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“Our name is our mission”

Every six years the leadership of Divine Word Missionaries meets in our headquarters outside of Rome for a General Chapter. This is an opportunity to assess our progress as a missionary order, to choose the leaders of our society and to establish goals for the next six years.

Our 18th General Assembly took place this summer. Aside from electing Fr. Paul Budi Kleden as our new Superior General, the 132 participants set priorities for the coming years. One of them is to seek a deeper understanding of and commitment to our namesake, the Divine Word.

“Our name is our mission” is the motto that emerged from the assembly. Yet as Shakespeare once asked, “What’s in a name?” The challenge with contemplating our name is that the Divine Word has several meanings.

The most obvious meaning is the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ—the Word made flesh from the opening of John’s Gospel. The second person of the Holy Trinity is also the Eternal Word, again from John’s Gospel, who existed “in the beginning” before entering human history as Jesus.

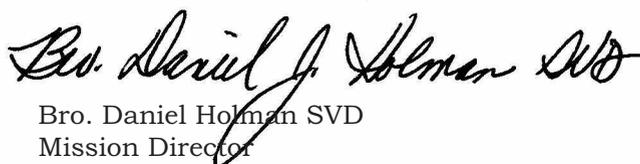
There’s more. The Word of God is the Holy Scripture, and the Word of God in Creation is how he speaks to us through the world. Finally, there is the Word that was announced, heard and witnessed by the community of the disciples.

In his apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI poetically referred to these meanings as “a symphony of the Word.” Divine Word Missionaries strive to conduct this symphony into our works serving the poor throughout the world. The Documents of our 18th General Assembly state it this way:

“[We] are impelled to cultivate an intimate dialogue with the Word in its multiple aspects, so that the beauty of this ‘symphony of the Word’ in its fullness resonates in the world of today and in our missionary communities.”

That’s a lot of deep thought, but our love of the Word leads to concrete actions. In this issue you will find those actions carried out in Ghana, Brazil, Papua New Guinea and India. ***Our name is our mission.***

Yours in the Divine Word,


Bro. Daniel Holman SVD
Mission Director

Contact me any time, my email address is:
director@svdmissions.org

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



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Divine Word Missionaries • Our name is our mission

Strangers are friends you have yet to meet.





Village Immersion Program

for seminarians in Ghana

by *Father Phaniel Agudu SVD*

Seminarians who come to study at the St. Joseph Freinademetz House of Philosophy in northern Ghana find themselves strangers in their new neighborhood.

The St. Freinademetz Formation House is located in Malshegu, a Muslim-dominated community in Tamale in the Northern Region of Ghana. The people of this area are Dagombas and their land is called the Dagbon traditional area, with Dagbanli as their language. Although the formation house and the seminary are located here, almost all our vocations come from outside this area. Most of our Ghanaian seminarians are from the southern part of the country. The few from the north are not from the Dagbon traditional area.

This means that all our seminarians are alien to the Dagbon culture and language, and so we wanted to institute a program to help the seminarians insert themselves into the worldview and culture of the area. We called this endeavor the Village Immersion Program, or VIP for short.

The VIP is a language and cultural learning formation program for our seminarians. It teaches them to cultivate the basic skills and techniques needed to learn the language and culture of our Dagbon neighbors. The VIP helps the seminarians and the formators learn to enter into a fruitful dialogue with other cultures and religions. The program is inspired by the missionary service at the heart of our order as spelled out in our Constitutions, which state, “To carry out our mission in a worthy and effective manner, we make every effort to master the language of the people and become familiar with their history and culture” (Cons. 120.1).

Because mission is the goal of formation, we establish programs such as the VIP to instill the missionary spirit in our seminarians right from the beginning of their studies. The Village Immersion Program helps seminarians appreciate the culture of their neighbors here in Ghana and prepares them to live among new cultures in the future, depending on where they are assigned. Again, this adheres to our Constitutions: “Following the principles of the gospel we respect the customs and habits of the people among whom we work, avoiding every derogatory criticism and comparison” (Cons. 120.2).



How the VIP works

The Village Immersion Program starts with preparation at the formation house. The seminarians learn the Dagbanli language in a mandatory two-year course as part of their academic curriculum. The Sunday apostolate program they follow during the academic year is also part of the preparation.

After the academic year closes and the seminary goes on vacation, a three-day intensive orientation program begins. An expert in the local culture and language is invited to lecture on techniques for entering into the Dagbon life and speaking Dagbanli.

