



# Society Matters

A Newsletter of the Divine Word Missionaries Inc - Australia Province

“So do not fear, for I am with you ... I will strengthen you and help you.”  
(Isaiah 41:10)



## Message from the Provincial Superior



Welcome to the Spring edition of Society Matters for 2015.

Lately I have been pondering that if I had to pinpoint the central role of the missionary, I think I would have to say it is simply 'being with' the people, wherever you are.

In his address to our recent AUS Province Chapter meeting, former SVD Superior General, Fr Tony Pernia, also highlighted this as a fundamental aspect of missionary life.

Fr Tony said that the missionary is sent in order to settle in and find a new home among the people.

"Just as the Divine Word pitched his tent among us, so also the missionary is expected to pitch his or her tent among the people he or she is sent to," he said.

All of us, whether living our missionary lives as consecrated religious or lay people, can gain a lot in our life simply by 'being with' the people with whom we live and work. For mothers and fathers this might mean being truly present to our children when we are together. For workers, it could entail getting to know your co-workers better. For priests and religious it could be spending time with parishioners, getting to know their way of life, their hopes, their dreams and desires, as well as their daily challenges. For all of us, it could be an invitation to 'be with' the poor and the marginalised in our community. In being with one another, wherever we are, we have more chance both of encountering Christ in the people we meet and being Christ's presence for others.

Our feature story in this edition of Society Matters tells the story of Fr Stach Kilarski SVD, a Polish missionary who has lived for more than 30 years with the people in the most remote parts of the PNG Highlands. When asked what he loved most about his mission there he said: "Just being with the people". In this edition you will also read about the spiritual gift of the Mission Mass League. There is an account of our recent Chapter meeting, where we looked afresh at our mission priorities, as well as the annual financial report, showing where we have sent funds to help in overseas mission projects.

We thank you, our readers and Partners in Mission for your ongoing generosity and for supporting us in all that we do. May God bless you.

Yours in the Word,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'H. Adler'.

Fr Henry Adler SVD  
Provincial Superior

**Cover Photo:** Locals in the PNG Highlands celebrate having successfully helped bring a missionary's motorbike across a swollen river. See our feature story on Page 4.

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## Provincial Chapter confirms focus on mission priorities and community life

The 2015 Provincial Chapter affirmed and confirmed the Province's commitment to its current mission priorities, as well as a desire to strengthen and further enrich SVD community life.

AUS Provincial, Fr Henry Adler SVD, says the Chapter also highlighted a growing sensitivity and commitment towards living interculturally, both within the Society and in its outward mission.

"The Chapter recognised that we already live interculturally, but that we want to get better at it," Fr Henry says.

"A desire also emerged for us to be more inclusive in our ministries, even though external factors don't always make this easy."

The Chapter confirmed the Province's commitment to the Biblical Apostolate, Mission Animation, and Justice and Peace initiatives. It reaffirmed that priority be given to indigenous Australians, the mission in Thailand, the urban poor and multicultural communities in Australia and New Zealand and faith seekers and people of other faiths and cultures.



"As far as Thailand is concerned, we confirmed that as a Province, we are looking beyond our present ministries there, to grow in mission, according to need."

Fr Henry says that while confirming the existing 'Ad Extra' priorities for mission outreach, the Chapter also expressed a desire to focus more on the 'Ad Intra' aspects of community and spiritual life.

"It was a recognition, I think, that we are all in this together, and so we need to work together to build up our communities and to engage with our SVD spirituality and also with practical matters, such as finances," he says.

"There was a very good spirit of collaboration at the Chapter meeting, which, I believe, was a sign of the presence of the Spirit in the Chapter.

"We worked hard, with the expert help of our wonderful facilitator, Patricia Bergin, and at the end, I think there was a real sense of excitement and reinvigoration for the mission in the coming years."



Still a road but not for long



## Missionaries overcome challenges to be with PNG's forgotten people

In a world of big cities and instant communications it is easy to forget that in places like the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, missionaries still walk for two days through rough terrain and swollen rivers to reach the "forgotten" people in remote areas.

Fr Stach Kilarski SVD has been missionary to the remotest parts of PNG's Enga Province since 1979, and is currently stationed at Maramumi Parish in Wabag Diocese.

"I've been lucky enough to have been most of the time in the really remote areas, in the so-called bush," he says.

"There's a lot of walking, but it's been a good experience for me to be in these remote, high altitude places."

When he's not walking from place to place, often for days, Fr Stach sometimes uses a motorbike or even a bicycle, depending on the terrain and the accessibility. On occasion, he asks the AUS Province to send him motorbike parts and other crucial supplies, something the Province, through its generous Partners in Mission, is very happy to provide. The AUS Province has also recently sponsored a new motorbike for another SVD missionary from the Highlands of PNG.

"We don't have big villages here, just settlements," Fr Stach says. "There is the mission station and then some small places where people live.

"Sometimes I can ride to one of the bigger stations, but then, from there, it is two days walk, across the river and through the bush to the outstation."

