



NEWSLETTER

# SVD BROTHERS

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[svd\\_brothersphil@yahoo.com](mailto:svd_brothersphil@yahoo.com), [lanyi.svd@gmail.com](mailto:lanyi.svd@gmail.com)



*Theme:*

*My Vocation Story*

# FOREWORD of our Brother General Councilor:



Dear confreres and readers,

I would like to thank you, once more, for your support that you expressed to me when I was elected General Councilor. It is, indeed, a new experience in my religious life and I need your prayers and collaboration.

For this sexennium of our administration, I would suggest that we focus more on how *to raise awareness of the importance of the Brother Vocation for the life and mission of the Church* as underlined in the Congregational Directions n°45, under formation. This could be a real opportunity for us Religious Brothers to rediscover the essential elements of our religious consecration. We will be able to truly appreciate our own ministry and role in the Church, if we are able to see our apostolate or work worthy of the dedication of a lifetime.

I am pleased to inform you officially that the General Council has assigned Br. DUARTE ROBERTO as the Assistant of the General Secretary for Formation on Brothers' issues. His main task is to help us during the next six years to achieve our principal goal which is, as I have said above, to raise awareness of the importance of the Brother Vocation for the life and mission of the Church by following up the implementation of the final document of the General Assembly on the SVD Brother Vocation held in Cebu, in 2009 (see Analecta 93/E, p. 189), and the Congregational Directions of the last General Chapter, with a special attention to number 45 (see In Dialogue with the Word n°11, p. 29).

As you know, the Brother at the General Council was the contact person for all the Brothers in the Society. He coordinated the Brothers' activities, besides his responsibility as a Councilor. The new General Administration has suggested handing over this task to Br. Roberto. Therefore, he will:

1. be the main contact person for the networking among Brothers in the Society;
2. work with Coordinators from every zone (if there is any) or the provincial/national director of Brother Formation to see what the issues for Brother are at this time;
3. attend the Zonal Assemblies of Brothers and other gathering if needed or invited;
4. animate Brothers to share about themselves, their activities, vocation, etc.; in view of vocation promotion, in particular, through the bulletin 'SVD Brothers' and other means;
5. look at the specific contributions of Brothers in implementing the 17th General Chapter Congregational Directions; look at the collaboration with mission partners in implementing these Directions;
6. continue with the Brothers' Network with Br. Bela Lanyi in Cebu to enhance communication among Brothers (E-mail addresses of Brothers and the bulletin).

I would like to thank Br. Roberto for accepting this challenging task. To achieve the goal we have set, he needs our collaboration. So, let us work together.

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all!**

*Br. Guy Mazola, SVD (ROM)*

## Factual information about Br. Roberto Duarte, our new Coordinator



Br. Roberto Duarte was born in 1964 in Argentina. He took his final vows in 1994. Since 1996, he has been working in Ecuador (PANAM). His first assignments were: Parish Coordinator and JPIC Coordinator. Since 1998, he has been a member of the Provincial Council of his province; recently as Provincial Admonitor. In 2000, he was appointed formator. From 2008 on, he also works as JPIC coordinator of the PANAM Zone.

He attended the last General Chapter. The new General Council assigned him as the Assistant of the General Secretary for Formation on Brothers' issues.

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## OUR QUESTIONS TO THE READERS

Because of the General Chapter, we have in this year only three (3) issues of the SVD BROTHERS bulletin. We publish your responses to our questions. It is a bulletin NOT ONLY FOR BROTHERS, but its theme is the SVD Brother vocation.

Our General Councilor, Br. Guy Mazola wrote to the editors of the SVD BROTHERS bulletin: *"My proposal for the theme of the next bulletin would be from the document of the last General Chapter. There is a paragraph (45) under formation that can inspire us (cf. In Dialogue with the Word n°11-Sept. 2012, p.29). This is our action plan for the next 6 years: 'Awareness of the importance of the Brother vocation for the life and mission of the Church...'"*

According to this, we asked you to respond to the following questions:

### FOR BROTHERS:

- My own vocation story (in brief). What moved me to become an SVD Brother?
- How could today's SVD vocation ministry use my experience?

