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EDITORIAL

The landscape of the Catholic Church shifted significantly since our last issue. As I'm certain you know, we have a new pontiff: Pope Leo XIV, elected on May 8. The announcement of his name set off great excitement once the world realized he was the first pope from the United States.

Everyone here at Techny was especially thrilled to learn that Pope Leo—formerly Robert Francis Prevost—was born and grew up just down the road from us in Chicago. He was educated and ordained to the priesthood at the Chicago Theological Union, where many of our missionaries have studied and our seminarians still pursue their degrees.

Leo is also a missionary pope. During his first Urbi et Orbi blessing, he said, "Together, we must look for ways to be a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges and encourages dialogue, a Church ever open to welcoming ... all those who are in need of our charity, our presence, our readiness to dialogue, and our love."

As a member of the Order of St. Augustine, Leo served as a missionary in Peru for more than a decade. Arriving in 1985, the priest known as "Roberto" was assigned to the Diocese of Chulucanas, located in an area of northern Peru with an almost desert-like climate. Here he worked directly with impoverished people, including itinerant laborers and members of indigenous communities.

After roughly 15 years serving in leadership positions with the Augustinian order, Pope Francis returned him to Peru as the bishop of Diocese of Chiclayo. His time there coincided with the Venezuelan refugee crisis, when the political and economic collapse of that country impelled more than a million people to permanently flee to Peru. As bishop, he organized care for this influx of migrants.

Bishop Daniel Turley has been friends with Pope Leo XIV for decades. Like the new pope, he is an Augustinian who hails from Chicago and served in Peru. He told America magazine he believes Leo's missionary experience will influence his papacy.

"That experience is a blessing for him as a pontiff of our Church," Bishop Turley said. "It means that he's not a pope who was just in the classroom or in a study or writing letters. He was out there. He was very active pastorally, very concerned about the pastoral care of the people, of the migrants, of the poor."

As Divine Word Missionaries, we are eager to see how the Church will be shaped by this missionary pope.

Yours in the Divine Word,

But Derich Johnson Did Bro. Daniel Holman SVD Mission Director

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

Thank you for your prayers & support!

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Ecuador parish extends hand to feed migrants

The Maria Madre de la Iglesia parish community cares deeply for its migrant neighbors—who face a long and dangerous journey, as they struggle to search for a better life.

Robert Christy SVD



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STAY **TOUCH**







Ukraine Update



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Raúl Alfredo Pí Sanchez

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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

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The Maria Madre de la Iglesia parish community in southern Ecuador cares deeply for its migrant neighbors. Forced to leave the security of their home countries because of political or economic strife—usually both—these migrants face a

long and dangerous journey, struggling to survive as they search

for a better life.

The parish takes care of its migrant neighbors by feeding them.

Ecuador parish extends hand to feed migrants

By Robert Christy SVD









The feeding program takes place at a Divine Word Missionary parish in Hauquillas, a small city with a population of 56,000 located in southern Ecuador on the border with Peru. Most people here, even those from Ecuador, are very poor because they came from other provinces searching for employment.

Our feeding ministry's primary focus is migrants. People crossing the border from Peru (even though most started their journeys in other countries) are on their way north where they hope to find a better life.

As Divine Word Missionaries, we reach out to those in need. We recognize that God never abandons his people, and neither should we. We join with the poor in their struggle for justice, equality and freedom. In their pain and sorrow, we see the face of Christ.

Our parish's primary ministry is the weekly feeding program, which assists the many migrants in need. We also provide basic medical assistance and a small amount of money to help them continue their journey.

The feeding program has been in existence for almost five years now. In the early days, almost all the migrants we served came from Venezuela. While the majority of them still come from Venezuela, we now see migrants from other countries, including Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Peru. Most of them travel with children and are in need of economic help. They wish to settle in America or Europe, places they hope to find jobs and make a better life for themselves and their families.

Our feeding program serves them meals every Saturday. Parish volunteers run the program. We have 12 to 15 weekly volunteers who prepare and serve the meals. Last May we served an average of 150 meals a week.

Our volunteers can find it challenging to watch the painful realities of the families who come through this much-needed program. Upon arrival, migrants are







strangers. They face suspicions and prejudices and are not accepted by many people around Hauquillas. Maria Madre de la Iglesia parish is a place where they can find refuge, where they can feel welcome.