From the surrounding villages we recruit people to serve as helpers and to host the seminarians in their homes for one month. These helpers act as teachers and guides once the seminarians are in the village. As part of the workshop session during the orientation, the helpers talk with the formation staff and meet the seminarians they will be hosting in their homes. The helpers share their experiences of hosting and teaching previous seminarians in the VIP and spell out their expectations for the coming group. During these three days the seminarians and helpers get to know one another, and friendships are built. This can defuse a lot of fear and anxiety in the seminarians before they leave for the village.



Village protocol

Immediately after the preparatory workshop, the seminarians go to the villages to start the program. Their helpers are there to welcome and assist them in adjusting to their new environment. After a day or two, the seminarians are sent to the village chief to introduce themselves and to inform the chief about their mission. The chief welcomes the seminarians and assures them that he supports the program and wishes for its success. Having been welcomed into the village by the chief, the seminarians now become members of the community. As part of the welcome ritual, the village chief often gives the guest a Dagbon name to signify he is now one of them. The community will call the seminarian by this name, which assists in the integration process.

In the villages, the seminarians and their helpers plan their daily schedules with an eye toward the teaching and learning process. The process involves theory and practice. What the seminarians learn from the helpers as theory, they go out daily to put into practice as “doing.” Much emphasis is placed on interaction with the people of the community. To foster this interaction, the seminarians visit villagers in their homes. These visits build a bond with the community and help the seminarians understand the Dagbon culture. The visits also give the seminarians an opportunity to



The language of friendship is not words but meanings

practice speaking Dagbanli. During their time in the VIP the seminarians will participate in community cultural activities such as infant naming ceremonies, marriages, festivals and funerals.

As a supervisor of the VIP, I make weekly visits to the houses where the seminarians are staying, provide them with their food allowance and address any challenges that may occur. At the end of the program, the seminarians return to the formation house and give reports of their experience. We use these reports to prepare the next program for the following year.



The Sunday Apostolate

At the beginning of a new academic year, we reassign the immediate past VIP “graduates” to Sunday apostolate in the villages where they had their training. This program has a twofold purpose: to serve as a follow-up program for the most recent VIP graduates and to serve as a preparation for the seminarians who will participate in the next VIP session at the end of the academic year. For the graduates, it offers the opportunity to practice and perfect their language skills and deepen their relationships with the people. The bonds of friendship built during their one-month stay in the villages are strengthened by regular Sunday visits for the whole of the academic year.





Benefits of the VIP

This language and cultural learning program benefits our formation house and the life of our seminarians in many ways. The VIP offers the seminarians the skills to learn a new language and to enter a new culture. Through this program the seminarians learn to appreciate and better understand the culture and worldview of their new neighbors, the Dagomba people. This program also opens the door to respect the cultures and languages of all people around the world.

The VIP helps our students appreciate interreligious dialogue. The Malshegu community is mostly Muslim, and a cordial relationship exists between the Muslims and the Christian minority. This openness teaches our seminarians and the locals that in spite of cultural and religious differences, we can live and work as one people. This is proved time and again by our Muslim helpers who openheartedly accept our students into their lives and homes.

With the seminarians living and working within the local community, the program naturally builds strong bonds of friendship. By extension, the St. Freinademetz Formation House also makes friends. To celebrate these friendships, one Sunday during the second semester we invite all the helpers and their wives for a meal in the formation house. In turn, the helpers often ask staff and seminarians to join their family special occasions.

The Village Immersion Program gives our seminarians a first-hand experience of what mission is and what to expect when they become missionaries. It is here, at the beginning of formation, where future missionaries acquire their needed skills. ♦

History of the St. Freinademetz Formation House, Tamale

The St. Joseph Freinademetz House of Philosophy, also known simply as the St. Freinademetz Formation House, was established in 1983 as a center of formation and training for Divine Word Missionaries in the Ghana Province.

