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mission
update

Volume 4 • 2025

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EDITORIAL

When disasters strike in one of our mission countries, the Mission Center at Techny will respond with an emergency appeal to raise funds for the disaster victims and our missionaries providing relief on the scene.

Such a disaster hit the Philippines on Sept. 30. Late that night, a magnitude 6.9 quake rocked the northern coast of the island of Cebu. At least 72 people were killed in the quake, with more than 550 reported injured.

Divine Word Missionaries on the island are based in Cebu City, which is on the southern coast. Although tremors were felt in Cebu City, no buildings were damaged and all our missionaries were safe. They immediately began relief efforts, collecting and delivering much-needed food, clean water and other necessities to people whose lives were disrupted on the other side of the island.

The earthquake's epicenter was 12 miles northeast of coastal Bogu City. This city of 90,000 people has been devastated, along with towns and villages in the nearby countryside. Early relief efforts were hampered because roads and bridges damaged in the quake were impassable.

"Now that a clearer picture has emerged, the extent of the damage has far exceeded our expectations," Father Roger Bag-ao SVD, superior of the Philippines - South Province, wrote days after the earthquake.

As disaster relief continues, Divine Word Missionaries in Cebu City have organized a task force to deliver assistance to those still reeling from the earthquake. The task force includes missionaries as well as seminarians, faculty and staff of the University of San Carlos. They plan to deliver emergency relief to 3,650 families in remote localities on the north side of the island.

To support these efforts, the Mission Center has declared an emergency fundraising project to raise \$10,000 to bring critical aid to these earthquake victims. You can contribute by visiting

missionimpact.svdmissions.org/philippine-earthquake

or by texting

EARTHQUAKE to 707070.

Your donation will help those whose lives have been upended by this disaster.

We thank you in advance for your generosity and compassion. May God bless you for taking the people of the Philippines into your heart.

Yours in the Divine Word,

Bro. Daniel Holman SVD
Mission Director



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

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



151 + **79** + **5,641** = **OUR**
YEARS COUNTRIES MISSIONARIES IMPACT.



A Christmas Story of Faith, Service and Belonging

2

Bao Nguyen SVD



8



Divine Word Missionaries helped build Papua New Guinea

Philip Gibbs SVD



14

Colombia: A Land of Challenges for Divine Word Missionaries

Seby Ouseph SVD

STAY IN TOUCH



18 Sankt Augustin Celebrates the Light

Sebastian Quillmann

20 Facing Melissa

Bernie Spitzley 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.

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A Christmas
Story
of
Joyful Faith, Service
& Belonging
on Karkar Island

By Bao Nguyen SVD



E

Every year on Karkar Island, as Christmas approaches the sea breeze brings the scent of ripe fruit and saltwater, something special takes place at the mission station in Tabel, located on this island off the north coast of Papua New Guinea.



It's more than just a party or a festive meal; it's a joyful celebration of the young people who serve the Church with faith, love and energy throughout the year. This Christmas tradition has become one of the most beautiful moments in our parish life, especially for the altar servers and the junior members of the Legion of Mary. All of it is made possible by the simple but faithful efforts of our small missionary parish family.

Throughout the year, these young people give their time freely, with kind hearts and helping hands. Many of them come from families who face daily struggles—some can't always afford school fees, proper clothes or even enough food. But that never holds them back.

Every Sunday, they come to church with bright smiles and strong faith. On Saturdays, the junior legionnaires come together to pray, visit the sick and elderly, and learn how to care for others with love. The altar servers are always ready to assist during Mass.

Quietly and faithfully, they take on many small but important tasks—cutting the grass, cleaning the church and the priest's house, repairing pews, setting up solar lights, or doing simple woodwork. Sometimes, they



carry heavy supplies from Madang on the mainland, lifting things on and off the car or the dinghy, doing whatever the parish needs.



They never ask for anything in return. Sometimes, we sit together and share a meal—breakfast, lunch or dinner. The food may be plain, but the time shared brings deep joy. It fills our bodies, yes, but even more, it fills our hearts.

Whenever I am able, I try to help with school fees or offer some clothes. I also support their parents, who, despite their own hardships, are deeply proud to see their children growing in faith and giving their time to serve the Church.


CHRISTMAS ANTICIPATION

Even though life is hard, these young hearts serve with joy. What gives them strength is the deep knowing that they belong to something bigger: the Church, the body of Christ.

As Christmas gets closer, their excitement grows. They don't just wait for food or gifts; they look forward to celebrating their faith together. In the days before Christmas, they decorate the church and the priest's house with fresh flowers and bright, colorful lights, filling our worship space with new life and happiness.

