



Society Matters

A NEWSLETTER OF THE DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES INC - AUSTRALIA PROVINCE

“Teach me knowledge
and good judgment...”
(Psalm 119:66)



Message from the Provincial Superior



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Winter edition of *Society Matters* magazine.

We are blessed in the SVD Australia Province to have a steady influx of both young and more experienced missionaries arriving on a regular basis. Every new arrival brings fresh enthusiasm, new ideas and a faith-filled passion for mission.

In this edition of *Society Matters*, we introduce you to a few of those missionaries. There is the story of three of our young confreres, Gusty, Krisna and Khanh, who took their final vows as Divine Word Missionaries and were ordained to the diaconate earlier this year. Their love for Jesus and enthusiasm for the missionary life that lies ahead of them is palpable and infectious. They have completed their formation here in Melbourne at Dorish Maru College and, after their ordination later this year, Krisna and Khanh will be sent out to Africa and Europe as missionaries, while Gusty has been assigned here to the Australia Province. What a privilege it has been for our Province to have provided their formation in recent years.

You will also read in this edition about the arrival of Fr Shiju Paul SVD, a missionary from India with long experience in different parts of Africa, who has now been assigned to the Tiwi Islands in the Australia Province. And, we reintroduce you to Fr Truc Quoc Phan SVD, who has recently been appointed as Mission Secretary for the Province, the second time he has held this post. Originally from Vietnam, Fr Truc has been a missionary in Thailand, has spent some time in Myanmar, and most recently has been parish priest at Emerald in rural Queensland.

All of these missionaries – young and old – have one thing in common. They have left their family, friends and home to share the Good News of Jesus Christ wherever they are sent in the world, as part of the Society of the Divine Word. They wish only to walk with and accompany people in faith, hope and love, especially those most on the margins or in need. It is this mission, which you, our partners in mission, continue to so generously support, and we are deeply grateful.

Yours in the Word,

Fr Boni Buahendri SVD
Provincial Superior

Cover Story: The Divine Word Missionaries in Telangana, India, are helping orphan children to grow and flourish by providing nutrition, education, and homely care. Read more about this project on pages 4-5.

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Fr Truc Phan SVD appointed as Province Mission Secretary for second time

The Divine Word Missionaries Australia Province has a new Mission Secretary, with the appointment of Fr Truc Quoc Phan SVD to the post.

Fr Truc, who is currently Parish Priest of Emerald Parish in Queensland's central highlands, has a good handle on what is required for the job, having served two three-year terms as Mission Secretary from 2014-2020.

"I am being recycled," he joked.

He said he was surprised to be invited by the new Provincial, Fr Boni Buahendri SVD and the Provincial Council to take up the position again.

"It is always hard to say goodbye to a parish," he said. "And I have loved my six years here in Emerald and the surrounding areas, so it is hard. But saying goodbye is part of missionary life.

"Having been the Mission Secretary before does give me a certain confidence in how I can approach the job. I can't promise I will do a great job, but I will do my best."

Fr Truc, who was born and raised in rural Vietnam, completed his missionary formation in Australia and was ordained to the priesthood in 2006. His first assignment was to Thailand in 2007, where he served as parish priest of three small parishes in the countryside, along the Mekong River.

He returned to Australia in late 2013 and served as Assistant Priest and Chaplain to the Vietnamese Community at St Mark's Parish in Inala, Brisbane for four-and-a-half months before being appointed as Mission Secretary.

During his term as Mission Secretary, Fr Truc was based at the SVD's provincial offices in Marsfield, Sydney, but also spent time in the mission field, working for a year in Myanmar to renovate and prepare a house for the SVD Australia Province's newest missionary endeavour in that country. During his second term in the role, he was also appointed as Mission Coordinator for the ASPAC region.

Fr Truc said that while he brings more pastoral experience to his second term as Mission Secretary, thanks to his years in Emerald, the role itself retains the same areas of focus.

"The responsibilities of the Mission Secretary are described in the Constitutions of the SVD," he said. "There are three



