, USA

Certificate of Pre-Theology

- *Plans after graduation?* I will work in the Atlanta area before applying to the SVD Novitiate.

- *What are you most excited about as you move forward?* I am most excited to share what I have learned and the cultural experiences I've gained at DWC, while continuing to prepare myself for my vocation.



Andrew Thanh-Quang Nguyen
Seattle, USA

Certificate of Pre-Theology

- *Plans after graduation?* I will go home and visit family and friends, visit Vietnam for the first time, and then go to the SVD Novitiate at Techny, if accepted.

- *How has your time at DWC prepared you to serve people from diverse backgrounds?* I have learned to serve other people. I need to be humble enough to be served by others and to be aware of how others are serving me every day.

FAITH IN ACTION

Celebrating Collaboration, Service, and Reunion

By Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD
Alumni Association Director

A proverb says, “One finger cannot lift a pebble.” Indeed, at Divine Word College, our mission has always been grounded in collaboration — between the Divine Word Missionaries and the laity, and especially with our alumni, who carry the spirit of the Society of the Divine Word into every corner of the world. This partnership is not only practical but also deeply spiritual, rooted in our shared calling to proclaim the Gospel and serve God’s people wherever we are.



A recent alumni survey revealed the many ways our graduates continue to live out this mission. They are lay leaders, deacons, religious, educators, healthcare professionals, and faithful disciples — embodying the missionary spirit in diverse settings. One particularly moving example is a team of four volunteers — three of them SVD alumni — who courageously traveled to war-torn Ukraine to teach English. In doing so, they offered not just education, but a ray of hope to people living amid fear and uncertainty. Their witness is a powerful testament to the strength of a community formed in faith and united in mission.

This summer, we also pause to honor two individuals whose quiet, steadfast service has deeply enriched our college. After 26 years of teaching, Dr. Ronald Condon, assistant professor of philosophy, is retiring — leaving behind a legacy of intellectual rigor and personal integrity. We also give thanks for Ms. Phyllis Urbain,



Development Office Secretary Phyllis Urbain and Dr. Ron Condon, now Assistant Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, celebrated their well-earned retirements together this spring.

who is retiring after 45 years of dedicated service in the Development Office. Their commitment reminds us that our mission thrives through the tireless efforts of many generous hands and hearts.

As we celebrate these legacies, we also look forward to our All-Alumni Reunion, taking place August 29–31 over Labor Day weekend. This special gathering is a time to reconnect with old friends, share stories, and renew the bonds that unite us. More importantly, it’s a chance to reflect on how we can continue supporting each other and advancing Christ’s mission in the world.

We warmly invite our alumni from DWC and all minor seminaries to come home to Divine Word College as we celebrate our shared journey, honor those who have served, and renew our commitment to building the Kingdom of God — together.

SCAN HERE TO REGISTER



August 29–31, 2025

ALL-ALUMNI REUNION WEEKEND

Divine Word College • Epworth, Iowa

***“Individually, we are one drop.
Together, we are an ocean.”***

– Ryunosuke Satoro

Walking with the Poor

Frt. Rafa's Path of Service and Hope in Jamaica



My name is Frt. Rafael Yescas, SVD. I am 26 and was born in Oaxaca in Southern Mexico. I have been in religious formation for eight years with the Society of the Divine Word (SVD). Divine Word Missionaries have been working in my home parish since 1982, so I grew up surrounded by priests and brothers from across the world. It was amazing to experience their diverse cultures. However, the most important action that caught my attention was the way they showed us Jesus as a brother, father, and friend. They showed us that God walks alongside the poor and the needy.

After the first two years of theological studies, SVD candidates in formation participate in a Cross-Cultural Training Program, where they experience a different culture, learn a new language, and engage in pastoral ministry. That's why I went to Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa to learn English before moving to Jamaica for my pastoral experience.

However, now that I've had some distance from DWC, I

"May the Heart of Jesus live in your heart and in the hearts of all people."

see that my time there was a period of grace. I didn't just learn a new language — I also gained experience in making true and strong friendships, living and leading with different cultures, exploring paths of understanding the Catholic faith, and encountering different mindsets.

Due to immigration issues, my time in the U.S. was extended — which turned out to be a blessing. It gave

me an opportunity to work with immigrants from all over the world at the Lantern Center in Dubuque, Iowa. Now, I realize God was preparing me with human, spiritual, emotional, relational, psychological, and missionary tools before sending me to the Caribbean.

Since coming to Jamaica, I have encountered the God whom Jesus speaks about in the Beatitudes — our God, who especially loves those who have nothing and who is present in the smiles of children, the handshakes of the hungry, the tears of a mother, and the SVD brothers who reach out to help everyone — Catholic and non-Catholic alike — unafraid to get their hands dirty in service. I've seen the SVDs serve in many ways: feeding the poor, driving the sick, visiting the homebound, sharing the Bible, and helping parishioners attend Mass.

I've been working with Bro. Bernie Spitzley, SVD, Fr. Bernard Latus, SVD, Fr. Shadrach Ketiga, SVD, and the Holy Spirit Sisters. I've experienced the same feelings I had when I went to my first SVD mission. I was 16 and excited to share my encounter with God with everyone. It's hard to express, but I know it's God confirming his mission in my life.

Visiting the sick touches my heart deeply. Many of them do not have food to eat, enough money to see a doctor, a

wheelchair, or anyone to take care of them. They often live in small houses built by Food for the Poor or in shacks. Nevertheless, every time we visit them, they welcome us with big smiles and a joyful “Wah gwaan?” — which means “How is it going?” After that, we sing Jamaican hymns and share the Word of God for a little while. They love doing this.

It is impressive to see that, even though they suffer from illness and poverty, their faith remains strong. They truly trust in God’s love. These moments have taught me to be humble and to approach them with love, because they are the presence of God for me, and I am the presence of Him for them. They often pray for me and offer blessings while holding my hand. These moments fill me with gratitude.