The migrants—men, women, young, old—are all so very grateful, and you can see the thank-you smiles on their faces for the food they receive. We are happy to alleviate their hunger with full, hot meals. Tired and hungry, some ask for seconds, which we provide if there is enough food. To help them even further we provide medical assistance and hygiene articles. These basic necessities—food, medicine, soap and water—allow them to recuperate until they are ready to continue their journey.

As for my own experience with the feeding program, I have become more open to responding creatively to the needs of the poor. As a Divine Word Missionary, I assume that the Church's preferential option for the poor comes from the Christ the Incarnate Word.

It is in caring for the poor and neglected that I am actually ministering to the Lord himself. This is very clear in chapter 25 of the Gospel of St. Matthew: Whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters (the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, etc.) we do for the Lord. My spiritual foundation in the Word impels me to put the last first. I personally find the presence of the Word in the realities of immigrants. This mission is non-negotiable.

Here at Maria Madre de la Iglesia parish we are grateful to YOU and all who help this mission. We appreciate your generosity and willingness to feed these hungry migrants in Ecuador. We appreciate your sensitivity to our neediest brother and sister immigrants. •



Whatever we do
for the least
of our brothers
and sisters—
the hungry,
the thirsty,
the naked—
we do
for the Lord.

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Parroquia Verbita en Ecuador tiende la mano para alimentar a migrantes.





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Spanish Lessons

A Journey of Leaving the Familiar to Find God's Plan

By Hoang Do SVD



Hoang Do SVD is a seminarian who was born in Vietnam and moved to the United States in 2016. Just six months after arriving, he was introduced to Divine Word Missionaries and eventually joined them.
With his second year at Chicago Theological Union completed he was sent to Madrid to spend two years in the Cross-Cultural Training Program. He has shared his experience with Mission Update.



Moving to Madrid has been an exciting and challenging adventure.

For me, being a missionary has always meant stepping away from the familiar to follow God's call. As the plane landed in a country I had only heard about from my Spanish teacher at Divine Word College or seen in pictures and videos online, I felt a mix of excitement and fear.

Stepping out of the airport, I realized this isn't Vietnam, where I had returned for a short visit during the summer, nor is it the United States, where I lived for the past eight years. I was somewhere entirely new, and carrying a new swirl of emotions inside me. Honestly, that feeling of excitement mixed with uncertainty has stayed with me, day after day, even now as I sit and reflect while writing this.

My journey here began with a retreat in Fatima, Portugal, a place I never imagined I would visit. Every year, the Spain and Portugal provinces of our congregation gather for a retreat, hosted alternately by each province. Last year, it was held in Fatima to mark 75 years of our presence in Portugal.







Slowly, I began to realize that this was not just a random stop on my journey, but part of God's greater plan for me. Fatima became the starting point for my cross-cultural experience. It was where my faith would deepen and my heart open to all the new experiences waiting ahead.

One of the first challenges after returning to Madrid was learning Spanish. It hasn't always been easy, but even the struggle has taught me something important about the mission: It begins with true and active listening, patience, openness and a desire to understand.

Spanish has become more than just vocabulary and grammar; it is a doorway into a whole new world. As language and culture are so deeply connected, learning Spanish has allowed me to be truly present with people here. I realized that I can't really share the Gospel if I haven't first listened to people's stories, their joys, their struggles and their hearts in their own language.

Being in a new country also has taught me that mission isn't just about learning the language or the culture. It's also about being welcomed into a new community. Living and working alongside other missionaries has made all the difference. Their presence, support and wisdom remind me that I'm not alone on this path. I'm constantly learning, and I'm trying to stay open, humble and ready to learn from everyone around me.

One of the most powerful parts of my journey has been visiting sacred places, includ-





ing cathedrals, monasteries, churches and chapels. Walking into these spaces, I feel deeply connected to those who have prayed there before me as well as those who pray there with me. It's a powerful reminder that our faith is both ancient and still so alive today.

I'll never forget spending Holy Week in Zamora. I had heard about Spain's Holy Week celebrations, but seeing them in person was something else entirely. As I stood among the crowds, watching the "pasos," the beautiful processions telling the story of Jesus' Passion, I felt so close to him. It was an experience that moved me deeply.

