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"Some of the saddest and most challenging situations are in the outlying villages, where many older people are without family support—they are entirely alone. On our visits we witness their tear-filled eyes, hear their fervent prayers and share the hope they feel in anticipation of their loved ones return. It pierces our hearts with pain."





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### **EDITORIAL**

We recently received exciting news about our superior general, Father Paulus Budi Kleden SVD. On May 25, Pope Francis appointed Fr. Budi Kleden archbishop of the Archdiocese of Ende in Indonesia.

This appointment is a huge honor for Fr. Budi Kleden, but it also is a huge honor for Divine Word Missionaries. Fr. Budi Kleden joins 41 other Divine Word Missionary bishops and archbishops in the Catholic episcopacy. Thirteen of them were appointed by Pope Francis. We think he likes us.

The archbishop-designee will be returning to his home country of Indonesia. The Archdiocese of Ende is located on the island of Flores, which is also home to our largest major seminary, St. Paul, at Ledalero. Fr. Budi Kleden also comes from Flores. He was born Nov. 16, 1965, in Waibalun in the Diocese of Larantuka.

Following his priestly ordination on May 19, 1993, Fr. Budi Kleden spent his first three years as a missionary in Switzerland. After studying in Germany to earn his doctorate in systematic theology, he returned to Indonesia to lecture and then serve as a formator at St. Paul. He then spent several years in administrative roles in the Indonesia - Ende Province before he was assigned to Rome in 2012 to serve on the Society of the Divine Word's general council. In 2018, he was appointed superior general.

The Vatican has taken the unusual step of allowing Fr. Budi Kleden to serve out the rest of his term as superior general, allowing him to preside over our 19th General Assembly in Rome until its conclusion in July.

The 19th General Assembly is underway as I write this, having begun on June 16. By the time you read this, our new superior general will have been elected. Look for his name in the next issue of Mission Update.

Meanwhile, please join me in thanking Fr. Budi Kleden for his leadership of Divine Word Missionaries and congratulate him on his appointment as archbishop of Ende. May the next phase of his vocation be enriching and blessed.

Solmen Det

Thank you and God bless you for your support.

Yours in the Divine Word.

Bro. Daniel Holman Mission Director

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

Thank you for your prayers & support!

### **DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES**

# mission stories from around the world sydmissions.org









# Unveiling Saving Graces: Father Thierry Koula's Journey in Chad

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A conversation with Father Thierry Balonda Koula SVD