When I’m with the children at the Bambu River during Bible sharing — in one of the poorest neighborhoods — I become like a child again. They run to hug me and touch my hair, which for them is something new and a bit strange. After sharing with them, my clothes are always dirty from lifting them up and carrying them on my shoulders. These children really enjoy playing and dancing with me, and even teaching me some words in Patois.

Nevertheless, the most important lesson they have taught me is to be happy and grateful for what I have. Despite the poverty they experience, they keep smiling, playing with their friends, and trusting in God. I hope you, dear reader, can one day experience something like this.

In Jamaica, I have also started to evangelize simply through my daily walk. Only about 2 percent of the Jamaican population is Catholic. Because my appearance is different from most Jamaicans, people are curious about me. They often stop me to ask, “Hey man, who are you? What kind of business do you do here?” or “How do you like Jamaica?” When I tell them I am a Divine Word Missionary from Mexico, they’re amazed and want to know more. That gives me the perfect chance to invite them to join us for Sunday Mass.

However, not everything has been easy. Missionary life requires me to leave behind my own culture, my understanding of the world, my comfort zone, my food, and my family and friends. That is a huge challenge because I have to humble myself before the people here and become like a Jamaican to better understand them. This is what God did through Jesus — and also what our first missionary to China, St. Joseph Freinademetz, SVD, did.

Still, this is a slow process that requires patience and openness. So, I am trying to become one of them — someone who enjoys dancing to Jamaican gospel songs, preaching, singing Jamaican hymns, eating jerk chicken, patties, fish, rice and beans, and, most importantly, learning to see God through their eyes.

In this spirit of joy and hope, as we journey through the Year of Hope, I want to thank all the SVDs who have made this experience possible, my family in Mexico and the USA, my friends who have encouraged my vocation, and all the benefactors whose prayers and financial support have made it possible for me to be a Missionary of the Divine Word.

I encourage you not to be afraid of following Jesus’ call and mission. If He is calling you, He will give you the grace to find your joy and your purpose in Him.

May the Heart of Jesus live in your heart and in the hearts of all people.

Blessings!

Frt. Rafa Yescas, SVD



A SHARED TABLE, *A Shared Mission*

The Kissanes and the SVD Family

Dr. Joseph and Lucy Kissane of Indiana aren't just supporters of Divine Word College — they're like family. For more than three decades, they've been an indispensable part of the SVD community.

Each year in October when it's time for the annual Mission Sunday celebration, Lucy is the first person in the kitchen and the last one to leave it. She doesn't just prepare her own dish (something delicious and traditional like egg rolls or chapchae) — she helps everyone else with theirs, always lending a hand.

"In many ways, she is the shared mother of our SVD family," said Associate Director for Development Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD.

Her connection to the Society of the Divine Word first started in 1988 when she was working for Fr. Peter Hung, SVD at the Pastoral Center for St. Thomas of Canterbury in uptown Chicago. One Sunday, Fr. Peter asked Lucy if she would cook dinner for eight Vietnamese Divine Word Missionaries from the Theologate in Chicago.

The eight dinner guests arrived after Mass as planned.

"It's often expected that the host, especially a woman, should cook, serve guests, and clean



Dr. Joseph and Lucy Kissane

up after meals,” Lucy recalled. “I was doing what I thought was my duty. But just as I turned to collect the dishes, two of them got up to help, and two others started washing. I was shocked! I’d never seen anything like that. I asked them to leave the dirty dishes for me but they kept going. Their humility and way of living left a lasting impression on me.”

From that day on, Lucy said her fondness for the SVDs only grew. She joined them for meals and social nights almost every week. “I felt like part of their religious family,” she said. And eventually, she brought someone else into it.

Two years later, when Lucy married Dr. Joseph in 1990, it was only natural that he also become a part of the SVD family. A chiropractor by profession, Dr. Joseph often volunteered his services to SVD members in need — offering adjustments, wellness advice, and heartfelt friendship.

As true family members, the couple genuinely cares for everyone connected to the SVD community. Their involvement goes far beyond simply attending events — they help host them.

Through the years, Lucy helped prepare the food for parties after milestones like the profession of first and final vows and priestly ordinations. The SVDs consider the Kissanes’ help a gift; Lucy, in turn, sees it as a privilege to be part of such special moments.

“Thirty-seven wonderful years experiencing the love

and prayers from the SVD family! We shared many good memories at Christmas Eve celebrations, parties and gatherings at our house,” she said. “This is all part of the blessing and privilege for both of us to be part of the SVD family.”

Fr. Thang says their support has made a lasting impact.

“Practically, we feel deeply supported by them — they are people we trust and confide in, especially when we need someone outside the SVD community. They have courageously challenged us when needed and enriched our lives with honest, practical suggestions that benefit everyone,” he said. “Symbolically, they embody the possibility and beauty of laity-religious collaboration. Their example reassures us that this kind of partnership is both possible and deeply rewarding.”

Their devotion has even become a source of joy and humor among the SVDs. Last year, when the couple celebrated their 34th wedding anniversary at the Theologate, Fr. Peter De, SVD asked Dr. Joseph, “What has impressed you the most in the 34 years you’ve been married to Lucy?”

“Lucy introduced me to the SVDs,” Dr. Joseph replied with a smile, “and I made the final vows right away.” His words drew laughter and affectionate nods — an inside joke that reflects just how deeply he’s become part of the family.

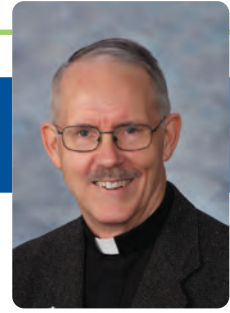
We are deeply grateful to Dr. Joseph and Lucy Kissane for their unwavering support, generous spirit, and the love they’ve poured into the SVD mission for more than 30 years.