### FOR PRIESTS:

- Do I know a vocation story of an SVD Brother that struck me?
- How could today's SVD vocation ministry use that experience?

Unfortunately, no priest confreres responded to the call, although we make efforts to retain the bulletin as it has always been: a forum ON BROTHER VOCATION, for both SVD PRIESTS and BROTHERS. On the other hand, we thank all the Brothers who shared with us their life (and vocation) stories.

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## MY VOCATIONAL JOURNEY...

Br. Alfonso J. Berger, GEN  
(Former General Councillor)

When I remember my vocational experience, from its beginning to the present, I can highlight some significant moments as well as some feelings and convictions that guided me in this journey. First, I recognize the value of Christian witnessing experienced in my family. Then, during my catechism classes, I felt fascinated by the person of *Jesus of Nazareth*, his way of being and doing leading to his passion and resurrection to save us.



I think those experiences grew in me throughout my youth until 1980, when after a catechism class the parish priest asked me privately if I had already thought of becoming a *priest*. This question struck me because until then I had not really considered that option, although my mother had asked the same question a few years earlier. Later on, I received an invitation to participate in a 'vocation camp', organized by the SVDs in January 1981. I attended this vocation camp and I enjoyed it. But I did not enter the seminary since I had to do the military service that year. When I finished the service, my parish priest and one SVD seminarian asked me again if I would like to enter the seminary to become a *missionary priest*...



I remember that I had my doubts and I shared them with my SVD pastor. He asked me to have a community experience in Fatima, an SVD minor seminary located about 10 km. from Posadas, Misiones in Argentina. If I like it, I can continue, he added. Before accepting his invitation, I

remember that one night I dreamt that someone responded to my concern of whether it was worth engaging my life in that direction. In my dream I heard the phrase *come and see (Jn 1: 46)*. A few days later, I decided to accept this proposal with a little prayer that I remember to this day: *Lord, I put myself in this journey, I am not sure how far I may go, but I trust you*. Later on, when I read the story

of *Abraham*, I felt very much identified with him because his response to God started by *putting himself in a journey (exodus)*, from his homeland to the land God would show him (cf. Gn 12:1-4).

On 01 October 1982, I entered the seminary of Fatima for a community experience until the end of that year. Later I learned that October 1<sup>st</sup> is the feast of *Saint Therese of the Child Jesus*, Patroness of the Missions, which made me particularly glad. I lived that experience with a group of young people (3 in temporary vows and 12 SVD candidates), all finishing their high school for adults. I 'felt at home' and was very happy sharing my life with them. Those three months in the seminary provided me with positive experiences so different from what I had experienced a few months earlier in the military service. At the end of that exposure, my formators and superiors recommended me to join the Postulancy program in Cordoba. The program concentrated on philosophy and theology studies at the same time. In 1983, I started that program and for the first time I got to know more clearly the SVD Brother vocation.

The following year, during the Novitiate, I felt a strong desire to become a *Brother*. The motivation that guided me in that direction was based on the possibility of dedicating my life to the formation of laity in the Church, especially through *biblical ministry*. My pastor and some members of my family were somewhat *disappointed* with my decision to become a *Brother*. Nevertheless, they respected my choice and wished me good luck in my next formation stages. Between 1985 and 1987 I studied Religious Sciences in Buenos Aires which gave me a good basic training and consolidated my Brother vocation. In my case, I requested a transfer to the Brazilian Central province (BRC) to complete my biblical studies from a more *popular* perspective. Between 1989 and 1991 I did some courses in São Paulo that enabled me to work afterwards in the formation of catechists, to organize biblical courses for the laity, and to collaborate with the SVD initial formation. That period, until the end of 1994, was very interesting since I got a good and local biblical ministry experience.

