



# Society Matters

A Newsletter of the Divine Word Missionaries Inc - Australia Province



“...that they may  
have life and have  
it to the full.”  
(John 10:10)

## Message from the Provincial Superior



Welcome to the Autumn edition of Society Matters for 2015.

Where I live, in Sydney, the Summer has been a turbulent one, especially in the lead-up to Christmas, with hot, humid days, building up to spectacular storms in the evening. At times it felt like we were living in the tropics! I think everyone is looking forward to some cool relief as we look towards Autumn.

As Religious brothers and priests, we are gratefully living out Pope Francis' call for this year to be the Year for Consecrated Life. We see it as a year for spiritual renewal, as a time for prayerfully reflecting on our vocation and our mission, and joyfully celebrating it. In June this year, we will reflect further, when we hold our triennial Provincial Chapter meeting, gathering together to listen to where the Spirit is leading the SVD AUS Province, and to respond to that listening by setting our goals and priorities for the next three years.

One thing that becomes more, and more, clear to us is that our consecrated life as missionaries is enriched and enhanced by our collaboration with lay people who are our partners in mission. We are all engaged in Christ's mission and, when we work together, it is amazing what can be achieved. In his apostolic letter, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis quoted from a meeting of the South American and Caribbean bishops, who said:

*"Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others."*

In this edition of Society Matters we read some wonderful stories of people who have left the security of the shore and who are truly excited by the mission of communicating life to others. One of our young missionaries, Br Iopam Willy Vincent SVD, shares with us his experience of missionary life in the Philippines, while Fr Anton Bulla SVD looks back over his 60 years in SVD vows and gives thanks for where God has led him, first in Europe, then PNG and now in Australia. We also give thanks to God for the lives of two of our recently deceased confreres, Fr Victor Stevko SVD and Fr Gerard Mulholland SVD. Our feature story tells of the wonderful work being done in India, where the Divine Word Missionaries are helping to empower women by teaching them to sew and to earn an income.

We thank you, our readers and partners in mission for supporting all that we do. May God bless you.

Yours in the Word,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'H. Adler'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fr Henry Adler SVD  
Provincial Superior

**Cover Story:** This sewing project in Khurda, India, is helping women to learn skills and earn an income.

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## Fr Anton Bulla SVD, thankful to God, as he celebrates 60 years in religious vows

Fr Anton Bulla SVD, who recently celebrated 60 years in religious vows, says he is thankful to God for leading him into missionary life and sustaining him in it, a vocation which he believes has its seeds in a promise made by his father on the battlefields of World War I.

Fr Anton's father was a soldier in the Great War, running telephone lines along the frontline.

"One day, on the Russian front, he came across an SVD brother who was mortally wounded, but was crying out in distress, 'who will take my job if I die?' My father asked him what his job was and he said he was in charge of distributing an SVD magazine," Fr Anton says.

"So my father said, 'I can do that for you'. Hearing this, the brother said 'Thanks be to God', and died."

As a result of that promise made in the heat of battle, Fr Anton's father took on the job of helping the Divine Word Missionaries with their mission publications.

"So I got familiar with the SVD through this work of my father's," he says. "We had books about mission all around the house and I would read them. There was one story I read as a boy about a missionary who went to India and had to shoot a tiger. So from then on, I always wanted to be a missionary in India."

Fr Anton was born in Silesia, Germany in 1934, under the Nazi regime, in an area that became Poland after World War II.

With a hearing problem from birth, Fr Anton says he was never a great student, but when he reached the end of primary school, he decided to seek admission to the SVD minor seminary and was accepted into the Mission House in Nyssa on the 8th September, 1949.

After the Second World War, the communists took over Poland and the government closed all the minor seminaries of the religious orders.

"So I found myself again on the street," he says. "But the Society gave us a chance to enter the Novitiate and to finish our schooling there. So I finished high school in the Novitiate and then took up my studies in Philosophy and Theology. Altogether, I lived there for 13 years, from 1952 to 1965."