“Thirty-seven wonderful years experiencing the love and prayers from the SVD family!”

Lucy Kissane and Fr. Bill Shea, SVD, share smiles and serve up their famous chicken kabobs with students Kim Hoa Pham (left) and Thi Van Nguyen (right) at the annual Mission Sunday celebration.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Fr. Tom
Ascheman, SVD

Educating the Whole World

The slogan on the wall at the front entrance reads:
Educating tomorrow's missionaries. I sometimes think it needs a bit of editing.

Here are a couple of alternatives.

Educating the whole world. DWC is a tiny college with a big mission, but can we really say we educate the whole world? Our students, faculty, and staff come from more than 25 nations. That's a good start to the "whole world." Another part of the story is that DWC is educating people who will become educators. Four current or recent college presidents studied here: one each in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines — and one at DWC: me! Nineteen alumni now work at the College, and hundreds more teach in schools and universities worldwide. One of the most recent was Sr. Paschaline who graduated in December 2023 and took up her responsibilities as a headmistress of a primary school in Cameroon in January of 2024!!! At Christmas break she flipped from one side of the desk to the other.

Beyond formal education, alumni are helping people read, use computers, improve farming methods, care for the environment, pray, study the Bible, promote justice, and foster unity. Thousands of catechists around the world have been trained by our alumni. I myself am grateful that years ago I could help start an informal school for catechists in Mexico City. The parish was huge (around 300,000 people), needing hundreds of catechists. For many, it was their first classroom since childhood. They did amazingly well.

Educating today's missionaries. Our College is not just for the future. DWC urges our students, faculty and staff to be more effective missionaries TODAY. Just by living here, in our extraordinarily intercultural community, we live out a part of the Constitutions of the Society of the Divine Word:

"We propose to make the goodness and kindness of God visible in our life and service. As a community of brothers (and sisters) from different nations and languages, we become a living symbol of the unity and diversity of the church..." (and of God's New Creation).

Living at Divine Word College is sharing in an ongoing Pentecost where the Holy Spirit continues to teach us to open ourselves to the whole world TODAY. Already during their years here at DWC, students reach out to people in the surrounding area and around the country. The stories of Spring Break in this issue of DWC World give some good examples of how we are missionaries today.

Working with others. Our vision and task are enormous, but we don't work alone. We count first and always on the grace of God. That grace often comes through the efforts of many collaborators from around the country and world. In this 60th year of the College's presence in Epworth, we have celebrated with three congregations of women religious in Dubuque who have been especially generous with their friendship, their prayers and their practical support for the College. We are blessed as together with them we work to educate the world.

For centuries, the Catholic Church has been one of the largest providers of education in the world, especially in areas where public education is under-funded. Catholic education of all kinds is based on long-standing commitments to universal access, human dignity, and integral development. DWC has a part in that splendid history.

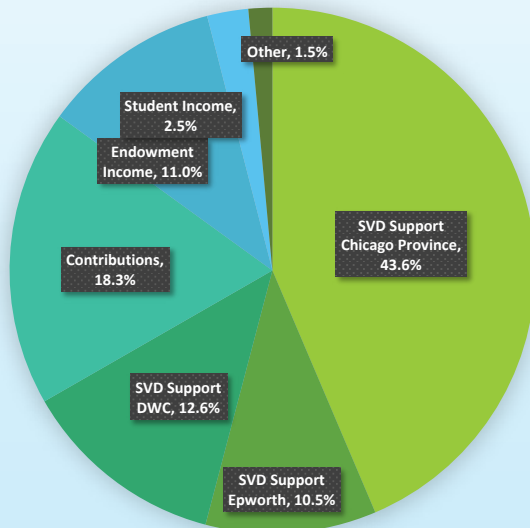


Sr. Paschaline Kengran Dzelimnyuy,
SST at St. Therese of the Child
Jesus Catholic Anglo-Saxon
Nursery and Primary School in
Nomayos, Cameroon where she
serves as headmistress.

PRESIDENT'S FINANCIAL REPORT

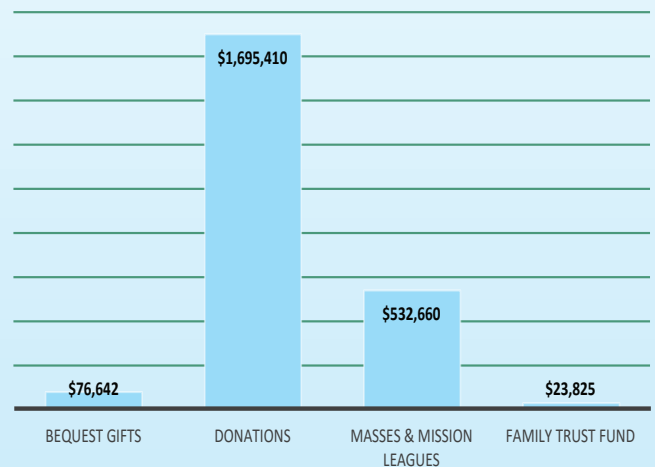


Divine Word College Income 2024 Fiscal Year



SVD Support Chicago Province	43.6%
SVD Support Epworth	10.5%
SVD Support DWC	12.6%
Contributions	18.3%
Endowment Income	11.0%
Student Income	2.5%
Other	1.5%

Benefactor Contributions 2024 Fiscal Year



Most Divine Word College students come from modest financial backgrounds, but no one who feels called to religious life is turned away due to lack of funds.

Last year, students received more than **\$1.63 million** in scholarship assistance.

Growing Together in Faith and Mission

Pray

FOR OUR MEN IN FORMATION



EDUCATING MISSIONARIES

Each year, young men take important steps on their journey toward religious life through the Divine Word Missionary formation program. During the 2024–2025 academic year, these men have been discerning their call at Divine Word College Seminary in Epworth, Iowa; the Novitiate in Techny, Illinois; the Brother Formation Program; and the Divine Word Theologate in Chicago.

