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# Divine Word

A close-up photograph of a woman with a shaved head, wearing a vibrant red and black patterned Maasai shuka. She is adorned with a large, intricate necklace made of white, yellow, and blue beads, interspersed with silver coins and metal pieces. She has a joyful expression, looking slightly to the right. In the background, another person in similar attire is partially visible.

**Missionaries Magazine**

Mission Updates from around the World

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Summer 2015

## From the Desk of Fr. Richie Vaz SVD

### **MISSIONARY JOURNEY TO MEXICO AND ECUADOR**

Dear Friends,

I bring you peace and good wishes from the people of Mexico and Ecuador and from Divine Word Missionaries who have made their home with them. My first overseas missionary journey as mission director was from June 8 thru July 1. It was challenging, inspiring, and educative.

In Mark 16:15, Jesus commanded his disciples, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation." Answering God's call to proclaim Christ, Divine Word Missionaries arrived in Mexico in 1964 and in Ecuador in 1962. I was astonished as I observed our missionaries serving the poor, migrants, drug addicts, victims of gun violence, widows and widowers living alone, single moms, orphans, homeless, sick, elderly, and others on the margins of society. It was heartbreaking to listen to the people as they voiced their sorrow, anguish, and suffering.

When our missionaries shared with me their concerns, anxiety, lack of resources, and dreams for the people, I recalled what the disciples said to Jesus, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Jesus told his disciples to have the people sit down. Then he multiplied five barley loaves and a couple of dried fish provided by a boy in the crowd. Everyone had plenty to eat with enough left over (John 6:1-13). I gratefully acknowledge the "lunch" that you share with Divine Word Missionaries through the Mission Center, just like the little boy in the Gospel who gave all that he had to Jesus. The miracle happens when you give and we share your gift with the people through our missionaries. Thank you for your generosity.

Please join me in welcoming our beloved Pope Francis to the United States in September. May his visit be a grace-filled and a joyful moment!



Fr. Richie Vaz SVD  
Mission Director



# DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES

AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND BROTHERS

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# A Bridge between Faith and Life

Rodrigo Mercado SVD

For the members of Holy Spirit Parish, their faith community is a sign of life in the midst of many signs of death.

The parish is located in El Pinar, a barrio close to the center of Santiago, the capital of Chile. El Pinar is one of the most high-risk areas of the city, where drugs, prostitution, and violence have a daily impact on life. Although Chile is a stable, prosperous country with a developing economy, there is still economic inequality. Many people take jobs as unskilled laborers because they lack the means to pursue education that would enable them to have a better life. The youth are especially vulnerable because their choices and opportunities in life are constrained by their situation.

When Pope Francis issued his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in November 2013, a group of us gathered to read and study it together. The Holy Father's message was so personal, so





easy to understand, and so unforgettable that it immediately resonated with the Catholics of Holy Spirit Parish. We have the joy of knowing Jesus, his love, and his forgiveness and want to share that gift. In the heart of El Pinar, we want to bring about change and to welcome anyone seeking the refuge, support, and companionship of the parish community.

Moved by concern for youth and adults searching for God and spiritual formation, our youth leaders and adult advisors began to talk with people on the streets and visit door-to-door to reach people in their homes.

We wanted the Word of God to be more a part of the lives of our sisters and brothers in El Pinar, so under the leadership of Mr. Guillermo Soto, who coordinated the project, a series of workshops took place during 2014. Some of us who read and studied *Evangelii Gaudium*



presented talks in five locations throughout the parish area on topics drawn from the Holy Father's exhortation.

The kind benefactors of the Mission Center at Techny, Illinois, helped us by providing one hundred Bibles for the workshop participants. Reading and study of the Word of God enriched the sessions, where youth and adults reflected on Scripture texts together, then talked about the significance of the message for their daily lives.



In this way, they connected their lives with the Word of God. That connection was a bridge between their experience of God and the reality of their lives. Immersing themselves in the Word of God opened the eyes of these youth and adults to see God's goodness around them. Now they are encouraged and have hope for the future. They are strengthened with a new attitude toward life and can better meet its difficult challenges.

