



Society Matters

A Newsletter of the Divine Word Missionaries Inc - Australia Province



“Let us then pursue what
makes for peace and for
mutual upbuilding”

(Romans 14: 19)

Message from the Provincial Superior



When Jesus commissioned his apostles to “Go out to the whole world and share the Good News”, he was setting them, and all of us, a pretty big task.

He didn’t just say, “Go out to the people nearby, to your friends and neighbours, the people you work with etc”, although, of course, that’s a good place to start sharing the Good News. No, he made his call to mission Universal. Go out to the whole world.

As I write this now, I’m sitting in Sydney, Australia – a part of the world that was not even known to the apostles at that time, although of course, it had already been home to indigenous Australians for thousands of years.

What this shows us is that as the years pass, new places, new situations, new people will present themselves to us. We will meet people who have new and different needs, and part of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ is that we respond to their needs and become the loving presence of Christ for them. So, the mission that expanded outwards from those first 12 apostles, has continued to expand, and will continue to expand in ways that we can’t yet imagine.

In this edition of Society Matters, we feature an exclusive interview with the Superior General of the Divine Word Missionaries, Fr Heinz Kuluke, who shares with us his views on the SVD’s commitment to keep growing and expanding in mission. In particular, he talks of one of the newest SVD missions, in the fledgling country of South Sudan. The three SVD missionaries who are assigned there have faced hardship and even mortal danger, but remain committed to helping restore peace to the long-suffering people of this troubled region. Their story is an inspiration. Also in this edition, we read of the five young men who are being sent out into the world as new missionaries after receiving their final formation in Australia; Fr John Hung Le SVD shares the story of his missionary life, from Vietnam, to PNG, to Thailand; and we catch up with how our Province’s first instalment of disaster relief funds is being put to great use in restoring the lives of people so badly affected by Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu.

Christ’s mission never ends. It never can and it never will. Thank you, our friends and partners in mission, for all that you do to support that mission, both in your own lives and by your support of the Divine Word Missionaries. May God bless you.

Yours in the Word,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'H. Adler', written over a light blue circular graphic element that resembles a globe's latitude and longitude lines.

Fr Henry Adler SVD
Provincial Superior

Cover Story: Children at a water well in South Sudan – one of the SVD’s newest mission areas. See page 4 for more.

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Five young SVDs sent out from Australia to be missionaries for the world

Five young men took their Perpetual Vows as Divine Word Missionaries in March this year and all five will be sent out from Australia to take up missionary assignments in other countries.

Anthony Li, Marianus Supardi, Michael Wu, Laurensius Woda and Uili Uvea took their vows before a packed congregation in St Paschal's Chapel, Box Hill, Victoria. The following day, Marianus and Uili were ordained to the Diaconate.

Uili has been assigned to the Philippines, Marianus to The Netherlands, Laurens to Indonesia, Anthony to Chile and Michael to the Central America Region.

SVD AUS Provincial, Fr Henry Adler SVD, says the sending out of the young missionaries is a significant expression of the important role the Province plays in forming missionaries to be at the service of the Divine Word Missionaries and the universal Church.

"These men have come to us from their country of origin for their final formation as SVDs and now, having played a role in forming them, we are sending them back out as missionaries to the wider world," Fr Henry says.

"We see formation of missionaries as a very important part of what we do in this Province. It is a commitment we take seriously, and to see them now embarking on their first overseas missionary assignments brings us great joy."

In his homily at the final vows ceremony, Fr Henry emphasised the call of Pope Francis that to live consecrated life is to live a life of joy.

"Your vows, your commitments are not about you only, but they are about God's Kingdom; they are about Witness, Service and Mission, and, as our Pope Francis often reminds us, consecrated life needs to be lived prophetically and authentically," he said.

In personal reflections prepared ahead of their vows ceremony, the five men spoke of having heard God's call many years ago, and putting their trust in God.



Michael spoke of his desire to share with others the love that he has found in Jesus.

"It is from this knowing God's love and friendship that I can now witness to others as a missionary," he said. I've always been touched and attracted by Jesus' compassionate love for all and it is this love that I want to share for the rest of my life."

Marianus, reflecting on the readings chosen for the vows ceremony (Jeremiah 1:4-10 and John 15:9-17), said he had come to realise that God is everything for him.