Fr Stach says the people in the remote Highlands face difficult times, with little support from the government in terms of health services and education.

"There are no health services here now. There used to be, but then it stopped. And there is no education. They used to have a health centre, police and agriculture, but now everything is gone."

Just this year some schools have started up again, after a 10 year absence.



Carry

Fr Stach Kilarski tending to small boy in Maramuni



Fr Stach Kilarski showing film to children in Maramuni using solar panel and battery



Getting motorbike across bridge



Getting a motorbike across a swollen river in PNG



"When it comes to health services, most of the time, people come to me," he says. "I have to be the medical officer.

There is a lot of malaria and typhoid and things like that and people have nowhere to get the medicine, so I have to help them.

"From time to time the plane comes with medical supplies, but it doesn't come regularly."

Once he receives the medical supplies, Fr Stach faces a long drive and then a two day walk to reach the people.

"I walk first to the first settlements, and I stay with the people there overnight. On the second day, I walk six to eight hours and then I come to the big station," he says.

"Of course, during the rainy season, I have problems getting across the rivers because they have no bridges. So we get together and put a few posts across the river and you have to walk across them."

Apart from helping with medical supplies, Fr Stach tries to get out to the remote communities regularly to hear confession, celebrate the Eucharist and spend time with the people.

"The most important thing is just that I am here," he says. Because the people are neglected. Nobody cares for them from the government unless an election is coming up.



Building bridge across a flooded river



Fr Philip Gibbs SVD on the track into Rulna

"So it is important to them that somebody comes and stays with them. It lifts up their self-esteem."

Fr Stach says that tribal fights and other problems meant that until he turned up in recent years there had been no priests in this part of PNG for about 30 years.

"My main task was to get the people around again and start again to worship, but there is still a problem in getting people to come back (to worship).

"The other problem is that here in the bush, many people have left and moved to the towns. More than half the population are now living in the big towns like Port Moresby, and many don't come back, especially young people."

Despite all the challenges, Fr Stach says he loves his life with the forgotten people of Papua New Guinea.

"I am very happy here," he says. "I like it here, being with the people. I really do."

Fr Philip Gibbs SVD also knows first-hand the challenges and joys of missionary life in PNG, having been there for more than 40 years.

"For many years I was parish priest in Porgera-Paiela parish," he says. "There were no roads in Paiela, only walking tracks. It would take three weeks to walk around and visit the outstations in Paiela.

"Some were relatively close, but for some others, it would take a full day of strenuous walking to make it to the next place.

"Mountain climbing was my favourite sport in New Zealand, so the walking in the mountains in Papua New Guinea was

more a delight than a penance, despite the rain and the muddy tracks.

"But I must admit there were times that I would dream of a hot shower rather than bathing under a waterfall, or of a comfortable bed, instead of the sleeping bag that seemed to have become a home for fleas."

Fr Philip says despite the challenges of missionary life in remote areas, there are rich experiences to be enjoyed too.

"Remote places give the missionary a chance to get closer to the people because there is just you with your parishioners and no-one else to distract you from listening to them, eating with them, administering some medical care and so on," he says.

"It is a time to hear and practice the local language, and a time to sit around the fire and listen to people's stories. The people appreciate it too. They know that you don't have to come along the muddy mountain tracks and that in another parish you might have the luxury of a car, but you have decided to spend your time to come be with them.

"It is a way of sharing the good news through your way of life."

*Your donation can help support the work of missionaries in remote places, such as Fr Stach and Fr Philip. Please note however, that due to Australian government regulations, funds donated to support missionaries in this way do not qualify as a tax deduction. If you wish to have your donation directed to help missionaries in their ministry or formation, please indicate that you do not wish to receive a tax receipt. Thank you and God bless you.*

## Mission Mass League – a deeply spiritual gift

On any given day at the Catholic Ashram Palda, in Indore, India, it is not unusual for Divine Word Missionary priests to be found praying at Mass for the special intentions of Australian families.

Indeed, such prayers would be prayed in SVD churches and chapels at places all around the world.

This spiritual link across the oceans is known as the Mission Mass League, the prayer association of the Society of the Divine Word.

SVD AUS Provincial, Fr Henry Adler, says the Mission Mass League was canonically established by the Divine Word Missionaries in 1910.

"Its purpose is to help serve people's spiritual needs and support the ministry of the Divine Word Missionaries," he says.

"We invite our faithful mission partners and donors to participate in the Mission Mass League by enrolling the names of their loved ones and their special needs.

"In this 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 their special intentions are remembered."

Membership enrolments are available in four categories – One year or Perpetual for both individuals and families. Donors receive a special membership certificate. Numbers of masses in different countries are expressly celebrated each day for Mission Mass League members.

Enrolments in the Mission Mass League might be appropriate in times of illness or death, or they may also be in recognition of birthdays, anniversaries of deaths or other notable occasions.