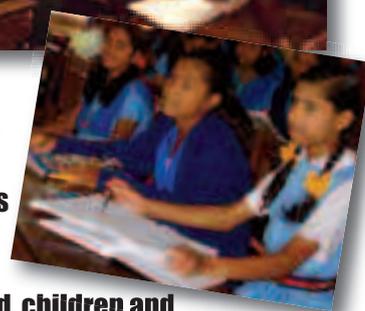


During the workshops, everyone realized that they were not alone. Their faith in God drew them to each other as a community that is part of a global Catholic community. In the midst of the community, they receive and offer one another wisdom, guidance, support, and help in times of need.

The workshops have ended now, but I believe the young people and adults will continue to discover that the Word of God is the bridge that helps them connect faith and life. My hope and prayer is that their lives will always embody the words of Pope Francis: ". . . we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a better world" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 269).



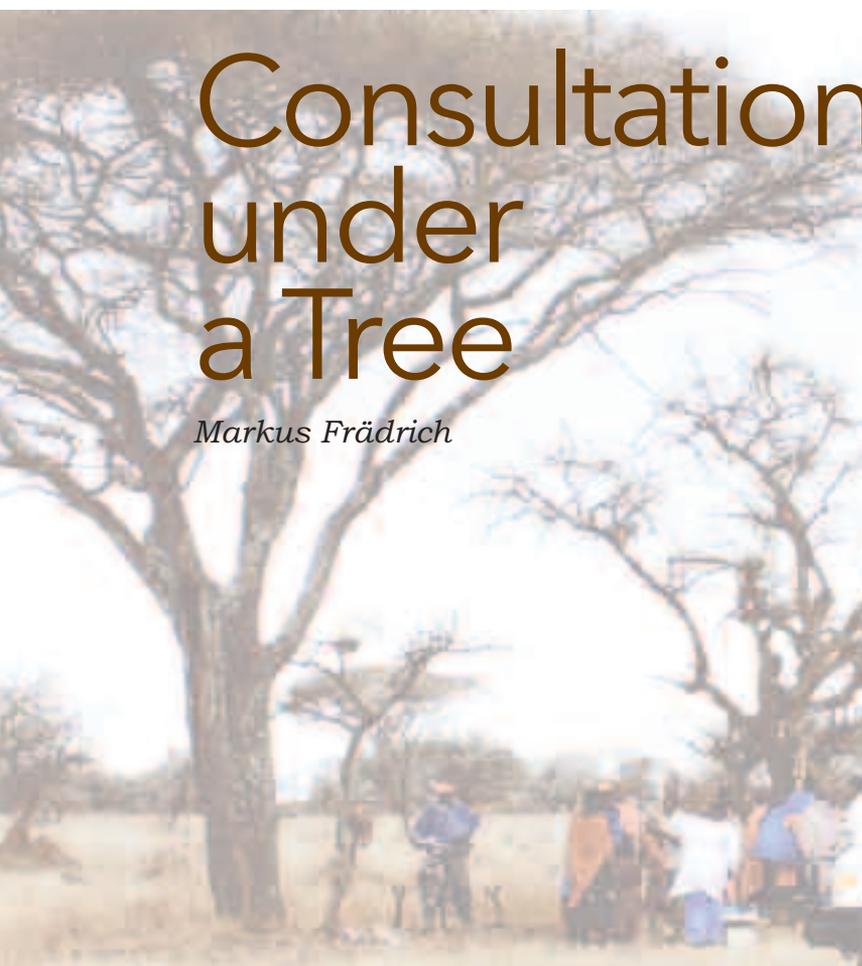
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# Consultation under a Tree

*Markus Frädrieh*

“Caution—Cows Crossing!” The yellow sign jolted me out of a half-sleep. I had been riding in the vehicle for hours as it bounced crazily over the plains of Tanzania. Along the way, I saw antelopes, zebras, and ostriches. Suddenly, seemingly in the middle of nowhere, the triangle-shaped warning sign stood at the side of the road. It welcomed me to Maasai country.

From then on, I began to see the Maasai along the sides of the very rough dirt track on which we traveled. The tall herders with long spears and colorful robes drove their animals before them. Some eyed us suspiciously, and others waved in greeting. Soon the setting sun flooded the savannah in warm, red light until it slowly gave way to a cinematic full moon.