"Like the prophet Jeremiah, I believe my vocation is quite unique. God has chosen me, not because I am the best person or worthy to answer God's calling or to do God's mission, but simply because God loves me so much and wants to form my life according to what God wants me to be. God has called me and made me worth to be sent out as a missionary, especially when I feel unworthy."

Uili too said he was convinced that God had a plan for him long before he was born.

"I fully trust God and God's amazing plan in my life. It is this God who has been protecting me and looking after me over the years. It is this God who sends me, Uili, from an unknown place (Tonga) to the people of the Philippines. This gives me mighty strength and courage to say YES to God for the rest of my life and leave the rest to God."

In his personal reflection, Laurensius (Laurens) said he was overwhelmed by God's love for him.

"God, with his great faithfulness, has truly loved me ever since I was even very young to realise his call. His loving mercy encourages me to say YES to Him and to fully give myself for His mission; abiding in his love and then sharing his love with others. So, I'm ready to set up permanent camp in God's love, and be stuck there forever. I strongly believe that His love is my safest home. All I need to do now is to abide in his love."

And, like his four companions, for Anthony, God's call is an invitation to a love-relationship with the Lord, which then leads to mission.

"Mission is a joyful experience, even if life is difficult at times. Knowing that God loves me and invites me to mission gives me tremendous joy and confidence to commit myself for life to the God who loves me, living my missionary life in religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience."



SVD takes up new Mission in South Sudan

“We want to be close to people, particularly the poor”

In an exclusive interview with Society Matters to mark the Year of Consecrated Life, the SVD Superior General, Fr Heinz Kuluke, explains why the Divine Word Missionaries continue to move into new missionary areas around the world, including into South Sudan, a brand new nation with a turbulent past and a challenging future.

“To come to the aid of Africa is probably one of the biggest challenges of the human family at this point in history.”

So says Fr Heinz Kuluke, SVD Superior-General, of the Divine Word Missionaries’ decision to open up a new mission in the Republic of South Sudan in 2012.

“The bad news about this beautiful continent each day seems to have no end,” Fr Heinz says. “As SVDs we have taken responsibility for people in very difficult situations in Africa in countries such as Kenya, Mozambique and more recently, Chad and South Sudan. Another addition this year will be Liberia.

“Civil wars have left a misery beyond description and traumatised people who need a big human heart in order to get back on their feet. The commitment of our missionaries, our friends in Australia and worldwide, make this greater involvement possible. For this, we and also the people we serve, are very grateful.”

South Sudan is the newest nation on earth, having gained independence from its northern neighbour, the Republic of Sudan, in 2011 after many years of civil war. Most of the population of South Sudan is Christian.

The history of civil war and dislocation has left the young nation with many challenges, including a very insecure economy, violence and a traumatised population.

“South Sudan, because of the civil war there for more than

two decades, has been on the radar of the SVD concerns for many years,” Fr Heinz says.

“Refugees have moved to neighbouring countries where SVDs have been working already and have provided a first contact with people from South Sudan. The persistency of the bishop in asking for help and the SVD concern about the people came together and led to a definite decision to join the Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS) and to start our own mission in South Sudan.”

Three pioneering missionaries were assigned to begin the SVD mission in South Sudan. They are Fr Francis Joseph Naduviledath from India (Mission Superior), Fr Bernard Ilunga Wa from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Br Vinsensius Knaofmone from Indonesia.

They arrived in South Sudan in April 2012, settling first at Yei after finding that their housing of traditional tukuls, or huts, in nearby Lainya, was still under construction by the local people.

“On our arrival in Yei, we were told that the tukuls in Lainya would be ready in two weeks’ time,” says Fr Francis Joseph in a report. “However, after a week, because of the rains and weak construction, two out of the three tukuls collapsed and the community had to start all over again. Meanwhile, we continued to stay with our sisters as well as to learn a little bit of spoken Arabic.”

The three missionaries eventually moved into their tukuls in Lainya at the end of June 2012 and began visiting the chapels under their care.

“Many of these chapels are more than 50 or 100km away from the parish centre, and were last visited by a priest more than three or four years ago, with some of them last



visited more than 20 years ago," says Fr Francis Joseph. "Even though South Sudan is considered a Christian country, and thousands of infants are being baptised year after year, hardly any instruction is being given to these children as they grow and become adults. Faith formation and Catechesis for both the children and adults is going to be a priority area and we are going to get involved immediately."

