

DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES  
**mission**  
update

Volume 4 • 2024

mission stories from around the world

[svdmissions.org](http://svdmissions.org)







# 1875 Legacy Society

## Remembering Divine Word Missionaries in your Will is a powerful way to leave a meaningful legacy

The simplest way to support Divine Word Missionaries is through cash gifts.

But creative gifts of assets can include stocks, bonds, and property. These can not only provide you with charitable deductions, but often offer additional tax savings as well.

Choose the category of assets below that best fits your situation.



BEQUEST IN YOUR  
WILL.



RETIREMENT  
ASSETS.



LIFE INSURANCE.



DONOR ADVISED  
FUNDS.



STOCKS AND  
BONDS.



REAL ESTATE.

Seek the advice of your financial  
or legal advisor.

Have you already included us  
in your Will?

Let us know so we can

**Thank You!**

For more informations about  
different ways to include  
Divine Word Missionaries  
in your Will or estate plan call...

📞 1-800-275-0626

✉️ [legacy@svdmissions.org](mailto:legacy@svdmissions.org)

## EDITORIAL

We have received exciting news since the publication of our last issue. Divine Word Missionaries around the world are celebrating the elevation of two of our archbishops—Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi SVD of Tokyo and Ladislav Németh SVD of Belgrade-Smederevo in Serbia—have been elevated to the College of Cardinals. They are the first Divine Word Missionaries to become cardinals in 78 years.

Former archbishops Kikuchi and Németh were among 21 prelates Pope Francis named as cardinals-elect on Oct. 6. They were created cardinals during a consistory at the Vatican on Dec. 7.

This moment is a great honor not only for these two men, but for the Society of the Divine Word overall—especially as we are in the midst of celebrating our 150th anniversary. The only previous Divine Word Missionary to receive this honor was Thomas Cardinal Tien Ken-hsin SVD, who was archbishop of Beijing. He was elevated to cardinal in 1946 and participated in Vatican II before his death in 1967.

In a joint interview prior to the consistory, both cardinals-elect reflected on what their spirituality as Divine Word Missionaries would bring to the College of Cardinals. Archbishop Németh said, “We have a special gift as the Society of the Divine Word to be open with the spirit of freedom ... and esteem for all cultures.”

Noting that his first assignment following his ordination was as a missionary to Ghana, Archbishop Kikuchi said, “The missionary spirit is really the foundation of my priestly life, and that is what is coming from the SVD identity. It is very important for the SVD missionaries to go out all over the world and create unity in diversity.”

Please join me and my fellow Divine Word Missionaries as we offer our congratulations and prayers to Cardinal Tarcisio and Cardinal Ladislav. We are grateful to Pope Francis for the esteem he has shown our missionary order. Before December, only one Divine Word Missionary had been a cardinal. Pope Francis tripled that number in a single day!

Thank you and God bless you for your support.

Yours in the Divine Word,

Bro. Daniel Holman SVD  
Mission Director

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

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



Globally, over 2 billion people don't have access to safe water.  
 Viet Quoc Hoang SVD

## Plans for the Future

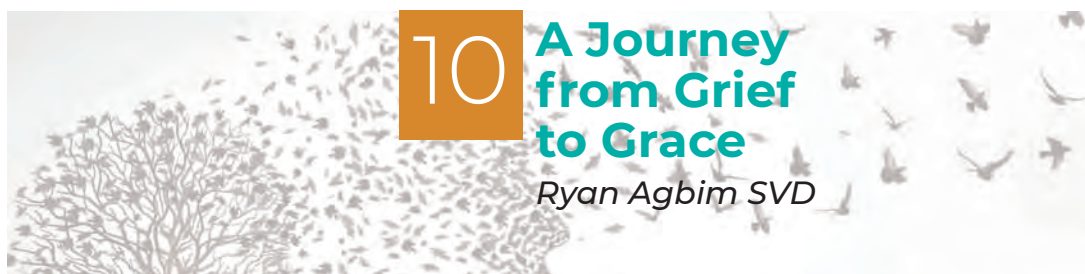
Romanus Thomas SVD

6

Throughout the years, by the grace of God,  
 our missionary journey has flourished.