A few days after Christmas, we gather for our special youth celebration. The morning begins with a joyful Mass, where the entire community comes together to give thanks to God. After Mass, the real fun begins. The mission ground bursts with laughter, music and the energy of young people.





The children are divided into mixed groups, and each group receives meat and ingredients to prepare a meal. But there's a catch: the cooking must follow creative and sometimes difficult rules that make the challenge fun and meaningful.

Each team collects its share of pork, along with garden food like taro, yams, bananas, rice, instant noodles and more. The girls usually lead the cooking, while the boys collect firewood and help where needed. The younger boys who are not ready to cook spend their time playing soccer or volleyball nearby.

COOKING CONTEST

The cooking isn't done the usual way. For example, the teams must cook rice without using a pot and prepare root crops without using direct fire. They also must decorate at least one dish in a fun and artistic way. Soon, the mission ground fills with the smell of food, the sound of laughter, and the joy of youth working side by side, using bamboo and banana leaves to create their meals.

To make it even more exciting, we turn it into a cooking competition. Each team is given a set amount of time. When I call out, "Stop cooking!" all hands must go up or points are lost! The children then bring the dishes inside the parish hall and present them to the judges: usually a

Missionary of Charity Sister, a primary school teacher and myself.

Some dishes are delicious, some a little burnt or overly salty—but each one is full of heart. This fun contest

reminds everyone that faith doesn't always have to be serious. There's room in the Church for joy, laughter and teamwork, too.

Once the meals are shared and the area is cleaned up, the most anticipated moment of the day begins: the gift exchange. A few days earlier, everyone had drawn a number and secretly prepared a small gift. In the evening, everyone returns with their wrapped presents. The gifts are handed to me, and I shuffle them and pass them out randomly.

What follows is pure joy. Some boys unwrap girls' socks or headbands. Some girls receive boys' underwear. Sometimes a small boy opens a gift to find a doll or pink lotion and bursts into tears. But soon everyone is laughing together. These funny surprises teach us all not to take ourselves too seriously—and that the real gift is the love and joy we share with one another.

GIFTS AND SONGS

Along with the fun and funny gifts, I also give special presents to those who have served with great dedication. These gifts are simple but full of meaning: solar lights, clothes, school backpacks or water bottles. They might not cost much, but to our young people they are treasures. These gifts say, "We see your hard work. We care about you. You belong here."

As the gift exchange goes on, we sing Christmas carols with the guitar and enjoy snacks, brisket, candies and share cans of Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Sprite, 7UP, Fanta and root beer. Everyone joins in. The older boys and girls help the younger ones sing along so no one feels left out. In a place where life can be tough, this one day of celebration becomes a special memory—a moment when every young person





feels that the Church is their true home, a place filled with joy, laughter and belonging.

As the evening comes to a close and the children walk home tired but smiling, something remains in their hearts. This day is not just about fun. It's a moment of formation. It helps them grow in faith, in character and in hope. It gives them a reason to stay close to the Church, rather than wandering toward trouble.

As I often say, "It's better to keep the boys busy with good things than to let them waste time and cause problems in the village." These joyful moments plant seeds: seeds of peace, of purpose and of a better future.

INSPIRING THE YOUTH

On Karkar Island, where traditional culture is strong and life is simple, even small acts of kindness and celebration carry great meaning. Many families live without enough resources. But in the middle of these challenges, our young people still shine.

These Christmas traditions, simple as they are, help build a Church that is truly alive—open, loving and full of spirit. As Pope Francis once reminded us, we are called to build a "culture of encounter," a way of living that is rooted in respect, friendship and walking side by side.

In the end, this Christmas gathering is not just a holiday celebration. It is the Gospel in action. It is about walking with our young people, lifting them up and showing them the love of God. On the dusty mission ground of Tabel—with pigs and rice, mismatched gifts and bright young faces—the Good News comes alive.

And as Pope Francis said, young people are the "protagonists of change." On Karkar Island, they already are leading the way. Through their prayers, their service, their cooking and their joy, they are helping to build a stronger Church. And through the faithful guidance of their missionary priest, they are discovering what Emmanuel really means: God is with us, this Christmas and always. ●





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Divine Word Missionaries helped build Papua New Guinea

By Philip Gibbs SVD



For more than a century, Divine Word Missionaries have been part of the social, cultural, educational and spiritual life of Papua New Guinea.