The three missionaries have reported that economic insecurity is a major problem for the people they serve, with South Sudan producing very little of its own and having to rely on the neighbouring countries of Uganda, Congo and Kenya for its security and survival. Although the country has an abundance of fertile land and rains and plenty of human labour, the presence of the UN's World Food Program and other International Non-Government Organisations throughout the war and even after the war, has meant South Sudan is yet to find its own feet. People lost many of their loved ones in the war and family members have been displaced internally and externally. The people are still traumatised by all they have seen and experienced during the long years of war.

Some of this trauma and accompanying violence became shockingly evident to the three SVD missionaries when their tukuls were set on fire in the middle of the night while they were sleeping in them. They escaped without serious injury, and members of the local community came to their aid and urged them not to leave, but to stay and help the people.

Fr Heinz, who has visited the mission in South Sudan, says such an incident can be really traumatic.

"We had several similar situations in the past years where the life of our missionaries was threatened," he says.

"In dialogue with our missionaries, we reflect on the best options. To pull out can always been an option and yet to pull out missionaries who have fallen in love with the people they serve is not that easy, even in very dangerous

situations. So far, decisions have always been made to stay, but to take preventative measures and precautions.

"What made us stay in South Sudan is the need, and also the care shown by the people.

"An experience of many of our missionaries has become true once again: You share your faith with the people and they will share their faith with you. You care for the people and they will care for you. You love the people and they will love you.

"And for South Sudan, we might add: You protect the people and they will protect you."

Fr Heinz says the mission in South Sudan fits perfectly into main priority areas of the SVD, known as Characteristic Dimensions.

"Years ago, in trying to determine who we are and what we want to be as SVDs, we agreed on four very basic characteristics," he says.

"One of them would be that we want to be close to people – we call this communication. Another characteristic is that we want to contribute to transform the world, make it a better place for the present and future generations – this is our concern for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

"Yet another characteristic is that we realise that we cannot do this alone, but only together with people who also want to take responsibility and who are willing to share their talents and material resources – this is what we mean by mission animation.

"And we also want to live a God-centred life – the love for the word of God as a characteristic of us SVDs and our partners in mission.

"Concretely, this would mean to learn to live the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan. That is, not to close our eyes and pass by when the people and the environment suffer and need help. All this, we can live together with the people of South Sudan."

Fr Heinz acknowledges the deep ethnic, religious and tribal tensions both within South Sudan and with its neighbours, but says dialogue is the answer.

"Being close to people means being in dialogue on a daily basis," he says. "People in South Sudan, independent of whether they are Muslims or Christians, are just tired of war and suffering. They want to go on with their lives.

"Dialogue is welcome by everybody in South Sudan longing for peace. And yet, there will be no peace without justice. As we know, both are conditions for any positive development that a country like South Sudan needs so urgently. There is still a lot of injustice in South Sudan and yet the process of reconciliation has started. Without dialogue among the parties belonging to different faith traditions, this process will not prosper. Dialogue exists and is in fact more needed than ever."

Fr Heinz says that for him, the call of Pope Francis for people living consecrated life to 'wake up the world' begins at a personal level.

"To wake up somebody else, one naturally has to wake up oneself first," he says. "Closeness to the people and being in touch with their sufferings is more than a wakeup call for our missionaries on a daily basis.

"The world will wake up seeing religious missionaries and their mission partners giving a good example in serving others. That is what being a missionary in today's world can be all about.

"The Gospel invites us to look at life not merely from the perspective of death, but from the perspective of life. The joy of the Gospel is then, a real joy that needs to be shared with people of all walks of life."

The Father General concluded with a message for people living religious life and for the SVD's friends, supporters and partners in mission here in Australia.

"Having visited many different countries in past months, during the Year of Consecrated Life, I have come to the simple conclusion that the world without Religious would be much poorer," he says.

"And this is equally true for all the good people in Australia who are supporting religious missionaries such as the SVDs; the world would be poorer without you."



The SVD Thai District confreres, gathered for a recent retreat with Fr Elmer Ibarra and Fr Michael Nguyen (centre), from Sydney.