It was late when I reached Emboreet. The little village lay in complete darkness. A light burned at the mission station thanks to the solar panels installed on the roof. Father Peter Pinto SVD, a Divine Word Missionary priest from India, waited for me. “I know you just got here,” he said, “but we need to leave right away for a neighboring village where I have been called to anoint someone who is sick.”

We finally got out of the car at a cluster of huts. People surrounded us in the pitch-black darkness, and the night was filled with their greetings. Children took our hands and pressed our palms to their forehead, hoping for a pat on their head. The earrings of the Maasai jingled and tinkled in the dark as they moved. In the distance, cows grunted and bellowed softly behind the thorny walls of their brush corrals in the center of the *boma* or village. This was my first encounter with the Maasai.



People brought plastic chairs for us from their huts, washed our hands with hot water, and then served us sweet tea with milk, along with dishes of goat meat and liver. While Fr. Peter went into one of the huts to anoint the sick person, the Maasai gathered around me and asked how old I was. “Thirty-two,” I answered. “Excellent,” replied one of the men. Apparently, I was just the right age to marry one of his daughters! I explained that I was already married, but he shrugged his shoulders as if to say: “No problem!” His offer still stood. He was willing to give me his oldest daughter, as well as one of his younger daughters, who was not doing well in school. This meant that he would probably have trouble finding a husband for her. It was a really good deal. Imagine—two wives for the price of one. Unfortunately, I did not have ten head of cattle to give him in exchange. That was the price that they expected of a rich *mzungu* (white man) for such a bargain.

Once back at the mission station, the night was short. Early Sunday morning we walked to the church at Emboreet. Above the door was an image of the Good Shepherd, an image that builds a bridge with the Maasai. “The Maasai believe that God left them all cattle of the earth,” said Fr. Peter. “Cattle shape every aspect of their culture. They build their huts from cow manure, and they drink fresh cow blood as an important part of their ceremonies. Any Maasai who owns fewer than fifty head of cattle is commiserated by the others as a poor man.”



The magnificent songs and multicolored robes of the Maasai made the Mass a memorable event. During his homily, Fr. Peter chose his words carefully. On the one hand, he spoke out of a deep respect for the people. He has great regard for the distinctive ethnic identity of the Maasai. On the other

hand, he did not hesitate to speak against traditions and customs that are contrary to Christian values. “Over and over again, I stress with the men that they must be respectful towards their wives and treat them as equals,” explained Fr. Peter. “I insist that the children must be allowed to go to school. I argue strongly against the practices of female genital mutilation and the forced marriage of the young girls.”

Fr. Peter’s words have not been in vain. The Maasai understand that the missionary’s interest in their wellbeing is not fake, but is honest, upright, and wholehearted. Fully half of those who attended Mass were patients from the clinic that Fr. Peter established close to the mission station. I accompanied him on his rounds through the forty-five-bed facility. People with simple complaints and minor wounds greeted us. Then there was Silau, a Maasai girl

who was very ill. While playing with her friends, she climbed into a tree and encountered a hive of wild bees. Swarms of bees stung her viciously. Now her face was puffy, red, and grossly swollen, and she could hardly see through the narrow slits of her enlarged eyelids. I was thankful that this clinic was there for her.



A thick dust cloud followed us as we set out across the savannah in Fr. Peter's ambulance after lunch. We passed the landing strip laid out for the team of "flying doctors" who regularly stop at Divine Word Missionaries' walk-in clinic. A group of Maasai women and children waited patiently for us in the shade of a large tree. Fr. Peter and his nurse assistants inoculated pregnant women, weighed newborns, and dressed small wounds.

I noticed one little boy whose arm ended in a prosthesis. The people who live in this area close to the Tarangire National Park are regularly attacked and mauled by wild animals. When that happens, Fr. Peter rushes to the scene and sets off with the patient on the trip to the hospital in Arusha. "Many don't survive that long trip," he told me. Thinking back to the pothole-riddled track that I bounced over the previous day, I understood.

Another picture-perfect sunset accompanied us as we returned to the mission station. Fr. Peter told me of his plans to expand the clinic by adding an operating room. Badly wounded people could be treated and deaths on the bumpy road to the hospital reduced. "Just last week," he says, "I had a young, pregnant woman bleed to death on the way to the hospital in Arusha. We just weren't able to do anything for her here in our simple clinic."

