

the

DWC

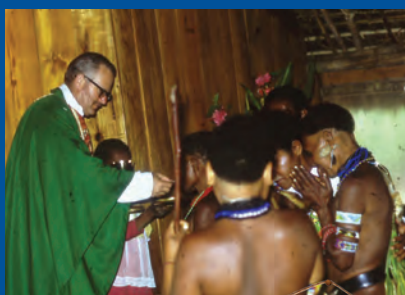
World

Fall 2025

Educating Tomorrow's Missionaries



WHAT'S INSIDE



**FAITH, FAMILY,
AND A HUNDRED YEARS
OF MISSION**

One Family in Mission

Each year, students and Divine Word Missionaries at Divine Word College gather for Family Feast, a tradition that began when St. Arnold Janssen's three congregations first came together to celebrate his name day. He later dedicated the day to honor all members, underscoring their unity as one missionary family. Today, Family Feast is observed on Sept. 8, the Society of the Divine Word's foundation day, as a reminder of their shared call to mission.

This year's celebration carried extra meaning as Family Feast was combined with the All-Alumni Reunion. Former students from Divine Word College and other SVD schools that have since closed gathered to join current students and missionaries. Through meals, games, and Masses, generations of the SVD family connected, celebrating their bonds of faith and the 150th anniversary of the Society's founding.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD



Planting Seeds that Bear Global Fruit

How can a school as small as DWC have such a wide impact?

Harvest time has arrived in northeast Iowa, as corn, beans, squash, apples, pears, and the last tomatoes fill bins and baskets. But fall's harvest began long ago with tiny seeds. They sprouted, were strengthened by sun and rain, and have produced ten-fold, or even a hundred-fold.

At Divine Word College, our harvest takes longer than one season. Each year, about 45 students finish their time here, most beginning with English before continuing formation or pursuing degrees in Theology and Mission, Intercultural Studies, or Philosophy.

Along the way, they are strengthened through prayer and shaped by their generous acts of missionary service. When they complete their education, some return to ministry around the world. Others become missionary priests, brothers and sisters. Still others follow a call to married life and form families.

In Vietnam and across Southeast Asia; in Cameroon, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and Africa; and in multicultural parishes across the USA and Canada, people have heard of Epworth, Iowa, because of our small but exceptional missionary college.

Jesus once told a story about the "smallest of seeds" that grows into a large mustard plant. It grows large enough to offer food and shelter to the birds of the air. That's how I see Divine Word College: a small seed that grows into something far-reaching and life-giving.

Folks from more than 25 nations gather here to live, work, study and pray. With your help and prayers, from this tiny town, God is growing an abundant harvest.

DWC's global impact doesn't come from its size. It comes from its purpose and trust in God. Like the mustard seed, we may be small—but we are deeply rooted. From here, missionary disciples go out to touch lives worldwide.

Divine Word College: a small place, with a truly global reach.

Fr. Tom



For more information about Divine Word College:

563-876-3353 | info@dwci.edu
www.dwci.edu



Vocation is Our Vocation

At Divine Word College, helping students discover their vocation is at the heart of everything we do. Now, with an \$18,350 grant from NetVUE (Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education), supported by the Lilly Endowment Inc. and the Council of Independent Colleges, the college is taking a fresh step to strengthen this mission — starting with our faculty and staff.

The grant will support a series of workshops, institutes, and forums designed to explore the meaning of vocation in the context of teaching, mentoring, and campus life. Faculty and staff will engage in conversations about calling, mission, and how to guide students as they discern their own paths in life and faith. The goal is to create a shared understanding of vocation that will inform both classroom teaching and everyday interactions with students.

"This grant will enable us to fill an important gap in our faculty's knowledge and experience, allowing us to organically create a definition of vocation that is truly ours and will make our teaching and support for students even more effective," said Dr. Joshua E. Young, Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The project's impact will be measured through surveys and studies to ensure it truly strengthens the DWC community. Faculty growth and student support will go hand in hand, making the college a place where vocation is not just a concept — but a lived experience.

At Divine Word College, fostering vocations isn't just part of our work — it's who we are. Every conversation, class, and mentorship is an opportunity to help a student hear their calling and take the next step with confidence.



Fr. Tuan Hoang, SVD, talks with student Joseph Vu about his vocation journey.