# **Building** a Ministry

Carpentry shop in Liberia opens the door to training and hope

Wisdom Agbovi SVD











40 X 3 10 A Triple Anniversary in Service to the Word of God Xene Sanchez SVD





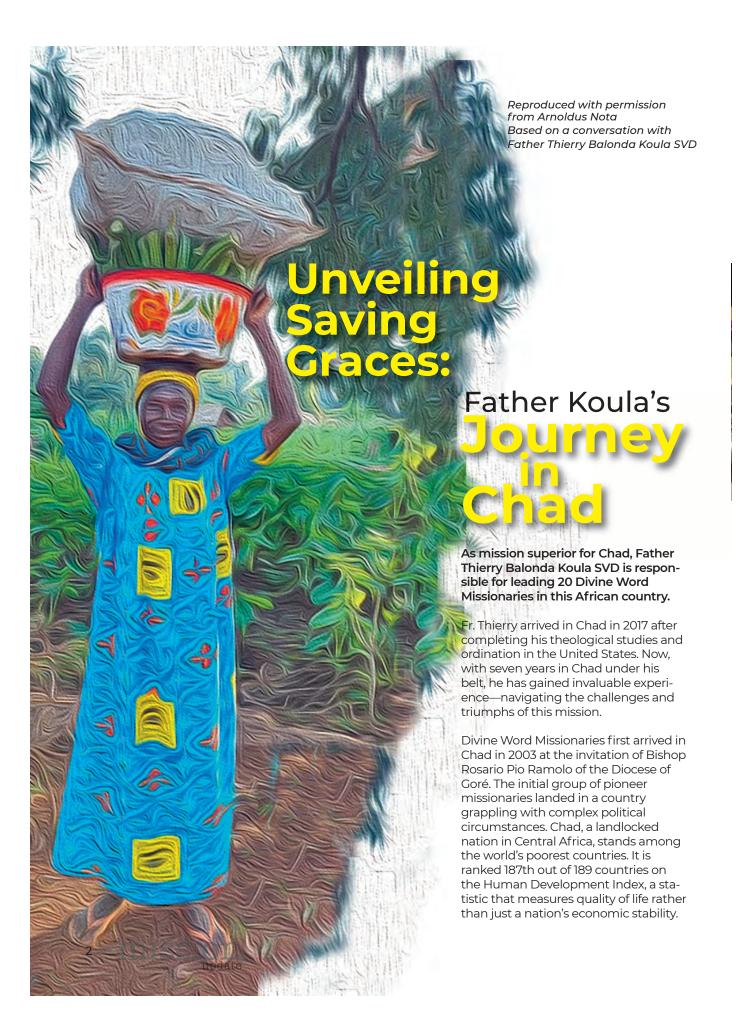
Another Day in Paradise A Commitment to Organic Farming in Bali A. Eko Yuliantoro SVD

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The Society of the Divine Word is an international Catholic missionary congregation. Divine Word Missionaries work in over 79 different lands on all continents except Antarctica.

Website: SVDMISSIONS.ORG

DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES MISSION UPDATE · Volume 2, 2024 · issued quarterly · Subscription \$20.00 a year Editorial Team: Bro. Dan Holman SVD Carmelita J. Linden Jeffrey Westhoff







A challenging mission field Our missionaries in Chad find themselves in a nation deeply affected by widespread poverty. According to the World Bank, 42.3% of the population lives below the national poverty line. The measure of the country's underdevelopment is staggering. Only about 6% of the population has access to electricity, and only 8% has access to basic sanitation. Adult literacy is 22%. Life expectancy is only 53 years. Income inequality is prevalent. Around three-quarters of all births take place without the care of a skilled health professional.

The challenges are particularly pronounced in rural areas, where limited infrastructure and economic opportunities exacerbate the shortcomings. Women lack equal opportunities in education

and training, making it difficult for them to compete for the relatively few jobs available. Although property and inheritance laws do not discriminate against women, local leaders adjudicate most inheritance cases in favor of men, following traditional practice.

Fully aware of the country's profound struggles and limited development progress, Fr. Thierry dedicated himself to the mission in Chad. Despite the scarcity of resources, he and his fellow Divine Word Missionaries work tenaciously to bring humanitarian assistance to those in their mission area.

#### Saving grace

All missionaries in Chad—before and after Fr. Thierry—share a common message. They have confronted countless challenges, yet they have found solace in the saving graces that sustain their mission.

Politically, Chad has endured longstanding governance issues and internal conflicts, marked by periods of instability, military coups and authoritarian rule. Despite this turmoil, the government has welcomed missionaries with open arms. The ruling authorities allow missionaries the freedom to uplift the lives of the people and empower them.

Fr. Thierry sees this open policy toward missionaries as a saving grace. Divine Word Missionaries and other religious congregations seize every opportunity to engage in fruitful mission work. Our mission in Chad strongly emphasizes biblical apostolate, family and youth. The four parishes they oversee—St. Arnold







Janssen parish in Laramanaye, St. Francis of Assisi in Boro, Sts. Peter and Paul in Moundou, and our newest parish, St. John Bosco in Maibo—are vital places to connect with the people and tend to their spiritual and personal needs.