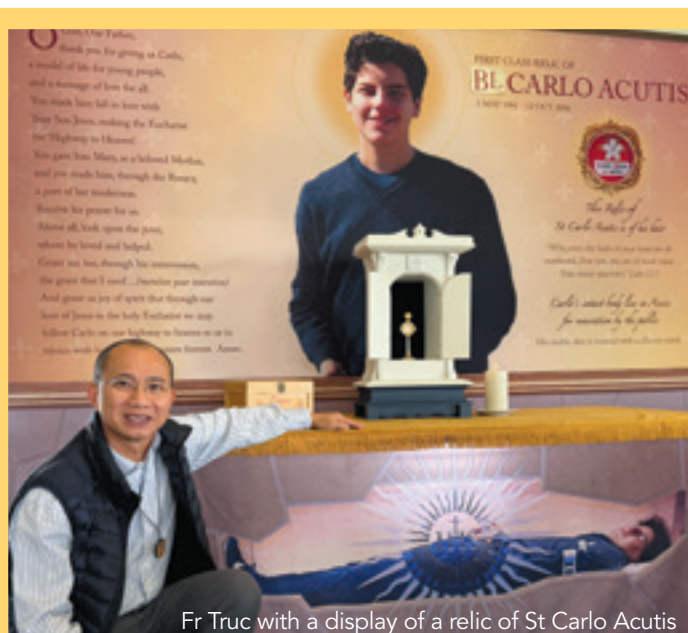
key roles: Mission Animation; Taking care of missionaries; and raising funds for mission."

Fr Truc said the Australia Province has been blessed with generous benefactors and partners in mission over the years who continue to support SVD mission both overseas and within the province.

"Fundraising is really about relationship," he said. "It's about building relationships and nurturing those friendships and we are blessed to have strong relationships like that. But we are also looking to reach new people, who might not know so much about the Divine Word Missionaries, and extend the invitation to them, too."

He said that a focus in recent years, under Mission Secretary Fr Viet Nguyen SVD, has been to strengthen bonds with migrant and ethnic communities with whom the SVD has pastoral ministry, including printing copies of *Society Matters* in the Vietnamese language in order to share mission news with them.

"There are lots of possibilities to explore. In the end, we are trying to invite people to join us in Christ's Mission, in whatever way they can. And we are very grateful for all of our partners in mission."





SVD in India giving orphans, street children, a head start in life through shelter, care and education

The Divine Word Missionaries in Telangana, India, are helping orphan children, often from the streets, to grow and flourish by providing nutrition, education, and homely care.

The Arnold Bala Vikasa Ashram was blessed and inaugurated on February 26, 2014, with a vision statement of proclaiming God's love through education of the less privileged.

In seeking funding support to maintain the home for orphan children, Fr Alwin Mascarenhas SVD said the ministry aims to witness to God's love for all by promoting justice and equity for less privileged children by eliminating the evils of child labour, illiteracy and school dropping-out by providing the necessary facilities to enable the children to complete their primary education.

"One of the most alarming local concerns is the rate of rapid increase in the number of orphaned children and their awful plight with regard to their future destiny," Fr Alwin said.

"At this tender age, they are forced to face innumerable hardships such as poverty, illiteracy, gender inequality, injustice, social instability, and above all, the personal and psychological pain and strain with a constant struggle for their very existence.

"Does it not create a moral and social obligation, implicating us to come to their rescue in their welfare?"

"It is a matter of providing homely shelter, moral support, educational support, health care and nutritional supplements. In short, giving a lease of new life, making them grow as independent and educated citizens of the nation to face the future with courage and determination with the right orientation."

Nizampet is a village of Sangareddy District, about 75km from Sangareddy, the district headquarters and 143km from Hyderabad, the State capital, in a largely non-Christian area.

Fr Alwin, a member of the SVD Hyderabad Province, said Nizampet is one of the most economically backward Mandals (an administrative unit consisting of many villages) in the Sangareddy District.





"Most of the people are daily labourers and small and part-time farmers," he said. "Success of their farming depends on rains, though a few have bore wells for irrigation. There are also people who rear animals – goats, sheep, cows, oxen and buffaloes."

The rapid increase in the number of children who have lost both parents is due to a range of reasons, including COVID 19, accidents, and suicide due to debts, he said.

"The orphaned children need to be housed in a loving and pleasant atmosphere like a home away from home," Fr Alwin said. "They must also enjoy their childhood like any other normal child in a playful atmosphere with good education."

Providing a good education is central to the aims of Arnold Bala Vikasa Ashram.

"Education is a basic human right for all children. A child who has access to quality primary and secondary schooling has a better chance in life," Fr Alwin said.

"A child who knows how to read, write and do basic arithmetic has a solid foundation for continued learning throughout his or her life.

"These children will be sent to school and will be given a sound education in all aspects."

Fr Alwin said the students also receive clean uniforms, educational materials, and medical care.

The Arnold Bala Vikasa Ashram currently has 25 orphan children, both boys and girls.

"Most of them are tribal children and many of them are street children. We are taking care of them in all aspects, including nutrition, clothing and education," Fr Alwin said.

Along with formal education, the children are also provided with tuition, spoken English coaching, and life skills such as tailoring and computer skills. Extra-curricular activities

include quizzes, singing, drawing and games.

The Divine Word Missionaries visit the villages of children periodically to make the villagers aware of the need to educate their children. They also organise guardians' meetings once a year to inform them on subjects such as illiteracy, child labour, child marriage and alcoholism.