Thai mission continues to grow, in response to great need

The SVD AUS Province continues to grow its mission activity in response to new needs, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Thailand District.

Provincial, Fr Henry Adler SVD, says the SVD has now been in northern Thailand for 15 years, providing care for children and adults with AIDS, or who have been orphaned by AIDS, as well as parish ministry, youth ministry, migrant chaplaincy, and the development of health, education and employment initiatives.

"Initially, the mission there was a project of a few confreres who were passionate about responding to the needs of people living with AIDS, especially, children, in the developing world," Fr Henry says.

"So we missioned three of our confreres to go there, and then the Bishop requested that some priests come, and we now have 12 members in the Thai District, both in Bangkok and working in four different parishes of the Udon Thani Diocese.

"And now, as our numbers are growing, we are beginning to look at the needs beyond Udon Thani Diocese."

Fr Henry is in conversation with Cardinal Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovitvanit of Bangkok about the possibility of providing missionaries to work in formation in Bangkok, especially in missionary formation. There is also some hope of SVD missionaries getting involved with other ministries in that diocese, and in other dioceses.

Fr Henry says the needs of people living in more undeveloped parts of Thailand are great, and there are a number of agencies working with migrants, refugees and tribal people.

"There are great needs for mission in the northern and eastern part of Thailand, to work with migrants and refugees," he says.

"So we are open to new missionary possibilities, excited about being present there and looking forward to the future of the Thai SVD presence."

An open heart the key to transition in missionary life

By Truong Le, SVD

"In spite of difficult situations and unforeseeable circumstances, God always manages to walk with us and open us up to new possibilities," says Fr John Hung Le SVD, when asked about his transition to Thailand after a 10-year term in Papua New Guinea.



"I'm a person that likes adventures and likes to experience new things," says Fr John. "I've made many transitions in my life; some I had no idea what was going on, but through these events I have come closer to what God has in plan for me."

At the age of 15, in a truly life-changing event, Fr John's parents entrusted him to his aunt's family to escape Vietnam for a new life in the United States.

"I had no idea what was happening other than my parents wanted me to go with my aunts and their family," Fr John says. "I realised that we were going to 'vuot bien' (a term to describe the journey of leaving Vietnam), but what that entailed I had no idea."

Fr John left Vietnam in September of 1979 along with two of his aunts and their family. They drifted on the ocean for seven days before being rescued and relocated to the refugee camp in Palawan, Philippines. They experienced many hardships during the journey, like lack of food and drinkable water, engine failure, and being lost at sea. After spending three years in the refugee camp, they settled in Orange County, California.

Fr John persevered with the life in the US, especially with his studies. He worked weekends, picking up aluminum cans and working at the flea market and completed his high school education. By that time, he was thinking of a religious vocation, an idea that first came to him when he was six or seven. After high school, being intrigued by a TV program on world mission and finding a pamphlet about the SVD, he entered into formation in Epworth, Iowa. However, during his formation, he could not resolve the disparity between his role as the eldest son in the family and his religious vocation. With difficulty, he decided to leave the SVD formation in order to work and support his family in Vietnam.

Being adept with his hands, Fr John made a living by fixing things (eg sewing machines) and saved enough money for a trip back to Vietnam – the first in 15 years. The reunion was not as he expected. He realised that his relationship with his parents had changed, and he could barely recognise his younger siblings. More trips back to Vietnam followed, and he began to realise that providing for the family financially was not the only mode of showing care. To his surprise, he learned that his family did not even have this expectation. The following year, Fr John sponsored his siblings to the US to explore new opportunities, and thus they were able to care for their parents in Vietnam. He no longer felt the contradiction between his role as the eldest son and following his missionary vocation.

"After 15 years, I finally realised what I had left behind in leaving Vietnam; I left my family," Fr John says. "The pain is real and the loss is apparent and I have to deal with it. When I reconciled that, I was able to pursue my religious vocation with the SVD."

The lessons Fr John had learnt about saying goodbye and letting go stood him in good stead for his next phase of transition – his first missionary assignment to Papua New Guinea.

"Once again I became an infant having to learn another language and another way of doing things –the social customs and culture. Not only that, I had to learn how to walk and climb," he says.