We offer heartfelt congratulations to the six men who were ordained Divine Word Missionary Priests in May, marking the completion of their religious formation. May their ministries be filled with joy, compassion, and a deep sense of mission.

There are four additional men in formation in the Chicago Province. They remain anonymous due to possible political and/or religious persecution.

We invite you to keep all of the men in formation in your prayers as they grow in faith, community, and commitment to serving God's people.



Fr. Ryan Agbim, SVD



Fr. Betenora Bako Liba, SVD



Fr. Junior Jean Baptiste, SVD



Mr. Peter Brungardt



Novice Antz Cadet



Mr. Thanh Cao



Fr. Christian Castro, SVD



Fr. John Cho, SVD



Fr. Cruz Colunga, SVD



Mr. Alejandro Gonzalez Cruz



Frt. Marc Declama, SVD



Frt. Augustin Dery, SVD



Frt. Hoang Do, SVD



Frt. Wisno Elie, SVD



Frt. Kodjo Emon, SVD



Bro. Joubert Felix, SVD



Mr. Ladouceur Flarissaint



Frt. Arnold Formbi, SVD



Fr. Martin Herrera, SVD



Frt. Brian Junkes, SVD



Mr. Benedict Pau Mun Khual



Frt. Joao Pinda Neto, SVD



Mr. Andrew Nguyen



Mr. Bao Louis Nguyen



Frt. Cong Van Nguyen, SVD



Novice Hung Cong Nguyen



Frt. Long Cao Nguyen, SVD



Novice Long Hai Ngoc Nguyen



Frt. Nam Nguyen, SVD



Frt. Quoc Nguyen, SVD



Mr. Tan Duy Trinh Nguyen



Mr. Thien Bao Nguyen



Mr. Thi Van Nguyen



Mr. Truong Van Nguyen



Bro. Vincent Nguyen, SVD



Frt. Friday Onoja, SVD



Mr. Chinh Cong Pham



Mr. Khoa Pham



Mr. Kim Hoa Pham



Mr. Angel Rodriguez Fuentes



Mr. Ricardo Jose Rojas Chavez



Frt. Miguel Toribio
Romo Romo, SVD



Frt. Engelbertus Salmon, SVD



Frt. Pedro Saveia, SVD



Frt. Joseph Simbre, SVD



Frt. Thong Tran, SVD



Mr. An Truong



Mr. Anh Truong



Mr. Tai Van Truong



Mr. Do Tuang



Mr. Nguyen Vo



Fr. Tin Vu, SVD



Novice Hoang Son Vu



Mr. Joseph Vu



Mr. Vuong Minh Vu



Frt. Rafael Yescas, SVD



Frt. Baruch Zinsou, SVD

Formation Houses:

Divine Word College
Epworth, Iowa

Divine Word Novitiate
Techy, Illinois

Divine Word Brother
Formation
Chicago, Illinois

Divine Word Theologate
Chicago, Illinois

Contact Us:

800.553.3321
svdvocations@dwci.edu
www.svdvocations.org

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF

PHOTOGRAPHY

A new photography class invited students to look inward, reflect deeply, and connect with others.

Erin LaBelle, Instructor in Photography and Graphic Arts, taught the digital course during the college's spring M Term, an academic session for students who complete the ESL program mid-semester. The class blended technical instruction with personal exploration, offering a fresh way to observe and express their faith — all through the lens of a smartphone.

For Sr. Hoa Nguyen, LHC, the experience was transformative. "Photography not only helped me develop my awareness of life around me in a positive way, but it also deepened my spiritual life," she said.

The importance of documenting her congregation's milestones and everyday moments for future generations was a key takeaway for Sr. Hoa. She also hopes to teach photography to children and fellow sisters as a form of creative expression and tool for connection.

Erin emphasized photography as a form of mindfulness and self-care. Students experienced photo walks in nature, a simple tool that can help individuals stay grounded and spiritually centered. They also discovered the possibilities photography holds for outreach: by documenting ministry efforts, they can bring their mission to people who might never experience it firsthand.

Throughout the course, students explored a wide range of techniques and assignments, learning to use the camera



Photo by Sr. Hoa Nguyen, LHC

Students get creative during an off-campus photo adventure.



for both well-being and service. They photographed school events, took an art walk in downtown Dubuque, and made portraits of themselves and one another.

"The class brought fine art, photojournalism and art therapy together, giving students the tools and experiences to communicate visually, whether giving voice to themselves, an organization or their religious communities," Erin said.

She noted photography is particularly valuable for students learning English. "Images transcend language barriers and evoke memory," she explained. Sr. Hoa agreed.

"As a student who just completed the ESL program, photography played a practical role in helping me communicate, interact with the world and build a deeper relationship with God," she added.

Her classmate, Bro. Long Nguyen, CSA, echoed the impact.

"Photography helped me discover my value and role as a photographer," he said. "This class changed the way I see the world around me."

For these students, the class was more than a creative outlet — they learned a new way of seeing and being in the world.

TRANSFORMATION

AT THE CROSS

A Young Man's Search for Meaning and Mission



One year after visiting Divine Word College for the first time as a Come and See guest, Alejandro Gonzalez Cruz found himself suspended from a wooden cross — playing the very role he once rejected because he felt unworthy.

Portraying Jesus in the Stations of the Cross was more than a performance for Alejandro. It became a sacred moment of transformation — a public expression of his acceptance of God's love and a powerful step in embracing his newfound faith.

For much of his life, Alejandro distanced himself from Catholicism despite his family's deep devotion. Attending Mass felt like an obligation rather than a choice. As a teenager, he felt aimless and disconnected, floating through life without purpose or drive.

"I didn't want to do anything with my life. I didn't feel any ambition or initiative," he said.