When missionaries persevere amid the trials of their work, it serves as a testament to the presence of saving grace. Fr. Thierry commends his fellow missionaries for their unwavering devotion and determination in carrying out their ministry. In an environment filled with hardships—an influx of forcibly displaced people, violence, food insecurity, floods and droughts—they have learned to work with whatever resources are available.

#### A community willing to contribute

Amid these limitations, one resource abounds and strengthens the vitality of our missionaries' work: the people themselves. In the four Divine Word parishes, a powerful desire to deepen faith resonates with a receptive audience and a community willing to contribute and realize shared dreams.

For Fr. Thierry, the power of the people is a saving grace that deserves recognition and celebration. In response to Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Fr. Thierry's parish, Sts. Peter and Paul in Moundou, began a garden project led by laypeople that has become a resounding success. With high food prices, trade disruptions and the impact of climate disasters, the people of Chad continue to suffer from food insecurity. The garden at Sts. Peter and Paul will grow food for today and teach generations self-sufficient ways to alleviate hunger in





the future. The garden impressed the local bishop enough that he provided additional land to expand it.

Drinking alcohol to alleviate loneliness and foster social inclusion is prevalent in the area where Fr. Thierry serves. Seeing a way to generate muchneeded income for their families, the women of Chad learned to brew beer and sell it to eager customers. However, these emerging family breweries have led to increased alcoholism, petty fights and family conflicts. Fr. Thierry presented the women with an alternative: giving up the breweries in favor of gardening.

By providing a viable alternative livelihood, Fr. Thierry paved the way for transformation and growth within the community. The transition from brewing to gardening has allowed families to escape the harmful consequences of excessive drinking and pursue a more sustainable and fulfilling path. The women's new garden will lead to better nutrition for families. In turn, this can translate to healthier and better-educated future generations capable of breaking the cycle of hunger and poverty.

Chad is vast, and most mission areas are exceptionally isolated. The people of Chad live with minimal water and little plumbing. If they have electricity, it is because they installed solar panels. For many of them, a trip to the store is a day's journey. Fr. Thierry and his fellow Divine Word Missionaries in Chad continue to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to their ministry. Their work amid adversity serves as a testament to the power of saving graces and the potential for positive change within the communities they serve.



### CHAD:

42.3% of the population lives below the national poverty line

6% of the population has access to electricity

8% has access to basic sanitation

Adult literacy is 22 %

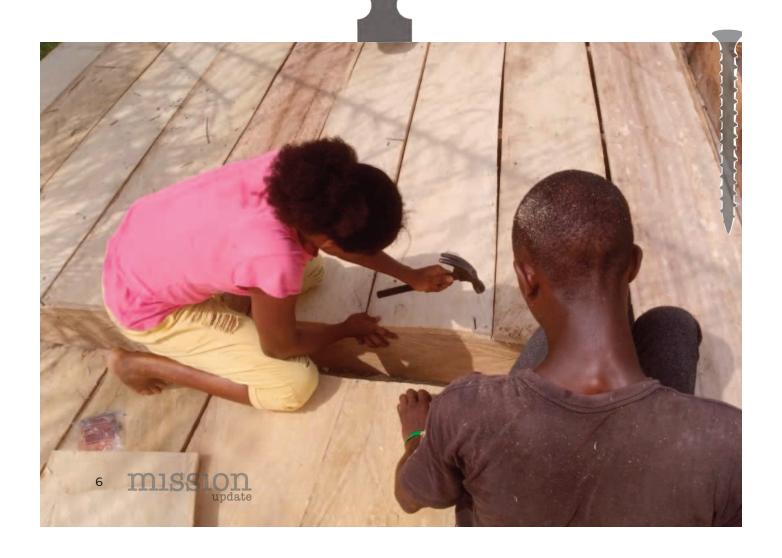
Life expectancy is 53 years



Carpentry shop in Liberia opens the door to training and hope

By Wisdom Agbovi SVD

Brother Wisdom Agbovi SVD is a Ghanaian carpenter turned Divine Word Missionary. He joined the Liberia mission in 2017 as his first assignment. Bro. Wisdom's carpentry skills form the cornerstone of his ministry, enabling him to take on various construction projects to improve the rural communities where he serves.









s a young Brother, I studied carpentry, joinery, building and construction in Ghana. I came to Liberia in 2017 to oversee the Divine Word Missionaries' project in Grand Gedeh County. While working on the construction of our new rectory in Zwedru City, I encountered problems purchasing doors and cabinets. I decided to open a small table carpentry shop on-site so I could make some of the items myself.