Beginning with their arrival on the island nation's north coast in the late 19th century, Divine Word Missionaries—together with their sister congregations, especially the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters—built schools and health stations, learned languages, published newspapers, trained leaders, and helped local communities navigate the upheavals of colonialism, war, independence and nation-building.

Today, as Papua New Guinea celebrates 50 years as an independent nation, the legacy of Divine Word Missionaries is visible in institutions such as Divine Word University, in research centers like the Melanesian Institute, in the country's sole Tok Pisin weekly newspaper, *Wantok*, and—most importantly—in the lives of people empowered through education, health and faith.

Early Years

Mission historians date the arrival of Divine Word Missionaries on mainland New Guinea to Aug. 13, 1896, when the first group landed at Madang. However, they were not permitted to remain and were sent to Tumleo Island, off the coast of present-day Aitape. Only in 1905 were they allowed to return and settle at Alexishafen, a town on the north coast near Madang.

The mission quickly prioritized catechist training, basic literacy, and teaching vocational skills to support village life. Missionary Brothers ran workshops that taught vocational training and provided employment. These workshops trained students in carpentry, boat building, mechanics, plumbing, shoemaking, butchery, kapok mattress making (for boarding schools), brick making and roof-tile making.

The north coast mission expanded along the Rai Coast, Bogia and the Sepik, creating parishes and schools that became centers for community gathering and social support. This period also saw the early collaboration of Divine Word Missionaries with the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, whose work in girls' education, basic health and women's skills development complemented parish efforts and helped establish Catholicism in local communities.



Divine Word Missionaries entered the nation's Highlands with Father William Ross SVD arriving at what is now Mount Hagen in 1933. The mission to the Highlands was not without its losses. Father Karl Morshauer SVD was killed in Upper Simbu over a dispute about a pig that was killed by another missionary. In 1935,

Brother Eugene Frank SVD died in Chimbu after being shot by arrows.



*Left and above:
Fr. William Ross SVD*



The Cathedral in Alexishafen before it was destroyed by bombing on Sept 1, 1943. Photo: SVD Archives, Madang.

War and Reconstruction

World War II inflicted heavy losses on Catholic missions. Alexishafen’s cathedral and mission complex, for example, were destroyed by bombs in 1943. During the war, almost 100 priests, Brothers and Sisters died—some executed and others killed in aerial attacks.

After the war, Divine Word Missionaries and partner congregations rebuilt rapidly, reopening schools and health centers and stepping into new forms of social service as colonial structures gave way to self-government. Through these years, mission airstrips, boats and carpentry workshops were as important as chapels—tools for connecting remote communities to education, medicines and markets.

Language, Media and Culture

One of the most distinctive contributions by Divine Word Missionaries has been in language and communications. Early missionaries were engaged in ethnographic and linguistic work with the many tribal cultures.



Photo: Dr Kevin Pamba

Shown above is the cemetery in Alexishafen. Not all missionaries are buried here, but it is here their memories are remembered. The bishop of Madang during World War II, Bishop Franz Wolf SVD is commemorated on the monument that acknowledges the missionaries who died during the war.

Bishop Wolf was among over 90 expatriate Catholic missionaries and lay workers across Madang Province that were rounded up by the Japanese military in 1943 and held captive for many months in the hills of Gayaba inland from Alexishafen. The spot where the missionaries were held captive is now a scared site for the Catholics in the Archdiocese of Madang. The Catholics in Madang call the site “Maria Helpim,” which is Tok Pisin abbreviation for “Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help.”



Later, Father Frank Mihalic SVD (pictured left) produced pioneering grammars and dictionaries of Tok Pisin. Encouraged by Bishop Leo Arkfeld SVD, he founded Wantok Niuspepa in 1970, training the first cohort of Tok Pisin journalists in Wewak. Tok Pisin is a creole language based on English and the most widely spoken language in the country.

Wantok became—and remains—the country’s only national Tok Pisin weekly, a vehicle for public education and civic participation during the independence era and beyond. Linguists widely acknowledge Fr. Mihalic’s orthography and reference works as foundational for Tok Pisin literacy and publishing.

Inspired by Father Wilhelm Schmidt SVD, Divine Word Missionaries also invested in intercultural research. The Melanesian Institute in Goroka—an ecumenical center with significant participation by our missionaries—has for decades provided social analysis, orientation courses and dialogue resources that help churches, nonprofits and government agencies engage with Melanesian cultures respectfully and effectively. Melanesians are the Indigenous inhabitants of New Guinea and other South Pacific islands.

