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Spring 2020  
mission stories from around the world  
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COVID-19

COVID-19

COVID

**Special  
EMERGENCY  
UPDATE**





# Ways to Give...

The easiest way to give is through cash gifts. But creative gifts of assets can include stocks, bonds and property (real estate and personal property such as artwork). These can not only provide you with charitable deductions but often offer additional tax savings as well.

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an IMPACT  
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the world!**



Welcome to the first remotely produced issue of Mission Update! I hope and pray that this issue finds you and your loved ones healthy and in good spirits.

As you probably have guessed, this issue was produced remotely because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Mission Center staff has been working from home since mid-March, ever since our Illinois governor issued a stay-at-home order. By the time you read this, we should be back in our offices and this likely will be our only remotely produced issue. But the way this year has gone, you never know.

Working from home, having groceries delivered and wearing a mask when in public are, of course, minor inconveniences compared with the suffering felt by millions during this worldwide crisis. As is always the case when disaster strikes, marginalized populations in developing countries have been hit the hardest. I have been receiving reports daily from Divine Word Missionaries detailing their efforts to serve their communities in the face of this pandemic.

In countries such as India, Brazil and the Philippines, our missionaries acted quickly, delivering food and medical supplies to impoverished people, many of whom have lost their jobs because of the pandemic. Probably the most wrenching account I received came from Father Toan Vu SVD in Guayaquil, Ecuador. We share his story with you in the special COVID-19 Emergency Update that runs from pages 10-18.

If you would like to help missionaries such as Fr. Toan and the people hit hardest by COVID-19, please contribute to our Emergency Program. ***We have set a goal to raise \$100,000 for emergency relief, and I am happy to report that thanks to loyal friends such as you, we have already surpassed half our goal.*** To donate, please visit our website at [svdmissions.org](http://svdmissions.org). The link to our Emergency Program should be the first thing you see.

Your continued health and well-being will be in my prayers and the prayers of our missionaries. As our country enters the next phase of responding to this crisis, please be safe and be healthy.

Yours in the Divine Word,

Bro. Daniel Holman SVD  
Mission Director

Contact me any time, my email address is:  
[director@svdmissions.org](mailto:director@svdmissions.org)

**Thank you  
for your  
prayers & support!**



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## Separated by Stigma

*Melanie Pies-Kalkum*

In the middle of this bushland is the home to about 70 people. The Gushiegu Witch Camp. Here are women who, for various reasons, have been accused of witchcraft and banished from their village communities. .

**Argentina•Ecuador•Hungary  
Mexico•Philippines•Japan  
India•Indonesia•Ghana**

# EMERGENCY 10 UPDATE



19

## Ready to Build

*Debra Vermeer*

"My hope personally is to fulfil the will of God," he says. "But for the mission started here, I would say my hope is to reach out to people in their local language, both in the written and spoken form."



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IN TOUCH**

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# separated by stigma

*above:  
Moseam and  
her son*

In the north of **Ghana**, belief in witchcraft is a reality. Committed to the welfare of women who are accused of witchcraft and expelled from their home villages, **Divine Word missionaries** are there to help.

*By Melanie Pies-Kalkum*





No tourist comes to this area. There are no roads, no electricity, hardly any drinking water. Only dust, mud huts and the scorching heat of the African sun. Here, in the north of Ghana, the roads are flooded knee-high during the rainy season. To reach some villages through streams and mud is a torture. With a vehicle it is almost impossible.

In the middle of this bushland is the home to about 70 people. The Gushiegu Witch Camp. Here are women who, for various reasons, have been accused of witchcraft and

banished from their village communities. One of them is the 35-year-old Moseam. For her and the others, the camp is a refugee center. The place that allows them to live on. Six such “witch camps” exist in northern Ghana where the accused find shelter.

In the Gushiegu camp Moseam has a new home. It has been four months since she was forced to leave her village. Her brother-in-law had blamed her for his sleepless nights and accused her of being a witch.





Persecution seized the village. “After a short time, the villagers said they could not live with me anymore because my witchcraft would only bring disaster to the village,” she says in a calm voice.

## Widespread belief

Belief in witches and witchcraft is widespread in Ghana and is part of everyday life. Nothing happens by chance in Ghanaian culture.

Everything has a cause. If someone is bitten by a snake, gets sick or suddenly dies, there must be a responsible person. Because of the patriarchal structures in Ghana, it is mostly women who are accused and expelled.