In high school, Alejandro sought belonging in the wrong places. He partied with classmates, hoping their wild lifestyles might help fill the void inside him. They didn't. Later, in college, he studied psychology and began dating, believing that the right relationship might bring him the love he longed for. That, too, left him empty. His lack of motivation eventually led to academic probation.

But everything began to change because of someone very close to him — his little brother, who is 12 years younger. His brother's devotion to Mary stirred something in Alejandro. As his younger sibling attended catechism classes, Alejandro became a catechist himself. That's when his pastor told him he might make a good priest. At the time, the suggestion felt absurd, so he dismissed it without much thought.

After meeting an SVD priest at his parish in Texas, Alejandro accepted an invitation to visit Divine Word College in Epworth during Holy Week. He participated in the Triduum liturgies and had his feet washed on Holy Thursday. The experience left a lasting impact.

"I realized I don't feel that emptiness inside of me anymore. I told my mother about it, and she told me, because it's been filled with God," he recalled.

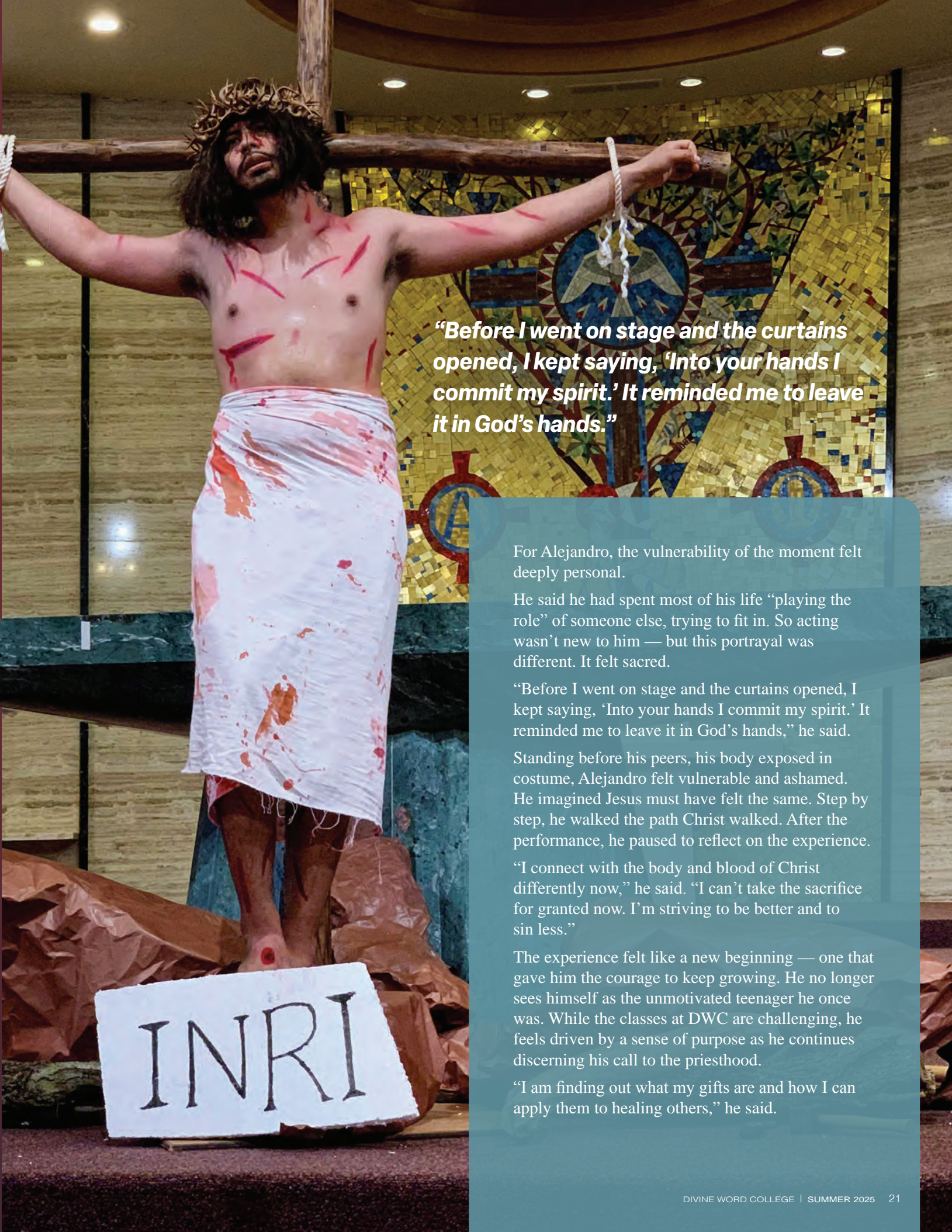
Alejandro enrolled at Divine Word College in the fall. Since then, he says, he's been on a journey of self-discovery. His classes and participation in the formation program have helped him grow spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually.

"In the past year here, I learned a lot about myself. I learned to love myself more, to love God, and to communicate effectively," he said.

So, when casting began for this year's Stations of the Cross, Alejandro didn't turn down the role of Jesus like he had in the past. This time, he was ready.

The role carries deep meaning in Alejandro's family. His father, uncle, and little brother have all portrayed Jesus in their parish's Via Crucis, or Way of the Cross. His grandmother once crafted a crown of real thorns for his uncle's portrayal, and his mother later did the same for his 10-year-old brother and father. When she heard that Alejandro had accepted the role, she carefully packaged the crown and mailed it to Epworth.

When Alejandro opened the box, students gasped at the sight of the gnarly mix of sharp thorns. They warned him to be careful during his performance — the crown could easily draw blood to match the theatrical makeup representing Christ's wounds.



“Before I went on stage and the curtains opened, I kept saying, ‘Into your hands I commit my spirit.’ It reminded me to leave it in God’s hands.”

For Alejandro, the vulnerability of the moment felt deeply personal.