Divine Word University and Beyond

Education has been the signature pathway that Divine Word Missionaries have employed to help the people of Papua New Guinea forge their own identity. The seeds of Divine Word University were planted in 1968 with the inception of Divine Word High School, followed by Divine Word Institute, which was established by an act of Parliament in 1980. It was granted full university status in 1996.

Guided by our congregation's educational charism, Divine Word University became Papua New Guinea's national Catholic university. It grew to encompass multiple campuses and thousands of students in arts, business, education, health sciences and theology. The school is known as a university that is academically serious, culturally grounded and service-oriented.

The university now has a medical school, preparing much-needed doctors for the nation's health services. The university also has pioneered flexible learning and professional programs that train public servants, teachers and health workers—developing a social infrastructure that has made an impact well beyond the campus gates.

Health and Human Development

From their earliest years here, Divine Word Missionaries and Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters integrated basic health care with pastoral work: dispensaries near mission stations, training of orderlies and nurses, maternal and child health, and outreach to remote villages. Scholarly overviews of mission medicine in Papua New Guinea highlight Catholic efforts as a backbone of rural healthcare. Today, the nonprofit Catholic Church Health Services remains a major provider nationwide, a system whose roots lie in our mission initiatives.

Divine Word Missionaries helped to open coastal villages to the wider world and provided people with an opportunity to transport their goods and to market produce. Mission boats ran regularly

along the coast, serving missionaries and local people alike: taking the sick to hospitals and young boys and girls to boarding schools.

The mission also established flying services with two companies established for that purpose: Divine Word Airways and Wirui Airways. These services reached people in areas without roads. Bishop Arkfeld, known as the "Flying Bishop,"



brought many sick people from interior villages to the hospital in Wewak. So did Divine Word Brothers and priests who also flew, including Father Henry Hoff SVD, Brother Larry Camilleri SVD and Brother Ben Seng SVD.



Above and right: Bishop Arkfeld.

At left: Bro. Larry Camilleri SVD.

Forming Local Leadership

Throughout the 20th century, the priorities of our missionaries shifted from pioneer evangelization to localization: forming local clergy and lay leaders and helping local scholars and ministers take the lead. The Papua New Guinea Province now serves



Top: Fr. John Ryan SVD with parishioners in Goroka.

Middle: Fr. Stach Kilarski SVD tending to a child in Maramuni, Enga Province

Bottom: Fr. Philip Gibbs SVD cutting timber for a school at Porgera, Enga Province

across multiple dioceses (Port Moresby, Mount Hagen, Madang, Wewak, Wabag, Kundiawa, Goroka, Daru-Kiunga), with Divine Word Missionaries working alongside Papua New Guinean priests, Sisters and lay professionals. In 2025, our province has 73 fully professed and five temporarily professed members. It is a multicultural group of 17 nationalities!

Missiologists describe the nation's Catholic Church today as moving from a receiving to a sending church, with local-born personnel contributing to mission beyond their borders—an arc of growth Divine Word Missionaries helped enable. There are 30 Papua New Guinea nationals who are fully professed Divine Word Missionaries. Of that number, 19 are assigned to missions outside Papua New Guinea, and 11 are working in their home country.

Tensions and Lessons

Mission history is not romantic. The Divine Word Missionary story in Papua New Guinea includes difficult chapters: wartime devastation, the ambiguities of operating under colonial regimes, and, later, the challenging work of handing leadership to local communities. Yet the broad consensus is clear: Divine Word Missionaries—often in partnership with Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters and countless Papua New Guinean collaborators—played outsized roles in building educational institutions, health services, media and leadership pathways that have served this nation's society for generations. It is hard to imagine Papua New Guinea today without the contribution of the Divine Word Missionaries.



50 Years of Independence

On Sept.16, 2025, Papua New Guinea celebrated 50 years as an independent nation. It is a time to remember and honour those who have contributed to this milestone. Divine Word Missionaries recently commemorated 150 years since their founding and the coming of their first missionaries to what is now Papua New Guinea 129 years ago.

Measured by institutions, publications and prominent personalities alone, the footprint of our missionaries in Papua New Guinea is impressive. Measured by changed lives—girls who learned to read, patients who received care, public debates held in the people’s language, students shaped for service—it is transformative.

Divine Word Missionaries have helped Papua New Guinean communities adapt to modernity without losing their Melanesian heart, and they continue to accompany the nation as it educates its youth, strengthens civil society and sends its own members into wider service. ●



Volume 4 • 2025

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PLAN & BUDGET

To sustain our mission programs overseas, it is an undeniable necessity to use these two words “plan” and “budget.” Budgeting is the only way to ensure program consistent funding. Preaching the Gospel, feeding the poor, providing medical attention to those in need and helping families around the world become self-reliant takes a lot of planning. These long-term investments in the future of struggling Catholic faith communities can be done only with consistent and planned monies coming in.