STAY  
IN  
TOUCH



16

## from Home Builder to Home Visitor

Bernie Spitzley SVD

Cover photo and water well photos courtesy of [svdphotos.org](http://svdphotos.org)

Divine Word Missionaries Mission Center • P.O. Box 6099 • Techny, Illinois 60082-6099

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](http://SVDMISSIONS.ORG)**

DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES MISSION UPDATE • Volume 4, 2024 • issued quarterly • Subscription \$20.00 a year

Editorial Team: Bro. Dan Holman SVD • Carmelita J. Linden • Jeffrey Westhoff





*Globally, over 2 billion people don't have access to safe water. This results in over one million preventable deaths each year — often from diseases like typhoid, cholera and hepatitis A. Contaminated water is also the most common reason for diarrhea, the second-leading cause of death in children under 5 years old.*



# Water is Life

*By Viet Quoc Hoang SVD*

**Fresh, clean, usable water for drinking, farming and bathing is becoming a scarce commodity. There should be enough for everyone, but the population explosion, the lack of infrastructure in many places, and especially climate change mean that today more people on the planet lack safely managed drinking water. And the number of people is growing.**



We are seeing the effects of water shortage here at St. Peter's, the parish where I am pastor in the town of San Pedro de Parana in southernmost Paraguay.

As a religious missionary priest, I believe a basic and indispensable resource for life such as water should be accessible to everyone. However, climate change has thrown precipitation patterns out of balance, causing more intense rainfall in certain areas and prolonged droughts in others.

Intense rainfall can cause natural disasters such as floods, river overflows and damage to urban infrastructure. Meanwhile, prolonged droughts can cause water and food shortages while harming agriculture, water resources and biodiversity.

These extreme changes in precipitation directly affect the availability of fresh water. Intense rainfall makes it difficult to store and use water, while droughts slow the replenishment of aquifers and decrease the flow of rivers and water levels of lakes. In the face of the challenges posed by floods and droughts, it is crucial to adopt new management measures that promote efficient use, capture and storage of water.





***Our parish has built three concrete tanks that hold 530 gallons—providing clean water for more than 20 families in their daily needs.***

For those who live daily without access to water, conscious and responsible water consumption is a matter of survival. Here at St. Peter's Parish, we are learning to harvest water before we are forced to learn how to live without it. If we protect access to water for all, we will also be protecting the environment, our common home.

One of our parishioners, Maria Fernandez, shares her daily struggle:

"Before, there were heavy downpours and we never collected water, not even for the bathroom. We didn't value it until I came here, where I really suffered to feel what it's like to not have water. But there's no way around it: We must learn to recycle it. We learn to live like this and to value the water that there is."

Maria describes collecting rain that falls from her roof during a downpour. Because the roof is made of tin and cardboard, dirty water falls during the early part of the storm. Once the dirt is washed from the roof, though, the rainwater falls clean. The early water is used for the toilet and to wash the floor, while the clean water is used for drinking and cooking.



Testimonies like Maria's encourage our parish to do something for our brothers and sisters who lack ready access to water. In our parish we do not dwell on the problem, but rather move towards a solution. We begin by meeting with people in places that lack water for daily needs. We talk about it, identify problems and look for creative solutions. Collaboration and solidarity are key to this effort. By working together, we can develop innovative solutions and share best practices to ensure equitable access to water for all, even in a world affected by climate change.

As of this year, our parish has built three concrete tanks in the surrounding area. Each concrete tank can hold about 530 gallons and provides clean water for more than 20 families in their daily needs. More tanks need to be built but this initiative is progressing slowly because each tank costs \$425 and our parish lacks the funding.