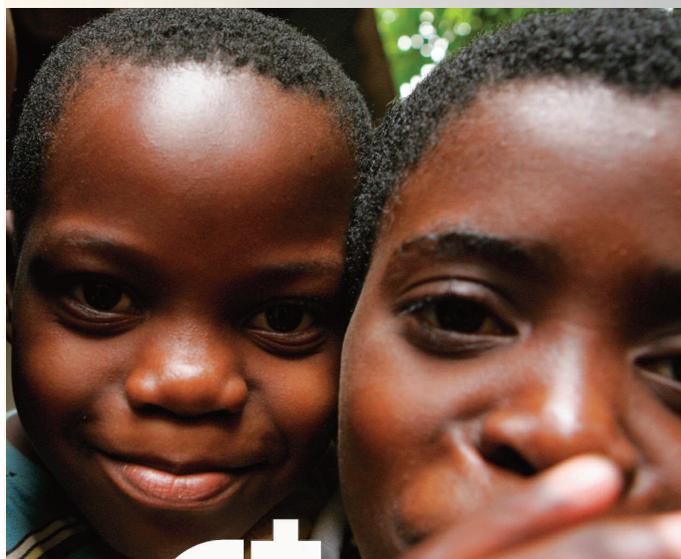
Located in Tamale, the formation house is the place where young Ghanaian men who feel called to the priestly and religious vocation begin their formation. Here they discern their vocation as missionaries.

Before this house was established, our seminarians studied alongside diocesan and Missionaries of Africa seminarians at St. Victor's Major Seminary main campus near Tamale. When the St. Freinademetz House was established in 1983, our seminarians and their formators moved in and began the formation program unique to our society as set forth in our Constitutions.

The move from St. Victor's did not mean Divine Word seminarians no longer had anything to do with this seminary. It still hosted the academic formation of our philosophy seminarians until the year 2000, when St. Augustine's Millennium Major Seminary was established as a philosophicum. From 2000 onward, our seminarians studying philosophy have had their academic formation at St. Augustine's, which is about 11 miles from the St. Freinademetz Formation House.

Divine Word Missionaries in the Africa and Madagascar Zone inaugurated a common formation program for our theology seminarians in 1995. This led to the establishment of the Common Formation Centre in Tamale. This also led to the separation of the seminarians studying theology from those studying philosophy. The theologians moved to the Common Formation Centre while the philosophers remained in the St. Freinademetz Formation House, making it solely a house of philosophy.

The house currently has three formators journeying with 34 seminarians in their various stages of philosophical formation. The St. Freinademetz House offers the seminarians an integral formation for mission and evangelization according to the six pillars of religious formation: human, spiritual, pastoral, intellectual, community living and the vowed life. The house seeks to create an environment that fosters prayer and discernment. It promotes a holistic development of the seminarians so that they can generously respond to the call of God.



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Editor's note: On Aug. 27, 2018, our mission in Venezuela ended—temporarily, we hope.

The mission in Venezuela was limited to a single parish, San Isidro, in the city of Maracaibo. The Venezuela mission fell under the Colombia Province, and as the political crisis in Venezuela deepened, the Provincial, Father Emigdio Cuesta Pino SVD, traveled to Maracaibo in August to consult with the confreres there. He determined that, despite the dedication of our missionaries and the trust he earned in their community, the situation under the authoritarian regime of Nicolás Maduro had become too dangerous for missionaries from other countries. Administration of San Isidro was transferred to the Archdiocese of Maracaibo until further notice.

In the following report, Father John Jaime SVD, the pastor of San Isidro, discusses the need for the Venezuela mission and his hope for a swift return.

Venezuela: A Country of Dreams, Hopes and Challenges

By Father John Jaime SVD

To go as a missionary to Venezuela is to be ready and willing to do everything: to witness situations of extreme poverty, to experience hunger, to be outraged by injustice, to be ready for any kind of insecurity ... but especially to be a sign of God's love and mercy, which we have seen reflected in the people of this country who are suffering but who know how to keep hope.

Divine Word Missionaries had a presence in Maracaibo, a large port city in northwest Venezuela, for 10 years. In that time we stood with the people and encouraged them in faith and hope. We helped those in need with life's necessities and reminded everyone that no regime could end human dignity. We lived in among the poor, sharing their day-to-day joys and sorrows, celebrating the sacraments and participating in local festivities—and sometimes just enjoying an *arepa* (corn pancake) or cup of coffee with them.

What a sadness for the people—our mission friends and neighbors—and what a sadness for us to have to abandon this mission, although temporarily, due to a dispute over a visa and identification card. I know Jesus would ask what is more important, the law or the human being? Well, in this instance the law dictated we had to leave the country. We hope it will be only for the moment, until this corrupt regime loses power and Venezuela is returned to its people.