Once an SVD, Always an SVD

Wherever life takes them, our alumni carry with them the spirit and heart of the Society of the Divine Word. The time they spent at Divine Word College was not just about preparation for a particular ministry — it was a time of being shaped by a missionary vision of life. That vision continues to inspire them long after they've moved on to different paths and vocations.

Indeed, *once an SVD, always an SVD*.

Our alumni live this out beautifully. Some continue to serve in SVD missions around the world as priests and brothers. Others, now lay professionals, bring the same missionary zeal to their own communities — as teachers, counselors, business leaders, and parents. They carry the Word of God into classrooms, offices, homes, and neighborhoods. Through their daily witness of faith, compassion, and service, they continue to make God's love visible.

We are deeply grateful for all who make this possible — our alumni, benefactors, and friends. Your prayers and generosity sustain the mission of Divine Word College, helping to form today's students who will become tomorrow's missionaries and faith-filled leaders. Your gifts make this kind of lifelong missionary impact possible, ensuring that the spirit of the SVD continues to shine through every life our graduates touch. Because of your support, the SVD charism continues to bear fruit in lives across the globe.

Everywhere they go, our alumni remind us that being missionary is not only about where you serve, but how you live. The missionary flame lit in their hearts years ago still burns brightly today — thanks to the ongoing partnership and generosity of our Divine Word family.

Once an SVD, always an SVD.



Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD
Associate Director for Development

Alumni Return to Celebrate Faith, Friendship, and Mission

More than 100 alumni from Divine Word College and other SVD schools — most of them former minor seminaries that have since closed — gathered in Epworth August 29-31 for a reunion filled with faith, friendship, and the enduring spirit of mission. The event created a meaningful bridge between past and present, as former students reconnected with one another and shared their stories with current students discerning their own call to missionary life.

A highlight of the weekend came when two alumni shared about their recent mission trip to Ukraine. During their visit, they taught English to young people in a country deeply affected by conflict. Their testimony served as a powerful reminder that the Divine Word spirit of service and compassion continues to shape lives well beyond graduation.

The weekend schedule was full of opportunities to connect and celebrate. Alumni were welcomed with a reception at the Grand River Center in Dubuque, then



joined students for Family Feast games and a picnic lunch on campus. Evening events included a lively banquet with student performances and a bonfire complete with music and s'mores. Guests also enjoyed building tours, a province update, and a warm welcome from DWC President Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD. The reunion concluded with a closing Mass presided by Provincial Fr. Adam Oleszczuk, SVD, followed by a farewell brunch.

For both alumni and students, the weekend was a joyful reminder that the Divine Word spirit spans generations, uniting all in a common call to serve.

FAITH, FAMILY, AND A HUNDRED YEARS OF MISSION

In September, Fr. Joe McDermott, SVD, passed away just a few months shy of his 100th birthday. In his nearly century-long life, this humble servant showed again and again that one person can make a difference — but when many join together, the impact can be extraordinary.

Born near Bankston, Iowa, Fr. Joe entered St. Paul's Mission House — the predecessor to Divine Word College — in 1939. After graduating in 1943 and completing his formation at Techny, Illinois, he was ordained in 1952. The following year, he was sent on mission to Papua New Guinea, where he would spend the next 23 years.

LIFE IN THE MISSION FIELDS

To reach his first assignment, Fr. Joe boarded a cargo ship in New Orleans for a month-long journey through the Panama Canal and on to Australia, before finally arriving in Papua New Guinea on December 1, 1953.

“The people of Papua New Guinea were happy and the pace was like going back in time, especially in the bush,” he once said. “There were no clocks. It was like walking into a different world. It’s slow paced, there’s no connections, no air strips at that time, no roads, no cars. We traveled by foot and horseback.”

In this remote corner of the world, Fr. Joe established schools, tended to health issues, introduced improved farming methods, and most importantly, cared for the pastoral needs of the people. Sometimes Mass was



celebrated with little more than a few sticks for an altar, but the people's deep faith and joyful spirit made those moments unforgettable.

LIGHTING THE VILLAGE

Among Fr. Joe's greatest accomplishments was bringing electricity to the village he served. The story began back in Iowa, where his father, Ambrose, worked with neighbors and friends in rural Dubuque County to design and build a water wheel that could generate power.



They carefully documented assembly instructions, tested the design, disassembled the wheel, and shipped it overseas — a process that took months. Once it arrived, Fr. Joe and a team of locals pieced it back together. When they finished, the community lit up with electricity for the first time ever.