Nevertheless, the challenges do not discourage us. We are more united in our commitment to protect this vital resource for present and future generations. Water is life, and its preservation is the responsibility of all of us. ●



**Help us  
protect the  
environment,  
our common  
home.**

**a gift of \$425  
will build a 530 gallon  
tank and provide  
clean water for  
20 families.**

**Visit our website at [svdmissions.org/water](https://svdmissions.org/water)**

Or send your gift by mail to:

Divine Word Missionaries/150 PO BOX 1835 Waukegan Rd Techny IL 60082-6099



# Plans for the Future

GOOD NEWS! Our Parish in Ecuador is Growing!  
***NOW we need more space to nurture the growth.***

*By Romanus Thomas SVD*





**Thirty years ago, Divine Word Missionaries arrived in the southern part of Quito, the capital of Ecuador, to work in Verbo Divino Parish. These missionaries embraced the parish's community of migrants—many of whom had relocated from rural to urban areas—and nurtured them to live by the Word of God with the Eucharist at the center of Christian life.**

Throughout the years, by the grace of God, our missionary journey has flourished. We have grown in faith and solidarity, spreading God's message to every heart. Today, we are blessed with various ministries dedicated to this cause. We have nearly 10 lay groups, along with lay partners of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters.

Notably, our youth formation programs and catechism classes are thriving, serving a substantial number of young people. As Divine Word Missionaries, we are dedicated to nurturing faith and planting the seeds of belief in the fertile and receptive hearts of our community. The people here are welcoming and celebrative, and they actively contribute to the improvement of their faith as well as the betterment of their lives.

As our community grows, we have recognized the need to grow with it, both spiritually and through community building. To this end, we





plan to construct a two-story reinforced concrete building to serve as our parish hall. We have conducted the necessary studies, and construction professionals have provided structural, electrical and plumbing plans. Each floor will have approximately 2,400 square feet.

The ground floor will feature a large multipurpose hall with a kitchen that is designed to accommodate various ministries. It will include a dining hall where we will provide meals to the elderly who require a balanced diet. Currently, we can serve lunch once a week to approximately 50 to 60 elderly people. First-floor plans also call for four additional rooms for other activities.

The second floor will have eight rooms, each capable of accommodating approximately 30 people. These rooms primarily will be used for catechism classes, as we





typically have between 300 and 400 children enrolled each year. This need for adequate space is urgent and pressing.

Since last year, we have been working to raise funds for the new parish hall through raffles and collections. So far, by the grace of God and with the collaboration of the faithful, we have managed to raise \$21,000. The total estimated cost of the project is approximately \$55,000. ●

Today we are reaching out to you, our mission friends who may wish to support this important project, which will provide healthy meals for the elderly and religious education for the children of our growing parish.



**Give a gift TODAY! Make an** **IMPACT.**  
Around the world!



# A Journey from Grief to Grace

*By Ryan Agbim SVD*







**It was early August 2023. I had just finished World Youth Day in Portugal, the excitement of the mission still fresh in my mind, and I was returning to Italy when I received a call from my sister. Her voice trembled as she explained that our mother's condition had worsened.**

I rushed to book a flight back home to New Jersey, the urgency of the situation sinking in. My thoughts raced during those hours at the Venice airport. Would I make it in time to see her? Nothing else mattered at that moment. I was determined to be there for her, to hold her hand one last time and to tell her how much I loved her.

Yet as I stood in line waiting to check my bags, my phone rang again. It was my sister, Jessica, calling through FaceTime. I knew before I even answered. I saw her tearful face on the screen, and behind her, a nurse checking my mother's



*My Italian friends rallied around me, becoming an unexpected source of encouragement.*

pulse, nodding silently. My mother had passed. I was in the middle of hundreds of strangers, people bustling around me, oblivious to the world-altering news I had just received. In that crowded airport, I was completely alone.

Fast forward to the final week of my Cross-Cultural Training experience in Italy. I leave the country with a heart full of joy and passion for serving God's people solidified. So, what changed?

I returned to Italy after mother's funeral carrying my grief with me, yet determined not to let it overshadow the work I had come to do. Returning to ministry after such a loss was one of the most challenging experiences of my life. Each day, I was confronted with moments that would normally have been filled with joy and energy.

I had to find a way to serve with an open heart, even when my heart felt so broken. But I was not alone. God, in his compassion, surrounded me with people who would help to carry me through this season of mourning.

One of the greatest sources of relief was the relationship I had developed with a family from Napoli. They took me in as one of their own, inviting me over for meals, sharing stories and reminding me I understood what the word "hospitality" meant. My priestly community also became a wellspring of support. The priests with whom I stayed, both my



fellow Divine Word Missionaries and the diocesan priests who welcomed me, understood the depth of my loss. Their presence reminded me of the strength that comes from a shared faith and a shared mission. In our moments of prayer and during community meals, I found a sense of belonging and solidarity that helped me face each day.