Fr Anton took his first vows in 1954, his final vows in 1960, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1961, working at first as the secretary to the Provincial, as well as teaching catechism.

In the mid-1960s, the communist regime began to allow small numbers of missionaries to leave Poland and take



up mission assignments, and Fr Anton was among those allowed to leave. The SVD assigned him to Papua New Guinea, where he arrived in May, 1967.

His first assignment was to a mission station in Kerowagi, where he worked in the school during the week and in parishes on the weekend.

From 1971-74, Fr Anton was in charge of a catechist school and then, in the early 1980s, he was asked by the local bishop in PNG to go to Canada to study Canon Law, with a view to setting up a marriage tribunal in his diocese.

After completing the studies, he returned to PNG and took up work in the marriage tribunal and parishes, until heart problems meant he was unable to stay on in PNG.

"I wanted to go back to Poland then," he says. "But they didn't have a job for me, so I came to Australia and I don't regret it."

Since then, Fr Anton has worked in the marriage tribunal of the Archdiocese of Sydney, a ministry he describes as a healing ministry.

"The tribunal is nothing else than healing wounded and broken relationships," he says. "We do not judge people. We just want the people to tell us the truth of the situation, because Jesus told us the truth will set you free, and that is the basis of our work."

To celebrate his Diamond Jubilee in religious vows, Fr Anton took a course for older SVD confreres in Nemi, Italy, and was also able to travel home to Poland, even taking a trip back to the same seminary where he spent 13 years in his youth.

"I am thankful to God, because he leads you in life," Fr Anton says. "It is important that we have a personal relationship with God. Vocation is a call of God, which develops slowly."

"For me, this call of God goes back to childhood. I have to thank God that my father was so pious, and also that he didn't get shot in four years of standing on the frontline in the war."



## Indian sewing project, empowering women to live life to the full

The women of the central Indian village of Khurda, have mostly not had the luxury of an education, and their employment prospects are slim, but thanks to a new SVD project, they are being taught to sew, and this skill is helping empower them to earn a living.

The project is a work of the Catholic Ashram Khurda, a part of the Divine Word Missionaries' Central Indian Province.

Fr Nicholas Martis SVD, Rector, says the sewing project is the latest in a series of initiatives which aim to help provide education, skills and employment opportunities for the local people.

"Catholic Ashram Khurda is about 60km from Indore City," he says. "In Khurda we have a Novitiate house, a school named after Mahatma Gandhi, and a parish, Holy Rosary Church.

"The Church was built almost 110 years ago and basically the whole village is Catholic. However, Khurda is surrounded by another 20 villages, who are not Catholics and we have a wonderful rapport with these villages, mainly due to our school."

Fr Nicholas says the people of Khurda depend on the crops they produce for their livelihood.

"For many years, the people could have only one crop," he says. "But gradually, after a lake was built close by, people are producing a second crop. This has made people happy, as they can have their fill.

"The vast majority of them don't have employment, and they are looking for work."

With the help of many benefactors, including the SVD AUS Province, the Divine Word Missionaries of Khurda built a school, to help the local people gain an education, which will give them a better chance of gaining employment.

Other initiatives aimed at providing skills for employment have also been undertaken.

"The sewing project is the latest one," says Fr Nicholas. "This is for women who don't have work. They come over here and a teacher shows them how to stitch clothes.

"The women learn this stitching gradually and they are being empowered, and in the meantime, they earn some money for their livelihood.

"These women are not educated, and if some of them have been to school, then it is only a primary education."





The tailoring machines were donated by a German benefactor, but more funds are needed to sustain the project and for new, similar skills projects.

"I see a bright future for these women who are not educated, as they can learn stitching clothes, and they can eventually become good tailors, which will help them economically," Fr Nicholas says.

"These women are not just Catholics; they are from different religions and this also helps with promoting dialogue and bringing people together.

"If we have more funds, we could have more tailoring machines and many more women and girls could make their lives bright. We could help these poor women, so that they can have their livelihood and can come together in harmony and peace. This is an excellent way of empowering women."