Once again, the only light I saw was in the hut of the missionaries. I asked Fr. Peter whether there was enough juice in the batteries to charge my camera. "You can always try," he said. I confidently plugged in my charger—and the mission station plunged into sudden darkness! We wished one another a good night, and I used the light from my cell phone screen to find the way to my bed.

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# A Day for the Children



It is estimated that more than six thousand families are engaged in scavenging in Indore, India. In a typical day, they collect plastic, paper, glass, and metal, which they sell for the equivalent of a few U.S. dollars.

Since 2001, Janvikas Society, a social service agency operated by Divine Word Missionaries in India, has assisted thousands of working children, women who scavenge, unemployed youth, and migrants engaged in waste picking and recycling.

Janvikas provides comprehensive programs in education, community organizing, healthcare, vocational training, and improved environmental practices. An education bridge program runs at different slums of Indore. The program helps transition young children from the dumpsites who have dropped out of school to centers where they receive special assistance and tutoring. The goal is to move these children back into mainstream schools. Currently, Janvikas Society educates about 350 children at education bridge centers and continues to improve the lives of the marginalized people of Indore.





## A Day for the Children

*Roy Chirappurath SVD*

It was a joyous day for the children who work picking up waste for their daily living at the Devguradia dump site in Indore.

On April 1, 2015, thirty children took time off from the dumping ground to gather at Janvikas. The children learned action songs, watched a movie, and spent the rest of the time playing various games. It was a moving experience to see the innocent smiles on the faces of these tiny kids who otherwise labor all day at their hazardous jobs to earn what they can to survive.

Devguradia is situated at the outskirts of the city of Indore, where 700–800 metric tons of waste generated in the city are dumped daily. There are 250 men and women along with about fifty children working every day at the dump.

I am grateful to our many friends who support our humble efforts to make a difference in the lives of these poor children.



Art by: Trajano Vaz, 1918



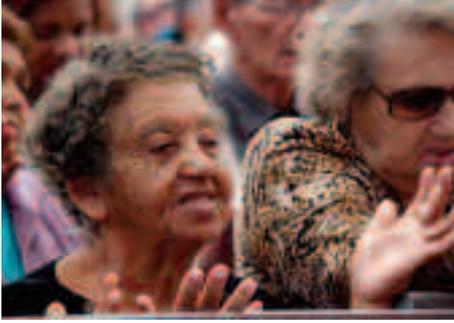
### *The Story of the Good Lord Jesus of Iguape, Brazil*

Devotion to the Good Lord Jesus originated in Portugal. This image of Jesus depicts him scourged, wearing a red cloak, with his hands bound, a crown of thorns on his head, and a palm branch in his hand.

In 1647, a carved wooden statue of the Good Lord Jesus was sent by ship to Brazil. Near the northern coast of Brazil, the ship was attacked. To keep the statue from being damaged or profaned, the commander placed the wooden box containing the image and some bottles of oil into the sea.

Ocean currents carried the box to the southern coast of Brazil. Many months later, two indigenous men traveling near Una Beach saw the box and found the image and the bottles of oil when they opened it. They removed the Good Lord Jesus from the box and left him upright facing east. When the men returned to get the statue, they saw that the image was facing west. Filled with amazement, the men ran to tell others what happened. Some people returned with them and knelt down to give praise to Jesus. With the image cradled in a fishing net, the people carried it to the village of Iguape, located about forty-three miles southwest of Una Beach.

Soon afterward, others heard about the statue and tried to take the image to Itanhaem, the capital of the region at that time. On the way to Itanhaem, the statue grew heavier. When carried in the opposite direction toward Iguape, the weight of the statue diminished. The people moving the statue realized that the Good Lord Jesus wanted to be in Iguape. On November 2, 1647, the image of the Good Lord Jesus was enshrined in the church dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows. In 1787, construction of a new church began. Even then, pilgrimages to Iguape and the celebration in honor of the Good Lord Jesus on August 6 were taking place.