He said he had spent most of his life “playing the role” of someone else, trying to fit in. So acting wasn’t new to him — but this portrayal was different. It felt sacred.

“Before I went on stage and the curtains opened, I kept saying, ‘Into your hands I commit my spirit.’ It reminded me to leave it in God’s hands,” he said.

Standing before his peers, his body exposed in costume, Alejandro felt vulnerable and ashamed. He imagined Jesus must have felt the same. Step by step, he walked the path Christ walked. After the performance, he paused to reflect on the experience.

“I connect with the body and blood of Christ differently now,” he said. “I can’t take the sacrifice for granted now. I’m striving to be better and to sin less.”

The experience felt like a new beginning — one that gave him the courage to keep growing. He no longer sees himself as the unmotivated teenager he once was. While the classes at DWC are challenging, he feels driven by a sense of purpose as he continues discerning his call to the priesthood.

“I am finding out what my gifts are and how I can apply them to healing others,” he said.

A Welcoming Home Away from Home

DWC honors **three Dubuque sister communities** for their generous support of Vietnamese students

It may come as a surprise that nearly a third of the students at Divine Word College live off campus. Perhaps even more unexpected is that most of those off-campus students aren't living in apartment buildings or rental houses. Instead, approximately 30 Vietnamese religious sisters enrolled at DWC reside with one of three religious sister communities in the nearby city of Dubuque.

These communities do more than provide housing — they create an enriching environment where the students

live in community with fellow sisters, receive academic support, and experience companionship on their faith journeys.

This spring, Divine Word College recognized the commitment of these three Dubuque-based communities by presenting them with the Donaghey Award for Outstanding Service. The honored congregations were: the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM), and the Sisters of St. Francis (OSF).

These partnerships have fostered meaningful collaboration among Catholic organizations in the area, benefiting both the students and the host communities. Divine Word College President Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD, expressed deep appreciation for the local sisters, reflecting on the profound impact they've had on the college community.

"The purpose of Divine Word College is to prepare missionaries for today and tomorrow," he said. "Our companion sister congregations are fully committed to the same purpose. The college is enormously grateful for and indebted to them for both their generous deeds and their prayers."



Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD

Sister Carmen Hernandez, president of the Sisters of the Presentation in Dubuque, reflected on the gift of



The Donaghey Award

The Donaghey Award is named in honor of Rev. John Donaghey, SVD, who dedicated much of his life to Divine Word, as an instructor dean of students, vice president of academic affairs, president, and longtime member of the Board of Trustees. Established in 1999, the award recognizes individuals and groups who have demonstrated a lasting commitment to the mission of Divine Word College.

Sr. Van Nguyen, MQP chats with guests during the Donaghey Award reception.





Back row L to R:
DWC President Fr. Tom Ascherman,
SVD and Associate Director for
Development Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD

Front row L to R:
Congregational leaders Sr.
LaDonna Manternach, BVM, Sr.
Kathy Knipper, OSF, Sr. Carmen
Hernandez, PBVM

community and the mutual blessings shared through this partnership.

“To us, this isn’t simply an act of service, it is an extension of the hospitality that is woven into the fabric of our identity as Presentation Sisters,” she said. “Having our Vietnamese sisters live with us has been an extraordinary blessing.”

Sr. Carmen said the DWC students bring vibrancy, resilience, and rich culture into the lives of the Presentation Sisters.

“In accepting this award, we want to express our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to Divine Word College for its inspiring missionary commitment, nurturing vibrant new leaders for the church. To our Vietnamese sisters, we offer our profound thanks for the gift of their presence,” she said. “You have widened our world and strengthened our sense of shared purpose. May this award reflect not only what we have been given, but also the immense blessings of which we have received.”

Living with the sisters also gives students daily opportunities to interact with native English speakers who help explain American customs and culture. Sr. Nhung Hong Thi Tran, LHC, who lives with the Sisters of St. Francis, said she and her classmates are each paired with a companion Franciscan Sister who accompanies them throughout their time in the United States. Step by step and word by word, these women help the students grow in language, understanding, and confidence.



*Sr. Nhung Hong Thi
Tran, LHC-TD*

Sr. Nhung shared a lighthearted memory that illustrates both the challenges and joys of learning a new language. One day, a Franciscan Sister taught her the word “deer,” showing her a photo of the animal standing in the prairie. Sr. Nhung carefully repeated the word: “deer, deer.” A few days later, she walked into a room where another sister greeted her warmly with, “Hello, my dear.” Thinking she had heard “deer” again, Sr. Nhung ran to the window in search of the animal — but saw nothing outside. Moments like these, she said, have brought both laughter and learning to her experience in the United States.

“With such encouragement, how could we possibly give up? Beyond our companions, all Franciscan Sisters have become our teachers,” Sr. Nhung said at the Donaghey Award presentation. “We Vietnamese sisters extend our deepest appreciation to you for your gracious hospitality, for opening your hearts and your home to us. Your embrace of our cultural traditions exemplifies the universal language of love and understanding that bridges all communities. Through your generosity, we have the opportunity to study at Divine Word College, to grow intellectually, spiritually and personally. Thank you for everything you have done and continue to do for us.”

A LIFE IN HARMONY

Bro. Don Champagne's Journey of Music, Ministry and Mission

At 88, Bro. Don Champagne, SVD, has learned that you never really know where God will take you in life, but if you let the Holy Spirit work through you, the journey is sure to be a memorable one. Looking back, he acknowledges the challenges but treasures the friendships he forged and the deeply fulfilling ministries he embraced along the way.

EARLY LIFE

Growing up in Milwaukee, Bro. Don attended a Catholic elementary school where he was impressed by the dedication of the religious women who worked there. "It was their dedication that inspired me," he said.

In eighth grade, a Maryknoll priest visited the school and introduced him to missionary life. Around the same time, family friends spoke about their son, a brother novice with Divine Word Missionaries in Techny, Illinois. Intrigued, Don agreed to visit.