My *first mission assignment* was the Togo-Benin region (TOG), located in West Africa. Between 1996 and 2000 I have been working as a missionary in Lomé, Togo. I dedicated myself to biblical ministry forming lay people and the religious. This required the translation of various biblical materials from other languages besides the use of local resources.

*Cont. Br. Berger*

Soon after, I was also involved in the SVD initial formation. I remember that once I had strong malaria which left me bedridden for several days. At that point, I experienced my limits. But interestingly, during that period God inspired me to recognize more than ever his *trinitarian presence* in the people of different cultures. In fact, I and other foreign missionaries were *white* but almost all the laity and many religious and local priests were *black*. But in the midst of this diversity we all were children of God, *created in his image and likeness (Gen 1: 26-27)*. That awareness developed in me a greater appreciation for the people of different cultures including the diversity of plants and flowers. In that reality I see a reflection of the Holy Trinity. (God is *One*, but also *Triune; unity in diversity*).

While in Togo, a major event in my vocational journey took place in 2000 when I was elected *General Councilor* during the 15<sup>th</sup> General Chapter. This came as a surprise since I had never imagined being entrusted with such a responsibility. As a result, I was transferred from Togo to Rome, Italy. That new step in my journey implied a learning process with regard to my life and work at the Generalate. My years in the Generalate (2000-2012) were quite demanding but I was enriched with the numerous experiences I had. In particular, I had the opportunity to meet many confreres in their working places in different countries and get an overview of the intercultural diversity in which the SVDs work. Often, I felt edified by the missionary commitment of our confreres in challenging missions (e.g. extreme poverty of the people, poor infrastructures, fundamentalist threats, etc.). Also, the *teamwork* in the General Council helped me a lot to cope with my service as general councilor.

Though I have not engaged in pastoral activities in Rome over those years, I have not stopped reflecting on my Brother vocation nor did I neglect deepening my faith in God. One important insight of this period was to rediscover the value of our *brotherly witnessing* based on the universal *fatherhood* of God. In fact, our fraternal relationship with our confreres and with the people in general testifies in a special way that God is Father (and Mother) of all men and women of the world. This call to be a 'brother of all' is manifested through our presence in solidarity with the people to whom we are sent. This calling to reach out is also done through our different professional

services in teams, either with other SVDs or with the laity and sometimes even with those who are not Catholics.

When I look back at my vocational journey, I feel grateful to many people who helped me to listen to the Lord's voice in different moments of my life and to follow Him. I am happy for the *SVD Brother vocation* God gave me, for which I thank Him from the bottom of my heart. I am also glad that I accepted the challenge of *putting myself in this journey*, even though I was not sure where God would lead me. Of course, I had to face some difficulties such as the disappointments of my family and pastor; my request for a transfer during temporary vows to get a suitable biblical formation and at times the 'defense' of my Brother vocation from *clericalism*. But these difficulties were the ones that also helped me consolidate my Brother vocation. As I continue my journey, I trust the Holy Spirit and I am confident that He will guide me also in the coming years of my missionary work in Brazil (BRN), from 2013 onwards...

*Rome, 17 November 2012.*

## HE INVITED ME TO VISIT MISSIONSHAUS ST. GABRIEL (AUSTRIA)

*Br. Vinzenz von Holzen, SWI  
(Former General Councillor)*



As a young man I felt fortunate to be born in a catholic family, in a Catholic surrounding. I know, many people around the world had no knowledge of the salvation through Christ.

I felt responsible and wanted to do something to bring them the news of the

Cont. Br. Von Holzen

love of Christ for them. In my first years of professional life as accountant, I met on a mountain-tour an SVD student. During his novitiate he invited me to visit the Mission House St. Gabriel in Austria. I went there twice and had also spiritual talks. There I decided the SVD would be my future place.

