

Voices from the Theologate

After beginning their journey at Divine Word College and then the Novitiate, these men have continued their formation at the Theologate in Chicago. During this stage, they have the opportunity to put mission into practice — some in local communities and others on a global scale.

Growing Through Cross-Cultural Encounter

By Frt. Wisno Elie, SVD



"I learned that unity in the Church does not require uniformity but mutual respect and openness to the Spirit's work in every culture."
- Frt. Wisno Elie, SVD

The Cross-Cultural Training Program (CTP) has been a life-changing part of my journey as a Divine Word Missionary seminarian. For one year at St. Eugene Catholic Mission & Student Center, I served in a parish with African American and Latino communities, where mission became real through relationships and daily life.

I learned that cross-cultural training is not only about studying cultures but allowing others to teach me. Through shared worship, pastoral involvement, and presence, I discovered new ways of understanding God and the Church. I experienced the truth that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

In the African American community, I was deeply moved by the lively and participatory worship. Their faith, shaped by history and perseverance, revealed a strong trust in God amid struggle. Listening to their stories taught me to honor lived experience in ministry.

The Latino community showed me a strong sense of family, warmth, and everyday faith. Faith was not just for Sunday Mass; it was part of everyday life through traditions, celebrations, and community events. Despite challenges such as migration and financial difficulty, their hope remained strong. Even when language was

a barrier, I learned that presence, gestures, and attentiveness often communicate more than words.

This experience taught me humility and patience. I came to see that being present, even in silence, can be a powerful form of ministry. It also helped me understand interculturality as a gift.

Spiritually and pastorally, this year helped me grow in openness, flexibility, and trust. I learned that God is already present in every community and that effective ministry requires listening before acting and building trust before taking initiative.



From Church to Community Garden

By Frt. Miguel Romo, SVD



"It gives me hope that God's work is never finished, but simply changes shape, always finding new ways to bring life to our communities."
- Frt. Miguel Romo, SVD



This year, I have been volunteering at Just Roots Chicago, working in a community garden in Bronzeville. Twice a week, I spend time weeding, harvesting, and caring for plants while the Green Line train runs overhead. It connects me to the earth and to the people around me.

This work is deeply connected to Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation. The land itself tells a story. For over 130 years, this site was home to St. James Catholic Church, built by Irish immigrants and later serving Black Catholics. It was a place where people gathered to nourish their spiritual lives.

After the church was demolished in 2013, the land remained empty until it became a community farm in 2020. Today, it produces thousands of pounds of fresh food each year. Where the altar once stood, vegetables now grow.

The farm operates on a shared model: half of the produce is sold through a CSA program, and the other half is donated, much of it to the St. James Food Pantry. The community now includes many elderly Chinese neighbors, and we grow culturally meaningful foods for them.

Working alongside volunteers, I see how people come for different reasons — peace, community, or simply to learn. Yet together, we create something life-giving. Fresh food, harvested within 24 hours, brings dignity to those who receive it.

This experience has shown me that the mission continues even when structures change. The same land that once supported a building to feed souls is now generating food to feed bodies. The building is gone, but the holy ground remains.

"Through my experiences, I have learned that persons with disabilities are not merely recipients of assistance but living witnesses of Christ's presence." - Frt. Hoang Do, SVD



Seeing Christ in Disability

By Frt. Hoang Do, SVD

My experience serving persons with disabilities in Leganés, Madrid, has become a living expression of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC). In this ministry, I have encountered Christ in simple but profound ways.

Through warm greetings, simple smiles, gentle gestures, and even in their quiet presence, I have encountered not only their humanity but the living Christ who dwells in them. Sitting with them is not just service, but an encounter with the Lord.

Their lives reveal vulnerability, trust, and mutual care. In their faces, I see both human fragility and divine grace. This experience has taught me that justice and peace begin with relationship. It requires time, humility, and a willingness to be changed. True ministry is not about doing for others, but being with them.



JPIC becomes real when communities welcome and value every person. It calls us to listen, accompany, and honor each life as a reflection of God's love.

When we walk together, we learn that human dignity is never defined by capacity but by the boundless love of God shining in every life. When we walk together, we learn to see Christ in one another; we discover that the work of justice and peace is not distant or abstract, but already unfolding in the relationships we nurture, the compassion we show, and the lives we honor.

"I have discovered that teaching the faith is also an opportunity to learn. I have learned to listen attentively, be patient, and witness with my life what I proclaim with my words."