AUS Provincial, Fr Henry Adler SVD, recently visited Khurda, and says the sewing project is a fabulous initiative.

"I was very impressed," he says. "It was great to see these women so happy and engaged in learning the skills of sewing, which, in turn, will empower them to earn some money towards their livelihood.

"It is a wonderful community at Khurda, and I was very glad to be able to visit the Mahatma Ghandi School, which our Province, through our generous partners in mission, has been able to support in recent years.

"What we see in Khurda is a true example of the SVD commitment to walking with the poor and marginalised, and, through education and skills training, helping people to gain employment and live their lives to the full."



# Br Vincent, using his IT skills for God's glory in the Philippines

By Brother Iopam Willy Vincent SVD  
Philippine Central Province

My name is Iopam Willy Vincent SVD, originally from Vanuatu, from an island called Tanna in the Southern part of the Archipelago. I first joined the Divine Word Missionaries in 1999 and decided to be a religious brother after the Novitiate in 2001. The decision to be a brother wasn't hard, due to my experience and first encounter with the sacred brothers who were the pioneers of my parish back home. The influence of these faithful brothers impacted me to be first a Catholic, and then with the ambition to become a religious brother.

I first heard of the SVDs through Fr Olivier Noclam SVD, then a seminarian, in 1998, when he was joined by his Novitiate classmates on a trip to Vanuatu as part of a Vocation promotion. After meeting with them and being inspired by their stories, then meeting Fr Tim Norton SVD and Fr Michael Knight SVD that same year, I decided to join the SVD the following year.

After the Novitiate, in 2001, I undertook my brother's formation in the then Brothers Formation house in Boronia, until it was closed in 2004. From the middle of 2004 to 2006 I joined the Seminary at Dorish Maru College, Box Hill, and took up an Information Technology course at Box Hill TAFE, continuing on for a year in Brisbane and completing it in Sydney in 2009.

To put into first hand practice what I had learnt, I had the privilege of going to Alice Springs and working at OLSH College for 3 years under the guidance of two IT professionals, Mr Jeff and Craig, to whom I am so grateful for the knowledge I gained from them. While in Alice, I was also involved in various ministries of the OLSH Parish. I took up Youth Ministry in the Parish, as well as the Indigenous Ministry and Prison Ministry with Fr Michael Loke SVD. These ministries were indeed a good foundation experience for my mission now in the Philippines.

In 2013, I left Australia for my first mission abroad in the Philippines Central Province. I set foot in Manila for the first time on January 12, 2013, just in time for the Provincial Assembly, where I was introduced to the Province. My first challenge was the language, which I undertook straight away after the Assembly on the island of Mindoro for five months, after which, I was assigned back to the Provincial house in Manila, where I remain until the present moment.



In August 2013, the Province assigned me to a challenging project to create a website for the Province. However, despite my lack of knowledge on Web Development, I accepted the challenge and finally created a website for the Province which I now administer as my ministry in the Province ([www.svdphc.ph](http://www.svdphc.ph)). My whole ministry revolves around communication, in which I travel or communicate with SVD confreres, in parishes, and districts regularly for news of our mission to be published on the provincial website. I am also assigned as the Assistant Archivist to the provincial Archive Office, where my office is now located in Manila.

After two years in the mission, I realise that there is still a lot to learn in the Philippines. The language is still a challenge, and the culture is also a challenge, but I am inspired by a quote from Nelson Mandela: *"after climbing a mountain, I realised that there are many more mountains to climb"*. Therefore, through the grace of God, I gain my strength to just give my best every day in his mission; I am still climbing.



# RIP Fr Victor Stevko SVD and Fr Gerard Mulholland SVD

The Divine Word Missionaries AUS Province lost two much-loved confreres in recent months, with the deaths of Fr Victor Stevko and Fr Gerard Mulholland.

**Fr Victor** died after a long illness, on September 6, 2014, aged 84. A Vigil Mass was held for him at the Slovak Catholic Church of Sts Cyril and Methodius, where he had been chaplain to the Slovak community for many years. His funeral Mass was held at the St Arnold Janssen Chapel, Marsfield.