Becoming a monthly sustainer is the easiest and eco-friendliest way to provide ongoing, reliable support for our missionaries overseas.



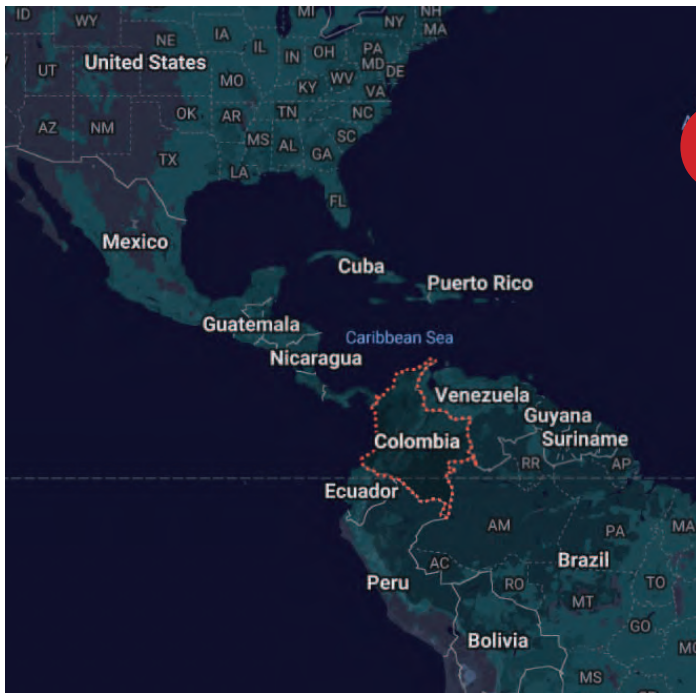
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Colombia:

A Land of Challenges for Divine Word Missionaries

By Seby Ouseph SVD

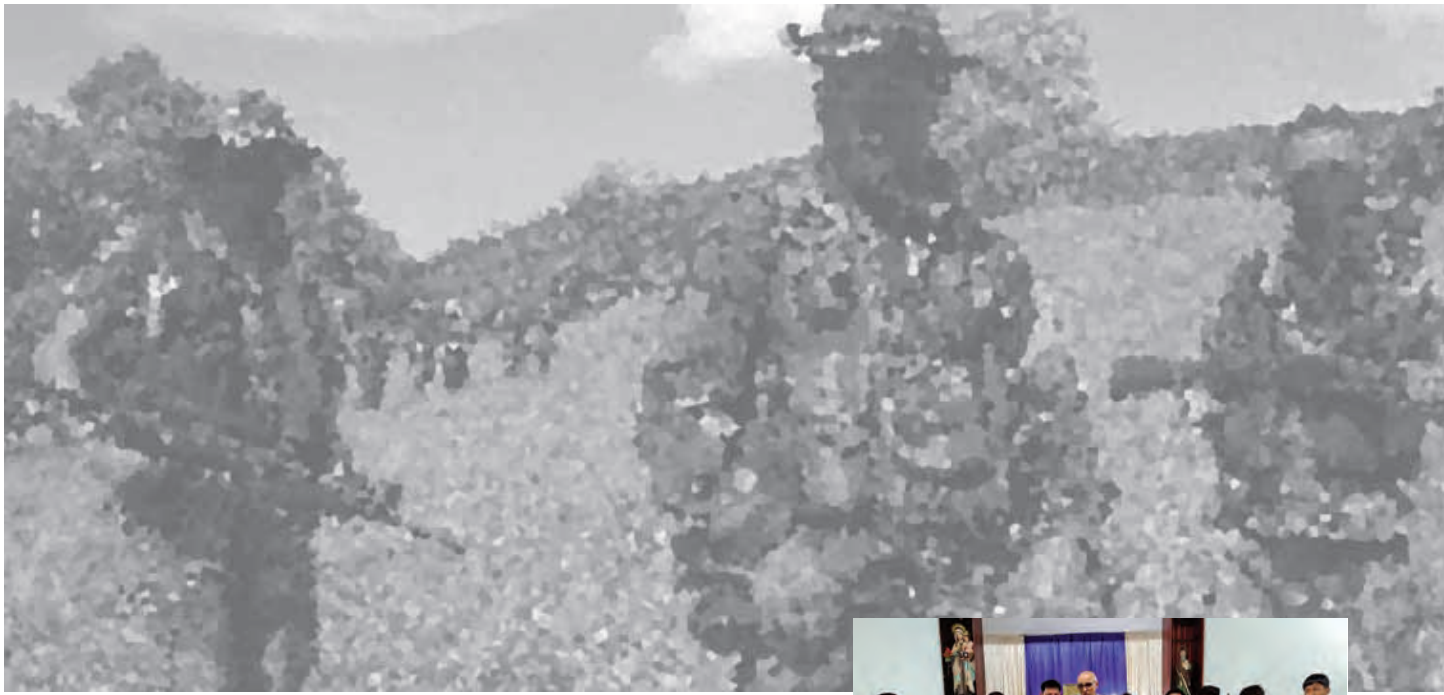
Located in the northwest corner of South America, Colombia is the only country on the continent with coastlines on both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It shares borders with Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador.



