

BRIDGING CULTURES, *Serving Communities*

Divine Word College's mission goes beyond educating young men discerning religious life with the Divine Word Missionaries. The college also plays an important role in training ordained priests from around the world to learn English and prepare for service in English-speaking communities. In recent years, some of these priests have stayed right here in the Midwest, stepping into parish leadership roles and bringing their unique perspectives to local communities.

One such priest is Fr. Telesphore Dusabe from Rwanda, who was sent to the U.S. at the request of his home

diocese. He enrolled at Divine Word College to gain a deeper understanding of the U.S. Catholic Church, graduating in May 2024 with an associate's degree in Intercultural Studies. Fr. Telesphore now serves as pastor for five parishes in Iowa's Holy Rosary Cluster, which includes the communities of Alta Vista, Lourdes, Elma, Riceville, and New Haven.

"When I first arrived in the U.S., I struggled to understand and communicate in English. It felt as though I was watching a television program in a foreign language, unable to grasp anything being said," he



recalled. “However, Divine Word College took me from a place of confusion to a place of confidence. The college’s rigorous language program played a significant role in this transformation. Divine Word College equipped me with the skills and knowledge to thrive in a multicultural and intercultural community. The college not only improved my language skills but also enriched my understanding of cultural diversity, enabling me to serve my community more effectively.”

Just a few months into his assignment, Fr. Telesphore adapted to rural Iowa life, driving from parish to parish and embracing the close-knit community he serves. He praises the local people for their hospitality and support.

“Their acceptance and encouragement underscore the universal nature of the Catholic Church,” he said. “This assignment has been a blessing, providing me with a rich environment to deepen my understanding of the Church’s practices and to serve a vibrant parish community.”

Fr. Telesphore cherishes the quiet, family-like atmosphere of the towns, where strong bonds of mutual support create a setting ideal for reflection and ministry.

“My greatest joy comes from being with my parish community, celebrating Mass, visiting the elderly and the sick, and administering the sacraments,” he shared. “These moments allow me to connect deeply with the parishioners, offering spiritual guidance and support. The warmth and openness of the people here make my ministry incredibly fulfilling and meaningful.”

However, his journey hasn’t been without its challenges. Adapting to the English language—especially with his accent—posed a significant hurdle, but he approached it with determination.

“I focused on speaking slowly, clearly, and loudly during my sermons and interactions,” he said. “I sought feedback from my parishioners and colleagues, which helped me identify areas for improvement. By dedicating time and effort to improve my English communication skills, I have been able to connect

“

**Divine Word College
took me from a place
of confusion to a place
of confidence.**

”

more effectively with my congregation.”

Fr. Telesphore is one of several priests who have found a new spiritual home in the Midwest after studying at Divine Word College. Another is Fr. Frantz Augustin, originally from Haiti, who spent a year learning English in 2019 at DWC before earning a master’s degree in human resources management. Since 2022, he’s been serving three parishes in Greene, Rockford, and Roseville, Iowa.

Fr. Frantz fondly recalls his time at DWC, where he was part of a formation group led by College President Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD. The group, composed of ordained priests, offered mentorship on everything from English pronunciation to parish ministry in the U.S.



Fr. Frantz Augustin

“Divine Word College played a very important role and has become more of a home for me,” Fr. Frantz said. “I am so grateful to the school and to all the staff who showed me great love and support.”

Fr. Frantz’s parishioners have embraced him with warmth, just as they did for Fr. Telesphore.

Other Divine Word alumni are also making their mark in Midwestern parishes. Fr. Milot Frederique, SMM, another Haitian priest, serves as Parochial Vicar at St. Thérèse of Lisieux Pastorate in Wisconsin, while Fr. Kayiranga de Dieu Felix from Rwanda serves as an associate pastor in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Fr. Telesphore says his experience at DWC helped prepare him to serve as a parish priest in Iowa. The diverse environment at the college allowed him to learn and appreciate different cultures. As he looks to the future, he remains optimistic about his ministry in Iowa, eager to learn more about U.S. Catholic traditions and to continue growing his connection with his parish.

“My hopes for my ministry in Iowa are centered on spreading the Good News, improving my language skills, learning from the Catholic Church in the U.S., and fostering spiritual growth within my parish community,” he said. “With God’s grace, I am confident that these aspirations will lead to a fruitful and fulfilling ministry.”