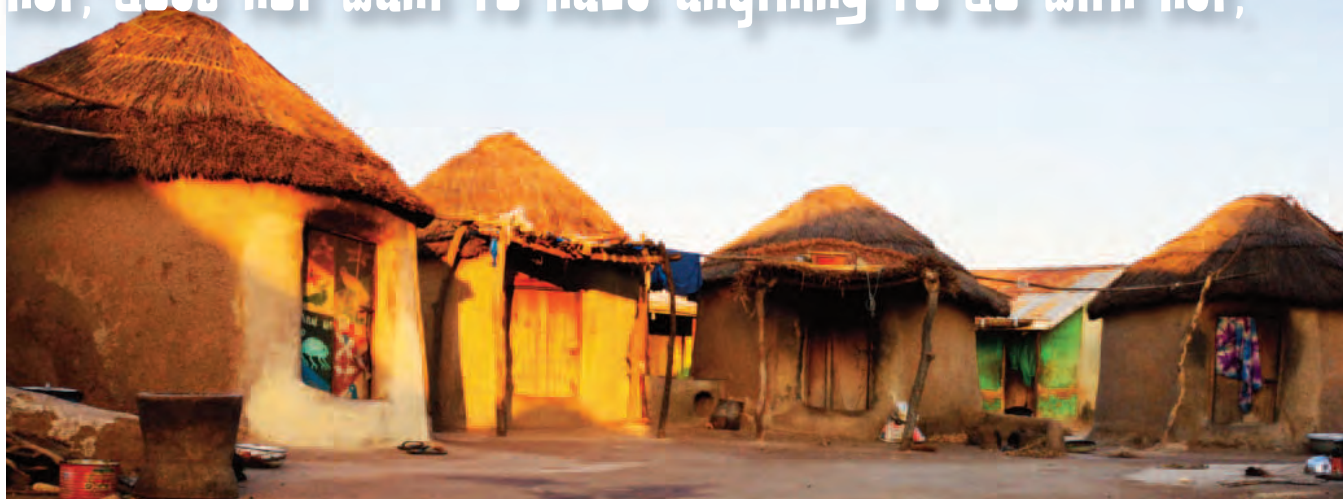
Father Phanuel Myers Agudu SVD explains that “women who are brave and progressive” are often expelled

because they threaten the patriarchy. “But often also older women, who [villagers] want to get rid of because they no longer have any benefit for society,” he adds.

For years Fr. Phanuel, together with his Divine Word Missionary confreres, has been helping the accused in the witch villages—building wells, supplying them with food and soap, and trying to strengthen their position in society.

“If a woman is publicly accused, she has no real chance anymore. Once accused, she is stigmatized. One avoids her, does not want to have anything to do with her,” Fr. Phanuel says. “In their home villages, they are then beaten and tortured until they admit to being a witch. Then they have to leave the village.” Otherwise they will be killed.

"if a woman is publicly accused, she has no real chance anymore. Once accused, she is stigmatized. One avoids her, does not want to have anything to do with her,"



## Goodbye to Family

Their only salvation is to flee. Moseam was lucky. Two of her five sons helped her and took her to Gushiegu camp. "If I had stayed, [the villagers] would have killed me," she says. Since then, she has not seen any of her children except for Bilimag. She was allowed to take the 3-year-old boy with her because nobody else would have looked after him.

The accused witches are separated from their families and cannot return to their villages unless they are seriously ill or dying. Sometimes they are allowed to return for funerals. Moseam shrugs and looks down. "It's tough. I do not know if I'll ever see my other kids again.

But that's the way it is in our culture. On the other hand, I cannot do anything and I have to accept that."

"Rarely would men be charged," says Fr. Phaniel. When that happens, the man moves away with his entire family. For them there is also a so-called "family" witch camp. Because the man is considered superior to the woman in the Ghanaian culture, he will not be separated from his family in case of an accusation.

At Gushiegu camp, Moseam feels comfortable. Here she has her own mud hut together with her son. As a child of an accused witch he too will not have it easy. But with the support of Divine Word Missionaries, he can go to





school in a few years and build up an independent life.

## "A great Community"

Mother and son are safe at the camp. Moseam sleeps quietly and is no longer worried about her life. A smile twitches on her face as she tells the other women, "We're a great community. We get up in the morning and say hello to each other. Often we dance together. That gives me strength!"

They all share the same fate, and that binds them. Fr. Phanuel has used his time with the women in the camp to write his anthropological master's thesis on witch accusations. "An impressive new social structure has formed," he says. "[They] take care of each other. The young and strong women go 2 kilometers early in the morning to the market in the city and search there for fallen grains, corn and millet together. The older women cook from this [to make] porridge."

