

Dear confreres,

While we are celebrating our Sesquicentennial Jubilee of the Foundation of our Society all over the world in a manifold way, the diocese of Bolzano/Bressanone (Brixen) in Italy proudly adds another significant jubilee, that is the sesquicentennial anniversary of the priestly ordination of Saint Joseph Freinademetz. As we know, his sacerdotal ordination took place on the 25th of July 1875; just a few weeks before our Founder Saint Arnold Janssen inaugurated the Mission House in Steyl.

His ordination was held in the seminary church in Bressanone, where he spent his years of formation. Due to his human and spiritual maturity, bishop Vinzenz Gasser admitted Freinademetz to the Holy Orders before reaching the prescribed age and before completing his theological studies. As the number of priestly vocations went down in the 19th century in Tirol anticipating the ordinations became a common practice so that those priests could help in the celebration of Sunday Masses in the neighboring parishes of Bressanone while completing their studies.

This issue of shortage of priests was raised by the bishop in his official answer to Freinademetz when he petitioned the bishop to be formally relieved from the diocese to join the Mission House in Steyl. However, the permission was granted as the bishop knew very well the strong missionary orientation of this young priest who made an outstanding impression during his years in the seminary and in his first year as an assistant parish priest in St. Martin, not far from his native Oies.

Freinademetz's motivation to become a priest can hardly be separated from his desire to dedicate himself to the missions. In his first letter to Fr. Arnold Janssen in January 1878, he wrote "Most Reverend Sir, the call of the missionary institution you have brought into being, on which God's blessing rests so conspicuously, has reached even the remotest corners of Tyrol. Since I have been thinking for years about dedicating myself to the missionary profession, I respectfully dare to knock on your door for admission."

The fact that he also dealt with the subject of mission as a student at the Brixen seminary is evidenced by a practice-sermon he delivered in January 1875 on the subject "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). In it he said, "I hear within me a voice calling for help, for help from me and through me from you. A voice is calling for help that has never been heard, a voice that may sound thousands of miles away, far from us, one up there in the north, the other in Africa or America or Asia. For these poor brothers of ours, who perhaps experience the misery of this world the most of all, I want to open my mouth today."

Many years later in a letter from China to his nephew Peter Freinademetz, a seminarian in Bressanone, he confessed, "What a joy it would be for me and a



great grace for you if you were later to come over to China as a missionary ... you may already pray for this grace, as I already did when I was a small student like you are now. I had also hardly considered it possible to come to China; but with God nothing is impossible.”

As soon as the foundations for the mission in South Shandong were laid by our confreres, beginning with late Bishop Johann Baptist Anzer and Josef Freinademetz, the question about local vocations to religious life and priesthood came up. The training of local clergy was a matter close to his heart. In preparation of the first Diocesan Synod in August 1892, he pointed out that “all ecclesiastical offices and dignities must be open to Chinese priests in the same way as European priests, without any difference.” Several years after establishing a seminary in Tsining, Freinademetz became its Rector from 1895 to 1897. His lectures and deep reflections about the Holy Eucharist were later published and widely used in China.

He wanted the Chinese clergy to be trained like Jesus the Good Shepherd, who, for him is the final role model for the priests and particularly valid for the missionaries. The priests should go out in search of the lost sheep among their own people. He himself felt called by this Good Shepherd and he shared this experience with his parishioners in his farewell sermon in August 1878 in St. Martin, shortly before his departure to Steyl.

He said, “My dear brothers! Through the infinite mercy of God, who chooses the weak as his instruments, I hope to share in a grace of which I am eternally unworthy. The divine Good Shepherd, in his unfathomable goodness, has invited me to go out with him into the desert to help him find the lost sheep. So, what else can I do but kiss his hand with joy and gratitude and say with the Scriptures: “Behold, I am coming!”

For Freinademetz, to be counted among the Lord’s priests was never a privilege but a lifelong commitment to reach out to all who thirst for the eternal truth, which is to be found in Jesus Christ. Countless are his testimonies for this one and only desire.

In his priestly duties, especially as he offered the Holy Mass, he never ceased to pray for his dear ones at home. In his last letter that he wrote to his parents from Singapore on 14th of April 1879 before reaching China, he let them know that “It was a great sacrifice that I had to leave you, father and mother, but I am comforted with every day that I will meet you again, maybe not in Oies but in paradise. Pray that I may have the grace to work much beforehand in the vineyard of the Lord for the salvation of souls. It goes without saying that I remember you every time I go to the altar, you, the brothers and sisters, certain friends and the whole Badia and Sankt Martin.”

Msgr. Ivo Muser, bishop of Bolzano-Bressanone diocese declared the Sanctuary in Oies, the birthplace of Freinademetz, as one of the official jubilee churches of the diocese during the Holy Jubilee Year 2025. As the Jubilee Year coincides with the sesquicentennial celebration of the foundation of our Congregation as well as the sesquicentennial anniversary of the sacerdotal ordination of Joseph Freinademetz, bishop Ivo Muser will celebrate the Eucharist in Oies on 29 January, the feast of Saint Joseph Freinademetz, together with the whole General Council.

On this graceful occasion, prompted by the spirit of Saint Joseph Freinademetz, we not only to pray for more vocations, but also promote them more committedly to our Society.

Fr. Anselmo Ribeiro and Leadership Team.





Christmas Message from Bishop Paulus Budi Kleden, SVD

From Ende, Flores, I send you my heartfelt Christmas greetings: Merry Christmas! I pray that the joy of the Lord's birth fills our hearts and renews our strength and enthusiasm for the New Year.

In August, I returned to Indonesia after twelve years in Rome, taking on a new role as Bishop of the Archdiocese of Ende. It is a significant change, and I am still in the process of adapting, but I embrace this mission with joy.

My diocese, the first in Flores and one of the oldest in Indonesia, has a rich history. The Divine Word Missionaries began their mission here in 1914. Just

one year later, they moved the Church's center from Lahurus, in Timor, to Ende. Today, our diocese serves nearly half a million Catholics across 80 parishes. We are blessed with 250 priests, including 178 diocesan priests, and more than 230 religious sisters and 193 religious brothers from 47 orders. Collaboration among all, coupled with active lay participation, is one of our greatest strengths.

Interreligious relations in our diocese are harmonious. In Ende district, Catholics live closely alongside Muslims. My neighbors are Muslim, and each day I hear the call to prayer from the mosques, just as they hear the church bells ringing. This mutual respect was evident during my ordination, where members of various faiths actively participated.

