



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.