Fr. Phanuel, and his Divine Word Missionary confreres often provide Gushiegu camp with donated food. This food, too, becomes part of the porridge.

Moseam is still "the new one" in the camp. Some others have been there for over 20 years. All their faces are marked by their fate. Moseam is blind in her right eye. She does not talk much. And yet a pride speaks from her when she does talk—the pride of a woman who has not given up and who looks forward with new life. ♦



# Witch camp Ghana an interview with Fr. Agudu



interview by  
Melanie Pies-Kalkum

**For those of us in other  
countries, the belief in witches  
in 2020 is inconceivable.**

**In Ghana it is everyday life...**

Yes, it is part of our culture.  
The Ghanaian culture believes in  
the supernatural world. But of  
course also in God.  
It's a mix of traditions  
and religions.



## **“Education is the key”**

Education alone can solve the problem of witch accusations, says Father Phanuel Myers Agudu SVD. He campaigns in the north of Ghana for the victims, who are expelled as “witches” from their villages.

## **How did the witch accusations come about?**

In Ghana there are regional differences. Although the belief in witches is widespread throughout the country, people in the south cannot simply accuse each other openly as witches. Although it is whispered behind the back, there is no public charge.

In the north of Ghana, a public charge is possible. For example, someone may say, “In my dream, this woman attacked me. She is a witch.” Or someone dies suddenly. Then one quickly searches for a cause, a culprit. Because nothing happens by chance in our African culture. If anything happens, there must be a cause, a cause, and it's being searched for. Often the reason is witchcraft.

The belief of the people here says that it is mostly women who practice it. Very rarely there are men who are accused.

## **What happens after the indictment?**

If a woman is prosecuted as a witch, she already is 70 percent guilty. She has the right to prove her innocence, but that is very difficult. Her family and children could protect her and say that she is innocent. But they are afraid. Because in Ghana they say that witches can disguise themselves in different ways and that one cannot look a person in the heart. So the only thing the women's children can do for her is to help her escape. If she is accused of witchcraft, she must go or she will be killed.

At Gushiegu camp, for example, one of the women there was hit with sticks until she admitted to being a witch. Escape was the only chance to save herself.



**You have just mentioned a few reasons for allegations. What others are there?**

Women are second-class people in the culture of Ghana. They are subordinate to the man. The man has the power and the strength. And in such patriarchal structures, women who show strength, who are successful and courageous and oppose the man, are often victims of witch accusations. The age of women also plays a role. Older women are often accused of witchcraft. They are considered useless to society because they can no longer have children, because they are too weak to work or because they are widowed.

**Are the women not afraid of being persecuted in the witch villages?**

No, luckily not. Because once a woman is banished, she does not care about people. They do not pursue her anymore and it is up to her where she goes. The main thing, she stays away from her home village. The women who flee to the witch camps know they are safe here. Here they do not need to fear their lives and can handle their trauma. Here they have to face new challenges. Because they are stigmatized, the people in the surrounding areas avoid them. So a witch camp is its own infrastructure, a refugee center.

**If a woman accused of being a witch is shunned, how do the women in the camps deal with each other?**

By suffering the same fate, camps have created new communities, new social structures, a “we.” There are weak and strong women. They all take care of each other. The stronger ones help on the farm, sow something and get a little money for that, for which they can buy food. Others collect fallen grains etc., from the market and bring them home. The others cook something out of it.

**Can the women ever return to their home villages?**

When they are ill, their community allows them to return to die at home. Because then they can no longer “do” anything. They are also allowed to come to the village for a funeral, but as strangers. To return forever would only be possible if the prosecutor withdraws the charge. And that happens almost never.



### Have you ever seen it happen?

Yes, once. For 13 years a woman had lived in Gushiegu camp. Her brother-in-law had accused her. And as he lay dying, his guilty conscience plagued him. He let the woman come to the village and told her that someone had influenced him to accuse her and that it was wrong. He apologized and withdrew the charge. With that she could return home.

### How do Divine Word Missionaries help the women?

Although these people have a roof over their heads in the camps, they still live in very poor conditions. That's why we collect food and clothing donations from the communities where we work and provide these women and children with medicine and toiletries. Justice and peace are very important to us Divine Word Missionaries, and these values are ignored by the witch accusations. That's why we stand up for these women who are accused and excluded from society, we want to empower them to regain their place in society.

### What is the government doing about this problem?

Nothing. There were tendencies of the government to solve the problem by closing the camps. But that's the wrong way. The camps are not ghettos, they are refugee centers. If you close them, the solidarity construct breaks down and the women are on their own again, they do not know where to go.