As I write this, I'm filled with a growing sense of hope that has been nurtured here during my time in Spain. It's a hope rooted in faith, in the people I've met and in the living Church around me. Pope Francis' words for the Jubilee Year 2025 have stayed in my heart: "Hope is the virtue that inspires us and keeps us moving forward."

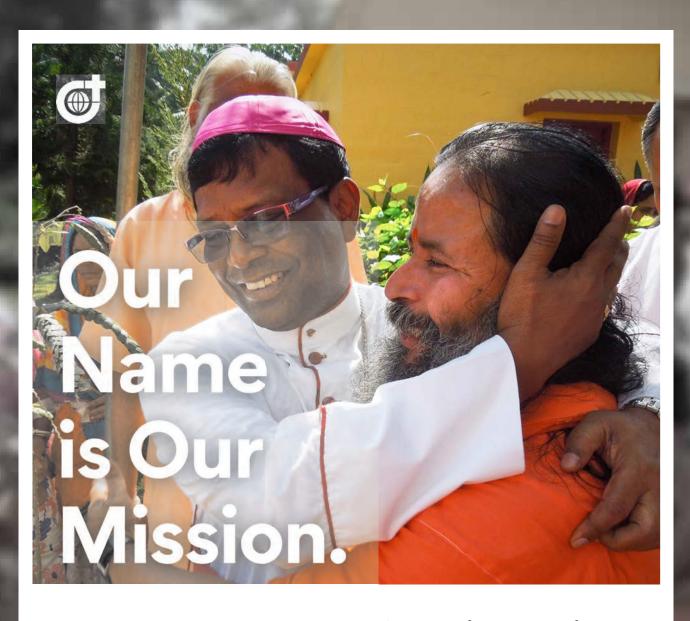
In a world so full of pain, division and uncertainty, being a missionary today means carrying hope—a hope that says: "You're not alone. God is with you."





Mission isn't always about preaching or doing grand things. More often, it's simply about being present, walking with people, feeling their struggles, sharing their joys and faith, and trusting that God is already at work in every encounter. I've come to firmly believe something I once learned only in books and theology courses: that being a missionary isn't just about bringing the Gospel, but also about discovering it is already alive in people's day-to-day existence, their traditions and their hearts.

My time in Spain is shaping me. It's teaching me to slow down, to really listen and to be open to change. I'm still learning, still growing. And in a world so hungry for hope, I pray that my life and my presence always point to the one who is the true and lasting hope, Christ himself.



Join Divine Word Missionaries today. Contact for more info:

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DETOUR SSION



How a threemonth vacation became a three-year vocation in Togo

By Edoh Adolphe Anato SVD



Months before our ordination to the priesthood in May 2021, my classmates and I received our first assignments. I would be sent to the Amazon Region in Brazil. I was eager to discover the mission and join the work with the brave confreres dedicated to spreading God's love in the Amazon.



That June, before heading to Brazil, while the paperwork to finalize my assignment was completed, I took a vacation back to my home country of Togo. I was set to leave for Brazil in August 2021. However, things did not go as planned, and I did not leave for Brazil until August 2024.

thanksgiving celebration



This is the story of my three-year "detour" mission.

During my planned time in Togo, I had a full schedule of Masses and sacraments, which I celebrated with faith and joy. The first was a homecoming celebration Mass on June 13, 2021, at the St. Daniel Comboni outstation, where I was once a member of the youth group (called the Jeunesse Missionnaire Catholique). This outstation is part of the Maire Mère du Rédempteur parish, which is staffed by the Comboni missionaries.

Even though some COVID restrictions were still in place, it was a beautiful thanksgiving celebration. It began with a procession from

procession



my house to the outstation. The Mass was concelebrated by 15 priests—Divine Word Missionaries, Comboni missionaries, Franciscans, Salesians, diocesan priests and deacons. It was a great joy to see my friends from long ago, as well as families, relatives and former members of the youth group that I knew from different outstations of our parish.

This first Mass began my ministerial journey back home. My time was filled with bits of vacation mixed with weekly Masses to celebrate sacraments, visiting the sick, blessing houses and farms, and witnessing the ordination of some of my friends.



Youth Groups

Change of Plans

By the end of August, we realized that the paperwork was not finished and I would not make it to Brazil on time. I was assigned to one of our Divine Word parishes, Notre Dame sous la Croix in Agbalepedogan, a suburb of Togo's capital city of Lomé.