Colombia has the third-largest population in South America, with approximately 46 million residents. More than half of the population is under 25 years of age. Its workforce is among the most highly qualified and competitive in the region, with labor costs 10 times lower than those in developed countries. The population is composed of 60% mestizo (mixed European and Indigenous descent), 20% European descent, 13.5% mixed African and Indigenous heritage, 5% Afro-Colombian and 1.5% Indigenous. The official language is Spanish.

For decades, Colombia has been plagued by violence and drug trafficking. Guerrilla and paramilitary groups played significant roles in the internal armed conflict. Guerrilla groups such as the FARC-EP and the ELN emerged in the 1960s as insurgent movements inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideologies seeking social and political change through armed struggle. Paramilitary groups, on the other hand, emerged as privately funded self-defense forces—often backed by landowners, businesspeople and drug traffickers—aimed at combating guerrillas and protecting their interests.

Until around 2010, Colombia experienced widespread massacres, kidnappings and terror. Although the FARC-EP—the largest guerrilla and paramilitary groups—were demobilized a



few years ago, new criminal organizations have since emerged, vying for control of the drug trade. Unfortunately, in recent months, Colombia has once again seen a surge in violence, kidnappings and drug trafficking.

DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES IN COLOMBIA

In 1961, Pope John XXIII made an urgent appeal for religious congregations to establish a presence and send personnel to Latin America to address a severe shortage of priests and religious workers. Divine Word Missionaries arrived in Medellín, Colombia's second-largest city, in 1962.

They were led by Father Francisco Knoblauch SVD, a German national who already spoke Spanish and had previously served in Argentina. Fr. Knoblauch and his team were assigned land to build a parish church in a newly populated western area of Medellín

named Barrio Conquistadores. From this beginning, Divine Word Missionaries have maintained a presence in Colombia for 63 years.

Today, the flourishing and international Colombia Province of Divine Word Missionaries is led by Father Marcelinus Belawa Nuhan SVD, the provincial superior. He is in charge of 40 missionaries from 10 countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, India, Poland, Germany, Spain, Ghana, Brazil, Ecuador and Colombia.

The province oversees 10 parishes in various dioceses across Colombia. Our missionaries serve primarily in impoverished outlying areas. Unemployment and poverty are persistent problems. Violence and drugs are our greatest challenges. Families are often displaced because they have been directly threatened or have had to move away from danger. Here, many



Bible studies



social issues—violence, natural disasters, the HIV/AIDS epidemic—contribute to the poverty and exploitation that Colombian youth face today. With our help, education and work skills programs provide the necessary tools to break the cycle of violence and poverty.

In the remote jungle regions, we oversee two mission stations that work with Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities. Despite being one of the largest populations in Latin America descended from Africa, Afro-Colombians are disproportionately affected by poverty. Along with the Indigenous population, Afro-Colombians face limited access to basic services like health and education. Our mission stations offer a range of activities, including evangelism, humanitarian aid and feeding programs.