### So what is the solution?

The solution must be done at the root of the problem, at the accusations. **And education is the only key. That's why we're working all over the country to educate people, starting with the children.** We need to make everyone aware that it is wrong to accuse a woman of witchcraft. Just as education was the key to reducing women's genital mutilation, education will also counter witch accusations. I am convinced of that.

### Why is the commitment to these women so important to you personally?

To see these vulnerable women suffering is the worst thing for me. It hurts to see a woman who could be my grandmother and should be able to live her life in peace and quiet be forced to leave her home village. For me it is very important to strengthen these women. Even if they cannot go back home, they should at least be comfortable in here, to live peacefully, in dignity. ♦

Who would believe in  
**Witchcraft**  
in this day and age?  
Help us enlighten  
the world  
and end  
**Witchcraft**  
accusations.

Your gift can help Divine Word Missionaries, like Fr. Agudu in Ghana, bring change to these areas of the world where women are kept subordinate to men, thought of as second-class people and often outcast unjustly from their place in society.

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INEQUALITY**

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Can Change  
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inequality, prevent  
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importantly help  
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# EMERGENCY UPDATE

from around the world



**your gifts  
are gifts  
of hope**

Thanks to your generosity, our missionaries were able to respond immediately to the COVID-19 pandemic. As soon as the crisis struck they provided food, temporary shelter and sanitation materials to poverty-stricken areas worldwide.



## Argentina

Distributing food items to families in need.

COVID-19 has hit the entire world, causing sickness and death and economic hardship and pain. This pandemic has especially devastated low-income countries. For the marginalized living in poverty, jobs, education, food and housing were already difficult to come by. When disaster hits, medical care, clean water and shelter are often nowhere to be found. Divine Word Missionaries Emergency Program exists to bring care, sustenance and hope to those in need.

# Ecuador

## Ecuador parish on front line of COVID-19 battle

By Toan Vu SVD

April 13 was a normal day until I got a phone call in the afternoon from one of our parish catechists asking us to help buy an oxygen cylinder. I asked her who would need it. She responded, "It's for my husband; he got infected by the coronavirus two weeks ago."

Her husband, Roberto, was a musician for the choir at our Divine Word parish in Guayaquil, the second-largest city in Ecuador. Roberto also worked as a taxi driver. However, for almost a month he could not and would not go out to work due to the restricted quarantine.

Two weeks earlier, his mother got sick and died. It was a very difficult time to call the police or the hospital. The government did not allow family to bury their dead until medical personnel came to certify the cause of death. However, due to the lack of coordination and the number of deaths, health officials were overwhelmed. Families had to wait several days to a week to get a death certificate. As a result, Roberto had to get in line day after day at the civil registry to get the permission to bury his mother. This is where he contracted the coronavirus.

Once infected, Roberto was told to go home and self-quarantine. Until his death, no medical personnel came to visit, no medication was offered. He died from lack of oxygen due to the respiratory disease COVID-19.

### DEADLY TOLL

This is one among thousands of cases in Guayaquil, hardest hit by the coronavirus of all Latin American cities. According to the official briefing at the time I am writing this (April 21), Ecuador has 10,398 infected cases and 505 confirmed

coronavirus-related deaths. However, the death toll is likely much higher. From the start of quarantine on March 17 to April 15, more than 10,000 deaths were registered in Guayaquil alone. They were caused by a lack of medical attention, insufficient medications, heart attacks, etc.

In some cases, the bodies were left in private homes for days until they started to rot and smell. Families and neighbors took the bodies to the street because the smell was unbearable. That is one of the reasons the infection has spread in this city.

The coronavirus outbreak continues to have profound effects on Ecuador, especially among the poor and the needy. Everything is shuttered. Food supplies are scarce and overpriced.

### A PARISH HELPS

Saintly Brother Miguel Parish is located in Guasmo Sur among the poorest of the poor neighborhoods in Guayaquil. Before the quarantine, most people in our parish worked day-to-day just to survive. One month without work is unimaginable. They cry out for help, but the situation is severe everywhere in the country.

At our parish we try to help by handing out some very basic food supplies such as rice, cooking oil, canned tuna and vegetables as well as toilet paper. We also have been streaming the daily Eucharist live.