During my first few months there, I helped with celebrations and observed how the missionaries in Togo live out ministry. And I continued waiting for the finished paperwork to get me to Brazil.

The holdup was with my visa to Brazil. The Brazil embassy in Togo disputed a document from Divine Word Missionaries' Brazil - Amazon Region. I was told the 2019 document was out of date by the time I had applied for my visa in 2021. The document should have been valid until 2022, but

the embassy staff didn't see it that way.

At one point the Amazon Region had to bring in a lawyer to explain the document to the people at the embassy. Not long after that, the person in charge of visas was replaced, and I had to start the process all over again with the new person.

Once it became clear that securing my visa would be a prolonged process, I was given more responsibility at the parish. I was assigned to oversee the catechism program, the youth group and the altar servers. I found myself immersed in the reality of a mission country in Togo. The challenges became real, and rightly so. They called for innovative ways of continuing the work of God.

The catechism program took a good part of my efforts and brain power. I supervised about 50 catechists from the parish and the two outsta-







tions. The three communities register around 600 people yearly for religious education, including recent converts and those studying to receive the sacraments. The catechists' formation, planning the year's schedule and coordinating the sacramental celebrations—we would have 100 candidates for confirmation and 150 for baptism and First Holy Communion—were all challenging joys.

Value of the Laity

I quickly learned the great value that the laity brings to mission work. Without those catechists, my years overseeing the catechism program would not have yielded any fruits. The end of the catechumenal year, when the sacraments are bestowed, is a time of celebration as all the parish communities thank God for his grace and the gift of the laity. I very much

enjoyed collaborating with the leaders of the altar servers. They always suggested new ways to walk together in the Lord's presence and give life to the group.

Catechism did not end at the door of the classroom. We invited those studying for the sacraments to join a parish group and fully participate in the faith community's life. Those who joined the youth group or became altar servers journeyed with me on another type of formation.



Albs for new Altar servers

servers was a
unique experience
for me because
I had never been
an altar server.
However, I believe
we all learned
something special
during our two
years of walking
together and discerning

God's ways for all of us.

Overseeing the altar



Ordination of friends



Farewell Mass





The annual ceremony before the parish community, where we impose an alb onto the new altar servers, was a moving moment for everyone. We celebrated their dedication to God and service to the Church.

With the youth group, we organized a weeklong retreat. These retreats created opportunities for members to deepen their faith, share spiritual conversation, form good disciplines, and develop authentic friendships. Leading this retreat was a personal moment for me, as I appreciated the opportunities God was giving me. I hope these retreats can be repeated yearly to continue spiritual growth and leadership for the youth group members.

Appreciating the Detour

A mission field brings opportunities to share with others the goodness of God. Those years of being on a "detour" mission have imprinted my priesthood with the conviction that the grace of God always walks with us.

My detour mission to Togo was filled with challenges, joys and God's love. That, I believe, is the experience of every mission country. It was painful to say goodbye to Togo, but in August 2024 I had to leave for the Amazon Region. I left with deep gratitude to Togo's people of God, who opened their hearts and homes to me.

The missionaries in the Amazon Region have been waiting for me to join them. I am now doing cultural training in Brasilia to fully contribute to my new mission. I am hoping to be a helping hand for the people of God here and for the glory of God's name.



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асир Полянська Ольга Юріївна

Ukraine Aid

As Russian drone and missile attacks in Ukraine have intensified, parishioners at a Divine Word Missionary parish in Verboviets, a town in western Ukraine, have received some relief.

Earlier this year, Father Wojciech Żółty SVD, pastor of the Verboviets parish, received a \$15,000 aid package from the Techny Mission Center. The humanitarian aid will benefit older parishioners and refugee families who have settled in the parish during the war.

The war has been hard on the people of Fr. Żółty's parish, located in a rural area that was low-income before Russia invaded their country in February 2023, which increased the economic hardships. Shortly after the war began, the parish opened its summer camp to refugees fleeing the violence in the eastern part of Ukraine.

Fr. Żółty reported the largest share of the money, about \$6,000, was spent on food to be distributed to members of his parish and the community. Other items purchased with the aid package include clothing, medicine, cleaning supplies, firewood and fuel.

In a message to the Mission Center, Fr. Żółty wrote: "The very difficult social and economic situation has motivated us to help our parishioners as well as refugees who have settled in our parish" On behalf of all parishioners, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all your help.