Born in New York City on August 16, 1927, Fr Victor's parents, Victor snr and Rosalia, had emigrated to the US from Czechoslovakia. When Victor was five years old, the Stevko family returned to their homeland in Slovakia, where he completed his schooling. Victor entered the minor seminary to begin his high school studies in 1941 and then the novitiate in September 1947. One month later he was sent to the United States to continue his novitiate training in Techny. He arrived wearing his cassock and carrying a violin, taking his final vows in 1955 and being ordained to the priesthood on June 9, 1957.

Fr Victor began his pastoral ministry in September, 1958, at St Anselm's Church on Chicago's south side, and then took up a missionary assignment to Indonesia, arriving in Jakarta in 1960. In 1965, Fr Victor was named pastor of St Mary of Fatima parish at Wangkung in western Flores. For 17 years he faithfully administered to his people in the local parish and also the 30 outlying mission stations, with horseback the only means of transportation, travelling up and down the mountainous terrain.

Fr Victor moved to the SVD community in Marsfield, Sydney in 1994, becoming the chaplain for the Slovak community, a role he remained in for 16 years, until his retirement in 2010. As his health deteriorated, Fr Victor needed the specialised care at the Yallambi Centre nursing home, where he lived until his death. He was dearly loved by the staff there, and everyone who came to know him was deeply impressed by his humble, welcoming ways. He always had a smile and a joke for everyone who came his way.

**Fr Gerard**, a much loved member of the SVD AUS Province, died on November 26, aged 58, some months after being diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. His funeral Mass was held at St Mark's, Inala in Brisbane, the same church in which he was ordained, and the same parish community to which he had been pastor until his illness forced him to retire.

Fr Gerard was born in Maryborough, on July 18, 1956, the second child of four to Patrick and Winifred Mulholland. Before entering the SVD, Gerard worked in a variety of jobs, including as an ambulance driver and a Workplace Health and Safety Officer, all the time doing volunteer work on the side. He joined the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1991, and was soon elected Conference President and then Regional President.

The St Vincent de Paul Society asked Gerard to go to PNG to help during a time of severe drought and in 1998 he returned there to work in Aitape after a deadly tsunami destroyed the area. It was while he was in PNG that Gerard decided to join the Society of the Divine Word.

After ordination in 2006, Gerard's first assignment was to PNG where he worked in Fatima in the Archdiocese of Mt Hagen. When an injury forced him to move back to Australia in late 2009 he became director of the Janssen Spirituality Centre in Boronia, Victoria. In 2011 he returned to his beloved Queensland, assigned to St Cecelia's Parish Hamilton and then also to St Mark's, Inala. Gerard also served as the Province Communications Officer.

After being diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease, Gerard was cared for lovingly at the Marsfield SVD community, before passing away in Macquarie University Hospital. It was a blessing to have Gerard in AUS Province, as he was one of the few Australian-born SVDs and was thus a great resource to confreres who have come here from other parts of the world. Gerard loved telling jokes, and his bright personality always left us with a smile.





# *Wake Up the World*

## Year of Consecrated Life

### *A Prayer for the Year of Consecrated Life*

Loving Father,

*In this Year of Consecrated Life, we give you thanks for the great gift of vocation that you bestow on those you have called to religious life.*

*We give thanks for the lives of religious sisters, brothers and priests, who are living your gospel in so many different ways in every country on earth.*

*In a special way, we give thanks for missionaries living in consecrated life around the world, walking with the poor and marginalised, often in places far away from their own home and family.*

*We pray that you will continue to bless missionaries everywhere and to sustain them in a joyous living out of their vocation, that they may bring the joy of the gospel to all people, to the ends of the earth.*

*Father, we thank you also for our many lay collaborators and partners in mission, who, by their very presence in our lives, help us to live out our calling more fruitfully. Please bless them in their own vocations.*

*May the Year of Consecrated Life be a time of renewal, thanksgiving and joyous praise.*

*We make this prayer through Jesus Christ, our Lord,*

*Amen.*



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