At the time, Techny was home to 450 people, including clerical novices, professed brothers, theologians, philosophers, and religious sisters.

"The brothers ran everything. They were carpenters, plumbers, electricians, painters, auto mechanics, tailors... They seemed to be so happy. They had a sense of humor about them. When I came back, I told my parents, I want to go there," Bro. Don recalls.

FORMATION & EDUCATION

In 1951, he enrolled at the high school seminary for brothers. Mornings were dedicated to academics, afternoons to apprenticeship training. Bro. Don was

assigned to the house office and quickly adapted to clerical duties. His efficiency led to a position in the Mission Office, where he worked for a decade managing tasks and handling mailings for fundraising efforts.

During this time, he continued a passion for music. Already proficient in piano, he advanced to the reed organ, the two-manual organ, and eventually the four-manual organ in Techny's main chapel. He professed vows as an SVD Brother in 1958.

In 1961, Bro. Don was assigned to the new high school seminary in Perrysburg, Ohio, where he managed the business office and served as the community's organist. Despite no formal bookkeeping training, he embraced the role. He later traveled to Rome for a tertianship, a period of reflection and discernment. Returning in 1970 at the age of 36, he enrolled at Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa, to complete his undergraduate requirements.

Through a music connection at Clarke College, then an all-women's institution, he took additional courses. Often the only male student in class, the women became more than classmates — they became friends. Over the years, he sang at several of their weddings and remains in touch with them today.



MINISTRY WORK

In 1976, Bro. Don returned to Perrysburg, where he developed a four-year music program for seminarians while continuing as organist. He also served as formation director until the school closed.

He spent about five years at St. John's High School in Toledo, where he developed a male choral program. In 1983, he returned to Epworth to teach music and serve as Director of the Year Abroad program at Divine Word College. "That work built up my confidence as a musician," he said.

In 1991, Bro. Don was assigned to serve as Music Minister at Miramar, an SVD retreat center in Duxbury, Massachusetts. For 32 years, he planned music for Masses, as well as morning and evening prayer.

He was appointed and elected Director and Rector of the retreat center from 2005–2011 and re-elected Rector in 2017.

During his time at Miramar, he felt called to serve people living with HIV/AIDS. After learning about the Amaryllis Foundation, he volunteered at the Robins Nest, a supportive center, where he answered phones, performed clerical work, and offered companionship through a buddy program. "I just felt that God was calling me to this," he said.

He became close with a family whose three sons had hemophilia and contracted HIV through blood transfusions. By the time he learned their story, one had passed away. He bonded with another, but months later, he too died of AIDS. Their mother asked Bro. Don to sing at the funeral.

Years later, the third brother's wife requested the same support buddy his late brother had. Bro. Don visited him regularly for five years, including daily visits in his final days. After his passing, the family again turned to Bro. Don for music and support at the funeral.

Bro. Don later created a retreat program at Miramar for people living with HIV/AIDS, offering time and space to focus on their well-being. For his service, he received the Amaryllis Foundation's Angel of the Year distinction and the Archdiocese of Boston's Cheverus Award in 2015.

He also regularly visited local nursing homes, where he was known for bringing muffins and sharing cheerful conversations with residents.

HEALTHY LIFE

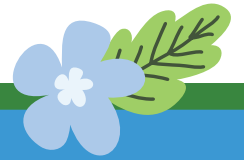
Though never an athlete, Bro. Don maintained an active lifestyle. He jogged six miles daily for decades until knee issues led him to switch to walking. Until recently, he walked five to six miles every morning at 2:30 a.m.

In January 2024, he moved back to Divine Word College. Despite a diagnosis of multiple myeloma 16 years ago, his health remains stable. While knee problems and Dupuytren's contracture limit his mobility and piano playing, his spirit is strong. He still sings, serves as a conversation partner for international students learning English, and sets an example for young men discerning religious life.

Reflecting on 67 years of religious vows, Bro. Don is grateful for the support of the Society of the Divine Word. He hopes young people continue to consider religious life, embracing its adventure and unpredictability.



"Be open, and let the Spirit work through you – but that's with any vocation," Bro. Don said. "You just don't know where God's going to take you or what He's going to put in front of you."



SPRING INTO SERVICE

During spring break, several student groups traveled to different parts of the United States to serve in local parishes. They assisted with ministries, supported community events, and immersed themselves in the cultures and traditions of the people they met along the way.

★ Chicago, Illinois

For spring break, my classmate and I visited Our Lady of Africa Parish in the South Side of Chicago. We stayed with the pastor, Fr. Carl Gales, SVD, at the rectory. Our Lady of Africa is a Black American parish with a growing number of immigrants from Africa proper. For five days, we experienced parish life in all of its ups and downs — broken pipes included! The parishioners were so warm and welcoming, and experiencing the uniqueness of a Black Catholic liturgy is something I will cherish. Fr. Carl also took us on a tour of Chicago! We got to visit many churches, including St. John Cantius Church. We also experienced the diverse cuisines that make up Chicago's landscape. In addition, we visited the Catholic Theological Union and our SVD brothers in formation at the Theologate! The traffic is something we will have to get used to in the future! Overall, I think I would give the experience an A-plus!

Reflection by Joseph Vu

★ St. Louis, Missouri

I've been living and studying in this beautiful country of America for almost a year now. One of the memories that I will probably never forget from my time here is the week of spring break that I spent at Resurrection of Our Lord parish in St. Louis, Missouri.

The first wonderful thing that left an impression on me was the care we received from our hosts, Fr. Binh Nguyen, SVD, and Fr. Son Le, SVD. Usually, when coming to a completely new place, meeting people you have never met before, people feel uncomfortable. I am no exception. I was a bit worried because I did not know the two priests, and I had never been to this parish before. However, all my worries were gone quickly because of the hospitality of our two host priests. They were like older brothers welcoming their younger siblings home. This made me think more about the community life of Divine Word Missionaries that I am pursuing.