Over the past four months, I have visited more than half of the parishes, both officially and informally. While improved infrastructure now allows access to most parishes by car, some mission stations remain challenging to reach, particularly during the rainy season.

However, poverty continues to be a significant challenge for many families. This has led to issues such as child malnutrition and the migration of young people to other countries, often as undocumented workers vulnerable to human trafficking. Tragically, more than 20 mutilated bodies are sent back to Ende each year.

Education also faces difficulties. Despite our long-standing commitment to this field, limited resources make it hard to maintain schools and fairly compensate teachers. As a result, fewer educators are willing to work in our schools. While the government offers many educational programs, these are mostly directed at state schools, prompting us to reflect seriously on the future of our Catholic educational institutions.

Despite these challenges, I remain full of hope. We have dedicated priests, religious, and laypeople who work tirelessly for the well-being of our Church. With their support, we continue to move forward as "pilgrims of hope," inspired by the theme of the Holy Year.

Once again, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a blessed Holy Year 2025.

The Role of the SVD in Welcoming African American Youth to the Priesthood

Fr. Luis Antonio Vergara, SVD

In the history of the Catholic Church in the United States, the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) played a groundbreaking role in opening doors for African American youth to the priesthood during an era marked by racial segregation and injustice. True to their missionary charism and commitment to the marginalized, the SVD embraced this challenge with courage and dedication, planting the seeds for a more inclusive and diverse Church.

The Pioneering Vision of St. Augustine Seminary

The story begins in 1920 with the founding of St. Augustine Seminary in Greenville, Mississippi, by the SVD, with the invaluable support of Mother Katharine Drexel, canonized in 2000. Mother Drexel, an untiring advocate for

social justice, was instrumental in this initiative, which boldly defied racial barriers by dedicating the seminary exclusively to the formation of African American youth called to the priesthood.

In 1923, the seminary was relocated to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, where its mission took root amidst open racial segregation. For young African Americans, entering St. Augustine Seminary was an act of dignity and hope. More than an academic and spiritual formation center, St. Augustine became a sanctuary where their vocation was recognized, valued, and respected. In a hostile world, the Divine Word Missionaries upheld their commitment to the Gospel, transforming the seminary into a symbol of resistance and a beacon of hope.

An Act of Resistance and Hope

The formation of African American priests was a profound act of resistance against racial injustice and a testament to the transformative power of faith. In 1934, the first four African American priests were ordained, marking a historic victory over the prejudices and limitations of the time.

These men not only brought the Gospel to marginalized and underserved communities but also became living symbols of justice, hope, and perseverance. Their ministry inspired future generations, proving that the call to priesthood recognizes no racial or social boundaries.

A Legacy Beyond Borders

The impact of St. Augustine Seminary extended far beyond the United States. During its operation, which concluded in 1968, the seminary formed numerous priests, including nine bishops. Among them was Bishop Carlos Ambrosio Lewis, SVD, the first Black bishop of Panama and Latin America. His life and ministry reflected the global reach of the SVD's inclusive vision, bringing hope to Afro-descendant communities across the world.

St. Augustine not only trained priests but also prepared religious and lay leaders who played vital roles in transforming their societies. Many of its graduates became educators, lawyers, judges, and social activists, contributing to the fight for equality and justice in deeply unequal contexts.

Although St. Augustine Seminary closed its doors in 1968, its mission had already achieved a significant milestone: the racial barriers in Catholic seminaries had begun to crumble. Its legacy endures in every African American priest and in every leader shaped by its principles of faith, justice, and service.

A Final Reflection

The story of St. Augustine Seminary and the role of the Divine Word Missionaries in welcoming African American youth to the priesthood is a powerful reminder that authentic faith knows no boundaries or distinctions. It challenges us to build a Church and a society where human dignity is respected, celebrated, and defended.

The example set by the SVD invites us to reflect on our own responsibility in the fight against inequality. Every act of love and justice, no matter how small, has the power to transform lives and communities. Following the testimony of those pioneers, we are called to be light in the darkness, to proclaim the Gospel where it is most needed, and to work tirelessly for inclusion and equality.

From Nuntius No. 3, December 1899 25th Jubilee of the Society

Fr. Ommerborn, Jürgen

When Arnold Janssen first envisioned founding a Mission House, he later confided to his confrere, Fr. Reinke:

"I thought of only one house which, in time, might be able to send a few missionaries to the missions each year. At that time, I had no inkling that the project would grow as it has."

Twenty-five years later, not only had the Society of the Divine Word flourished, but it had also given rise to the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit, with their two branches: the Missionary and the Cloistered Sisters. By then, his missionaries—both male and female—were working in Argentina, Togo, New Guinea, and the United States, with male missionaries additionally serving in China and Brazil.

It is, therefore, fitting that for the first jubilee of the Society of the Divine Word, Arnold Janssen penned this circular letter, which can be summarized in the heartfelt words: "Thank you, Lord!"

Fr. Arnold wrote:

“On September 8, 1900, it will be 25 years since the Mission House first opened its doors, marking the beginning of our Society. During this time, how many and how great are the blessings we have received from the goodness of the Lord!

The initial stages of such an endeavor are always the most challenging. At the outset, there were no rules, no traditions, and no foundation of trust. The right collaborators—so essential for administration, teaching, and education—were often lacking, making it impossible to achieve anything substantial without immense effort. Financial resources, too, were scarce, causing significant difficulties and, at times, great anxiety. Everything had to be created from scratch, built up with tireless labor and perseverance.

For such achievements to be possible, the powerful help of the Lord was indispensable. He brought people together, uniting them in pious zeal to form a single religious community.

How profoundly grateful we must be to the Lord for enabling us to overcome all these challenges!

It is abundantly clear to me—and this has been echoed by many others countless times—that God’s guiding hand has been unmistakably present in all that we have achieved. Without His help, it would have been impossible for human effort alone to accomplish what has been done. To believe otherwise would require attributing an even greater miracle to human endeavor than to divine intervention. Therefore, in agreement with Holy Scripture, we affirm: ‘It depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy’ (Rom. 9:16). And so, we proclaim with the Psalmist: ‘Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory.’

After experiencing such abundant divine love, it is our sacred duty to offer continual thanks to God.

Beloved confreres, it falls to us to fulfill this obligation with zeal. The life of a devout religious finds its highest expression in holy thanksgiving to God. Such gratitude cannot remain self-centered, as we are all part of larger communities that contribute to our lives in countless ways. We must give thanks not only for the blessings we have individually received but also for those bestowed upon these communities.