– Deacon Pedro Saveia, SVD



Serving the Triune God in Mission

By Deacon Pedro Saveia, SVD

Being a missionary has shaped my life as a response to the love of the Triune God. Mission is not just an activity but a way of life.

As a deacon at St. Rita of Cascia Parish, I assist in catechesis, often stepping in with little preparation. This reminds me to always be ready and encourages me to deepen my knowledge of the faith.

My diaconal ministry has also deepened my understanding of service. To serve means standing with others without seeking recognition. Celebrating baptisms reminds me of my own call to serve. In welcoming each new child into the Church, I rejoice that another brother or sister is joined to the Body of Christ, called to live in communion and to love without limits.

Preparing and delivering homilies is a deeply personal encounter with the Word of God for me. Before preaching, I am invited to let the Word transform my heart. Sometimes, I have the privilege of preaching within the Latino community, where many people carry heavy burdens of uncertainty and fear, particularly regarding immigration challenges. While I may not be able to solve every difficulty, I can listen to them with compassion, pray with them, and remind them that God walks with His people through every trial. Even in moments of helplessness, faith assures us that our prayers are heard.

These experiences continue to shape my heart. They remind me that we are all sent to witness the love of God who accompanies, sustains, and sends us forth. Every word we speak, every act of service, and every blessing we share becomes an opportunity to live our faith with gratitude, joy, and dedication.



Being Present in Chaplaincy

By Frt. Tinh Cao, SVD



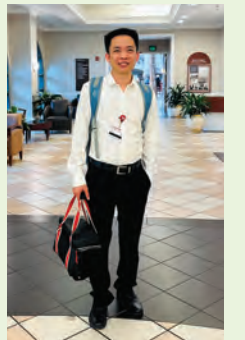
"To be a chaplain is to empty oneself of the desire to fix, explain, or dominate the encounter, and instead to create space where God can quietly work within the other's story." – Frt. Tinh Cao, SVD

Hospital chaplaincy has been a transformative experience in my formation, especially since it was not part of my earlier training in Vietnam. Entering the hospital felt like stepping into a new garden, a sacred space where suffering, hope, fear, and longing coexist.

This experience led me to reflect on the meaning of being rather than doing in ministry. Rooted in the Incarnation, Christian faith calls us to enter into the lives of others. In the hospital, this means listening, accompanying, and remaining with others in their vulnerability, rather than trying to control or resolve their suffering.

Through Clinical Pastoral Education, I became aware of my tendency to rely on words and solutions. Yet I learned that true ministry begins with listening. One encounter remains vivid: I spent nearly 40 minutes with a patient, sharing silence, deep emotions, and tears. She later thanked me simply for being there. I realized then that listening can be sacramental.

This experience deepened my understanding of kenosis, the self-emptying love of Christ. Across my experiences in three different hospitals here in the U.S., I have learned that ministry is not measured by results but by faithful presence. I continue to be formed to enter each new "garden" with humility, trust, and openness to God's work.



"Working alongside volunteers, sorting food, and meeting those who come for assistance has reminded me that true service is not about recognition, but about allowing God to work through us with gentleness and humility." – Deacon Thong Dinh Tran, SVD



Ministry in Pine Bluff

By Deacon Thong Dinh Tran, SVD

I thank God for the grace of serving as a deacon in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Since my deaconate ordination in October 2025, these first months at St. Peter Parish have been filled with joy, challenge, and growth.

From the beginning, I experienced God's kindness through the people. Parishioners welcomed me warmly, helping me settle in and feel at home. Their hospitality reminded me that God's love is often shown through simple gestures.

St. Peter Parish is a diverse community of many cultures. Their openness has deeply touched me. Many have helped me learn Spanish and welcomed me into their lives. Through them, I see how the Holy Spirit brings people together as one family.

My ministry includes assisting at Mass, leading prayer, preaching, and visiting families. These visits have shown me the beauty of people's daily lives and their deep faith.

Each week, I also serve at a food pantry, preparing meals for those in need. This ministry has taught me humility and compassion, reminding me that service is about love, not recognition.

Though learning Spanish is challenging, it has become a joyful part of my mission. With support, I continue to grow in confidence.

These experiences have strengthened my calling. My formation has prepared me to be flexible, open to new cultures, and ready to serve wherever I am sent. I am learning to listen more deeply, to speak with care, and to appreciate the richness of cultural diversity as a gift from God.