My Italian friends, too, rallied around me, becoming an unexpected source of encouragement. The friendships I had formed, initially out of cultural curiosity, became vital lifelines. Whether it was a shared coffee in the afternoon, a simple conversation or a gathering at someone's home, these small moments with my friends gave me a sense of normalcy and joy. These people, too, understood how to bring light into dark moments, and their companionship was a daily reminder of God's grace.

Underlying all of these relationships was a profound sense of God's presence. In the quiet moments of reflection, in the loving gestures of those around me and in the strength I found to continue each day, I knew God was carrying me. It was as if he had placed each of these people in my life as a testament to his love, showing me that even in the midst of loss, I was not alone. God blesses us with the strength to do many things: to take on missions, to serve others as Jesus did in his ministry, and to persevere even when life does not go as planned. My time in Italy, though marked by sorrow, became a testimony to God's faithfulness. Through the



*The friendships I had formed, initially out of cultural curiosity, became vital lifelines.*

relationships he brought into my life, I learned that mission is not about denying our pain but about finding ways to serve through it. Each day, I felt the gentle nudge of his presence, reminding me that even in my weakness, his strength was made perfect. And in serving others, I found healing for myself.

Through this journey, I discovered that God doesn't promise to take away our hardships, but he does promise to walk with us through them, surrounding us with people who reflect his love and grace. The image of Jesus as the servant who suffers yet lovingly serves his brothers and sisters made clear to me what a large part of mission may entail for many of us. When we offer up our struggles to God, the mission goes from a seemingly impossible situation to a life-giving adventure. ●



World Youth Day, Portugal

***Through this journey,  
I discovered that God  
doesn't promise to take  
away our hardships,  
but he does promise  
to walk with us  
through them . . .***





## Clean = Big Water = Smiles

Give Once

Give Monthly

\$500

\$300

\$150

\$50

\$25

Visit our website at  
**[svdmissions.org/water](https://svdmissions.org/water)**

Or send your gift by mail to:  
Divine Word Missionaries/150  
PO BOX 1835 Waukegan Rd  
Techy IL 60082-6099

Divine Word Missionaries  
sesquicentennial







# from **Home Builder** to **Home Visitor**







## Bro. Bernie Spitzley recounts his missionary journey in Jamaica

*By Bernie Spitzley SVD*

I had spent 18 years doing formation work in the United States when I finally received a hands-on mission assignment. In 1999 I was sent in Jamaica with the task of building houses for underprivileged families.

This was a monumental task. I settled in Morant Bay, a coastal town in the civil parish of St. Thomas (the Jamaican equivalent of an American state), which is located on the southeastern tip of this Caribbean island. The region is rife with ever-present poverty and a high number of people living in houses that could be charitably described as “insufficient.”

We began to at least try to meet their needs.

Coordinating with Food for the Poor, an international charity known for building houses and distributing food, my job became not only a reality, but also a needed ministry.

We had a process for constructing homes. First came the investigation of the need for a house. This was very easy. Anyone could see if a family’s home had



dilapidated walls or a rusted-out roof—or if they had a home at all.

Next came the work of documentation. We needed proof of land ownership or a certified statement that the landowner gave permission to have a Food for the Poor house constructed on their property. This was not always easy. Some families lived for generations on the same lot with no certificate or govern-

ment documentation to prove ownership. So we developed a system where candidates would bring their documents to me to be verified. When I had done this successfully, I would bring the documents to Food for the Poor headquarters here in Jamaica.

Once a project was approved, we started to set the home's foundation. This massive construction undertaking was under the supervision of Max Smith, my right-hand man. After we surveyed the site and decided where the veranda would go, we lined and dug the foundation. Max and his helpers took over from there. In two days' time, his team would complete a 12-foot-by-12-foot foundation, square and level. Over the years we had more than 80 groups



of visiting volunteers—Divine Word College students and alumni, as well as family friends—work with Max and his crew. All were amazed by the work ethic and construction skills in an area where all the materials had to be hand-delivered before construction could begin.