Let us resolve to offer thanks daily, whether during morning or evening prayer or in visits to the church. Let us do so especially during Sunday services and, in the coming year, with particular attention to our Society’s Jubilee.

The year 1900, our Society’s first jubilee, invites us to reflect on 25 years of labor and toil, but also on 25 years of God’s abundant blessings.

I, therefore, decree that this Jubilee Year be dedicated to thanksgiving to our gracious God. Let us strive to remember His benefits more keenly during this year and to thank Him from the depths of our hearts.

In all our larger houses, with the approval of the respective territorial superiors, the intention of the High Mass on the first Sunday of every month—barring specific obstacles—shall be thanksgiving for the blessings God has bestowed upon the Society and each of its members. In this, we also implore His forgiveness for the failings we have committed despite His generosity.

September 8, the day of the Most Blessed Virgin’s Nativity, will be a special day of thanksgiving. In all churches and chapels of the Society where it is feasible, a solemn High Mass shall be celebrated, and the Te Deum sung as an expression of our gratitude.

May this glorious day, which is one of joy and thanksgiving in heaven, be the same for us. May our celebrations bring delight to the Most High, and may we not forget to give thanks to our holy patrons, particularly our beloved Mother Mary, whose birthday we commemorate.

Praise and thanks be to the Most High for all His blessings, now and forever. Amen.”

ROM Two SVDs Cardinals: A Milestone of Faith and Mission in the Catholic Church



On Saturday, December 7, 2024, a momentous event took place at the Vatican: the consistory that named 21 new cardinals from 17 countries. Among the newly appointed cardinals are two distinguished members of the Society of the Divine Word.

The appointments of Cardinal Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, Archbishop of Tokyo, and Cardinal Ladislav Nemet, Archbishop of Belgrade, stand out not only for their remarkable trajectories but also as a reflection of the Church's universal spirit.

Cardinal Kikuchi made history as the first Japanese priest sent as a missionary to Ghana. Inspired in his youth by the legacy of Cardinal Thomas Tien Ken-sin, the first Chinese cardinal and a member of the Divine Word Missionaries, Cardinal Kikuchi has devoted his life to evangelization and social action. He currently leads Caritas Internationalis. His episcopal motto, *Varietate Unitas* (Unity in Diversity), embodies his commitment to cultural inclusion and global unity.

On the other hand, Cardinal Nemet is the first cardinal from Serbia, born in 1956 in what Yugoslavia was then. Ordained in 1983, he earned a doctorate in dogmatic theology and served as a missionary in the Philippines before taking on significant roles in Europe, such as Provincial in Hungary and Secretary General of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference. He is currently the Vice President of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences. His episcopal motto, *Benedicite, Omnia Opera Domini, Domino* (Bless the Lord, all the works of the Lord), reflects his deep pastoral commitment.

Both cardinals embody the SVD charism of unity and mission, reminding us that the Church, in its diversity, is called to be a beacon of hope, service, and reconciliation in a wounded world. Their elevation is a testament to living faith and dedication to the most vulnerable.

Celebration of the Immaculate Conception: A Global Tribute to Mary in the SVD Jubilee

On December 8, 2024, during the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception a deeply significant ceremony was held at the Generalate. The presence of the newly appointed cardinals, Ladislav Nemet and Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, elevated the event, which honored the Marian heritage of the congregation with the blessing of four images of the Virgin Mary. These images represent the four zones where the SVD missionaries carry out their work: Europe, the Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Africa-Madagascar.

Each image, originating from Bali (Indonesia), Kenya, Steyl (Netherlands), and Latin America, symbolizes not only the cultural diversity of the regions they represent but also the universality of the SVD mission. These sculptures pay tribute to Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word, who has been a spiritual pillar for the Society since 1875, when St. Arnold Janssen entrusted it to her protection.



The liturgical act renewed this Marian commitment, highlighting Mary as a model of faith, attentive listening, and missionary action. Under the jubilee theme, "Witnesses of the Light: Everywhere and for Everyone," the event marked a new chapter in the history of the SVDs, reinforcing their missionary identity and global unity in service to the Gospel.

The blessing of these images serves as a tangible reminder of the Church's universal call to be a light in a wounded world, guided by the maternal presence of Mary.



Resource Committee of Interculturality and Arnold Janssen Spirituality Network: Meeting Together in Steyl

Roger Schroeder, SVD

For the first time, twelve members of the Resource Committee of Interculturality (RCI), comprised of SVDs and SSpS, gathered in person in Steyl from November 22–26, 2024. During these five days, the group reviewed their ongoing efforts to promote interculturality within their respective regions worldwide. They dedicated significant time to clarifying the committee's structure, exploring additional networking opportunities, and crafting a three-year plan aimed at deepening the understanding and practice of interculturality across continental/zonal, sub-zonal, and P/R/M.

Following this initial meeting, RCI engaged in four days of collaborative sessions with the Arnold Janssen Spirituality Network (AJSN) Core Team, from November 27–30. These sessions focused on advancing a year-long project to develop materials on the theme of “Interculturality and the Vows” for the two congregations. This initiative aims to provide ongoing opportunities for reflection among select focus groups within the SVD and SSpS.

Additionally, RCI and AJSN discussed their shared efforts in co-sponsoring two international programs planned for 2025 and 2026 in Steyl. The meetings underscored the importance of collaboration in fostering interculturality and deepening the shared spirituality of the two congregations.

PANAM ZONE

PAR Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation: The Commitment of St. Michael Archangel Parish

Fr. Paulus Paskalis Semaun, SVD



St. Michael Archangel Parish in Saltos del Guairá, Paraguay, is deeply committed to the principles of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JUPIC). Inspired by the global mission of the Divine Word Missionaries, the

parish community takes action in response to social and environmental challenges, seeking to heal the “wounded world” through concrete and supportive actions.

One of the parish's primary focuses is supporting urban indigenous communities who face poverty, marginalization, and a lack of access to basic services. Through educational programs, solidarity assistance, and awareness-raising activities such as broadcasts on Radio Parroquial San Miguel Arcángel FM 92.3, the parish fosters greater social and environmental responsibility.

However, significant challenges remain, such as resource scarcity and the lack of government support, which limit the reach of their projects. Despite this, the parish strengthens its mission through initiatives like the Solidarity Bazaar, water conservation efforts, and the promotion of social inclusion, reaffirming its commitment to the most vulnerable.

Water management, an essential human right, occupies a central place in their work. In a context of climate change and inequalities, the parish works to ensure access to drinking water, recognizing it as both an ethical and social imperative.