The experiences we had at parish activities also left an impression on me. I attended Mass with the parishioners, visited families, attended funerals, and encouraged the bereaved families. I also learned about pastoral responsibilities from the priests. This was very useful for someone like me who is pursuing a religious vocation with Divine Word Missionaries. It helped me learn how the priests serve and live in relationship with the parishioners, something I had only learned about in books before this.

I also had an opportunity to help the priests clean the yard and repaint the doors. Being so busy with





Truong Van Nguyen (left) and Tai Van Truong (right) take a moment to enjoy the scenery with Fr. Binh Nguyen, SVD (middle) during their spring break trip to St. Louis.

my studies since arriving at Divine Word College, I had not had the time to do things like that for a long time. It was the kind of work I used to do with my father when I was at home. Therefore, when I was assigned the task, I thought I had completed it well. I was also very happy because I could contribute a little bit of my strength to serve God's house. This reminds me that, when I learn a lot, I will be able to help the Church a lot. Therefore, I will try to study well with the ability that God has given me to serve Him.

I am also quite impressed with the community of Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters (SSpSAP) in St Louis. Fr. Binh took me to visit the community. I experienced the sacredness that the sisters gave to God when they adored the Blessed Sacrament. I also spent a few minutes praying with them. This sacred act is like a reminder to me of the importance of a prayer life.

I only spent one short week at the parish, but I learned many useful things for my religious journey. Through the intercession of Mother Mary, may God grant peace upon the two priests and the parishioners of Resurrection of Our Lord Parish, and may they always live in God's grace.

Reflection by Truong Van Nguyen

★ Memphis, Tennessee

During spring break, our group served at St. Augustine Catholic Church in Memphis, Tennessee. It was a good opportunity to experience working in the parish, even though it was only for a week.

We joined in some of the parish's activities. First, we cleaned the school that belongs to St. Augustine Catholic Church. This summer, the parish will host a summer Peace Camp for children, so we prepared the space for the event. Not only did we clean, but we also helped prepare for the summer camp. Second, we rebuilt the garden at the church. We planted some flowers and vegetables. Lastly, we joined an activity called Men Who Cook.

Though we feel that we did not do significant work for the parish, we enjoyed our time and gained insightful experiences. We got to know more about the SVD mission and ministry with the people of Memphis. We were also exposed to the life of a parish priest. We recognized the presence of God. He works through us and with us. We hope there are more opportunities in the future where we can spend some time during our breaks at SVD mission sites around the United States. We thank God for calling us to be God's instruments as missionaries.

We are grateful to Fr. Stephan Brown, SVD, who hosted us at his parish. He has invited us to help him at the Peace Camp this summer. We look forward to joining this event and serving the people at St. Augustine Parish.

Reflection by Ricardo Jose Rojas Chavez and classmates (names withheld)



Ricardo Jose Rojas Chavez digs in – literally – during his spring break service trip to Memphis.

Campus Connections



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Fr. Linh Pham, SVD
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102 Jacoby Drive SW • PO Box 380
Epworth, Iowa 52045-0380

1

Ladouceur Flarissaint flashes a proud smile as he exits the commencement ceremony having just received his philosophy degree — a moment that marks both an ending and a new beginning.

2

Strike a pose and take a deep breath! Students and staff tried yoga on campus as part of the Live Healthy Iowa initiative. A local instructor led the way with stretches, stillness, and lots of laughs.

3

A student takes a closer look at a statue of Jesus featured in the Weyland Art Gallery. The wooden sculpture was part of *Nature's Artist*, an exhibit showcasing works by the late local carver Jack Becker.

4

Do “Leo” Tuang lends a helpful hand at Epworth’s weekly community meal site. As part of his ministry practicum, he’s learning that missionary work often starts with rolled-up sleeves and a heart ready to serve.

5

DWC student Ricardo Jose Rojas Chavez gives his English Conversation Partner, Cory Rude, a quick trim in the campus barber shop. After weeks of grammar and conversation practice, it was time for a new kind of lesson — trust.

6

Fr. Djeny Joachim paints an imaginary door in his ESL writing class. The creative exercise gave students a playful way to explore language — and dream about where their words might take them next.

7

It’s wriggling, it’s real — and it’s dinner! Sr. Anh Nguyet Thi Pham, LHC-GV, shows off a lively crawfish during the preparation for the Vietnamese Student Association’s festive end-of-year meal.

8

Students beam with pride as they carry flags from their home countries before the celebration of St. Josephine Bakhita, a former slave who found freedom, faith, and a new life as a Catholic religious sister.



YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE. **THANK YOU!**

Your gifts help our students with their educational expenses and help us pay the bills. A majority of our students don't have the financial means to pay for their education. That's why your gifts are so important.

There are many ways you can help our students with their education:

- 1) Donations to our appeals
- 2) Become a member of our Monthly Donor Club
- 3) A gift of a portion of your IRA's required minimum distribution
- 4) A donation from your Donor Advised Fund
- 5) A donation of appreciated stock
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If you would like more information about any of these opportunities, please contact Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD at 563-580-5764 or hcthang@dwci.edu or go to www.dwci.edu/giving

Thank you for your financial support and prayers. You make our mission possible!



11TH ANNUAL

BENEFIT



GOLF OUTING

2025

FRI, JULY 18
2025

**TIMBERLINE GOLF COURSE
PEOSTA, IOWA**

**18 HOLE FOUR PERSON BEST SHOT
1:00 PM SHOTGUN START**

*\$80 per person - includes golf, cart, dinner,
and prizes. \$25 for dinner-only guests.*

To register your foursome, sponsor our event, or for more information, please contact Sandy Wilgenbusch at Divine Word College: 563-876-3353 x.302 / info@dwci.edu