We all pray this nightmare will pass soon so we once again will be able to go back to our normal life. However, we know that our lives will never be the same. One thing for sure is our faith will be stronger. After all this is over we will thank God for the strength he gave us to overcome this ordeal. ♦





# CUARENTENA COVID-19



# CUARENTENA COVID-19



## Thinking of Ecuador's poor during the pandemic

*By Sister Anjela Bhabor SSPS*

The challenge we face today has been both unexpected and devastating. The rapidly spreading coronavirus is changing how we live and work day to day. I'd like to share how we at the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters convent in Ecuador are facing up to this challenge and what we are doing to keep safe and help others during this extraordinary crisis.

Like most, we are in a lockdown situation and remain at home in our convent. While these times and the future may seem very uncertain for us, it is even more uncertain for the poorest of the poor entrusted to our care.

Most of them have lost either their source of earning or the charity that helps them. Thousands are willing to work but sadly no work will be found for the next few months. In spite of the lockdown, many people who are infected with the coronavirus are forced out on the street in search of food. Inevitably, they will spread the virus, and as the virus spreads more jobs are lost. It is a vicious circle.

Those who have lost their jobs can no longer afford to pay their rent or utility bills. Children are unable to complete the school year because classes are now online, and parents have no money to pay the internet bill. The poorest of the poor can no longer afford a shelter over their head.

Walking the streets barefoot and hungry, people have no food to feed their children and no money to buy it. There is no government assistance to help these families. Migrants are walking back home, a desperate journey they are not certain they will complete. Minimum-wage earners such as sweepers, cobblers and food vendors have lost the jobs that paid for their basic daily needs.

The abandoned and the marginalized who often relied on charity for their food and shelter are now living on the streets, beneath underpasses and in marketplaces.

We thank God, grateful as we sit in our homes taking all precautions to keep the virus away. But we must keep in mind those who remain in the same clothes for days without a bath. We must remember those who walk the streets in the heat and rain in search of something to feed their children. We must pray for those who fear they will die of hunger before they die of the virus.

This is our call to see to the needs of this unprecedented time and to help in ways that will ease the world through this misery. A simple act of kindness might give a glimmer of hope to someone in need, showing them that they are not alone. Kindness becomes an expression of compassion to someone so much in need. A small act of charity could restore a sense of hope and maybe the lost smile on someone's face!

The Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters are supporting many initiatives and funds to help the poor. Our biggest challenge as this pandemic continues is to provide a safe environment for our students. When school resumes, hand sanitizer and soap will be made available to our students as they enter and leave the school each day. This will assure parents of their children's safety. This project is just one tiny step in fighting the coronavirus in Ecuador.

**Bring back the lost smile!  
Be home! Be healthy! Be safe!  
God bless you! ♦**





## Hungary



Distribution of food items for the Romani community.

## Mexico



While many migrants centers are closed due to the pandemic, Divine Word Missionary Migrant Welcoming Center continues caring for migrants.

## Philippines





# EMERGENCY UPDATE

Japan

## Pandemic will Force Missionaries to Change Many Practices

*By Bob Riemer SVD*



**Deeply impressed on my mind is the image of Pope Francis celebrating Mass alone in the huge St. Peter's Basilica. It is a symbolic image of one of the consequences of COVID-19 in the world in 2020.**



The Pope, Jesus' Vicar on earth, prayed alone for his worldwide flock. For me it caused a flashback to the image of Jesus alone on the cross offering to the Heavenly Father his sacrifice to redeem the world. Lockdown ordered by the Italian government and prudence to protect the welfare of his flock motivated Pope Francis to conduct his lone liturgy. He offered to the Heavenly Father the sacrifice of the Mass to free the world from the evil of the pandemic.

The Holy Father was as alone as Jesus nailed to the cross and raised between heaven and earth. At that time Jesus carried in his Heart the whole world. So too Pope Francis carried in his heart and in his prayers the whole world suffering from the ravages of COVID-19.