I did not hurry with the entry because my family of nine children was poor and needed my salary. Some of my friends suggested to start studying theology for the Priesthood. But the main desire for me was to help the people in poor countries. I felt no interest to do this with the sacramental pastoral and therefore came to the decision that the Brotherhood was my real God-given vocation. I never regretted this decision. My life and experiences afterwards were unexpectedly rich and blessed. I thank the Lord for it every day. I suggest to the **SVD vocation ministry** to keep contact to adult people, between 20 and 30 years of age, and give them the possibility to experience SVD community life with young SVD's in their formation.



## A COMMENT ON THE AUGUST 2012 ISSUE

Br. Gaby Wangak, IDE



Our bulletin last August was very interesting. It contained the latest issue of the XVII General Chapter and it was interesting reading. The introduction was written by Br. Berger. I was also

interested in the interview with our new Superior General Fr. Heinz Kulueke done by Br. Bela. In the interview, the Fr. SupGen repeatedly emphasized that we are all SVD's, SVD missionaries. I understand why he emphasized this statement because in reality although it is not obvious, the discrimination between the priests and Brothers in some places still exists.

In my opinion, this difference still exists for two reasons:

1. **Local culture.** Local culture would look at the priest as the highest position in the society compared with the Brother or Sister.
2. **Anniversary of Vows.** In some places, there are big celebrations done to commemorate his ordination.

I would like to inform everybody that we are about to celebrate our silver jubilee of our vows for our batch this year. Our batch (priests and Brothers) had a retreat in Cisarua, Bandung in the beginning of August 2012. We called this batch "SVD and FRIENDS '87". We will gather again after 5 years to celebrate the silver jubilee of ordination of both '87. Attached are our pictures during the retreat in Bandung.

## I WAS LONGING FOR A MORE MEANINGFUL EXISTENCE

Br. Errol Torres, PHC

I must admit the very reason I applied for SVD Brotherhood way back during my senior year in high school was my dislike for



preaching. Knowing myself then as a very shy boy, I know then that priesthood is not my cup of tea. But upon the urgings of practically everyone who knew me and my potentials along with their assurance that the long seminary formation would prepare me especially for the preaching ministry, I gave priesthood formation a try. But my six years as a clerical candidate proved to be a real struggle. I was all the time going against myself. Simply put, I was feeling then like a prisoner, unhappy and dissatisfied. So I left the seminary for further discernment outside.

To cut the long story short, I came back after six years and re-entered as a Brotherhood candidate; I simply long for a more meaningful existence by offering myself in loving service to God and others. Others wanted me to continue my priesthood formation, but I became resolute to be an SVD Brother. Enough for chasing dreams in some way imposed by others, I embraced "Thy will be done" as my motto, and pursued a vocation that I believe God is calling me to be happy.

Paraphrasing my spirituality professor way back in college, if I am created a "*sanggot*" (sickle) I should not aspire to become a "*silhig*" (broom); otherwise, I will not be doing the will of God and would not find true happiness and fulfillment in this life.

So I would like to believe that following the Lord is a call to be happy. No loving God *Cont.* would have thought of unduly burdening His child by calling the latter to a ministry or

mission he does not like or is not inclined to be or to do. Despite physical sorrow, our martyrs must just be too happy deep inside to heed the call to die for our faith, very much convinced that there is eternal glory thereafter! Despite the fact that the Brothers are less known and revered than the priests, not to mention all the other lofty positions and perks that go along with the priestly vocation, still I believe that the ultimate criterion for a genuine calling is the joy of having responded to whatever God is calling us to become. The bottom line is that each calling from God is meant to make us personally happy, which we in turn are called to spread to others. Isn't it that we are called to proclaim to others the "good news" of God, by word and deed? Anything short of personal happiness may be a sign of a wrong response to an otherwise joyful calling.