Without a doubt, this mission has been very important for the people of Maracaibo and for the local Church. Even though we are absent for the moment, the people we served know there are missionaries who are willing to take risks in order to dedicate their lives to those in need ... the people of Maracaibo will keep hope alive. ♦





**Progress Report:
Your Gifts at Work
Karunalaya Leprosy
Care Center
Puri, Odisha, India.**

By Father Joseph Philip SVD



Located in Puri in the Indian state of Odisha, the Karunalaya Leprosy Care Centre was founded in 1975 by the late Father Marian Zelazek SVD to provide clean housing, food, education, healthcare and social integration to people who to this day are considered “untouchables.” Now providing housing to 1,000 people (including the children of those with leprosy) the center continues to carry out Fr. Marian’s vision.

Today, Karunalaya serves not only the people of Puri district, but also a number of nearby districts and even the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh. As the Indian government has closed many of its leprosy centers, ours remains the only one in the vicinity dedicated to and specializing in the care of leprosy patients.

The centerpiece of our health care mission at Karunalaya is the 22-bed, short-stay hospital where leprosy patients can be admitted for treatment, including therapy for the ulcerations often caused by the disease. Because many of our patients are not accepted at other hospitals, they can also find care for general illnesses here.

To save money we buy most of our general medicines from a medical wholesale outlet in Bhubaneswar. For immediate needs, we get medications from the local pharmacy. Besides medicines for leprosy, we also supply the more common medicines: antibiotics, cough syrup, vitamin tablets and painkillers. We also stock baby food for infants in our care.

No hospital is complete without a laboratory. Here, pathology work and tests to detect disease are constantly in demand. Our bandaging and dressing room is always busy as well. Thanks to YOUR GIFTS, both rooms are now stocked with new equipment including scissors, trays, stethoscope and a blood pressure machine.

We are lucky to have Dr. S.B. Mahapatra, a specialized leprologist, with his ability to quickly diagnose leprosy cases. He is a great asset to our center. Dr. Mahapatra leads care clinics twice a week to assist those living with leprosy.



The town dentist joins our staff once a month to host a clinic. Unfortunately, our dental chair, which is more than 25 years old, needs some serious repairs. We hope to have it fixed this year. Also on staff is a shoemaker who is trained to make the special orthopedic shoes with hard rubber soles that suit leprosy patients who suffer from neuropathy.

We have a healthcare worker dedicated to dressing leprosy patients' wounds. We regularly treat 89 patients with ulceration wounds. Some of them have had ulcerations that have not healed for 20 years. Fortunately, we have recently acquired a new medicine from Germany called Octenisept that is helping to heal these old wounds. We also have two paramedics who have been with the Leprosy Care Centre for many years. In addition to their emergency training they can also do laboratory work and basic dental care. They maintain patient records, check the medicine stock and handle a multitude of necessary paperwork.

As you can see everyone at the Leprosy Care Centre wears many hats! The first priority of our two nurses is tending to the patients, but they also feed them and keep the hospital clean. Our Mercy Kitchen provides three meals a day for the hospital as well as the handicapped and the elderly. A staff member delivers food to those patients too sick to go to the kitchen themselves. The same staffer also washes the many hospital bed linens. This year we got a washing machine, and she was thrilled! We have an "all-rounder" on staff who brings the patients to and from the hospital and tends to the trees and plants on the grounds. Finally, there is the night watchman keeping everyone safe.





Those who work at our Leprosy Care Centre have a practical understanding of living with leprosy. Out of our staff of eight, six have been treated for leprosy. Some have minor disabilities because of the disease.

Around the world there are fewer cases of leprosy, but in Odisha the rate is increasing. In 2011, no new cases were reported in India, and leprosy was declared eradicated. Then new cases began to emerge in 2013, and the disease continues to grow. Last year we treated seven new cases of leprosy. Out of the seven, three were completely cured, but two remain in our center for treatment. We continue our work believing medicine and loving care will decrease the number of cases again in the coming years.

While our hospital is the center of our mission, Fr. Marian's vision lives on in many ways. To teach self-reliance, the center has organized a cooperative that enables some of our long-term patient-residents to earn a living. With local raw materials of coconut fiber and jute fiber, weavers make rope and doormats. Currently they are using a manual loom, but our goal is to add mechanical looms. In this small industry we employ 22 people, and we hope to employ a few more when we mechanize the looms.

