



# Society Matters

A Newsletter of the Divine Word Missionaries Inc - Australia Province



“And you will have confidence,  
because there is hope; you will be  
protected and take your rest in safety.”  
(Job 11:18)



## Message from the Provincial Superior



Welcome to the Winter Edition of Society Matters. Our feature story in this edition is about the opening of a new hostel in the Indian village of Borgaon-Buzurg to house students from outlying villages as they attend school.

Education is a big priority for the Divine Word Missionaries around the world. It is well known that education can hold the key to helping people from poor backgrounds to further themselves, break out of the cycle of poverty and create hope for their future. As baptised Christians and missionaries, it is our task, through Christ, to bring good news to the poor, liberation to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Providing an education for young people whose families have been trapped in a cycle of poverty for generations does all of those things. It brings them the good news of hope for a better future. It liberates them from being held captive to the circumstances in which they, through no fault of their own, find themselves. It opens their eyes to new knowledge, new skills, new possibilities. And it frees them from the oppression of poverty. The SVD AUS Province is pleased to have been able to support the building of the students' hostel in Borgaon-Buzurg, and we are thankful to you, our partners in mission, whose generosity helped us to fund this project. Your support for our mission activity is changing lives.

In this edition of Society Matters you will also read about the inspiring missionary life of Fr Frank Gerry SVD, who recently celebrated 65 years in vows as a Divine Word Missionary, and you will read the story of how one of our younger confreres, who came to us from Fiji to complete his formation in Australia, is now ministering in South Africa. We remember, too, our confrere, Br Maurice Taylor SVD, who went to God in March.

Thank you to our readers and partners in mission for your ongoing support of our SVD ministry and mission activity. Please pray for us as we promise to keep praying for you. I hope you enjoy this edition of Society Matters.

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:** These children from outlying villages in India can now attend school, thanks to the opening of a new hostel to accommodate them.  
See story, Pages 4-5.

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## Fr Ioane, missionary to South Africa, sharing his story & his faith with young people

Sharing his story and his faith with young people is what Fr Ioane Racumu SVD loves most about his missionary life in South Africa.

Fr Ioane, who is a Fijian, has been in South Africa since 2009. He completed his formation in Australia at Dorish Maru College in Melbourne.

"I arrived in South Africa on the 14th of September. I remember the date, because it was the Feast of the Holy Cross, and that was special to me because my parish in Fiji, on Tavuni Island, was Holy Cross Parish," he says.

Based at Good Shepherd Parish in Phalaborwa, Fr Ioane was asked by the local Bishop four years ago to be the Youth Chaplain for the Diocese.

"So, I do pastoral work in the parish, but a big part of what I do is coordinating the ministry of youth in the Diocese," he says.

"They seem to appreciate my presence there with them and they ask me a lot about my country. Some of them have never seen the sea, so living on a small island seems incredible to them.

"And so I share my story with them and it's very different to their story, but they see that even with our different stories we are all part of the one faith and that's a really strong thing."

The town where Fr Ioane lives is a mining town, supporting three mines.

"In town, it is mostly people who would be considered fairly well off," he says. "But there are a lot of North African mine workers as well. In the villages outside of town, where some of these workers live, people are struggling.

"So, as a parish, we have our communities there, with the people and in town."

Fr Ioane says the faith is growing and lively in the area he lives and works.

"You can tell this by the number of Easter baptisms we had," he says. "I think we had 50 or so this year. And these people would have done two or three years of catechism study first."

The local diocese has put together a plan for the immediate future called '20/20 Vision'.

"It touches on all areas of faith and gives targets and structures to follow. For example, one of the things



we have done as part of the plan is to restructure our catechism classes so that every parish is following the same one."

Fr Ioane says worship in South Africa is very emotional and spirit-filled and young people love coming together to share their faith.

"I observed how articulate and expressive the youth were," he says. "So I would ask them to come forward and give a poem about their faith and they would come up with the most brilliant things. I like to allow them to express themselves in their gifts.

"They are also great singers. Music is a big part of it. It's part and parcel of who they are as a people and a Church. And they don't hold back when they sing. Everyone sings out strong and loud, whether they can sing in tune or not."

Fr Ioane says one of the challenges he and his colleague, Parish Priest Fr James Sebastian, face is to encourage the youth from the poorer community to participate in events.