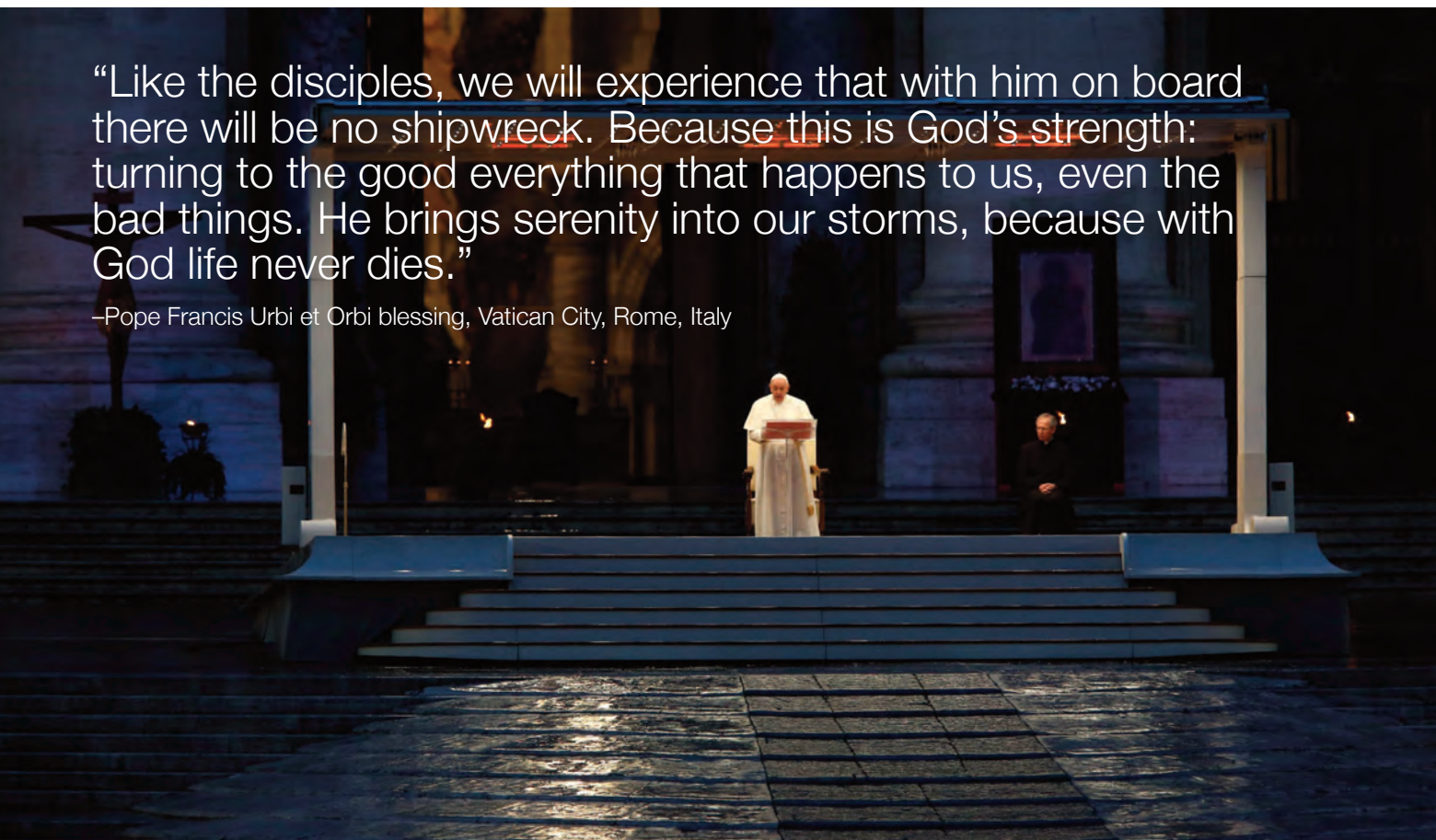
The mystery of the cross was not comprehended by the onlookers, but it effected the salvation of the whole world. So perhaps also Pope Francis' offering of the Mass in the huge, empty basilica leaves one in a state of shock rather than edification. Yet, his lone liturgy reaffirmed the fact that the mystery of the cross and the Mass will truly have a salvific effect for the world suffering from coronavirus.

I view the Holy Father's symbolic act from the viewpoint of a Divine Word Missionary stationed in Japan. For more than 100 years, Divine Word Missionary priests and Brothers in Japan have focused their energy and zeal on parish mission churches and Catholic schools.

The missionary work grew, developed and changed significantly since the first four missionaries arrived in the Akita Prefecture in 1907. As the number of Divine Word Missionaries increased, the parish ministry expanded from the sparsely populated prefecture in the north to the densely populated area of central Japan.

“Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God’s strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.”

—Pope Francis Urbi et Orbi blessing, Vatican City, Rome, Italy



There the missionaries began Nanzan High School for young men. After World War II, Nanzan expanded into university education for men and women, which became a major endeavor for our missionary work. Now it is not unrealistic to believe that in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, there will be significant changes in missionary activities in parishes and schools.

#### CHANGES TO MINISTRY

In the fight against the onslaught of COVID-19, Christian communities ceased to assemble in mission churches, and the Mass was live-streamed into the homes of Christians. Other liturgical functions—funerals, weddings, Bible classes, etc.—were cancelled or reduced to minimum attendance.