Based at Dirima in the mountains, Fr John served three parishes including 12 outstations. He established personal relationships with the people of different tribes, and learnt much from them. Over the years, he helped them build schools, and upon his leaving, they were able to renovate one of the main churches. Perhaps, at the peak of his ministerial role, with strong ties with the people and stories of successes, Fr John decided it was time to say goodbye.

"I felt satisfied and fulfilled, and so it is time for me to let go," he says.

Into his 50s, Fr John now accepts his new assignment in Thailand and is currently residing in Bangkok for language studies. He says an open heart is the secret to managing transition in life.

"Be generous with yourself; don't attach too much and possess too much," he says. "Share your time, gifts, joys, pain and suffering with the people around you and open up your hearts –that is the key to making a good transition."

RIP Fr Henryk Nickel – missionary to Australia and PNG



Fr Henryk (Henry) Nickel, a missionary to Papua New Guinea and Australia for many years, died in his home country of Poland on March 4, 2015 at the age of 78.

Fr Henry had returned home to take up his retirement at St Joseph Mission House in Górna Grupa, in 2014.

He was born on December 21, 1937 in Rybnik, Poland, to Leonard Nickel and Elisabeth, nee Macura. After his matura exam in 1956, he entered the Society of the Divine Word in Pieniezno, where he started his spiritual and intellectual formation. He entered the novitiate on September 8 of the same year, also in Pieniezno, and on September 8, 1959, he pronounced his first vows. Fr Henry took his final vows on September 8, 1963, and was ordained a deacon on December 22 of the same year. He was ordained a priest on May 10, 1964, by Bishop Józef Drzazga of Warmia in Pieniezno. After his ordination, he was sent for a pastoral year to Rybnik. From 1965-1967, he was appointed assistant of the parish priest of Saints Peter and Paul in Pieniezno.

Fr Henry received his mission assignment for Australia on September 13, 1967, and worked here until 1971. Later on, he was sent to the mission frontiers of Papua New Guinea, where he worked for about 10 years. He returned to Australia in 1980 and took up pastoral work, among other things working on behalf of the bishop of the Diocese of Ballarat. For many years, he was served the Polish community in Australia and also celebrated Masses in Latin.

In January 2014, after many years of missionary service, Fr Henry returned to the Polish Province for his merited retirement. He took up residence at the Mission House in Górna Grupa and, on May 10 of that year, along with his classmate, Fr Joseph Sudolski, he celebrated the 50th anniversary of priesthood. Fr Henry will be remembered as a cheerful and friendly person, always open to other people. His funeral was held at St Joseph Mission House in Górna Grupa and he was buried at the Mission House cemetery.



First funds already at work to help the people of Vanuatu

The first instalment of funds has made its way from the SVD AUS Province to cyclone-devastated Vanuatu and is already making a difference to the lives of the local people who have lost so much.

Mission Secretary, Fr Truc Quoc Phan SVD, was accompanied to Port Vila by Fr Olivier Noclam SVD, who is from Vanuatu, and then made his way to outlying Tanna Island, which was one of the areas worst hit by Cyclone Pam in March.

"This was the worst hit area," Fr Truc says. "About 90 per cent of people don't have houses now. All the trees are bent and without leaves and even the local church had its roof blown off.

"It's a miracle that only five people living on Tanna Island died in this terrible cyclone. But the people there are living in terrible conditions. They don't have electricity, safe water, or reasonable shelters. It's truly terrible for them."

Fr Truc says his visit was designed to take a "first look" at the situation and work out what aid is most urgently needed.

With no shops operating on Tanna Island, Fr Truc and Fr Olivier ordered the necessary stock from Port Vila, but found shops there were also out of stock, because of the great need.

"Luckily, we had a relative of Fr Olivier working in a warehouse in Port Vila who eventually helped us order equipment such as nails and tin roofing, and arranged for it to be sent to the people of the parish on Tanna Island," he says.

"I'm hoping that later this year we might be able to go back there and rebuild the roof of the church but for this visit, we took \$20,000 of money to provide quick relief for the people.

"Our fundraising campaign for the people of Vanuatu is continuing and we hope to return sometime in July to take a second distribution of funds to help people rebuild their lives."

If you wish to donate to the SVD Vanuatu Disaster Appeal, you can do so securely by visiting www.divineword.org.au or by mail to Locked Bag 3, Epping, NSW, 1710.



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