"They can sometimes feel intimidated by the youth from the town," he says. "So we work to overcome that."

He celebrates Mass in the three languages of the local people – Sepedi, Tsonga and English – and says the local people appreciate the effort involved.

"When the people see that you are learning their language they have a special respect for you," he says.

Fr Ioane says the cost of travelling to World Youth Day in Poland this year is too prohibitive for the local people, so he is organising a diocesan gathering for the youth, to be held at the same time.



## New hostel gives Indian children access to school and hope for a brighter future

In the Indian village of Burgaon-Buzurg, on the side of a highway in the Khandwa district in Madhya Pradesh stands a newly built hostel to house the young boys who have come in from the surrounding farming communities to attend school.

In the grounds of the hostel, a brass plaque gives thanks to the Australian Province of the Divine Word Missionaries who, with the help of their generous benefactors and Partners in Mission, helped to fund the hostel building.

Fr Mathew Patani, the Parish Priest of Burgaon-Buzurg, says the news that the mission project for the AUS Province had been approved "brought us great happiness and encouraged us with new vigour".

Begun on November 25, 2013, the hostel was officially opened on June 13, 2015, with a blessing and a great celebration attended by the Bishop, AAS Durairaj, other local dignitaries and many people from the village and surrounding areas.

Burgaon-Buzurg is a village hamlet by the side of the state highway, with a population of 12, 520.

"The major part of the village population is economically poor, with 30 per cent of the population owning farmland of the village and earning a living as small scale farmers," says Fr Mathew.

"The main occupation of the village people is agriculture-related works. During the off season, a good number of people migrate to other places to seek daily work to support families."

Fr Mathew says the need for the hostel was very great,

as up to now there had been little accommodation for children who came into the village for schooling.

"Burgaon-Buzurg is easily accessible from all sides, as it is situated on the highway," he says. "The village has a good higher secondary school run by St Anne's Sisters, Tiruchirappally (Tamilnadu).

"This is the only school in this area where quality and standard education is offered at affordable fees."

Fr Mathew says the school services up to 11 villages in the vicinity of Burgaon-Buzurg.

"These are interior villages far away from any towns or cities, with Burgaon-Buzurg being a connecting point, where people from the villages come to work.

"The village has a Central Government Bank, Government Health Centre, and other offices, thus people of these villages seek to send their children to St Anne's High School. There are also other children from these faraway villages who are studying in the Government high school nearby.

"All these children need boarding and lodging at inexpensive fees. The new hostel building will primarily facilitate the education of such children who hail from these nearby villages where no proper educational facilities are available.

"Thus, the new hostel has become a centre of hope for many who cannot afford to stay at Burgaon-Buzurg otherwise, due to the poor economic condition of their families."





Fr Mathew says the building of the hostel had its ups and downs because of various weather events.

"We were forced to stop the work as the hard Indian summer was on its way and the only water source dried up," he says. "We waited for the monsoon which removed the harshness of the nature and blessed this time specially with a regular shower, thus rejuvenating the water source."

Despite the challenges posed by the weather, the hostel was completed as per the government-approved plan and with all the basic facilities for the children to have a comfortable stay, with spacious rooms for them to stay, study and sleep.

"The building is protected with strong wooden doors and windows, covered with mosquito nets, as well as a hygienic kitchen and an environment conducive for promoting health and education," Fr Mathew says.

"We take this opportunity to express our gratitude and appreciation to all those who made this venture come true.

"We express our heartfelt thanks to Divine Word Missionaries Australia. It is this kind gesture that has helped us to put up this structure.

"As the new academic year started, students from far villages began to seek admission at the new hostel and today we are happy to say we have 45 students admitted to the hostel and studying at St Anne's School."

Fr Mathew says that while the hostel is for boys, the future for girls in the local area is slowly starting to improve as more families seek an education for their daughters.

"As per the Indian culture and social taboos, the general public at large in the villages is not keen to educate their girl children," he says. "But the situation is changing now due to an awakening among the people that without education, nothing is achievable in life.

"Many parents in the villages are therefore sending their children to our school with a hope that their future will be safe and that girl children will command respect in society."