“It was quite an act by many people. It was just fabulous and very magical over there,” remembered his sister, Bea Soens. “It was really something that those communities came together and so many people helped so much. It was a beautiful project.”

Though heavy rains later washed the wheel away and it had to be rebuilt, Bea said the effort was an inspiring project that symbolized the way people from different corners of the world could unite to achieve something extraordinary.

A NEW MISSION AT HOME

In 1976, Fr. Joe returned to Epworth at the invitation of Bro. Leonard Bauer, SVD, to work in the Development Office at Divine Word College. For nearly 25 years, he was a dedicated member of the team, reaching out to friends and benefactors. His easy-going personality and firsthand missionary experience made him a natural.

But Fr. Joe didn't just ask others to support the mission — he joined them.

In 1987, he deposited \$5 to create the Ambrose and Ruth McDermott Family Trust Fund, named in honor of his parents. His vow of poverty meant he had little money of his own, but what he had, he gave. Then he invited others to join in.

At family reunions, he handed out small cardboard banks to siblings, nieces, and nephews, encouraging them to collect spare change. Some boxes came back filled with pennies and nickels, others with dollar bills folded tightly inside.

“It was so wonderful that we knew we were participating in this great fund drive that Fr. Joe had,” Bea recalled. “He always prayed for more priests and brothers, and we thought we were contributing to that in some little way.”

Penny by penny, the fund grew. Today, the Ambrose and Ruth McDermott Trust has more than \$150,000 in it, supporting the education of future missionaries.

RIPPLES OF A LIFETIME

Fr. Joe retired in 1999, though he remained at DWC as a mentor until 2024, when he moved to Techny, Illinois. His impact continues to ripple outward. Just this past June, a man from the parish in Papua New Guinea where Fr. Joe once served reached out to ask about him. Though he had been only six years old when Fr. Joe left decades earlier, he still remembered the missionary fondly — and said parishioners continued to hold him in high regard for all he had done for their community.

At Fr. Joe's request, memorial gifts were directed to the Ambrose and Ruth McDermott Trust Fund. His funeral Mass was celebrated in the chapel of Divine Word College, the place he had loved and supported for so many years. The pews were filled with family, friends, students, and benefactors whose lives had been touched by his kindness, humor, and steady faith.

In the hallways outside, people lingered over photographs from his years abroad and at DWC, sharing stories of the many ways he carried the

mission of the Society of the Divine Word forward.

“He did big things, but he was always very humble about it,” Bea reflected.

A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

From a childhood on an Iowa farm to decades of mission in Papua New Guinea, from pioneering projects like the water wheel to the quiet collection of pennies from cardboard banks, Fr. Joe McDermott lived a life rooted in service.

He never sought recognition. What he wanted was simple: more missionaries to carry God's Word to the ends of the earth. Thanks to his vision, his family's partnership, and the generosity of many benefactors, his legacy continues through the education of the next generation of Divine Word Missionaries.

Fr. Joe's life is a reminder that it doesn't take grand gestures to change the world. Sometimes it begins with faith, a little imagination, and a pocket full of spare change.

WHAT IS A FAMILY TRUST FUND?

When you establish a Family Trust at Divine Word College, you create a living legacy that supports the education and spiritual formation of future Catholic missionary priests, brothers, and sisters.

A Family Trust:

- Can be created in the name of an individual or family
- Can be added to at any time, as often as you wish
- Becomes part of the Family Trust endowment at Divine Word College, where only the interest is used for scholarships
- Is established with a minimum of \$1,000

Your trust — your belief, your hope, your expectation — helps students realize their vocations and carry God's Word to the world.

To contribute to the Ambrose and Ruth McDermott Trust, or to establish one, contact the Development Office at develop@dwci.edu or **563.876.3353**.



Students with a Mission - Divine Word College's Student Senate organized a garage sale that raised money for the Dubuque County Backpack Program, which provides meals for kids in need. On top of that, students sold eggrolls to help support their own Senate budget — making the day a win for everyone.



Picnic Kickoff - The first week of classes called for celebration, even in 90-degree heat! Students packed Murphy Park in Dubuque for Divine Word College's Opening School Picnic, where games, music, and dancing kept the energy high. Nothing builds friendships faster than laughter, sunshine, and a little sweat.