Fr Nicholas Martis SVD, Rector of the Catholic Ashram Palda (SVD formation house) in Indore, India, recently wrote to AUS Mission Secretary, Fr Truc Quoc Phan SVD to thank the AUS Province and its generous partners in mission for funding a project to build basic housing for staff at the formation house.

He assured Fr Truc that he and his confreres regularly offer Masses for the intentions of those enrolled in the AUS Province Mission Mass League.

"I am ever grateful to the AUS Province for supporting this project," Fr Nicholas said.

"From this Province, I have often received the Mass



Intentions which we celebrate for the intentions of the donors.

"I sincerely thank the donors for their great help. Without your help, these families would be just on the side of the road."

In promulgating the establishment of the SVD Mission Mass League in November, 1979, Saint John Paul II said he highly recommended it.

"It is our ardent desire and hope that it will be a source of support for the Church in her missionary work. To all who are enrolled and to those who spread the Mission Mass League, I give my Apostolic Blessing," the promulgation read.

Fr Henry says the Mission Mass League has always been popular with people in the AUS Province.

"It is a deeply spiritual gift to remember loved ones or special needs and intentions in the form of Mass Intentions," he says.

"In a special way, it links our partners in mission, our friends and donors, with the many wonderful works of SVD missionaries around the world, but also with our prayer life. And, together with God's blessing, this forms a deep, living and active communion."



# Financial Distribution for Overseas Mission projects 2014-15

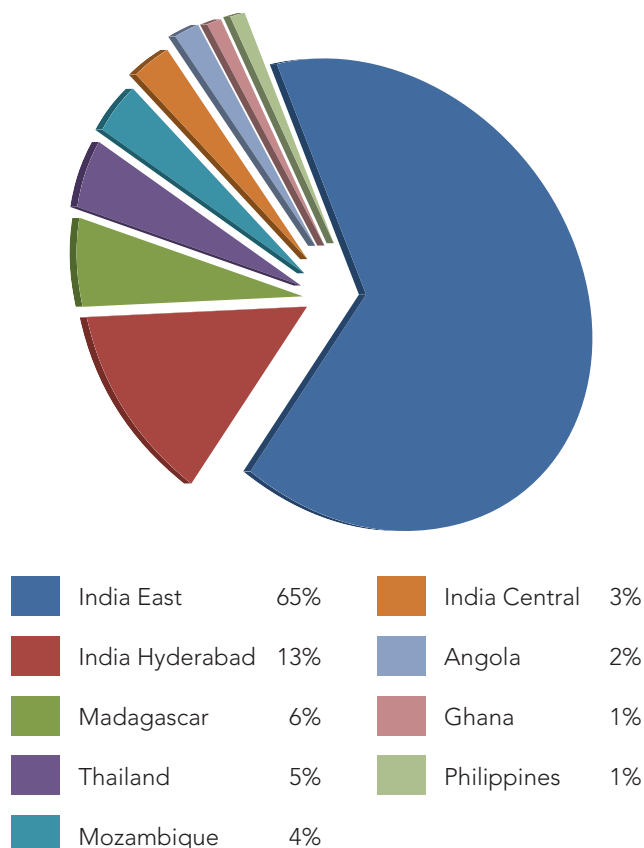
The generosity of our benefactors, our Mission Partners, continues to provide much-needed funds for distribution to our SVD ministries in overseas countries.

As you can see from the chart, in the past financial year, the Mission Office of the SVD AUS Province has directed funds to a range of countries around the world.

A large proportion of funds has in the past year has been directed to various parts of India, where the need is very great. Madagascar, Thailand, Mozambique, Angola, Ghana and the Philippines also received significant distributions from our Overseas Aid Fund, for their life-changing projects.

None of these projects would be possible without the generous financial support of so many of you, our readers, friends and partners in mission

The Divine Word Missionaries appreciate your ongoing support, however small or large and give thanks to God for you, our partners in mission, and we pray for God's blessing upon you.



## Thank you from Vanuatu

Of course the other great display of generosity from our partners in mission this past year has been the Vanuatu Cyclone Special Appeal, the funds from which are still being distributed.

You will recall reading in this year's Autumn edition of Society Matters that the first instalment of funds had been hand delivered by our Mission Secretary, Fr Truc Quoc Phan SVD, to the outlying island of Tanna, which was devastated in the cyclone. Those funds helped people to buy basic materials such as tin roofs to rebuild their modest homes.

In a recent email from Vanuatu, Sr Koleti SMSM thanked Fr Truc and the donors for the assistance.

"People are trying to rebuild their homes and even to plant crops again for their families," she said.

"On behalf of the families in the parish who received the iron roofs from your congregation, they express their sincere thanks for the support and the help you people have given to their families to start their lives again."

Fr Truc says a second instalment of funds from the Appeal will be delivered to Tanna Island in the coming months to help the parish community rebuild its Church.



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Donations to the SVD AUS Province Overseas Aid Fund can be made online at [www.divineword.org.au](http://www.divineword.org.au) or by mailing to Divine Word Missionary Appeal Office, Locked Bag 3, Epping NSW, 1710, Australia.