# Our Good Lord Jesus

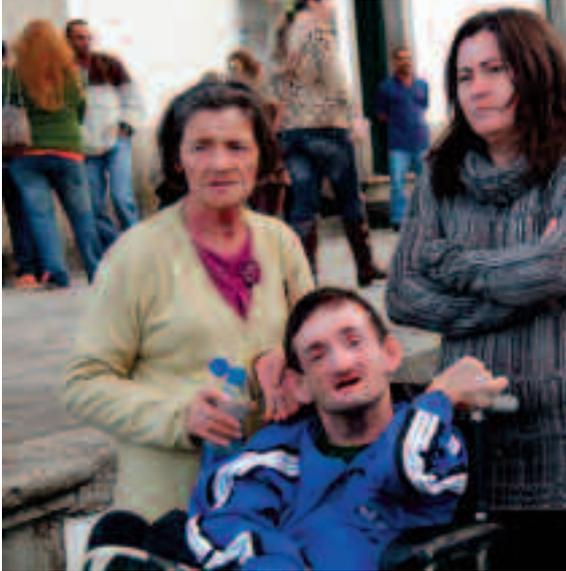
*Omira Oliveira SVD*

**W**hen I was ordained twenty years ago, I never imagined myself ministering to thousands of pilgrims. After working in Zambia in Africa for fourteen years, I returned to my native Brazil almost six years ago, and I am now in Iguape, a town not far from the Atlantic coast of the state of São Paulo in southern Brazil. The parish encompasses the main church dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows in Iguape and twenty-three smaller Catholic faith communities in mission stations, most of which are scattered in rural areas.



Each year from July 28 to August 6, the population of Iguape swells from thirty thousand people to about two hundred thousand. During that time, there are shortages of food, water, sanitation, and housing. The overflowing throngs find what they can in Iguape and neighboring towns and villages. Pilgrims travel as far as 215 miles to reach Iguape, where the image of the Good Lord Jesus is enshrined in the church dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows. They come by car, bus, motorcycle, on bikes, on horseback, and on foot. None of the hardships they experience diminish their fervor and happiness, for they come to honor their beloved *Senhor Bom Jesus* (Good Lord Jesus).





Beginning on July 28, nine days of prayer are celebrated to prepare for the feast of the Good Lord Jesus on August 6. It is an active but prayerful time for the pilgrims. Masses and confessions take place throughout each day. In the evenings, the novena prayers are sung by a choir and a visiting priest, who then speaks to the pilgrims about the day's theme. The main theme for the 2015 celebration is from the Gospel of John: "I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness" (10:10b).

On August 5, we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of the Snows with Mass. The image of Our Lady from the church is carried in an outdoor procession, as crowds of pilgrims accompany her.



The novena of prayer culminates with the feast of our Good Lord Jesus on August 6. A visiting bishop presides at an outdoor Mass. The original statue of the Good Lord Jesus is taken from the church and carried in procession through the narrow streets of Iguape. A multitude of thirty to forty thousand pilgrims presses after him. The procession concludes with a closing celebration before the image of our Good Lord Jesus. A magnificent fireworks display marks the end of the days of prayer.

Father Jaime Gato SVD, Father Remigius Sihombing SVD, and I are assigned to Our Lady of the Snows parish and share the work of the parish and the shrine. During the nine days of prayer each year, we do all we can to meet the needs of the pilgrims and make the shrine a welcoming place for them. As rector of the shrine of the Good Lord Jesus, I am especially concerned for their spiritual and physical well-being.

Ministering to the pilgrims is not something we do alone. When the town is overflowing with pilgrims, we have the help of the