When freedom of movement resumes, men, women and children will joyfully return to the social interaction at liturgical services in the churches. Yet the services will be less like the routine Masses and other activities

held before. Rather, the sacred solemnity of the celebration of Jesus with the Apostles at the Last Supper will take pride of place. The celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass and other services will stress more as a personal encounter with Jesus rather than formal assemblies of people in chapels, churches and cathedrals.

In the pandemic atmosphere even medium-sized gatherings in churches have been avoided. Pastors and their assistants must visit the members of their flock, either directly or via computer messaging, in order to bless the sick, to encourage parents, to help the youth, and to assist the poor. Such practices may be inconvenient, but they are beneficial and appreciated. Indeed, when our missionaries in Japan began their work a hundred years ago, personal visits to homes and individuals were dominant. That practice probably will return, and at the same time live-streaming, iPhones, and computer-aided parish Bible classes will come into vogue.

Seminarians in formation at Nanzan University, it seems, are being indirectly trained to bring wide-ranging technology into their mission work in the future. Their classes at the university are conducted online during the pandemic. Thus they observe the advantages and drawbacks of teaching with PowerPoint programs and Zoom interaction. They will modify the use of computers and other advanced technology to meet their needs in parish ministry as well as in schools.

#### CHANGES TO EDUCATION

Conditions in our apostolate of education at Nanzan University will change too.







St. Thomas Aquinas might turn over in his grave when he sees his teaching computerized in theology and philosophy classes. Also, missionaries who are engaged in teaching at universities will have to find the medium between online and classroom teaching. The latter permits the students to interact with teachers and fellow students. This social interaction is necessary for the total growth of the students. But universities and their leaders will have to develop the correct formula for online teaching as well as for social interaction in the classroom.

Another effect on university education is financial. During the COVID-19 pandemic many universities in Japan, Catholic ones included, have distributed a substantial monetary subsidy to students to help them survive the pandemic. (Universities vary in the subsidies that they give, between \$300 and \$1,000.) The pandemic has caused many household heads to lose their employment and their ability to support children studying at the university. Also, it has limited the number of part-time jobs that students have traditionally taken to supplement their incomes. When the COVID-19 pandemic ends, universities will have to reevaluate the fees that they collect from the students.

Another aspect of the apostolate of education is secondary education. Divine Word Missionaries in Japan operate five junior-senior high schools, all with six-year courses. Each of the five schools has approximately 1,200 students. Online courses for the senior high school are possible, but for the junior high students

it seems to be impractical on a regular basis. During the pandemic, the schools have had prolonged vacation periods. When these schools return to a normal schedule, the impact of the coronavirus will have to be evaluated.

#### MISSIONARIES MUST ADJUST

The apostolate of education also includes primary education and kindergartens. Divine Word Missionaries oversee two primary schools and about 10 kindergartens attached to mission parishes. The effect of the pandemic on these schools is not clear. The initiative and ingenuity of missionaries in charge of the parish facilities have to be tapped in order to live in a new era.

As missionaries adjust to life during the pandemic, the missionary work of St. Paul may be recalled. On this first missionary journey he taught in cities and villages in Asia. However on his second trip with his companions Silas and Timothy, he was guided by the Holy Spirit to move away from Asia to Europe (Acts 16:6-10).

The first city where they preached the Good News was Philippi in the province of Macedonia. The main work of spreading the Gospel remained, but the circumstances were different. Philippi was distant from Jerusalem, the European culture was different from the Asian culture, and the missionaries had to adapt to a foreign environment. Likewise, after the ravages of COVID-19 missionaries in Japan and elsewhere must make changes and adaptations in their work of teaching the message of Jesus. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the way. ♦



## A Prayer to Mother Mary

**MOTHER MARY, we your children are now sorely afflicted by the scourge of Coronavirus. Kindly protect us from this disease, bring to quick recovery those who have been afflicted by it, and usher into eternal life those who have succumbed to it.**

**Also MOTHER MARY, we ask you to protect and encourage the doctors and nurses and other care givers who spend themselves in tending to those afflicted by coronavirus. Win for them the grace to see your beloved Son in the face of each patient, the prudence to handle with loving care each of God's sick children, and the kindness of the Good Samaritan to nurse back to health each suffering victim.**

**Finally, MOTHER MARY, we invoke you as the Seat of Wisdom. Give insight and perseverance and knowledge to doctors and researchers in their pursuit to find adequate medicines and vaccinations to cope with this disease.**

**Through your loving intercession, MOTHER MARY, may our worldwide human family receive the strength and courage to endure and overcome this silent evil that is causing so much suffering and pain and death.**

# Amen.

## India



Provisions of rice, daal, oil, salt, turmeric powder, chilli-powder, spices, and soap were distributed to over 1,000 families from 10 villages.



