

## Educating Tomorrow's Missionaries



## WHAT'S INSIDE

SENIORS HELP ESL STUDENTS  
PRACTICE ENGLISH**Building Bonds with the Arnoldus Family**

The pre-novices traveled to Nebraska, where they visited the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters (SSpSAP) and explored the Omaha Zoo. Known as the "Pink Sisters" for their rose-colored habits, these sisters lead a contemplative life centered on perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Their congregation was founded by St. Arnold Janssen, who also established the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS). This visit provided the young men with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Arnoldus Family and experience the cloistered way of life. Together, they attended Mass, shared stories, and built connections through conversation. As a token of appreciation, the DWC students gifted the sisters a stuffed pink penguin from the zoo, affectionately named Sr. Sylvia. The Pink Sisters, who regularly pray for the SVD candidates studying at Divine Word College, were delighted to meet the men they keep in their prayers, strengthening the bond between these two branches of the Arnoldus Family.

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD



## Missionary Skills – A Community Affair

Celebrations at Divine Word College are really great. After a party, there is one more spectacle to behold. **Everyone** gets busy: clearing tables, washing dishes, storing tables and chairs, sweeping floors, and putting away the remaining food. It's pandemonium – but in 30 minutes it's all done. Visitors stand aside to watch in amazement.

In previous centuries, missionaries were usually pictured as strong, individual, heroic figures. The truth is there is as much need for listening as for talking, for receiving as for giving, for communal effort as for individual labor. For today's missionaries, dialogue is our way of life. At Divine Word College, we help students prepare by emphasizing five fundamental missionary skills:

- Critical Thinking Acuity
- Social & Global Responsibility
- Communication Effectiveness
- Missionary Discipleship
- Intercultural Competence

There is a “secret sauce” to these five skills, they can only really be practiced in community.

Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two. St. Paul had many companions and collaborators in his missionary outreach. Their challenge, and ours today, is to build friendships with faith-seekers, with people of other cultures, with the poor and marginalized and with people of other religious traditions. The five skills help us invite friends to join us on the road to the Kingdom of God.

Here in the US, though we live in the most prosperous nation in history, we may be reluctant to share the blessings that God has showered on us. We might think, I got *mine* through *my* hard work, let them get their own. We may forget that previous generations have given us a rich foundation of thinking, technology, abundant resources, and good neighbors to our north and south. Not everyone in the world starts with so many blessings!

At Divine Word College we pray, eat, study, play, and work together. Everyone shares in learning, in making a home, and in helping brothers and sisters from around the world. Good grades matter, but more important is giving and receiving life in the community and with neighbors all around.

Friends and benefactors of the College are a vital part of our missionary community. Through your friendship, prayers, and generosity, you are helping to make missionary service possible today and tomorrow. You are part of the “secret sauce” of a missionary education.

Fr. Tom

## Renewed Growth in SVD Vocations



Divine Word College welcomed five new SVD candidates during a special reception in January. They joined six others who entered the formation program in the fall, bringing the total number of candidates enrolled to 21. These men are discerning their call to religious life as a Divine Word Missionary Priest or Brother.

Like many religious orders and dioceses, the college experienced a decline in the number of men entering the formation program during the coronavirus pandemic. In January 2020, Divine Word College had 50 SVD candidates enrolled. Over time, some men graduated and advanced in their formation and others discerned out—a natural part of the process. However, from August 2020 to January 2023, only 11 new candidates were admitted, an unusually low number. This decline, combined with the natural attrition of candidates, resulted in a reduced number of men in formation.

Today, those numbers are rebounding, offering renewed hope for the future.

“During the Covid-19 pandemic, the whole world was torn apart. It filled people with fear and hopelessness, even the Church and religious orders,” said Dean of Students Fr. Tuan Hoang, SVD. “This year, our college was blessed to have 11 men enter formation. We give thanks for the hard work of our vocation directors, and to God for bringing the Church and the whole world out of this darkness.”