We would like to extend Fr. Žółty's gratitude to our generous donors, who made this aid package to Ukraine possible.

Rebuilding in Cuba

Divine Word Missionaries played a crucial role in a crucial time

By Raúl Alfredo Pí Sanchez

The story of the Catholic Church's revival in eastern Cuba cannot be told without mentioning Divine Word Missionaries, known as "Verbitas" across Cuba.

In the late 1980s, they arrived in Holguín and were sent to spread the faith in Mayarí, Preston, Nicaro and Sagua de Tánamo. They later expanded to Levisa, Nipe and Guaro. They faced severe hardships, often clashing with communist authorities who opposed their mission.

Despite the many challenges, these missionaries went on to provide not only spiritual guidance but also essential aid like medicine and food. Their dedication led to the complete reconstruction of San Gregorio Nacianceno Church in Mayarí and the repair of churches in Preston, Guaro and Sagua de Tánamo. Religious activities flourished in these churches under the leadership of Divine Word priests and committed laypeople.

photo: T. Giovan



The "Special Period" spurred radical change in Cuba's economy and culture. Without access to the oil-rich Soviet Union's gasoline, Cuba's transportation and agricultural industries were in crisis. There were power cuts and famine.

Divine Word Missionaries are an internationally diverse group of men of faith who undergo rigorous mission training worldwide. Many stories I have heard reflect their humility and dedication. During the 1990s, amidst Cuba's "Special Period"—a time of economic crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union—Fr. João Mellato SVD led the mission in Mayarí and Sagua, which included the Preston community.



Fr. Nevil D'Silva and I visited the community of Preston in the parish of Mayarí, Holguín. In the photo is the parish vicar, Fr. Benito Raydais SVD. Known as Fr. Juan, he was a physically imposing Brazilian with a commanding voice, his sermons often criticized the oppressive conditions in Cuba. He oversaw partial repairs to Preston's severely damaged church, securing materials for restoration and obtaining the building called Casa de los Muros, which served as a retreat and catechism center. When the church was later burned down, this house became the town's new place of worship.

One time, while driving his rundown Volkswagen Beetle back from a service in Nipe, Fr. Juan encountered a man assaulting a woman on a deserted road. Without hesitation, he stopped, intervened forcefully, rescued the woman and rushed her to the hospital. The assailant was arrested but soon released. This incident exemplifies his fearless spirit during Cuba's difficult times.

Father Thomás Kearney SVD, an Irish priest fluent in more than 12 languages, was another memorable Divine Word Missionary who served the Preston community. Parishioners loved to hear his stories.



Visitation to the community of San José and Santa Rita in Yara, Bayamo. In the photo is the parish vicar, Fr. Marcos Ostrycharz SVD.



Visitation to the SSpS community in Havana. In the photo is the District Superior, Fr. Francis Ylagan SVD.

He once shared a memory of his mission in the Paraguayan Amazon. Sent to a remote village, he arrived with only a suitcase and a box of Bibles. Greeted by the local mayor, Father was asked if he also could serve as the village schoolteacher, as there was none. For four years, he not only ministered but also educated the community.

During a quiet afternoon in Preston, he reflected on his spiritual journey, referencing St. Teresa of Ávila's book "The Interior Castle." Despite his lifelong sacrifices and service, he modestly admitted he was only at the "threshold of the first mansion." His words were a humbling reminder of the vast spiritual journey ahead for all believers.

Many laypeople played crucial roles in supporting Divine Word Missionaries in Cuba. In Preston, the late Juana Muguercia was a pillar of the Catholic community, tirelessly maintaining the church and leading prayers. Her devoted service earned her an invitation to the Vatican, an experience that deeply moved her. Her passing was a significant loss to the church.

Professor Elio Díaz Galán, alongside his wife, Maria Amelia Bresler, contributed to both spiritual work and church restorations.

Another key figure was Professor Diosdado Samé, who led prayer workshops that strengthened the faith of many in Preston.

Jorge Thomas and his wife, María, and Niurka Ricardo, so many others that devoted themselves and made a difference in the growth of the Church.

Raúl Alfredo Pí Sanchez is a layperson who lives in the Preston community.



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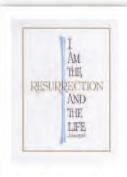
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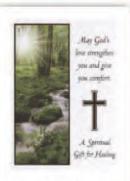
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Get Well Card 1



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