## IT WAS MY DESIRE TO SERVE OTHERS

Br. McDaniel Acquah, GHA



Throughout my life, I had wanted to use my talent, skills and knowledge to communicate to others how effective I am in the house or at school. Little did I know that these three ingredients mentioned above in life are just the beginning of things to happen. I recall my childhood days as far back as a primary grade four pupil during a football match between my school and another school. I missed the opportunity to score a goal from a close range. I was called off the field and flapped in public and I was asked to go back to



*Cont. Br. Acquaaah*

perform and put on my best. The lesson I learned was that my best was not enough and that I could do better. At that point I wished I were withdrawn from the school team, yet friends kept encouraging me to realize the potentials in me and never to give up exhibiting my talent for the benefit of my school.

From a poor family background, I started selling food stuff almost every morning before going to school. I enjoyed doing that for my grandmother to get enough money to pay my school fees. At the age of nine, I became a news vendor and sell newspapers before going to school. My desire to serve others wherever I go kept growing. This made me join the altar boys in my village. From the beginning of my life my grandmother made me aware of the importance of the morning mass before any other business. I did not know at that time that my spirituality was being built. Even when I joined bad company during my secondary school days and refused to attend mass or church service for five years, it was the spirituality being implanted in me by my grandmother that brought me back to track. After secondary school, I recalled being an altar boy before – my desire of becoming an altar boy reignited. Within a year, I found myself in eight different youth groups in the parish and served in various positions faithfully. My interest with the youth grew stronger and stronger and I never stopped offering my services to them. I therefore felt a strong need to share with the youth the qualities I have. I read from the “WORD” magazine from the States that, the SVD Brothers were also offering good services to the youth – through their skills, talents and knowledge. I pictured or mirrored myself being one of them one day – working serving and helping the youth. For once I told myself, this is what I can do best in life. My dream of being a model to the youth came through when I started feeling

a strong urge to become an SVD Brother. It was like a magnet that was pulling me closer to become an SVD Brother and so far so good I have no regrets of being one.

Many young men felt called in so many ways today to be a Divine Word Missionary as religious, yet I believe there are qualities we could look for in the vocation ministry from my own experience:

1. The background of a candidate
2. Church activities he’s involved in
3. Qualities he has as a person

Even though I believe that the motive of the person purifies during his formative periods it is equally good to consider the above points. My experience had made me who I am today. I believe I drew a greater part of my strength as a Religious Brother from my up-bringing. My background makes me humble yet makes me great whenever I look back in my life. From my own experience, my background gives me some sort of stability in my vocation.

Secondly my involvement in Church activities brings out the qualities in me to serve others through various activities and societies. The desire to serve others is the key to religious life and it is equally important in my vocation ministry.

Lastly my quality as a person is very important to the church and must be respected. Even though there might be other qualities undiscovered, my skills and potentials must not be taken for granted so long as my vocation ministry is concerned. Any time I take stock of my life, I come to realize how my life as a Religious Brother had attracted many young men to become religious. As a vocation director for the Ghana Province for the past four years, I can proudly say that I have recruited (32) thirty two candidates for the Priesthood and Brotherhood: Philosophy one (12) twelve, Philosophy two (7) seven, and Philosophy three (7) seven and novitiate six

*Cont. Br. Acquah*

**(6). This year God willing I can recruit about (8) eight more candidates to study Philosophy. I strongly believe I was able to achieve this through hard work and determination and I also believe that through the gift of service, many young men had found their vocation. Like a young man selling food stuff before going to school, I am always determined to sell the society of the Divine Word to the young men out there without money.**

## **OPTING FOR BROTHERHOOD INVOLVES A MYSTERY**

*Br. Stephen Bonsu, GHA*



### **What moved me to become an SVD Brother?**

It all happened when I was attending St. Joseph Technical School (SABTECH) which the SVD society was in charge of the institute affairs. I joined the catechism class. I was baptized when I was in Form Three. When I completed I started teaching in one of the Primary Schools in Saboba.

All along while I was attending SABTECH I sighted one of the Brothers running the School by the name Br. Williams Dennis, SVD from America. I contacted him that I had developed interest in becoming a religious minister. I did not know the difference between a Priest and a Brother.

So he gave me the brochure of the SVD published by the Vocation Director at that time.