Through their tireless efforts, St. Michael Archangel Parish continues to be a living example of solidarity, justice, and care for our “common home,” inspiring the community to build a more just and sustainable future.

BRA BRAZIL SUBZONE HOLDS ANNUAL MEETING

Fr. Leonardo Gade, SVD

From November 25 to 28, the Brazil Subzone of the Society of the Divine Word held its annual meeting, bringing together the provincials of BRC, BRN, BRS, and the BRA region, along with the coordinators of dimensions and areas within the subzone. As is customary, the event provided an opportunity to reflect on the past year’s progress, evaluate projects, and plan joint initiatives.

In 2024, the Brazil Subzone implemented several significant activities, including initial and ongoing formation programs, support for lay partners, and training for new missionaries. The subzone also promoted the Divine Word Missionary Sunday campaign, which raised funds to support pastoral and missionary work in indigenous areas within the BRA region.

The meeting also served as a platform to prepare for the key celebrations of 2025, a milestone year for the congregation. Planned events include the 150th anniversary of its foundation, the 130th anniversary of its presence in Brazil, and the SVD Brazil Subzone Assembly.

A noteworthy decision made during the gathering was to reshape future subzone meetings into moments of study, reflection, and deeper engagement with the SVD identity, focusing both on internal growth and outward mission.

The event also featured a meaningful dialogue and exchange with lay associates from the BRA region, known as Friends of the Word in the Amazon (AVA), further strengthening collaboration between religious members and lay partners in their shared mission.

BOL Seventh Brief Report on the Laudato Si’ Project Preservation of the “Common Home” Climate in San Ignacio de Velasco

By Michael Heinz, SVD

The rainy season has begun favorably, allowing us to transplant the first trees, mainly fruit trees such as lemon, mandarin, and orange trees. So far, we have planted



around 500 trees, using natural fertilizer made from the waste of our cows and sheep.

However, we are facing significant logistical challenges due to a shortage of gasoline and diesel in Bolivia, which complicates plant transportation and causes delays. Additionally, occasional rains have interrupted work, although they are essential to ensure the trees survive the expected drought in 2025.

The second phase of the project involves planting 1,000 native trees in areas where vegetation has disappeared. This stage is progressing more slowly, as the hardened soil requires more effort to dig the holes. While we have a borrowed tractor to speed up the work, the lack of fuel forces us to do much of the labor manually, increasing costs and extending timelines.

Despite the challenges, we continue moving forward with hope. We trust the rains will continue, supporting the trees’ growth.

We thank you for your support and prayers, wishing you a blessed Christmas and good health in 2025.

AUS Effective Communication Course Enhances Skills and Faith Understanding

By Bhumbodin Hiranrattanaajinda SVD



The Society of the Divine Word (SVD) recently held an intensive Effective Communication course at Dorish Maru College, Box Hill, led by Dr. Cecilia Francisco-Tan. Aimed at enhancing communication and English proficiency among 12 SVD students, the course focused on listening, critical thinking, speaking, reading, and writing.

Interactive methods like debates and case studies played a central role. Topics ranged from theological questions, such as Mary's title as 'Mother of God,' to modern ethical dilemmas like fast food in schools. These activities challenged students to question assumptions, think critically, and articulate their beliefs effectively. Case studies further bridged theory and practice, preparing students for real-life pastoral challenges, including addressing communities in crisis.

As a non-native English speaker, I initially struggled with theological terminology, but the course's supportive environment and Dr. Cecilia's engaging teaching style boosted my confidence and skills. Her method of guiding reflection rather than providing answers fostered deeper understanding and personal growth.

Beyond language proficiency, the course instilled critical thinking and meaningful dialogue, equipping us for ministry and everyday life. It was a transformative experience, enriching both communication abilities and faith exploration.

A Joyful Gathering and Remembering a Faithful Friend

Fr. Michael Donovan, S.V.D.

December 7th was a day of great joy for the Diocese of Port Moresby as over eighty priests, sisters, and brothers gathered in the Chancery meeting room to celebrate our annual Christmas gathering. The festive spirit was infectious, and when a sister invited us to dance to *By the Rivers of Babylon*, nearly everyone eagerly joined in. The room was filled with laughter and celebration, setting the perfect tone for the rest of the day.

Cardinal Sir John Ribat took a moment to reflect on the year, acknowledging the challenges, including the painful riots of January 12th, a day etched in our history as Black Wednesday. Yet, amidst these difficulties, he highlighted moments of hope and joy, notably the Papal visit to Papua New Guinea, which inspired and uplifted many. Following the reflection, the shared meal became a cherished time of fellowship, and the Cardinal's thoughtful gesture of distributing Christmas cakes and gifts marked the true beginning of the festive season.

However, just two days later, I received the heartbreaking news that my dear friend Bernard Bowie from Timbunke Parish had passed away. Bernard had been a dedicated teacher and missionary, whose commitment to the mission field never wavered, even after losing his teaching job following Papua New Guinea's independence. He devoted over twenty years to the missions, touching countless lives. One of his proudest moments was teaching a young Grade Two student, Alous Tapi, who later became a priest. Bernard would always say with pride, "I taught a priest how to read and write."

I also recall a special moment from 2007, when Denis O'Brien introduced Digicel mobile phones to Papua New Guinea. With the help of some Irish friends in Port Moresby, I received a carton of phones and gave one to Bernard. It was a luxury he had never imagined, and his joy was overwhelming. His children, equally thrilled, joked with him, "Ring Fr. Michael and tell him we'll look after his grave when he dies." We laughed then, but now that memory fills me with a bittersweet smile.

ING Inauguration and Blessing of the Divine Mercy Chapel

BY Ivan DSilva, SVD

Ambassa, Tripura – December 22, 2024: The Catholic community of the Holy Spirit Church in Ambassa celebrated the inauguration of a new chapel in the village of Tangboul, with over 500 faithful in attendance.



The event was presided over by Bishop Lumen Monteiro, CSC, who was warmly welcomed with flowers and applause. The celebration began at the former chapel, where the bishop blessed the statues of Jesus of Divine Mercy, St. Joseph, and the Virgin Mary, which were then carried in procession to the new chapel.

Fr. Jeevan Kennedy, the regional SVD superior, inaugurated the chapel by cutting the ribbon, and Bishop Monteiro led the blessing ceremony. During the Mass, girls from the village performed a traditional entrance dance, and the history of the local church was presented. During the offertory, the community offered home-made food and agricultural products as a sign of gratitude.

After the Eucharist, a felicitation program was held, recognizing parish leaders and donors who contributed to the construction of the chapel. The event concluded with a locally prepared communal meal, bringing attendees together in a spirit of celebration and hope.