Another employment opportunity for long-term patient-residents is a small farm named Garden of Hope. Here we cultivate vegetables and coconuts for our kitchen. Besides the garden, our small agricultural operation includes two large fishponds that keep the kitchen stocked with fish and a dairy with seven cows that provides milk for the patients and children.

Our Mercy Kitchen serves three meals a day to all leprosy patients unable to work or earn their daily living by begging (which is their sole source

of income). These are the patients in serious need of help. They are the leprosy patients with physical disabilities or unhealed wounds needing regular medical attention. Many elderly from the "untouchable colony" also take their meals at the Mercy Kitchen. They live alone without any family support. Twice a year, on Christmas and during the Hindu festival, we distribute clothing to the elderly, but sadly many of their needs go beyond material things. In hope of providing one last dignity, at the end of their life we are there to take care of their final expenses.

In recent years we have undertaken several projects to improve the lives of our patients and residents:

- This year we received funding for a 3-kilovolt solar power system for the hospital. Patients now have 24-hour power without fear of an outage.
- Over the last three years we began a housing renovation project, with a goal of 50 houses. To date 20 houses are completed. The remaining houses are dilapidated and require total reconstruction.
- We have completed a school building where 680 children study. Of that number, 198 children come from a leprosy background. More bathroom facilities are now needed, and a playground is on our wish list too.

Forty-three years ago, Fr. Marian founded Karunalya Leprosy Care Centre and began a mission of solidarity with the most outcast and vulnerable people of India. THANKS TO YOUR GENROSITY we proudly continue to carry on *and grow* his mission, fighting the battle against this dreaded disease and the stigma it carries. ♦

*Cast all your anxieties
on him,
because he cares for you.*

Answering the Call of Our Lord to Care for the Sick

By Eric Ankamah SVD

The sick and the elderly have a special place in my ministry as a priest in Papua New Guinea. They have won my heart because of their deep sense of faith. Through compassion, mercy and caring, in their presence I am given the opportunity to experience the living presence of God.

Psalm 106:44

God saw their misery and heard their cry.

Every two weeks, on Wednesday and Thursday, I visit the homes of the sick and the elderly to bring them the Body of Christ. I hold this ministry dear to my heart for two reasons. First and foremost, it delights my spirit that I am literally answering the call of our Lord to care for the sick: "I was sick and you visited me" (Matt 25:36b). Secondly, my heart is filled with the gift of compassion. Comforting the frail and dying, sharing in their lives in this intimate way of bringing the sacrament, is a reminder that we are all called by God to be servants to those in need. I am also reminded of the frailty of our own lives.



My love for this ministry began at a very young age when I became a member of the Legion of Mary. As a seminarian I often accompanied priests on their visits to the sick, called “communion rounds.” The devotion of the physically infirmed and their openness to receive the Lord have always stirred up something deep inside me. In my own faith journey the sick have become my special friends. Visiting them is one of the greatest privileges and blessings of my pastoral ministry. I call on the Lord in the name of those in need, to bring them his caring words and to walk alongside them with compassion and empathy.

The lack of health facilities here in the countryside of Papua New Guinea means that gaining medical assistance can be quite a challenge. When I make my visits I hear heartbreaking stories. I often find the elderly home alone and neglected. I hear of children who have departed the countryside for a better life in the city, leaving their parents to

fend for themselves. I hear how medication is not provided. Others tell me they have no way to get to the clinic. Many complain that the food they are allotted is very poor—if it arrives at all.

In our parish, the Legion of Mary takes an active role in the apostolate for the sick. Most often, the legionaries are the ones who prepare the sick to receive the Lord. They also alert me when someone needs a visit. The legionaries look to the priest’s support in their apostolate not only for the sick but also for family life.