Once the foundation was completed, a Food for The Poor housing crew would come. These skilled carpenters could build a wooden home in three hours, complete with a coat of paint! Of course, this was made possible because of a Max Smith foundation, always square and level.

Once the home was finished, we would have a short prayer service that ended with handing over the key to the new owner. We usually had a visiting volunteer lead the prayer. This ritual became a memorable tradition as recipients entered their new home.

In 2012, our Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters came to Morant Bay and started a Catholic school. With their arrival, I was forced to leave the convent, where I had lived for 12 years, and was now “on loan” to the Archdiocese of Kingston. The archbishop at the time, Charles Dufour, asked if I would be willing to be the administrator of Holy Rosary Church, an inner-city parish much different from rural



*Anyone could see if a family's home had dilapidated walls or a rusted-out roof...*

St. Thomas. I accepted and served there for 12 years. After that I was on loan again to St. Patrick's Church, another inner-city community.

This August, I was called back to work in the Divine Word Missionary community at Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Morant Bay—the place where I started my first overseas mission. On my return, I was inundated with calls for the “house father”! People just automatically expected



that I would return to house construction. This did not become a reality for numerous reasons but mostly because my ministry had changed from “doing for” the people to “being with” the people.

Thus began my new ministry of spiritual direction and Bible sharing.

Instead of building homes, I now visit them. I no longer experience the joy of the prayerful ritual of handing over the key to a new homeowner. Now I'm blessed by a new apostolate, one of enhanced, enriched and improved service and outreach.

Upon reflection I approach my new ministry with humility and respect. I have learned to receive and to give, to be evangelized and to evangelize, to listen and to speak, to walk with the people and respect their pace, to be changed and to change, to be converted and to invite into conversion.

I have come to know that mission is first and foremost God's mission and that the main agent of mission is God's Holy Spirit. I am to collaborate with the Spirit in helping to unfold God's ongoing dialogue with humanity. So to paraphrase the words of St. Peter: “I have neither silver nor gold [a house], but what I do have [the word of God] I give you” (Acts 3:6). ●



# MASS REQUEST.

GIVE THE GIFT OF A HOLY MASS.

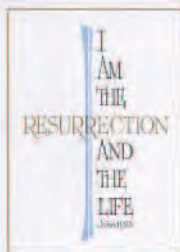
## svdmissions.org online MASS REQUESTS

See how quick and easy  
it is to request a Mass

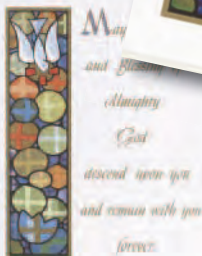
Divine Word Missionaries are honored to pray with you for your special intention.

- Your Mass will be celebrated by our missionaries overseas.
- Your offering supports our missionaries and the people they serve.
- Mass requests are also available by calling 1-800-275-0626.

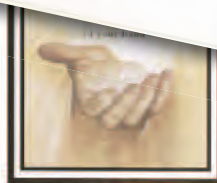
Mass cards can be sent to an honoree or a family member.



☐ Sympathy Card 1



☐ Sympathy Card 2



☐ Sympathy Card 3



☐ Sympathy Card 4



☐ Birthday Card 1



☐ Birthday Card 2



☐ Get Well Card 1



☐ Get Well Card 2

Divine Word Missionaries  
P.O. Box 6099  
Techny, Illinois 60082-6099

Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Divine Word  
Missionaries

Give a gift TODAY! Make an **IMPACT.**  
Divine Word Missionaries  
sesquicentennial  
**Water Well project**  
Around the world!

Give a gift on line or use the enclosed envelope at the center of this magazine.  
PLEASE add your name, address and GIFT CODE to the form.

**No one should  
have to drink  
dirty water.**

Give Once

Give Monthly

**\$500**

**\$300**

**\$150**

**\$50**

**\$25**

Visit our website at  
**[svdmissions.org/water](http://svdmissions.org/water)**

Or send your gift by mail to:  
Divine Word Missionaries/150  
PO BOX 1835 Waukegan Rd  
Techny IL 60082-6099

**Yet in many parts of the  
world people don't have safe,  
clean water to drink.**



***Give the gift of clean water!***