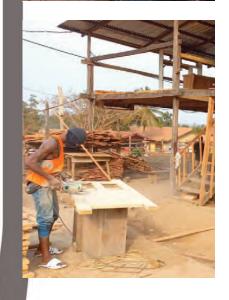
I started the shop with the help of a young layperson. We were able to fix almost all the carpentry and joinery issues in the new rectory. The shop became so successful that many people who saw our craftsmanship asked us to do jobs for them. With this increased interest in our work, I sought funds from friends to help me implement a business plan and buy some small carpentry equipment for the new shop.

The idea of having this carpentry shop was not only to make items for the rectory or to take in jobs to raise funds for the mission but—more importantly—to train the area's young men with carpentry skills they could use for employment. I saw this as a way to reduce the poverty rate among the youth in Zwedru.

Currently, I have about eight young men apprenticing under me. But apprenticing has







its challenges. Many of the apprentices do not live in Zwedru City. When they are here to study carpentry in the shop, they often cannot find a place to stay in the city. This hampers their training.

Also, road conditions in Liberia can be terrible. During the rainy season, roads become impassable with deep mud. This hinders the students from getting to the shop and also our travel to job sites. However, despite these many challenges, we already have come a long way.

The newest projects on our schedule involve infrastructure within the Diocese of Cape Palmas and project work such as building a health center for the diocese in Zwedru City. We are also constructing a front porch extension for a Divine Word parish, Christ the King, in Zwedru City and building a convent for the Sisters of the Holy Family in Monrovia.

The busy schedule is exciting, but as business grows, so do the challenges. We need





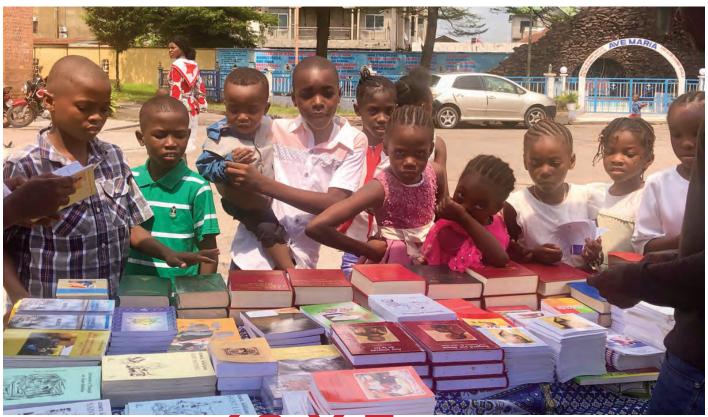
more equipment in the shop. Without it, our production time slows and we can't finish projects as quickly as we should. Also, materials are often in short supply in Liberia, sometimes delaying work by one to two weeks. As the output from our current schedule raises income, we hope to purchase new equipment in the fall and continue to invest in our carpentry shop and the training of Liberia's youth.

Even with all the activities with the carpentry shop, none has distracted me from active pastoral work. I make time to visit the parish outstations and serve the people there. I find joy in caring for others.

I hope that my pastoral activities and work in the carpentry shop bring a positive image of Divine Word Missionaries to the people of Liberia. I pray that the shop will grow and become useful for all of Grand Gedeh County and that it promotes vocations for future Divine Word Missionaries.







40 X 3

# A Triple Anniversary in Service to the Word of God

by Xene Sanchez SVD

Guided by his Spirit, my last few years have been marked by a series of anniversaries that I call triple 40.