## “The people from the garbage dump saved me” - Fr Frank Gerry SVD, celebrating 65 years as a missionary

As a Divine Word Missionary for 65 years, Fr Frank Gerry SVD, says he has had many wonderful experiences, but none touched him and transformed him as much as his ministry and friendship with the people who lived on the garbage dump in the Philippines.

“When I was working in formation in the Philippines I attached myself to one of the priests going down to the garbage dump every month,” he says. “And when he went away, I went down and did Mass in Tagalog for the people.

“It was a very important experience for me, because I was at a low point in my own life at that stage. I suppose you could call it a mid-life transition.

“But the people at that garbage dump received me with their hospitality, their humanity and their hope, and really, they saved me.”

Fr Frank recalls that the chapel at the dump was dedicated to the Mystery of the Resurrection.

“Imagine that, a chapel for the resurrection there in the midst of all that decay,” he says.

“After about three months one of the local women came to me and said, ‘we hope you keep coming here’. I did keep coming there for two to three years and gradually a resurrection occurred in me.

“Of my six years assigned to the Philippines, the time spent at the garbage dump was the most important and the most enjoyable.”

Fr Frank, who now lives in retirement, was born and bred in Brisbane and remembers being entranced as a teenager by the story of the Dorish Maru, the ship on which more than 100 SVD missionaries, Holy Spirit Sisters and civilians were taken prisoner by the Japanese during WWII and then shot at by American air forces.

“All through my young years I had an interest in the Missions. There was something enchanting and inviting about the mission fields,” Fr Frank says.

Responding to his missionary call, the young Frank joined the SVD in 1948 and in 1951, he left Brisbane to undertake formation and theological study in the United States.

Following his final vows and ordination, Fr Frank was appointed to the AUS Province as Vocations Director, and then Novice Master. In 1979 he undertook a Research Fellowship at Yale Divinity School, spending a year working with the renowned spiritual writer Henri Nouwen. He was then assigned to the Philippines, where he became Assistant Novice Master to 90 students at the Divine Word Seminary in Tagaytay. In 1986 he returned to Sydney and was elected Provincial.



"It was an interesting time," he says. "I saw it as a time of great openness to Asia. There had always been an openness to PNG, but because of my experience in the Philippines, I was able to help open up the Province to Asia. At my invitation, we started to get students from the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam come here for study and formation and we can still see the benefits of that today in the students we have."

Following his time as Provincial, Fr Frank was appointed Rector of Dorish Maru College in Box Hill, Melbourne and became a facilitator of the Siloam Program at the Heart of Life Centre.

In 1999 he spent two months at an Interreligious Dialogue Centre in Japan and went to India with the Christian Meditation Community for a three-day conversation with the Dalai Lama and some of his Tibetan followers. In 2004 he did a tour of the Holy places of India and in 2008 opened the Janssen Spirituality and Interfaith Dialogue Centre for the AUS Province, in Boronia.

Since retiring in 2010 and returning home to Brisbane, Fr Frank has been helping out in the SVD parish in Hamilton and giving spiritual direction. He now lives in retirement at Boondall.

"When I look back, I can't believe it's been 65 years and I wonder how it all happened," he says. "With this life, you don't sit down and calculate how it will all unfold. It's the vision that attracts you and you follow it," he says.

"It doesn't feel like 65 years, but I'm just grateful that I'm still here and that it's been such a rich life."



## SVD still committed to helping rubbish tip dwellers find a better life

The Divine Word Missionaries remain committed to being with the people who live on the rubbish tips of the Philippines, and helping them to work towards a better life.

Regular readers of Society Matters will be familiar with the story of how Divine Word Missionaries JPIC (Philippines) and many partners and benefactors, including Ron and Maria Natoli of Sydney, have worked together to fulfil a dream of moving local families off the rubbish tips and into housing – a project which is now a reality in the form of San Pio Village.

The current SVD Superior General, Fr Heinz Kuluke, spent many years as a missionary in the Philippines, working closely with the people from the Smokey Mountain rubbish tip, and was a big supporter of the San Pio Village project.

Among those who worked hardest to make the dream a reality were the home-owner partners themselves.

Not only were they required to assist in building various parts of the village, but they were also asked to attend two training sessions a week to help them build the necessary life skills and attitude to leave behind the negative aspects of their old life on the Smokey Mountain rubbish tip and embrace their new opportunities. Job training and education also form a big part of the Village project.