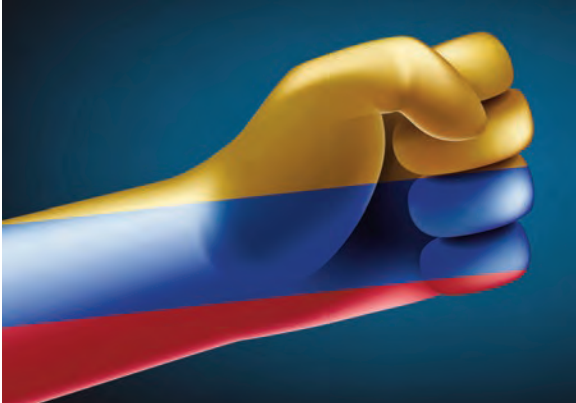


Above: Father Emigdio Cuesta Pino SVD, working with the National Conference of Afro-Colombian Organizations

Through the justice and peace ministry, Father Emigdio Cuesta Pino SVD, coordinator, has collaborated for many years with the National Conference of Afro-Colombian Organizations. This network includes women, youth, members of the Afro-LGBTQ community, displaced persons, community councils, and both urban and rural organizations. The Afro-Colombian and Indigenous people still suffer from events that threaten the physical, ancestral and cultural survival of their population. The national conference and Divine Word Missionaries are working together toward a common goal: enabling the Afro-Colombian people to exercise their right to live with dignity and tranquility on their own land.

To help spread the Word of God in Divine Word parishes and across various dioceses nationwide, the biblical apostolate has four bookshops run by Fathers Pablo Gbortsu SVD and Carlos Betancur SVD. In addition to biblical studies and scriptural formation for the laity, these bookshops provide significant financial support to the mission.

Through the communications ministry led by Brother Ángel Figueroa SVD, spreading the Word of God also includes digitally providing Sunday Gospel reflections, formation through virtual conferences, bulletins with reflections, and updates on current events.



Another priority is preparing future lay missionaries to spread the Word of God. Currently, 60 active members are preparing for consecration, ready to support the mission of evangelization.

CHALLENGES

Colombia has a rapidly aging population, and couples are having fewer children. Once again, Colombia is facing a decline in priestly vocations. It has become increasingly difficult to attract young men willing to dedicate their lives to consecrated service and the evangelization of God's Kingdom.

Promoting biblical, missionary and social pastoral work in a society shaped by technology and secularism is a demanding and ongoing challenge. How can we proclaim the God of life amid the violence and terror that have beleaguered Colombia for decades? How can we enhance lay ministers' presence and engagement in these new social and cultural contexts? And how can we creatively and effectively use the media to spread the Word of God in a more meaningful way in this digital age?

These challenges are formidable, but Divine Word Missionaries in Colombia are determined to meet them with faith, hope and perseverance. Through our efforts, we will endeavor to improve the lives of those we serve in this troubled nation. ●



“The poor can act as silent teachers for us ...

The poor ... remind us how uncertain and empty our seemingly safe and secure lives may be.”

—Pope Leo
Dilexi Te, October 2025

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Sankt Augustin Celebrates the Light

by Sebastian Quillmann



Light Presentation

A showcase of light, music, dance, and storytelling.



To celebrate the 150th anniversary of Divine Word Missionaries, the church at the Sankt Augustin seminary in Germany was transformed into a space of inspiration and celebration using light, music, dance and storytelling. With two sold-out events, the light festival “Klosterleuchten” (“monastery lights”) was a resounding success.

More than 3,000 visitors enjoyed an evening that shed light on our colorful history and mission.

One highlight was a pretend interview with our founder, St. Arnold Janssen, featuring extracts from his letters. Father Bernd Werle SVD voiced St. Arnold.

Other performances demonstrated how Divine Word Missionaries has grown into a global, intercultural community. One showed how St. Josef Freinademetz SVD came to love the Chinese culture. Another told the story of how Divine Word Missionaries

started the first seminary for young African Americans in the United States.

Outside of the church, Divine Word Missionaries and their guests had a lively get-together with food and drinks in illuminated tents. Our guests stayed late into the night, enjoying the special atmosphere of the architecture and the colorful lighting.

The visitors' enthusiasm and the unique atmosphere will be remembered for a long time. The team has experienced the feeling of witnessing to the light. As the word of the event spreads, so does the Divine Word. And the light continues to shine. ●



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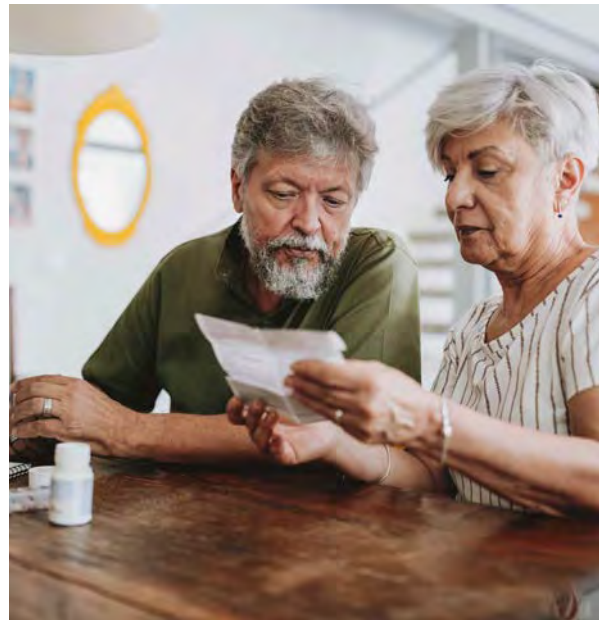
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As a hurricane hits Jamaica, one missionary shares his story.