I try to respond to the concerns of the sick and the elderly. On my visits I sometimes bring little gifts. Something as simple as bathing soap is welcomed and needed. I hope to work more actively with the legionaries here at Sacred Heart Parish to make this ministry a pastoral priority. Together, we can bring hope to the sick and to help them find meaning in their lives. ♦

Matt 25:36b

*I was sick
and you
visited me*

Our Lady of Aparecida Parish Placas – Pará – Brazil

By Father Odenilson G. Guimarães SVD

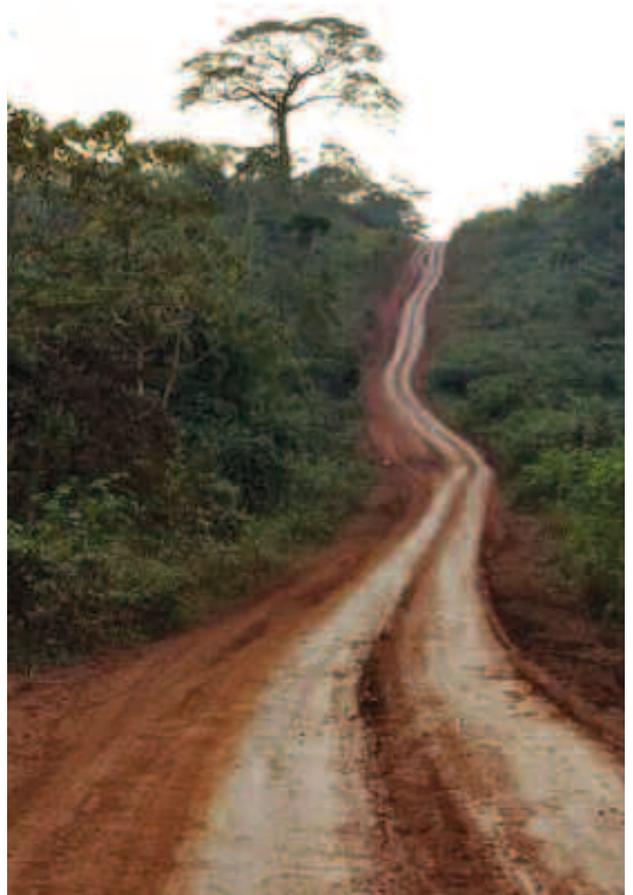
I was born in the Amazon region of Brazil and now serve this vast area as a Divine Word Missionary.

Seven months ago I came to Our Lady of Aparecida Parish and was appointed parish priest only three months later. Our Lady of Aparecida is the spiritual hub to a network of 34 faith communities, three in urban settings and the rest in the rural zone. Our parish is located in Placas, a municipality with a population of about 17,000 people.

Placas is situated along the Great Trans-Amazonian Highway in the northern state of Pará. The Trans-Amazonian Highway was a Brazilian government project begun in the early 1970s that aimed to make the Amazon habitable. The families that live here were brought from many parts of the country. “Land without men for men without land” was the government’s slogan.

As people settled here, however, they never received what the government promised. They had to fend for themselves by cutting down parts of the Amazon for their survival. The deforested area along the Trans-Amazonian Highway turned into grazing fields and entry roads into the “Unknown,” as the Amazonian interior is called.

roads into the unKnown





Many people persevered and survived the tough conditions. Their insistence and resistance earned them a piece of land. For years, these families were a forgotten lot without roads, hospitals or schools. Their daily lives were filled with the challenges of traversing the Trans-Amazonian Highway, which is an unpaved dirt expanse where it passes through Placas.

Today, after nearly 50 years of survival and resistance, this remains their harsh reality. Perhaps it was this common fate that united them to form the small Christian communities that we Divine Word Missionaries now serve.

During our pastoral visits to these communities in the Unknown, we encounter rut-filled muddy roads during the rainy season and blinding dust during the dry season. Mission work here is challenging, and getting from town to town on treacherous roads demands strong, reliable vehicles.

These are the conditions that underlie our mission. The few structures we have need urgent repair. The parochial building in Placas is falling apart. The big parish hall was constructed without good planning and it too must be repaired. We have no





“Today is my day to tell our story and pray that dreams can come true!”

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proper facilities to hold catechism classes or parish meetings.

The Amazon can be oven-hot, yet funds for air conditioning—so that people can attend meetings and catechism without roasting—seem like a far-fetched dream. Most of the time catechism classes are taught under the shade of trees.

But today is my day to tell our story and pray that dreams can come true! Our Lady of Aparecida would like to grow. We need learning-friendly classrooms for children, dormitories where lay leaders from the rural areas can stay for formation during the year and a center for parish activities with a kitchen and bathrooms.

These are the challenges we face, and these are our dreams: to build a better, more welcoming Our Lady of Aparecida Parish for future generations.

In the peace of Christ, may God bless the dreams of all our benefactors. May the Triune God live in your hearts! ♦



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*May the Lord
accept this
sacrifice for the
praise and the
glory of his
name...*



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