Fr Alwin said the ministry to maintain residential care for orphan children is expensive.

"But I feel it is a worthwhile mission as we will be helping not only this generation but also future generations as well," he said.

"True compassion shown especially to the poor and the suffering has to be the hall-mark of Christian commitment.

"In this endeavour, we have made a very small attempt to relieve the suffering of these children, bring them from the shadow of despair, guide them to come out of their neglect, care for them with compassion and serve them with true love, in order to make their life a more joyful experience."





Fr Shiju Paul SVD as a missionary in Africa



Fr Shiju (far right) with parishioners and religious sisters on the Tiwi Islands.

Missionary brings rich experience to ‘ministry of presence’ on Tiwi Islands

Fr Shiju Paul SVD has taken up ministry in the Australia Province after almost 30 years as a missionary in India, various parts of Africa and the United States.

Fr Shiju's first assignment in the Province is in the Tiwi Islands, north of Darwin, reflecting his special interest in living and working with Australia's First Nations peoples and providing presence, deep listening and accompaniment.

Born and raised in Kerala, India, Fr Shiju joined the SVD minor seminary in Kerala in 1985. He professed his first vows as a Divine Word Missionary in 1992 and his final vows in 1997 when he was also ordained to the priesthood in the Syro Malabar Rite.

"I was drawn to religious missionary life after watching my aunt with the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa, serving the poor," he said.

Following his ordination, Fr Shiju was appointed as Vocation Promoter at the same seminary he attended, St John's Mission Seminary in Kerala.

His first overseas missionary assignment was to Zambia, where he served as Parish Priest at St Francis Catholic Church in Livingstone from 1999-2002.

He then worked for three years in the Philippines at the Asian Religious Formation Institute and the SAIDI Foundation and completed a Master's in Pastoral Studies from the Ateneo de Manila University.

In 2005, Fr Shiju headed back to Africa, becoming Assistant Novice Master at Divine Word Novitiate in Ghana.

From 2008 to 2014 he was elected Provincial Superior for the SVD Botswana-Zambia-South Africa Province.

After his time as Provincial, Fr Shiju served as Parish Priest in Botswana for three years before being assigned to the United States as formator of Divine Word Theologate in Chicago from 2017-2021.

Prior to his assignment to Australia, Fr Shiju served from 2021 to 2025 with Jesuit Refugee Services, living in refugee camps at the border of Sudan, in Maban, South Sudan.

"In 2025 after completing two contracts with Jesuit Refugee Services, I returned to India. In early 2025 President Trump issued a Stop Work Order, practically ending all funding support to refugee projects overnight," he said.

"The major source of JRS operations in refugee camps was provided by the Bureau of Population, refugees, and Migration (BPRM). The SVDs returned to South Sudan only in November 2025 after we were forced out in 2016."

Health challenges also prompted Fr Shiju to look for a new assignment in an area not so subject to tropical and sub-tropical diseases.

"During life in refugee camps, I was frequently infected with malaria and fell sick five times each year during rainy season," he said.

"So, I contemplated a change and the possibility of doing Aboriginal ministry was suggested."

After initially settling in at the SVD's Marsfield community in Sydney, Fr Shiju spent time with the SVD's ministries in Alice Springs.

He said he feels sure that his decades of missionary experience around the world will assist him in the challenges of getting accustomed to ministry in a new country and different cultures.

"My hope for my collaborative ministry in Australia is discovering our shared humanity through presence, deep listening and accompaniment. This way Jesus' presence in our world becomes truly incarnate."

After two months on Bathurst Island, Fr Shiju says his listening and learning has only just begun.



Fr Shiju (right) celebrates Mass in the Tiwi Islands with Fr Jun Perez SVD.



Mission Mass League - let us pray for you and your family

We invite our faithful mission partners to participate in the Mission Mass League by enrolling their loved ones, living or deceased, and their special needs.

"Enrolment in the League is a spiritual gift," says outgoing SVD AUS Province Mission Secretary, Fr Viet Nguyen SVD. It expresses the donor's thoughtfulness or their condolences. Enrolments are appropriate in illness or for a death. Enrolments may also be sent to Divine Word Missionaries in recognition of birthdays and anniversaries or other notable occasions.

"In that way they are linked spiritually to the masses and prayers of more than 6,000 Divine Word priests, brothers and seminarians around the world, ensuring that your special intentions will be remembered."

Five masses in seven different countries are expressly celebrated each day for Mission Mass League members. The donor receives a special membership certificate. Membership enrolments are available in four categories: One year or Perpetual for Individuals and One year or Perpetual for Families.

"I have seen that Catholicism here pivots around the rich mission history of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and statutes of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart," he said.