Father Ivan D'Silva SVD reported: Pope Francis remind us, "I ask our Priests to be on 'the front line,' and must be available when their people are looking for a source of comfort and courage as the COVID -19 pandemic continues." The Ambassa parish reached 63 poor families in the immediate area, and visited seven villages with relief materials. "Our help was like a drop in the ocean to ease the pain of deprivation."

## Indonesia



Divine Word Missionaries COVID-19 Emergency team in Ruteng made a disinfectant and has sprayed more than 500 houses in the area. They also distributed more than more than 260 gallons of spray disinfectant to people who can spray their own house. The team has made and distributed 30 gallons of hand sanitizer to 1,600 people.

## Ghana





# EMERGENCY UPDATE

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## Ready to Build

After 10 years as a missionary in Kenya, Father Mariusz Kubista SVD has arrived in Myanmar, saying he is keen to get to know the people and help establish the new mission in this Southeast Asian nation.

**Polish missionary arrives in Myanmar keen to reach out to the people**

*By Debra Vermeer*

“My hope personally is to fulfil the will of God,” he says. “But for the mission started here, I would say my hope is to reach out to people in their local language, both in the written and spoken form.”

Fr. Mariusz was born in 1972 in Tychy, Poland, but grew up in Katowice. After graduating from school, he studied to become a transport engineer and then worked for a computer company.

His life took a turn in 2000 when he responded to a vocational call to join Divine Word Missionaries in Poland. He took his final vows on September 29, 2007, and the following April he was awarded a master’s degree in theology and was ordained a priest on May 10, 2008.

His first assignment was to the Kenya-Tanzania Province, but from September 2008 to March 2009, he studied English in the Philippines. He then went to Morogoro, Tanzania, to undertake a course in the Kiswahili language. He subsequently worked in parishes in both Kenya and Tanzania.

“After spending almost 10 years in the Ken-Tan Province, I realized that the situation of the Church in that part of Africa is well established, with plenty of local vocations, good structures in place, so I started to think about something else, where I could realize my missionary vocation, a place where the Church is in the process of building, where I can use my experience,” he says.

“It happened that in our Arnoldus Nota [the Divine Word Missionaries international newsletter], I found an article about Myanmar, about the invitation from Cardinal Charles Bo for the Australia Province to establish a mission there, and about our positive response.”



**“In a country which is considered as one of the poorest in the world, to see such openness is not only a joy, but it gives us a lot of motivation and strength to get through the difficulties and to continue the job we have started.”**



Fr. Mariusz says he was immediately interested, and he wrote to the Australian Provincial, Father Henry Adler SVD, asking for a transfer to Myanmar.

He arrived in Myanmar, together with Fr. Tuyen Nguyen SVD, in May 2019 and their first priority was to begin learning the language and to continue working on the mission house, named the Divine Word Center, in Hmawbi.

“We were given a house by the bishop to further our ministry here, but the house needed a lot of renovation.”

The Divine Word Center was dedicated and blessed in December with Cardinal Bo and Fr. Adler in attendance, along with Divine Word Missionaries Superior General Father Paul Budi Kleden SVD.

Fr. Mariusz says he is learning the Burmese language at the University of Yangon and also working on setting up a website for the new mission.

“And I’m trying to be more and more involved in the parish activities, like English Masses, Bible sharing and so on, as well as participating in diocesan events to get to know the local priests and their roles and how the Church functions here.”

He says that while there are plenty of challenges in setting up a new mission in a different country, his years in Kenya prepared him well to get through such challenges.

“It gave me a lot of experience in how to go through the things we don’t understand or that look strange to us,” he says.

“One of the biggest challenges is communication. Very few people speak English and the alphabet here is unique and sounds are unique, so reading, writing, speaking and listening is really a challenge.”

Despite the challenges, Fr. Mariusz already is experiencing joy in his new assignment. “I think for us who work between and with the people, the biggest joy is to see people being open to us, welcoming us; people who are ready to listen, to cooperate, who want to change and live better,” he says.

“In a country which is considered as one of the poorest in the world, to see such openness is not only a joy, but it gives us a lot of motivation and strength to get through the difficulties and to continue the job we have started.” ♦

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