The challenges of the past three years highlight the importance of this renewed growth. The recent increase in vocations reflects a hopeful future and the dedication of the Divine Word Missionaries in nurturing religious vocations.



For more information about  
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## Raising Our Neighbors' Children Is Our Duty and Honor



Fr. Thang Hoang, SVD

At this time, 112 students are attending Divine Word College Seminary. This diverse group includes seminarians, sisters, and priests from 19 different countries around the world. Of these, nearly one-third are candidates for the Divine Word Missionaries. The remainder belong to various religious orders and dioceses that lack the financial means to support their own members. Almost all of these students are on full scholarships, which cover not only tuition, room and board but also necessities like medical insurance and travel expenses.

Many people ask, "Why do you feel the need to raise your neighbors' children?" Our answer is simple: "They are our children as well." In the garden of God, there is no "I" and "mine"—only "we" and "ours." Everything we have comes from God and is meant to be shared. For this reason, we do not merely educate and train missionaries for our own congregation but for the Church as a whole. And the Church belongs to all people. If we desire a holy and inspiring Church, we must foster the growth of holy and inspiring leaders.

As we await the arrival of spring, I invite you to breathe new life into the Church by helping us train these future leaders at Divine Word College Seminary. As the African proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." In the same way, we need your support to provide these students with the resources they need to develop into leaders who can build a world of peace and justice and lead all people to God, the source of true happiness.

Together, may our collective efforts yield abundant fruit in God's garden. And may the joy and renewal of God's springtime fill your hearts and homes.

*Happy Spring!*

## A Lifelong Commitment To Faith and Education

Mary Ann LeMay first learned about Divine Word College when she moved to Dyersville in 1984. Originally from Chicago, she studied Food and Nutrition at Iowa State University and built a career as a dietitian. After meeting her husband, a native of Storm Lake, Iowa, they eventually settled in Dubuque County, where they were introduced to Divine Word College through a local woman whose cousin was a Divine Word Missionary Priest. Curious to learn more, they began attending college events, including the annual Lunar New Year celebration.

In 2000, the LeMays relocated to Ocean City, Maryland, but their connection to Divine Word College remained strong. Supporting the college became a meaningful way for them to contribute to both education and their faith. Mary Ann's husband passed away in 2012, but she has continued their shared commitment to helping future missionaries.

"I hope it will allow students to study and not worry terribly about how they're going to pay for it," she said. "I pray for them to embrace the jobs that they have taken on."

Mary Ann recognizes the increasingly global nature of the Catholic Church. While priests from the United States serve in missions abroad, priests from other countries come here to minister in local parishes, too. She understands the challenges that international students may face when adjusting to life in the U.S. In her own parish, a Nigerian priest serves as associate pastor.

She believes there are many ways people can contribute to the growth of the Church and support missionary work. Encouraging those discerning a religious vocation, praying for seminarians, and offering financial support for their education are all meaningful ways to make a difference.

"I'm not present in that area, so I certainly can't come in and do something like tutor students who are learning the English language," she said. "But I can pray for them."



# SOMETIMES CREATIVE SOLUTIONS ARE THE **BEST SOLUTIONS**

When the activity director at Bethany Home in Dubuque reached out with an unusual request, it sparked an opportunity for connection. Several residents at the nursing home wanted to tutor students learning English—but there were a few logistical challenges to address. Weekly transportation for the residents wasn't feasible, and the college couldn't manage the logistics of transporting students to Dubuque regularly. That's when Dr. Seo Hyun Park, director of the Intensive English Language Institute, came up with a creative solution: Could the residents commit to visiting the college just once a month during the spring semester? The answer was a resounding yes.

This simple yet innovative idea quickly became a win for everyone involved. Each month, four residents from Bethany Home are driven to the college to spend an hour in conversation with ESL students, helping them practice their English. The program launched in January, when the residents met with a Level 1 class of students who had arrived in the United States just three weeks earlier.

At first, the room buzzed with nervous energy. The students, eager but shy, had prepared questions for their guests. Then, it was the residents' turn to ask questions. "How long will you study here?" Blank expression.