The inauguration marked a significant moment for the parishioners, reaffirming their faith and strengthening community bonds on the eve of Christmas.

AFRAM ZONE

SSD

World Day of Migrants and Refugees in Bidibidi

Andrew Truong Quoc Hung, SVD.

On November 9, 2024, the World Day of Migrants and Refugees was celebrated at the Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in Uganda. The community was honored to host His Excellency Fr. Fabio Baggio, recently nominated as a Cardinal and serving as Undersecretary for the Vatican's Migrants and Refugees Section. His visit reflected Pope Francis's deep concern for migrants and refugees worldwide.

Accompanied by The Most Reverend Luigi Bianco, Apostolic Nuncio to Uganda, and Bishop Sabino Ocan Odoki of Arua Diocese, Fr. Baggio began the day with a briefing by Father Andrzej, mission superior, on the challenges and future plans of the mission. The upcoming 150th anniversary of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) was also highlighted.

At the settlements, the guests received a warm welcome with singing, dancing, and traditional music. During Mass at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel, Cardinal Baggio delivered a homily encouraging focus on the Word of God. He also pledged to share the stories of Ugandan and South Sudanese Christians with the wider Church.

The refugees expressed their gratitude through a drama depicting immigrant life and heartfelt prayers, highlighting their resilience and faith. The community's gratitude extended to Pope Francis, the SVD General Superior, benefactors, and supporters. Prayers were offered for the success of Cardinal Baggio's mission and continued support for the Bidibidi community.

GHA Ghana Province Welcomes New Lay Associates to the Arnoldus Family

By Emmanuel Danso Abeam, SVD,
Acting Mission Secretary

The Ghana Province has taken a significant step forward in implementing the 18th General Chapter's resolution on lay associates, which calls for provinces and regions to officially recognize lay associates as members of the Arnoldus family (Resolution 1.1.3). Responding to this directive, the province has established a structured training program for SVD lay partners in Northern Ghana, home to several of our formation houses.

As part of this initiative, 14 individuals were formally inaugurated as lay associates during a solemn ceremony attended by the Provincial Superior. Their admission, conducted by the Mission Secretary, who also serves as the group's director, marked their official integration into the Arnoldus family. Each new member made a commitment to actively participate in the missionary endeavors of the Society of the Divine Word.

The Ghana Province congratulates these newly admitted lay associates and looks forward to their dynamic contributions to the missionary mission. Their inclusion not only strengthens the bond within the Arnoldus family but also highlights the vital role of lay collaborators in spreading the Word of God.

BOOKS WRITTEN BY SVDs

"Called From The Fields, Michael Donovan, SVD

CALLED FROM THE FIELDS



The life of a missionary
in Papua New Guinea



FATHER MICHAEL
DONOVAN, SVD



Father Michael Donovan, a native of Ireland, was just 19 years old when a sudden and profound calling led him to the priesthood. Despite leaving school early to help his father on the family farm, Donovan's journey was anything but conventional. With limited formal education, he faced considerable challenges on his path. Yet, driven by a deep sense of faith and determination, he overcame these obstacles and was eventually ordained as a member of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD).

In 1981, Father Donovan left his home in Ireland and traveled to Papua New Guinea, where he began his missionary work in remote rural parishes. Over the years, his role expanded to include teaching and serving as a spiritual director, deepening his commitment to the communities he served.

"Called From The Fields," a collection of letters spanning more than four decades, offers an intimate and compelling look into Donovan's missionary life. The book provides readers with a rare personal perspective on the demands and rewards of a life devoted to faith and service. It chronicles not only the challenges he faced but also the triumphs that sustained him, offering a rich narrative of resilience and dedication.

Now available on Amazon, Called From The Fields is a must-read for anyone interested in the realities of missionary life. The book goes beyond being a spiritual memoir to become an important historical account for the SVD and other religious communities. It vividly details the transformation of Papua New Guinea, a country where tourism, modern technology, mobile phones,

BOOKS WRITTEN BY SVDs

and the internet are reshaping daily life. Father Michael reflects on these changes, noting the shift from handwritten letters to the convenience of emails, highlighting the evolving nature of communication in missionary work.

A captivating and insightful read, *Called From The Fields* serves as a powerful testament to the enduring impact of faith in action. It's a story of perseverance, service, and adaptation—offering invaluable lessons for those looking to understand the transformative journey of a missionary priest.

“VALIENTE PARA SERVIR” (BRAVE TO SERVE) by Karl Heinz-Arenz, SVD (in Portuguese)

Brother Karl Heinz-Arenz, SVD, a distinguished university professor and member of the Society of the Divine Word, has recently published his latest book, “Valiente para Servir” (Brave to Serve). The work delves into the life and legacy of Luxembourgish Jesuit priest and missionary to the Amazon, João Felipe Bettendorff.

The book not only chronicles Bettendorff's pastoral and missionary endeavors but also immerses readers in the cultural and natural landscape of 17th-century Portuguese Amazonia, offering a profound exploration of the complex interactions between European influence and indigenous communities in the region.

“Valiente para Servir” provides a broader historical perspective by linking the Jesuit's European academic and spiritual formation to his transformative work in the Amazon. The book underscores key themes such as missionary dedication, ecclesial administration, leadership, and Bettendorff's advocacy for the rights of indigenous peoples against Portuguese colonial powers.

This publication is a significant contribution for those interested in understanding the impact of Jesuit missions in the Amazon and the historical context shaping relations between Europe and the Americas during that era. An essential read for religious leaders, scholars, and anyone passionate about missionary history and the cultural richness of the Amazon region.

“Communicating with Silence” by Modeste Munimi Osung, SVD



The Verbo Divino Publishing House in Spain, has released “Communicating with Silence”, a thought-provoking book by Fr. Modeste Munimi Osung. The work invites readers to reflect on the importance of silence as an effective and often underestimated tool in personal and professional interactions.

In a world overwhelmed by words and media noise, the author explores how silence can enrich dialogue, deepen understanding, and bring authenticity to communication. Munimi argues that silence is not a sign of weakness but a powerful means to connect with others and give meaning to words.

The book examines silence in various contexts, ranging from prayer and introspection to interpersonal and professional dialogue. The author emphasizes that, in an era marked by information overload, learning to value silence can transform both our relationships and our communication style.

Modeste Munimi Osung has an impressive academic background in communication and currently serves as the communication coordinator for the Society of the Divine Word in Rome. This work adds to his growing contributions to the study of communication and social reflection.