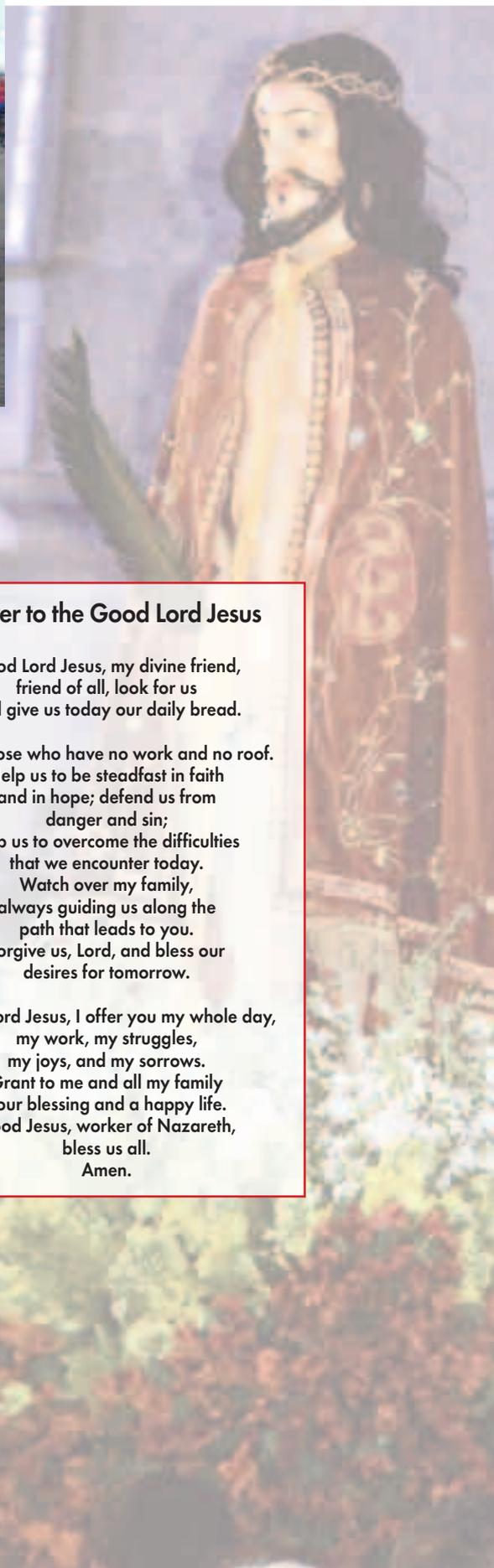




priests of the diocese for Masses, confessions, and blessing groups of pilgrims. Dedicated volunteers lend their hands and hearts to help in many ways. Religious sisters, seminarians, and lay people organize lines of pilgrims waiting to enter the church to visit the Good Lord Jesus, to leave treasured mementos in the Miracle Room, or to light a candle. Other volunteers provide a place where volunteers can take a break, rest, and eat.

What a life I meet at times in the streets of Iguape among the pilgrims! I talk with them, get to know their backgrounds and difficulties in life, and learn why they have come to the shrine of our Good Lord Jesus. Some say they have been healed from diseases. I remember talking with a mother who came with her son to thank the Good Lord Jesus for healing her of a serious illness. She pledged to walk to and from Iguape from her home, a round trip of 248 miles. Other pilgrims have endured hardship and suffering in their lives. Many people journey to Iguape to fulfill promises they have made.

As rector of this beautiful shrine, I minister to countless people on pilgrimage whose faith and good hearts move them to show their appreciation for the many gifts and blessings they have received from the Good Lord Jesus. I thank him for the pilgrims, because they are blessings to me. I offer to my Good Lord Jesus all of my days, my struggles, my sorrows, my joys, and my life as a Divine Word Missionary priest.



### **Prayer to the Good Lord Jesus**

**Good Lord Jesus, my divine friend,  
friend of all, look for us  
and give us today our daily bread.**

**Help those who have no work and no roof.**

**Help us to be steadfast in faith  
and in hope; defend us from  
danger and sin;**

**help us to overcome the difficulties  
that we encounter today.**

**Watch over my family,  
always guiding us along the  
path that leads to you.**

**Forgive us, Lord, and bless our  
desires for tomorrow.**

**Good Lord Jesus, I offer you my whole day,  
my work, my struggles,**

**my joys, and my sorrows.**

**Grant to me and all my family  
your blessing and a happy life.**

**Good Jesus, worker of Nazareth,  
bless us all.**

**Amen.**

# Saint Arnold Janssen Visits Sadori

*Mathias Yaadar SVD*

The Catholic community of Sadori in northern Togo marked a new beginning on October 12, 2014. For many years, Sadori was a mission station served by Franciscan missionaries assigned to Saints Peter and Paul parish in Mango in the Diocese of Dapaong.

Last year, Most Reverend Jacques Anyilunda erected a new parish with Sadori as the main station. At the invitation and request of Bishop Anyilunda, Divine Word Missionaries of the Togo-Benin Province officially accepted the new parish, which is dedicated in honor of Saint Arnold Janssen, founder of Divine Word Missionaries.