"How many years will you be in Epworth?" Blank expression. Finally, a breakthrough: "How long will you be at the college?" A spark of understanding lit up the conversation. "Two years for English, then four years for undergraduate," one student explained, proud to get the words just right.

As the hour unfolded, the tentative exchanges gave way to animated discussions. They talked about families, hobbies, and favorite foods. Laughter echoed through the room as both students and residents found common ground—and occasionally stumbled over unfamiliar words. By the end, the initial nerves had melted away, replaced by wide smiles and a sense of accomplishment. Before leaving, the students eagerly posed for selfies with their new friends, thanking them for their visit.

In the coming months, this group of former teachers, nurses, and lifelong learners from Bethany Home — including a remarkable 101-year-old — will return to engage with various ESL classes, fostering connections and bridging generations. What began as a logistical challenge has become an enriching experience for everyone involved—proving that sometimes, creative solutions truly are the best solutions.





# SHAPING FUTURE MISSIONARIES

At Divine Word College, we are dedicated to equipping students with the essential skills needed to thrive as future missionaries. Our holistic approach integrates academic excellence with personal and spiritual growth, preparing students for a life of service. Beyond mastering the fundamentals of science, math, and English, our programs emphasize cultural understanding, effective communication, and spiritual development. This synergy between academic and formation programs fosters compassionate, confident leaders ready to serve diverse communities worldwide.

By the time students complete their journey at DWC, they will have developed and refined the following core competencies:

## Critical Thinking

Students develop strong critical thinking skills, enabling them to explore issues, ideas, and events thoughtfully and carefully before forming opinions, making decisions, or drawing conclusions.

## Communication

Students become proficient in both writing and speaking, mastering the art of clear communication and building connections with diverse audiences.

## Intercultural Competence

Students learn how to understand, relate to, and work well with people from different cultures. They build the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to connect effectively with others.

## Social and Global Responsibility

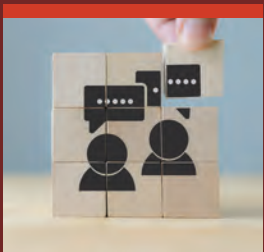
Students are aware of the world's biggest challenges, especially those affecting the poor and marginalized. They use their knowledge and skills to create solutions that align

with Catholic Social Teaching, working to make the world a better place for everyone.

## Missionary Readiness

Students are prepared to engage in meaningful conversations with people from different backgrounds. Whether they're seeking faith, facing poverty, or coming from different cultures or religions, our

students are equipped to follow the example of Divine Word Missionaries and build connections through respectful dialogue.



# Campus Connections



## Christmas Performance

Members of the Divine Word College community performed “The Importance of Giving” at Epworth’s annual Christmas festival. This heartwarming story, inspired by the Little Drummer Boy, taught local children about the nativity and the spirit of Christmas.



## Exploring and Learning

ESL students enjoyed a day of discovery in Dubuque. First they learned pickleball at the Five Flags Center and then they explored the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, where they experienced hands-on exhibits about the region’s history, wildlife, and waterways.



## Year of the Snake

In January, the Divine Word College community celebrated Lunar New Year with vibrant performances, delicious food, and joyful traditions. Known as Tết in Vietnam, it’s the most important holiday in many Asian cultures, marking the arrival of spring and a fresh start.



## Celebrating Graduates

December graduates Vuong Minh Vu (left) and Sr. Jesca Alitubeera, IHMR (right), had the honor of celebrating their achievements alongside a distinguished guest, Fr. Anselmo Ricardo Ribeiro, SVD (center), the new Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word.

# FROM REFUGEE CAMP TO VOCATION:

By Ae Pa You Paw

## *Trusting God's Plan*

I was born and raised in a Thailand refugee camp with limited opportunities to engage with religious people, whom I admired. After settling in Texas in 2012, my family faced challenges due to the language barrier and cultural adjustments, making it difficult for us to attend Mass and communicate with others. Despite this, my family advanced here in this country through the help of my mom's English teacher. She took us to church every weekend, although we still struggled to understand the Mass. After spending a year in Texas, my family moved to Minnesota, where we found a Catholic community consisting of our Burmese ethnic group known as Karen. Moving to Minnesota gave me hope and a sense of belonging in my Catholic faith again.