BOOKS WRITTEN BY SVDs

Paradigm of the New Evangelization



Victor Sagayam Zackarias SVD

Paradigm of the New Evangelization, Fr. Victor Sagayam Zackarias, SVD,

Fr. Victor Sagayam Zackarias, SVD, has released a new book titled *Paradigm of the New Evangelization: A Study of Paradigms of Evangelization in the Church with Reference to Tamil Nadu, India*. The book explores the origins and growth of the concept of New Evangelization, focusing on its purpose and relevance in today's Church, especially in Tamil Nadu.

This work highlights the missionary efforts of remarkable figures like St. Thomas, St. Francis Xavier, Robert de Nobili, St. John de Britto, Joseph Beschi, and St. Deva-sahayam Pillai. It applies the paradigm theory to their contributions, showcasing them as models for modern evangelization.

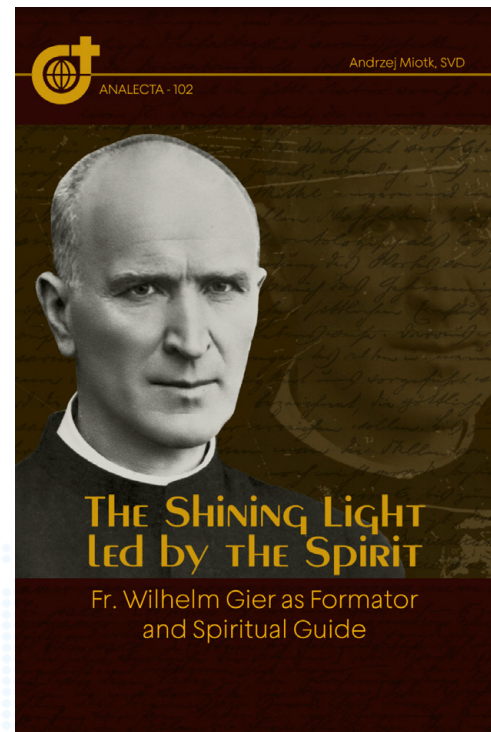
The book offers fresh ideas and strategies for today's evangelizers, aiming to inspire new ways of sharing the Gospel effectively in Tamil Nadu's local Church.

The Spiritual Legacy of Fr. Wilhelm Gier, Fr. Andrzej Miotk, SVD

A book is now available in English, collecting four articles that provide an in-depth view of the life and spiritual legacy of Fr. Wilhelm Gier (1867–1951), the third Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word (1920–1932). While the articles do not follow a single thematic thread, they shed light on his profound spiritual influence during a critical period in the history of the Society. Fr. Gier, deeply marked by his closeness to the Founder, Fr. Arnold Janssen, played a crucial role in consolidating the spiritual and missionary identity of the Society after the Founder's death.

The first and most extensive article, based on the biographical research of Fr. Fritz Bornemann, narrates Fr. Gier's life and leadership. Combining chronological and thematic approaches, it highlights his contributions to the Society's spiritual growth and international missionary expansion. The following articles explore the veneration of the Holy Spirit within the Society, focusing on Fr. John Janssen and Fr. Gier, who shared a commitment to promoting this devotion as a central part of the Society's charism.

The final article examines Fr. Gier's role in establishing the Society's mission in Poland, emphasizing his warm and insightful leadership. Together, these studies present Fr. Gier as a humble yet influential figure, whose dedication to the Holy Spirit and missionary work continues to be a source of inspiration.



Biography of Fr. Joseph Grendel, Fr. Andrzej Miotk, SVD

This study begins the first part of a comprehensive biography of Fr. Joseph Grendel (1878-1951), a significant figure in the Society of the Divine Word, who served as Superior General from 1932 to 1947. Grendel, one of the longest-serving leaders of the Society after the Founder, led the institution during some of its most turbulent years, including the rise of Nazi Germany and World War II. Despite his remarkable leadership during this crisis, Fr. Grendel's character remains relatively obscure, even within his own community.

Before becoming Superior General, Fr. Grendel had a distinguished career as an administrator and educator. Raised in a devout family in Sauerland, Germany, he was intellectually gifted and dedicated to his religious mission. He completed theological studies in Rome and earned recognition as a professor of dogma. However, his administra-

BOOKS WRITTEN BY SVDs

tive talents eventually took precedence, leading him to roles such as Rector of St. Gabriel's and Provincial of the West German Province. His leadership style, marked by firmness and a high standard of dedication, garnered both respect and criticism for its autocratic nature.

This research delves into Grendel's early years, tracing his formation and rise to prominence, and aims to shed light on his influence as Superior General. It offers insights into his leadership, personality, and legacy, contributing to a deeper understanding of the Society's development during a period of profound global crisis.

Anthropos: Recommended Reading

Jean Michaud: Priest, Rebel, and Scholar. François-Marie Savina in Tonkin (Vietnam), 1901–1941. *Anthropos* 119/1: 2024, pp. 1-17.

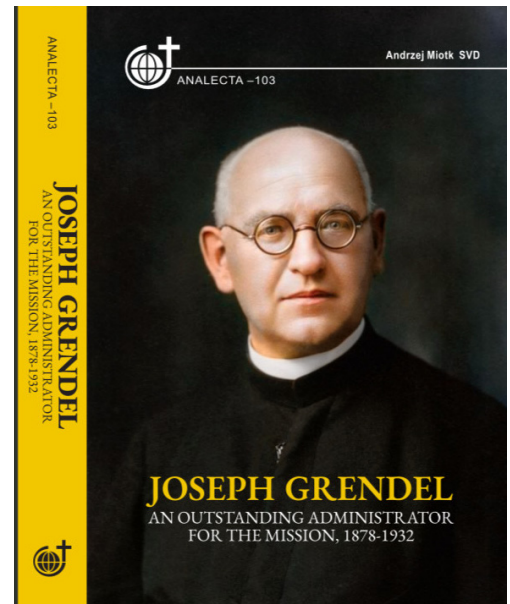
Can a young Catholic priest of humble, peasant origins transform into a seasoned ethnographer and a bona fide scholar through sheer determination—and in defiance of his ecclesiastical superiors? What happens when this transformation earns him the reputation of being unruly, deviant, even nearly rogue, leading his bishop to sideline him for decades? In colonial Indochina a century ago, what could drive such a determined missionary to persist against such formidable challenges?