Miles of Smiles - Labor Day at Divine Word College kicked off with the annual 5K run. Students laced up, laughed together, and encouraged one another across the finish line. More than just a race, it's a tradition that builds community, celebrates health, and guarantees a good time.



Tradition on Parade - Epworth's Town and Country Days parade got a boost of energy from Divine Word College students and staff this summer. About 35 participants handed out candy, waved to neighbors, and enjoyed the chance to join a small-town tradition that makes them feel right at home.

FINDING HIS VOICE



"I think the best way for me to learn and grow is to step outside my comfort zone and do something that I normally wouldn't do."

When Bao Nguyen arrived at Divine Word College in 2023, he carried with him the quiet faith of his Texas upbringing and the encouragement of a family that had long nurtured religious vocations. Raised in Wichita Falls in a devout Catholic household, Bao learned daily prayer and parish involvement from his parents and grandparents, while several relatives had already chosen priesthood or religious life.

Bao quietly considered religious life from a young age, but the idea became real when a visiting uncle who was a priest asked if he had ever thought about following the same path. That conversation prompted Bao to reflect more deeply and discuss his calling with his parents, who assured him they would support him if God was calling.

Later, a different uncle who studied at DWC invited Bao to a profession of vows ceremony in Techny, Illinois. There, he met vocation directors and other Divine Word Missionary priests and brothers, whose energy and commitment to serving others left a lasting impression.

As Bao neared the end of his high school years, he was torn between entering religious formation or pursuing an undergraduate program. He researched religious congregations and explored diocesan formation programs. Fascinated by engineering and inspired by his father's work, Bao ultimately enrolled at Texas A&M, where he joined the Corps of Cadets. While classmates focused on studies and military training, Bao gravitated toward parish activities. Gradually, he realized his heart was in ministry and applied to Divine Word College.

Life at DWC was an adjustment at first. Quiet and reserved by nature, Bao found the community welcoming and supportive. Encouraged by his peers and mentors, he began to take on new responsibilities — helping with chapel ministries, managing the on-campus café, and joining student leadership. Now in his third year, he is serving as Student Senate President, a role that challenges him to step up, lead, and serve with confidence.

"I think the best way for me to learn and grow is to step outside my comfort zone and do something that I normally wouldn't do," he said.

Bao draws inspiration from the many Divine Word Missionaries he has met — in classrooms, parishes, retreat centers, and even abroad. Their example has shown him that missionary life goes beyond parish work — it's about accompanying people in their everyday joys and struggles.

Bao's journey is still unfolding, but Divine Word College is giving him the formation, community, and experiences he needs to trust God's call and follow it boldly.

Teeing Up for Scholarships

Sunny skies and plenty of smiles set the stage for Divine Word College's 11th Annual Golf Outing at Timberline in July. Eighty golfers teamed up for a day of friendly competition, laughter, and shared purpose — raising \$18,500 for scholarships that help future missionaries answer their calling.

Thanks to all who participated!



Journey to Mission

Celebrating Formation Milestones



For many men in formation with the Society of the Divine Word, the journey begins at **Divine Word College**, where students grow academically, spiritually, and personally as they discern God's call. The foundation laid here supports each step that follows, and the fruits of that formation are evident as our alumni continue to reach remarkable milestones on their missionary journey. Recently, several men who began their formation at DWC celebrated significant moments in their progression toward priesthood and religious life.

This fall, **seven young men entered the SVD formation program at Divine Word College.** Six are new students, eager to begin their formation, while one previously studied here as a lay student and has now embraced the call to pursue religious life with the Society of the Divine Word.

In July, **four men who once studied at DWC professed their first vows** as Divine Word Missionaries. They have since moved to the formation house in Chicago, where they are beginning their theological studies and continuing to deepen their discernment and commitment.

On September 20, at **St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Wheeling, Illinois, eight men — most of whom began their formation at DWC — professed**

perpetual vows with the Society of the Divine Word. Among them, one professed vows as a religious brother, completing his formal formation. The other seven men on the path to priesthood will next be ordained as deacons, the final step before priestly ordination, scheduled for May.

These milestones are powerful reminders of the dedication, courage, and faith it takes to follow God's call. Please keep these men — and all who are discerning a vocation — in your prayers as they continue to grow in faith, respond generously to God's call, and prepare to serve the Church as missionaries.