In 2014, I moved to Minnesota, where I was able to attend Sunday Mass in my language and engage with local religious communities, including the Franciscan Brothers of Peace and Missionaries of Charity. In 2017, a vocation director from the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS) visited and sparked a curiosity about the congregation. Later, I was invited to attend Mission Sunday at Divine Word College and continued to learn

more about the SSpS. Eventually, I participated in a "Come and See" experience in Techny, Illinois and engaged in various activities, including retreats and volunteered at a summer peace camp. Ultimately, I developed a strong connection with the community.

I visited Divine Word College multiple times and faced skepticism from my parish about joining the SSpS. Despite this, I felt supported by my family and defended my choice. I had previously known the Missionaries of Charity but determined that they were not the right fit for me due to some circumstances. This experience was interpreted as a sign that God was not calling me to that order.

Later, I received an offer to apply to DWC, which I saw as an opportunity to focus on my discernment. In 2022, I began attending school at DWC. Through my formation, ministries, and the examples set by others, I have learned that being religious is about my commitment to God and serving others, regardless of my appearance. I am grateful to God for guiding my vocation, and I thank my mom for her devotion. I may struggle to recognize God's presence, but I am beginning to see His plans for me. God's plan involves trusting Him rather than conforming to the expectations of others.



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# EPWORTH FIRE VOLUNTEERS HONORED



In November, Divine Word College presented its prestigious Matthew 25 Award to the Epworth Community Volunteer Fire Department in recognition of their unwavering dedication and selfless service to the Epworth community.

The award, established in 2001, honors individuals or groups connected to the local area who embody the spirit of Matthew 25:35-36: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.”

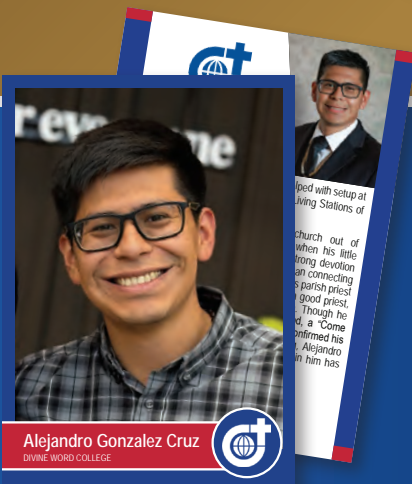
College President Fr. Tom Ascheman, SVD, expressed his gratitude during the award ceremony. “The Matthew 25 Award allows us to remember and celebrate works of kindness, welcome, and mercy by our neighbors in Dubuque County and the surrounding area,” he said.

“Today, we

particularly appreciate the long years of service of the Epworth Volunteer Fire Department.”

Fifteen current and retired members of the department, along with their families, attended the event to accept the award. Fire Chief Tom Berger shared insights into the department’s ongoing commitment to the community. “The Epworth community and the fire department are very appreciative of our wonderful relationship with Divine Word,” he said. “The principal foundations of our fire department are dedication, professionalism, and volunteerism. I am extremely thankful for our active members who unselfishly give their time and talents to the department, ensuring a quick and professional response.”

The Epworth Community Volunteer Fire Department currently has 40 members who respond to approximately 250 to 280 calls each year, exemplifying the spirit of service and community that the Matthew 25 Award celebrates.



## PRAY FOR OUR FUTURE MISSIONARIES

Would you like to support the men at Divine Word College who are discerning their call to become Divine Word Missionary Priests or Brothers? Let us know, and we’ll send you a profile card like this one! Each card features one of the 21 SVD candidates at the college, along with a glimpse into his journey on the back. Please keep him in your prayers as he listens to God’s call and prepares for a life of mission and service.

To request a card, email [info@dwci.edu](mailto:info@dwci.edu) with the subject line “Send Me a Card.” Be sure to include your name and mailing address in the message.