Through this case study of Fr. François-Marie Savina, a French Catholic missionary in Tonkin (modern-day northern Vietnam), Jean Michaud explores how one man carved out his own path of expression despite ongoing clashes with church hierarchy. Michaud critically examines a scenario in which Fr. Savina's scientific and ethnographic pursuits in the field became, in effect, his second "calling." This evolution led him to consciously step outside the confines of Catholic dogma and its rigid moral framework. Rather than conforming to expectations of proselytization and obedience, Savina made a deliberate and bold move to embrace an alternative intellectual and cultural engagement.

The article builds upon Michaud's biographical notes on Fr. Savina from his book *Incidental Ethnographers* (2007) and significantly expands them through a critical reassessment and newly discovered materials that have only recently come to light. In reflecting on similar cases, anthropologist Oscar Salemink (2015) described another Catholic missionary as "a marvelous maverick, an irreverent reverend, a missionary celebrating pagan culture ... a celibate man who admired and enjoyed the eroticism of Jarai culture. He was not an easy man, and he got easily and often into trouble because of his idiosyncratic thoughts and behavior ... He was not very serious about missionizing in the sense of converting the local population to Christianity, because converting them would mean destroying the very culture that he loved so much."

The same could well be said of Fr. Savina. His story is that of a missionary who dared to follow his passion for understanding and preserving indigenous culture, even when it set him at odds with the institution he served.

Darius J. Piwowarczyk Anthropos



APPOINTMENTS AND TRANSFERS

Appointments

26.11.24	Fr. Jerzy Faliszek	Sup.Prov.ARS
26.11.24	Fr. Pedro Ricardo Pitura	Vic. Prov. ARG
26.11.24	Fr. Jesu Raj Alphonse	Adm.Prov. ARS
26.11.24	Fr. Fransiskus Borgias Langoaran	Cons. Prov. ARS
26.11.24	Fr. Alfred Mbalanda Shinda	Cons. Prov. ARS
29.11.24	Fr. Asuncion Vásquez Bustamante	Vic.Rect. ROM
02.12.24	Fr. Carlos Paniagua-Monroy	Asist. Dir. Nemi
03.12.24	Fr. Saju George Aruvelil, ARG	Sec.Miss. ARG
03.12.24	Fr. Marlon Bobier Vargas	Editor.AN. ROM
03.12.24	Fr. Kieran Sun	Dir. Archives. ROM
03.12.24	Fr. Pawel Wójcik	Dir. Hist.Arch.ROM
03.12.24	Fr. Andrzej Miotk	Dir. Found.Arch. ROM
03-12-24	Fr. Mark Angelo Ramos	Dir. Gen.Publ. ROM
03.12.24	Fr. Piotr Marian Gracz	Webmaster.ROM
03.12.24	Fr. Márcio Sanches Passador	Asis.Oecom. ROM
03.12.24	Fr. Christian Estrada	Asis.Oecom. ROM
03.12.24	Fr. Biju Varghese Kottorathil.	Asis.Oecom. ROM
03.12.24	Bro. Zbigniew Toczek	Dir. Data/Cat.ROM
03.12.24	Fr. Asuncion Vásquez Bustamante	Span.Sec. ROM
10.12.24	Fr. John Jerome Asidigbe	Miss. Sec. ESP
14.12.24	Fr. Camillus Seran	Vic.Dist. Sup. St Peterburg/URL
14.12.24	Fr. Rahul V.M	Vic.Dist. Sup. Siberia/URL
17.12.24	Fr. Salomon Leki	Sup.Prov. IDT
17.12.24	Fr. Ireneus Bernardus Boli Lolan	Vic.Prov. IDT
17.12.24.	Fr. Salvator Kino Towary	Prov.Adm.IDT
17.12.24	Fr. Dismas Mauk	Cons. Prov.IDT
17.12.24	Fr. Ubaldus Djonda	Cons. Prov.IDT

Transfer

28.11.24	Fr. Specht Hermann	PNG/GER
29.11.24	Fr. Emil Kalka	ANG/POL
20.11.24	Fr. Vinod Kumar Reddy Gopu	INM/IBP
03.12.24	Fr. Sergio Patricio Candia	ARG/CHI
06.12.24	Fr. Antonius Doni	ZAM/IDJ
13.12.24	Fr. Edward Jan Gue	POL/BRA
12.12.24	Fr. Borgia Aubespin	USS/USC
18.12.24	P. Mariano Venzo	BRS/ITA

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Fr Salvador Serrao, SVD



Fr. Salvador Serrao was born on January 10, 1935, in India, feeling a strong calling to serve God from a young age. This led him to join the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), beginning a lifelong journey of missionary service.

Fr. Salvador was assigned to the INS Province on February 4, 1965. His early ministry was marked by dedication to spreading the Gospel. On December 12, 1997, he began serving at Sacred Heart Parish in Andheri-East, Mumbai, where he became known for his approachable nature and zeal for pastoral work, building a vibrant faith community.

In December 2002, Fr. Salvador moved to the INM Province and took on a leadership role at the Provincialate in Bandra. He offered guidance to fellow missionaries and helped administer the Province. On November 3, 2009, he was appointed to St. Theresa Church in Bandra, where he became a beloved figure, providing spiritual support and fostering a strong community.

In October 2012, he moved to Kirem, where he continued his pastoral work and mentored younger missionaries. In November 2022, Fr. Salvador returned to Andheri, residing at Soverdia House, where he remained a spiritual pillar.

Fr. Salvador Serrao passed away on December 2, 2024, at the age of 89, leaving behind a legacy of faith and service. May his soul rest in peace.

Fr. Yohanes Eduard, SVD



Fr. Yohanes Eduard, SVD, born on February 3, 1973, in Indonesia, was called to eternal rest on December 7, 2024, in Atambua, Timor Province. His life was a profound testament to faith, service, and dedication to the mission of the Society of the Divine Word.

After professing his first vows in 1996, Fr. Yohanes embraced his missionary journey with humility and zeal. He began his ministry in the Timor Province, where he served in various communities, offering pastoral care and leadership. His assignments took him to Dili-Soverdi, Maliana, and Nenuk, where he dedicated himself to

forming future missionaries as Magister Novitiorum. He also pursued theological studies at the Angelicum in Rome, preparing for greater responsibilities within the Society.

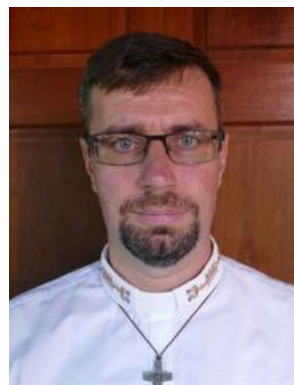
Fr. Yohanes balanced administrative duties with pastoral care as Administrator Domus in Nenuk, always prioritizing the well-being of those he served. His leadership qualities were recognized when he was appointed Vice Provincial Superior of the IDT Province, and later as Provincial Superior, a role in which he guided his confreres with wisdom and compassion.