## RIP Br Maurice Taylor SVD – teacher, administrator, man of prayer

Br Maurice Taylor SVD has been remembered as an exemplary religious, a dedicated teacher and administrator, but also as a man of deep prayerfulness.

Br Maurice, whose health began to decline about four years ago, died in hospital in Sydney in March, at the age of 81, with his last words to a nurse at his retirement village being: "I am at peace."

Br Maurice Whelan Taylor SVD was born on 7th December, 1934 in Paddington, Sydney. He was the second son of Wilbred and Mary Taylor. Maurice finished high school in 1951. He went on to achieve a NSW Diploma at the Guild Teachers' College in 1968. Then in 1994 he graduated from the Australian Catholic University with a Graduate Diploma of Arts, majoring in Religious education.

Maurice entered religious life in 1962. He originally joined the Society of St Gerard Majella (SSG), an Australian order, specializing in teaching religion to Catholic students in Government schools. This teaching order was dissolved in 1993. At that time, Br Maurice was the Superior General of the Society. It was after this that he approached the SVDs with a request to be accepted into our Society.

For three decades Maurice was an exemplary religious as he worked in his teaching ministry. He was greatly admired for his teaching skills and he was good at administration. He showed remarkable courage in working in this ministry of religious education for Catholic Students in Government schools. Br Maurice worked in the outer western region of Sydney from 1966-1978. He then moved to Bunbury Diocese in Western Australia and continued this difficult work from 1979-1987. Subsequently Br Maurice worked as an administrator for five years in the Diocese of Parramatta from 1988 to 1993, co-ordinating the Religious Education Apostolate in the government schools of the diocese.

The Bishop at the time, Bishop Bede Heather, described Br Maurice as a man who "carried out his duties faithfully and humbly. He lives a simple style of life, in which he seeks little for himself beyond what is necessary for his own livelihood and ministry. He shows zeal in applying himself to the apostolate" Br Maurice enriched the SVD AUS Province with those very qualities noted by Bishop Heather.

Throughout his life, Maurice showed leadership and compassion to those to whom he ministered. He was always a reliable man, a man of discernment and great resolve with a wonderful sense of humour. He was deeply

spiritual and ever ready to serve. He was appreciated for his many fine qualities, the greatest of which was humility. He could never do enough for those he served, and for his community.

Maurice remained deeply grateful that he was accepted into the Society of the Divine Word in 1995. In Melbourne Maurice was very welcome in the formation of SVD brothers, first at Dorish Maru College, then at Ben Seng House in Mitcham which later on moved to Boronia.

Maurice subjected himself to a rather severe prayer and meditation routine. In his prayerfulness he was a wonderful role model for the young brothers, language students and priests staying in the same house.

In Boronia Br Maurice became involved in prayer and meditation groups active in the local St Joseph's Parish. The depth of his influence became clear only when the Ben Seng Community was dissolved in 2005 and Br Maurice left for Marsfield in Sydney. Many of the parishioners were devastated.

Br Maurice had a curious mind; he was always interested in learning. In his retired years he would take himself off by public transport to attend talks and discussions around Sydney, and again he joined in Meditative Contemplative Prayer Groups. He had a great belief in the power of prayer.

Maurice's health began to really decline about four years ago. He was taken care of for a short period in Mary Potter Nursing Home and more recently at Southern Cross Apartments, where he was deeply grateful that he had such a beautiful room with a view. The care was excellent. The SVD Community is very grateful for all the loving care shown to Maurice. Recently one nurse had started coming often for a personal blessing from him. It was moving to see him praying over her as an old father over his child. She is a Buddhist.

One of the nurses had seen Maurice go off in the ambulance for his last journey to hospital. She was moved to tears when told about his passing. She said: "His last words were "I am at peace". By the grace of God, Br Maurice had really found a steady home where he could be at peace. He loved quoting St Julian of Norwich: "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well".

Maurice, our dear brother, dear friend and spiritual guide to many, you have finished your laborious pilgrimage here on earth and reached the summit of your Mount Horeb, the Mountain of God, union with God in whom you are finding your completion, perfect wholeness. Maurice, pray for us.



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