"Notable among those are Francis Xavier Gsell MSC, who became the Bishop of Darwin in 1938 and Sr Anne Gardiner FDNsc, now aged in her mid-90s, who is accorded with the title of 'Puwanimawu', meaning 'a person who provides light to the people' by the indigenous people of Bathurst Island, for her decades of life and service on this land, which continue today."

Fr Shiju said that Bishop Gsell (Patakijiyali) devoted the first 10 years on the islands to observing the people and learning their ways, while Sr Anne says it took her more than five years before she and the Tiwi people understood each other.

"And I am here, just two months now on this remote island without any language and culture preparations, which might sound very unusual for SVDs," he said.

"I am observing and learning.

"What must I be here? I grapple with this inner question 24x7.

"Sr Anne encourages me often when I share with her. 'Love them, talk to them, be a friend to them,' she says.

"Love them. That is the real deal. Fr Greg Boyle SJ, whom I met many years ago, says, 'Love is God's religion and loving is how we practice it.

"The Tiwi mob reassures me, 'ngawa wiwi ngimpinganuwani nuwa', 'We will help you'. And I say, 'nuwa nguri', 'Thank you'.

"God's mission continues!"

The Divine Word Missionaries took up the pastoral care of the Tiwi Islands in 2022 at the invitation of Darwin Bishop Charles Gauci. Fr Shiju succeeds Fr Niran Veigas SVD who has been assigned as Arrernte Catholic Chaplain in Alice Springs. Assisting Fr Shiju are Fr Hung Nguyen SVD and Fr Jun Perez SVD.

Supporting the SVD

If you wish to support the missionary work of the Society of the Divine Word, we would welcome your donations.

Simply scan the QR code below and it will take you directly to our secure online donations page. Or, visit divineword.org.au and select 'Support Us' at the top of the page, followed by 'Make a Donation'.

Donations to the SVD AUS Province Overseas Aid Fund can also be made by mailing to the address at the bottom of page 8.

SCAN TO
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Three young missionaries take final vows and are ordained deacons

Three young SVD seminarians professed their final vows as Divine Word Missionaries earlier this year and were ordained as deacons as they continue their journey towards the priesthood.

Agustinus Buu Araujo Siga, SVD (Gusty), Antonius Kristanto Papalesa, SVD (Krisna), and Anthony Khanh Ngoc Nguyen, SVD (Khanh) made their final profession at St Paschal's Chapel, Box Hill, in Melbourne on Saturday, March 21, before being ordained to the diaconate in the same chapel the following day.

The three made their final vows, as nine of their fellow SVD students professed their temporary vows for one more year.

In his opening remarks, Provincial, Fr Boni Buhaendri SVD, thanked each of them for their generosity in responding to the Lord's calling to a consecrated life.

He welcomed those family and friends gathered in the chapel as well as watching overseas via livestream, saying that in making their vows, the seminarians would "give yourself entirely to Jesus, vowing poverty, chastity and obedience".

Later, in his homily, Fr Boni, commenting on the Gospel reading from John's Gospel, "I give you a new commandment, love one another just as I have loved you", said that Jesus' inexhaustible love for us is the love we draw from when answering the commandment to love others.

"The nature of God is love, and therefore, we are challenged today to show that kind of love to one another without limit," he said. "In times of difficulty, brothers, always remember the one who calls you today."

Fr Boni said that along with loving God and loving others,

the foundations of religious life also include a firm commitment to prayer and to community life.

At the conclusion of the Perpetual Vows Ceremony and the celebration of the Eucharist, Gusty spoke on behalf of himself, Krisna and Khanh, thanking everyone for being present, including Gusty's parents who made the journey from Indonesia to Melbourne, and Krisna's father, also from Indonesia, with Khanh's family watching the ceremony online from Vietnam.

"Today we have made our perpetual vows. That means we have promised our lives to God and to the Society of the Divine Word forever," Gusty said.

"When people hear the word 'forever', they sometimes look at us with a mixture of admiration and a little concern, like, 'Are you sure about this?'

"But standing here today, surrounded by our families, friends, formators, community, we can honestly say, 'Yes, we are sure'.

"But we did not arrive here alone. It's because of so many helping hands, so many supports that we've experienced throughout these years."

The following day, Gusty, Krisna and Khanh were ordained deacons during a Eucharistic celebration at St Paschal's Chapel, presided over by Melbourne Auxiliary Bishop Thinh Xuan Nguyen.

Bishop Thinh told the three young men that deacons are called to serve people and to proclaim the Word.

"Today, Gusty, Krisna and Khanh, you are not simply receiving a title of deacon, you are receiving a mission, a mission to serve," he said.

Gusty, Krisna and Khanh have now received their first missionary assignments, which they will take up after their ordination to the priesthood in November. Gusty has been assigned to the Australia Province, Krisna to Ghana and Khanh to Slovakia.



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