Facing Melissa

By Bernie Spitzley SVD

The whole world knows about Hurricane Melissa and her devastating impact on Jamaica. Here is my personal experience.

With weather forecasts predicting the worst, Food for the Poor was ready and delivered a truckload of hurricane supplies. We immediately unloaded the truck and put the supplies in our storage container so we'd have easy access when we needed them.

I began the weekend by getting the generator ready while others worked boarding up the house at Our Lady of Assumption Church in Morant Bay. My attempt to buy groceries was unsuccessful—the shelves were already bare. I witnessed two ladies fighting over the last loaf of bread. It reminded me of how people in the States fought over toilet paper during the COVID outbreak.

As the storm intensified, we let our parishioners know that Sunday Mass was canceled; we advised everyone to stay home and pray. Melissa came closer, and the wind and rain grew stronger. We then learned the storm was moving to the west and that we would not take a direct hit here on the southeast coast.

Yes, I was relieved that we were spared the brunt of the storm, but our hearts and prayers were with the people of Black River and other areas in western Jamaica that we knew would receive catastrophic damage. All told, Melissa caused an estimated \$6 billion worth of damage across the island and killed at least 32 people.

From Saturday on, we lost electricity and internet. That made for long days and nights. Of course, I prayed, but I also started a John Grisham novel to try and pass the time.

Before leaving Jamaica, Melissa turned east a bit. We wound up catching the tail end of her departure. I woke up in the early morning to the sound of a bedroom window being blown out of its frame but held in place by the inside grill. Once the wind subsided, I was able to pop it back in and tried to go back to sleep.

Melissa has finally moved on, and by Tuesday morning, Father Shadrach Ketiga SVD and I had cleared the church grounds

and hauled six truckloads of branches and debris from our property.

With some roads now cleared, we could finally reach out to others. We decided to break into groups and identify needs in various areas. Sister Monica Zhang SSPS and I went to Church Corner and Bamboo River, two low-lying areas that I remembered were severely damaged from Hurricane Ivan in 2007.

Much to my surprise, and relief, the area was dry, with just a few puddles. Thank God the garbage dump, which stands higher than this area, held back the river.

Sr. Monica and I gathered essential items—food, blankets, hygiene products, and sandals—and invited people to come to the church take what they needed. Initially, this went smoothly, but as word spread, more people arrived seeking supplies. After four hours, we closed distribution to ensure that our resources could reach other parts of St. Thomas, the civil parish where Morant Bay is located.

We loaded the truck and headed across St. Thomas with the remaining supplies. We went to distribution sites we had previously established, and we handed out items till all was gone.

In Jamaica, we speak of the devastation of Gilbert and Ivan as the worst hurricanes we've faced. Now we have a higher standard to measure as the destructive force of nature. She is called Melissa.

Thanks to your continued generosity to our Emergency Relief Fund, Divine Word Missionaries can work with others to bring immediate relief and long-term recovery to families as they rebuild their lives after a devastating storm like this. ●



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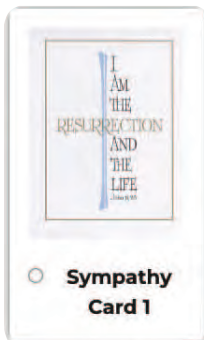
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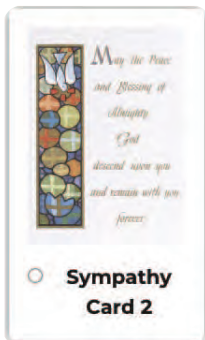


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\$91
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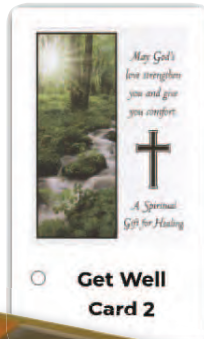
○ Birthday Card 1



○ Birthday Card 2



○ Get Well Card 1



○ Get Well Card 2

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Gregorian Masses (30 Masses)

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