The whole village welcomed us jubilantly on October 12. The people rejoiced because the spiritual and practical development of Sadori would continue. I was officially installed as the parish priest and Frater Martin Kotchoffa SVD assists me in the



pastoral care of the parish. Residents of the area, Bishop Anyilunda, Father Karolus Emi SVD, vice-provincial of the Togo-Benin Province, and civil and political authorities were present when I rang the bell to call the people to active participation in their parish.

Sadori is a big village with about five hundred inhabitants. The main parish church is in Sadori, and there are smaller Catholic communities in seven other mission stations. Five full-time, trained catechists travel long distances on their bicycles throughout the parish to proclaim the Word of God and distribute Holy Communion, provide religious education and sacramental preparation, visit the sick and aged and respond to people's needs. These dedicated, devoted men carry out a vital apostolate to their sisters and brothers and are an invaluable help to me and Frater Martin.

In October, even before our official installation, our catechists and other members of the parish, Frater Martin, and I visited the Catholic families to pray the rosary in their homes. The catechists led the prayers of the rosary in the local dialects of the people. The response from everyone was tremendous. Each family was eager for the pastoral team to come to their home because their intentions would be prayed for and the household received a blessing after the rosary. Eventually, we combined extended families so we could reach everyone and not leave any family out.





**Two of our catechists**



**The families offered gifts to the team as a gesture of gratitude**

The families offered gifts to the team as a gesture of gratitude. Since the people earn their livelihood by cultivating small farms, their gifts to us were the fruits of their labors: yams, watermelons, chickens, or guinea fowl. We shared these with our neighbors who passed by or with members of other religious communities.

After visiting the Catholic families, we visited our sisters and brothers who are Muslims or followers of African traditional religion. With the approach of the New Year, it was an ideal time to extend our greetings and good wishes. At the same time, we sowed seeds of unity and understanding.

As we traveled around the parish, it was as if our patron, St. Arnold Janssen, was visiting the people with us. May St. Arnold's vision inspire us and guide us as we bring Christ and his gospel values to everyone.



## QUARTER HOUR PRAYER

- L. God, eternal truth,**  
**A. We believe in you.**
- L. God, our strength  
and salvation,**  
**A. We trust in you.**
- L. God, infinite goodness,**  
**A. We love you with  
our whole heart.**
- L. You sent the Word into  
the world as our savior.**  
**A. Make us all one in him.**
- L. Fill us with the spirit  
of Christ,**  
**A. That we may praise  
your name everywhere,**  
**Amen.**

—From the *Vademecum*,  
the prayer book of Divine Word Missionaries

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# In the Journey of Faith

*Karolus Boro SVD*

When God calls us into religious life, he calls us to embark upon a very special journey. Becoming a religious is a process, a way of life, a quality of relationship, and a depth of commitment which should be the symbol of every person who follows Jesus Christ. Jesus calls us to act, to go with him, to learn of him, to be trained by him, to be of service to others, and to become his true disciples.



As a religious missionary Brother, what makes me happy in my service is my love for my work as an accountant and a formator, who accompanies young men exploring their vocations as Divine

Word Missionaries. I serve and give witness to the people when and where I work. As a religious who has professed vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, I feel that I am a living symbol of the unity and diversity in the Church and a witness to the Word through my missionary service. God calls us and wants us to make a difference in this world. He wants us to work through us. What matters is not the duration of our lives, but our contributions. To say it more simply, what matters is not how long we live, but how we live.



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If you are not involved in any service and ministry, what excuse have you been using? God uses each of us in his mission. There are many people around us. They keep asking for our services. They are in need of our help, presence, commitment, a little attention, dedication, spiritual guidance, or spare time more than they need material things. All of these take time and faith to share with others. They require that our hearts are ready to go and serve. As a religious missionary, I am in a journey of faith. May I be in prayer body, heart, spirit, and mind!

This simple quotation is filled with rich meaning because it encompasses all the moments of life lived in union with God:

**During our happy moments, praise God!  
During our difficult moments, seek God!  
During our quiet moments, worship God!  
During our painful moments, trust God!  
Every moment, thank God!**

*This article is reprinted from the SVD BROTHERS Bulletin (November 2014). We acknowledge the editorial work of Brother Mark Paglicawan SVD, Brother Hubertus Guru SVD, and Father Nico Espinosa SVD. Without the selfless work of these (and many other) people, the bulletin could not exist. Brother Bela Lanyi SVD is coordinator of the SVD Brother's Bulletin.*

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