In 2021, I completed 40 years of priesthood. In 2022, we celebrated 40 years of Verbum Bible, a ministry that translates the Bible into African languages. In 2023, I accomplished 40 years of missionary life in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Looking back, I can see God's hand—his divine plan—as he moved me wherever needed in the work of evangelization, learning and sharing his Word. His Word took me around the world!

Divine Word Missionaries are well known in the Democratic Republic of Congo for their commitment to the Word of God, which is why I chose Congo as my mission country.



In 1982, Verbum Bible, Kinshasa, was chosen as Divine Word Missionaries' Bible publishing house to serve Africa, Madagascar and Haiti. It followed the work of the Biblical Apostolate Center in promoting biblical formation and producing learning materials translated into local languages.

I arrived in Congo and joined the Verbum Bible team in 1983. While I was studying the Kikongo language, one of Congo's four national languages, I was asked to teach an introduction to the Bible class at the novitiate, which had just reopened following decades of turbulent national politics. However, plans changed quickly as we learned our parish in Bagata desperately needed a bush missionary. Off I went to Bagata to help Father Everard Leferink SVD, the pastor. It was providential—his passion for proclaiming the Word to far-flung villages was contagious and taught me a lot! Our farthest village was more than 50 miles away. Everywhere, the thirst for the Good News was felt. A village leader walked nearly 20 miles to tell me: "We are not looking for money nor material aid. Come, preach, and share with us Jesus' teachings."





Thanks to catechesis, celebrations of the Word, retreats, biblical training, and animation and Bible sharing, the power of the Word was visible in the Bagata parish. During my three years there, I witnessed each of the 33 villages build chapels by their own means. The Word was alive! This echoed St. Peter's words: "Silver and gold I have none; but what I have (the Word of God), I give it to you" (Acts 3:6). The years seemed to go very fast. The time to say goodbye came too soon.

Next, sharing his Word took me to Belgium, to the Lumen Vitae, a catechetical and pastoral institute, where I translated their basic biblical seminar into French. Six months later, I returned to Congo and held the first Bible study at the Arnold Janssen Formation House in Kinshasa.

From Kinshasa, I participated in the Dei Verbum course in Italy, attended the Catholic Institute of Paris, and then attended the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. After several years of learning, I longed to return to field missionary work. Thankfully, I was appointed to the Arnold Janssen House in Lemba, Congo.

In Lemba, I spent seven years as a formator to our students who were studying to become scholars, thinkers and religious experts. It was a unique chance to take all I had studied and



pass the knowledge on to our young candidates, sharing the importance—and joy—of learning and spreading the Word.

Through Father Hugo Tewes SVD, head of the Notre Dame d'Afrique parish in Lemba, we became involved in the creation of the Biblical Pastoral Commission—one of the first of its kind. With our Bible team of religious and volunteers in full force, many churches in the area began to ask for our help in organizing Bible seminars. Even the Cardinal of Kinshasa commissioned us to teach his future diocesan priests about the Bible!

In 1988, in anticipation of the Catholic Church's Great Jubilee in 2000, we began a project called "All Africa Reads the Whole Bible." Hundreds of people joined in! Furthering our quest to spread the Word, we opened a Bible Apostolate Center with the local church in Kinshasa.

From 1995 to 2001, I coordinated our biblical apostolate in the

Africa-Madagascar Zone. Here, various groups dedicated to spreading the Word of God met regularly to share ideas and make plans. It was a wonderful time of collaboration and evangelization.

As the years went by, I became the provincial superior of the Congo Province. After that I served as rector for six years at the Common Formation Center in Kinshasa, where we had Brothers and theology students from countries across Africa. I was also once again the coordinator for the biblical apostolate for the Africa-Madagascar Zone. It was an opportune time to promote the biblical apostolate, as we were able to provide biblical retreats for many other religious organizations along with our own Divine Word provinces.