Known for his humility, deep spirituality, and unwavering commitment to the Word of God, Fr. Yohanes touched countless lives. His quiet strength, servant's heart, and ability to connect across cultures made him a beloved figure in every community he served.

He will be dearly missed by his confreres, family, and all who were blessed to know him. His legacy of faith, dedication, and love will continue to inspire those who follow in his footsteps.

May he rest in the peace of Christ. Requiescat in Pace.

Fr. Ondrej Pešta, SVD



Fr. Ondrej Pešta, SVD, was a dedicated missionary priest whose life exemplified service, leadership, and commitment to spreading the Gospel in diverse cultural and pastoral settings. Born the 30 December 1975 in Slovakia, he joined the Society of the Divine Word in 2002 and was assigned to the Bolivia Region, where his remarkable journey of mission began.

Missionary Work in Bolivia

Fr. Ondrej's first appointment in Bolivia was in El Alto, serving the Parish of María de Los Ángeles (2004–2010). In this challenging environment, he was known for his compassionate approach and tireless work with the marginalized communities. His ability to connect with people and his administrative skills were recognized early, leading to his appointment as the Regional Counselor of Bolivia from 2008 to 2010.

In 2011, he moved to San Miguel de Velasco, serving as both an assistant pastor and administrator of the Ori-

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ente District. His work here solidified his reputation as a capable leader, overseeing pastoral and administrative needs while fostering a spirit of collaboration among his confreres.

Academic Pursuits and Leadership Roles

Fr. Ondrej's intellectual curiosity and dedication to the Word of God led him to pursue advanced studies in biblical theology at the Collegio in Rome in 2011. Armed with this knowledge, he returned to Bolivia, where his scholarly insights enriched his ministry, particularly in the role of Coordinator of Apostolic Biblical Animation (2020–2024).

Throughout his ministry, Fr. Ondrej demonstrated exceptional leadership, serving in various capacities, including District Administrator of Oriente, Vice Regional Superior of Bolivia, and ultimately as Superior of the Santa Cruz District from 2023 until his passing.

Final Years and Legacy

In September 2023, Fr. Ondrej was assigned to San Juan Diego Parish in Santa Cruz, where he continued to inspire his parishioners and confreres with his pastoral zeal and unwavering faith. Even amidst the challenges of leadership, he remained approachable, always prioritizing the spiritual and pastoral needs of the people he served.

On December 12, 2024, Fr. Ondrej passed away in Santa Cruz, leaving behind a legacy of humility, service, and faithfulness to the Divine Word. His missionary spirit, coupled with his genuine love for the people of Bolivia, will continue to inspire those who knew him and the communities he served.

May his soul rest in eternal peace. Fr. Ondrej Pešta, SVD: "A missionary who lived to proclaim the Word, in service of the Word."

Bro. José Pineda, SVD (1935–2024)



Bro. José Pineda, SVD, was born on March 15, 1935, in the Philippines and dedicated his life to service as a missionary brother of the Society of the Divine Word. Known for his humility and fraternal spirit, he lived his vocation with deep commitment to accompaniment and formation, significantly contributing to the communal and spiritual life of the Verbitas.

Throughout his life, Bro. José was a model of faith and perseverance, especially in his later years, when he faced health challenges with serenity and trust in God. His quiet yet charismatic nature inspired many, leaving behind a legacy of love for service and fidelity to the divine call.

He passed away on December 14, 2024, in Quezon City, surrounded by his community. His simple and dedicated life will be remembered with gratitude and affection by all who had the blessing of knowing him. May he rest in the peace of the Lord.

Benito Falquetto, SVD



Benito Falquetto was born on July 2, 1935, in Venda Nova, Brazil. During his ministry as a member of the BRN Province, he dedicated his life to pastoral service and administration in various communities. Throughout his mission, he took on key roles such as parish priest, provincial treasurer, and community leader,

standing out for his commitment to the Church and the congregation.

Benito will be remembered for his humility, dedication, and closeness to the people, especially in the communities of Espírito Santo and Juiz de Fora, where he spent the last years of his life. His testimony of faith and missionary spirit left a deep impression on all who knew him.

He passed away in Juiz de Fora, Brazil, on December 17, 2024. His life was a true reflection of the Verbite charism in action.

Antonio Blöhsel SVD



Fr. Antonio Blöhsel SVD was born on July 27, 1946. He joined the Society of the Divine Word and was ordained a priest on November 1, 1970. His first missionary assignment was in the Congo Province (CNG), where he served for three years. In 1975, he was assigned to the Argentina

Province (ARS), initially working in Posadas.

In 1976, he returned to the Congo, but in 1982 he was called to Rome to serve at the Collegio del Verbo Divino. Later, in 1988, he briefly held the position of General Secretary of the Congregation.

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on two occasions, demonstrating devoted leadership.

In 2012, he concluded his parish ministry and moved to the Retreat House of Our Lady of Fatima in Posadas. There, he continued providing spiritual support to the community until his passing on December 17, 2024. His life was a testament to missionary dedication and love for the people of God.

Frank Drzaic, SVD



Born on November 20, 1934, Frank Drzaic dedicated his life to serving others as a missionary priest of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD). He began his missionary journey in Paraguay in 1962, where his passion for pastoral ministry and cultural engagement flourished. His next assignment took him to the USA in 1974, where he worked in the USW Province.

Drzaic's commitment to missionary service led him to travel across continents, including a period in Yugoslavia in 1984. In 1988, he returned to the USS Province, continuing his work with unwavering dedication. In 1997, Drzaic moved to the USC Province and settled in Techny, the heart of the Society in the United States.

In 2002, he served in Memphis before retiring to the USW Province in 2004. He ministered at St. Bernard's Parish in Oakland and Our Lady of Loretto in Los Angeles, among other assignments. His later years saw him at St. Kevin Church in San Francisco before his final transfer back to

Techny in 2013, where he retired.

Frank Drzaic passed away on December 17, 2024, at Techny, leaving behind a legacy of faith, cultural appreciation, and missionary zeal. His journey across continents and his lifelong commitment to serving others reflect the spirit of the Society of the Divine Word.

SSpS

Sister: Rel.Name	Prov./Reg	Date of Death	Age	Vows
Sr. Theresilde Gerlinde Pils	OES Austria	18/12/2024	88	66