My dedication to sharing the Word continued as I was appointed director of Verbum Bible in 2012. By 2019, the Verbum Bible team had finished translating the Kikongo Bible, which completed our set of Bibles in Congo's four national lan-







guages. (The three other languages are Lingala, Swahili and Tshiluba.) We also finished translations into Mashi and Kivira, two local languages.

At the African level, we worked with the Liturgical Episcopal Association for French-speaking countries. We obtained the rights to publish the Ecclesial Bible (recognized as the official liturgical Bible in the French world), the New Testament and the weekly and Sunday Catholic missals for Africa and Madagascar.

Verbum Bible became an Editorial Verbo Group member, which linked us as publishers on three continents—Europe, the Americas, and Africa—all dedicated to the Bible. At the international level, the Catholic Biblical Federation, composed of 126 members, elected Verbum Bible to its executive committee. The Word continued to flourish!

Finally, after 10 gratifying years as Verbum Bible's director, I began preparing to hand off my duties to a successor. Father Arnold Biago SVD became the new director in 2023. Thus, the 40th anniversary of my mission in Congo is completed.

As I reflect on my triple 40 years of service to the Divine Word, I am filled with profound gratitude. Throughout my journey, I have felt deeply connected to the mission of Jesus, the Divine Word, who has showered my life with abundant grace and blessings.

In these four decades, I have witnessed the incredible power of the Word of God to transform lives and communities. From my early days as a missionary in the Democratic Republic of Congo—where I shared the teachings of the Bible with people in the most remote villages—to my later roles in teaching and publishing, I have seen firsthand how the Word can inspire and uplift people.

As I look back on my journey, I am reminded of the importance of passing on this sacred mission to the next generation. As service agents of the Divine Word, it is our duty to continue spreading the Gospel with passion and dedication.



A Message from Father Wojciech Zolty SVD

# YOUR recent gifts totaled over \$13,000

THANKS TO YOUR Generosity,

I was able to help refugees who live in our retreat center. I also traveled eastern Ukraine to help other families in need. Along with necessities like food, medicine and household items, we purchased blankets and firewood for the elderly and toys and treats for the many children.

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Here is some of what I bought:

Groceries – \$4,790 Cleaning supplies – \$1,059 Household appliances – \$1,260

Medicine - \$1,764 Fuel - \$756 Wood - \$1,512 Clothes - \$832 Blankets - \$655

Blankets - \$655 Sweets - \$277 Toys - \$252

Thank you for giving

Wojciech Zolty SVD Father Wojciech Zolty SVD 160 TAXII-TIME

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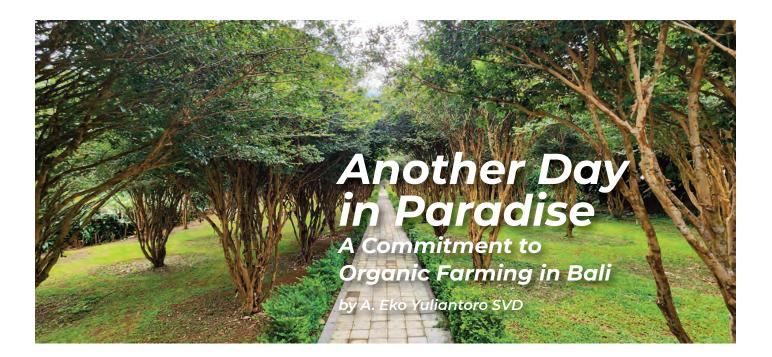
THANKS YOU!



Thanks to your generosity we continue to provide food, shelter and spiritual support to so many in need in Ukraine and Poland.







It is just around 7 o'clock in the morning. The sun has risen. A light wind is blowing. Fog covers the farm. The air is cool. Brother Pius Himaang SVD and three workers—Mr. Ruben, Mr. Agung and Mr. Agus—prepare for another day's work in the greenhouses and fields of our farm.

This is a normal morning at the SVD Janssen Farm in Pancasari village, a resort area on the Indonesian island of Bali. Surrounded by mountains and covering an area of about 5 acres, the farm lies within a traditional agricultural zone. Most of the area farmers make their living by growing fruits and vegetables. The weather is favorable, and the soil is fertile. With three lakes nearby, Pancasari faces no shortage of water. It is a significant source of agricultural products for the region.

When Divine Word Missionaries decided to develop a farm on the island of Bali, the first decision was what type of farming it should be. Economically, it would have been easy to follow this area's conventional agricultural system. Farming supplies were widely available, prices were affordable, and the planting system was not too complicated.

66

If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* 



However, based on our commitment to the integrity of creation and protecting the environment, we chose to farm organically. It was not an easy decision, though. We faced many challenges, especially because organic products were uncommon when we started. Despite the hurdles, organic farming is our statement toward an ecological mission: no chemical fertilizers that damage the soil. In the long term, we are deter-

To market our harvest and to encourage a relationship with the local

mined to preserve the environment and

safeguard people's health.

farm initiatives:

or stay and make salads and juice from

their harvest. Many find this experience fun. We hope it helps them feel and understand the real life of a farmer.

U-Pick: Invites visitors to join our staff in the fields and experience nature up close. After picking vegetables and fruits, visitors can package them up to take home

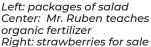
Education: Offers knowledge and practical lessons on entrepreneurship, building an organic farming system, and producing organic fertilizer from waste. Students, youth



The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from community, we developed three main the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things.

-Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*'









associations and members of the public participate in these classes. At the end of each session, we encourage our students to take this knowledge and grow their own organic garden in any free space in their yard at home.

Local farmers partner for economic empowerment: Helps us and our fellow farmers cooperate to bring our harvest to market. The local farmers are enthusiastic about this program. After seeing our harvest and learning the benefits of our system, some farmers have converted from conventional farming to organic.

Most of our land is dedicated to jaboticaba, a fruit-bearing plant native to Brazil but relatively new to Indonesia. The jaboticaba is neatly planted and looks beautiful in the fields. In addition to our fields, we have two greenhouses where we practice hydroponic farming to cultivate vegetables, fruits, flowers and various other plants.

66

All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* 



Above: organic vegetables



The SVD Janssen Farm is not solely about agricultural work. It also shares Pope Francis' thoughts in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, *On Care for Our Common Home*, promoting the values of education, training, recreation and empowerment. The farm, with its beautiful fields, serves as a place of solitude. It is a place to sit quietly, look at the fields, relax and feel a prayer of peace and calm, thanking God for his creation.

Above: Jaboticaba.



The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything, as it were, a caress of God. —Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*'

Tucked away in a quiet corner of the farm stands a small Hindu shrine where our neighbors come every morning to pray. We are grateful for their presence and plan to build a prayer garden for the shrine.



Left: Hindu shrine



Above: greenhouse planting Upper right: learning the system lower right: youth group





Through social media, the farm has grown in popularity. To keep up with the increase in visitors, we have begun to renovate our facilities. Thanks to donations from our confreres in Germany, we have already upgraded several areas—a larger multipurpose room for meetings and classes, wider walking and driving pathways around the farm, and a composting room.

The SVD Janssen Farm in the Pancasari village of Bali is a true commitment to an ecological mission, a symbol of patience and collaboration with people and the earth.



above: greenhouse plants

### 66

God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty. Praise be to you!

-Pope Francis, closing prayer *Laudato Si*'



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- · Your offering supports our missionaries and the people they serve.
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Sympathy Card 1



Sympathy Card 2

 Sympathy Card 3



Sympathy Card 4



0 **Birthday** Card 1



0 **Birthday** Card 2



0 **Get Well** Card 1



0 **Get Well** Card 2