Like choosing a wife or a husband from among many choices, opting for brotherhood over priesthood involves a mystery. One does not simply choose to become a Brother; he is called or meant for it. Brotherhood, just like priesthood (or marriage or single blessedness) is a divine calling or vocation which one personally responds to with love and fidelity, without regarding other callings as either greater or less. As St. Paul says: "Now, there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:4-7) We cannot therefore just choose to be a priest (or to get married or to remain single) as if to become one is simply a matter of choice or interest; we also have to consider our giftedness and listen to the manifestation of the Spirit in our lives.

After a deep reflection I went back to Br. Williams Dennis, SVD and told him that I was interested in becoming a Rev. Father but he told me that one of the requirements was to have an Ordinary Level Certificate. Since I had completed a Technical School I only had the Intermediate Certificate. I thought of this and I decided I wanted become a Brother instead. Looking at the good work done by the SVD Brothers teaching in the St. Joseph Technical School I resolved to follow their footsteps.

After a successful completion of the Advance Certificate, I applied to the Vocation Director at that time. He called me for Aspirant Meeting and Retreat which

Cont. Br. Bonsu

I did attend. After sometime I received a letter to start my postulancy program at Sunson Centre in the SVD Yendi district. After one year postulancy I was admitted to the Novitiate for two years. After the first vows, I wrote the City & Guilds Part I & II at Accra Polytechnic. I did pastoral work for two years before making my final profession. The formation lasted for about 6-7 years. After the final profession I was appointed to work at Madagascar Region. I did the missionary work for six years. When I returned from Madagascar I had to study one year Education at the University of Education Winneba- Kumasi Campus. At the moment I am teaching at the St. Paul technical School Kukurantumi- Akim.

### **How could today's SVD Vocation Ministry use my experience?**

Today's SVD Vocation Ministry could use my experience by telling the younger Brothers and the youth the experience of the other Brothers who have good moral character, who show love for study and work, and are willing to be formed, at least with an average mental ability for studies; have good health and free from any chronic ailment; have sincere desire to serve God and his people, and ready to be sent to the foreign missions.

### **Do I know a Vocation Story of an SVD Brother that struck me?**

Br. Pius Agyemang, SVD who is committed to the proclamation of the Gospel. He is a very good musician and knows very well the Liturgy and very charismatic; gifted in preaching the homily. He has written many liturgical books and composed many songs being used in the Catholic Church in Ghana. He gives talks and seminars to the laity, the parishes and religious groups. He goes outside Ghana to countries like

Nigeria to give talks to the Christians and parishioners. Br. Pius Agyemang, SVD uses the title "Brother" to signify his spiritual leadership in his respective community. He has trained many young people in music who have become potential musician in Ghana.

### **How could today's SVD Vocation Ministry use that experience?**

Today's SVD Vocation Ministry could use Br. Pius Agyemang, (SVD) experience by allowing him to share his experience with or even be a mentor for the younger Brothers who are coming up in the Society so that one day if he is not there one of the Brothers could take his place.

## **MY VOCATION MAKES ME HAPPY**

*Br. Karolus Boro, PNG*



What moved me to become an SVD Brother? When I was in high school, I became interested in religious life. But at that time I have no idea about religious life. When I was last year in my high school, we had recollection given by an SVD seminarian. He was member of the SVD, a missionary order of Priest and Brothers. He was first to tell me about religious life. It was then I wanted to become an SVD Brother. After I finished high school I went to Brother formation. In 1987 I become a Brother postulant. I was 24 years old. In 1988 I went to Novitiate. In 1990 I had my first vows. During

*Cont. Br. Boro*

my temporary vows, I was working in a printing press for 4 years. After that I went to study Diploma Business Administration in Jawa for 2 years. Then in 1996 I made my final vows and had mission appointment in PNG. Before I came to PNG I went to Australia for an English Course for 8 months. In 1998 I went to PNG, but before I started my work I went to the Highlands for pastoral and cultural experience in Derima parish for 8 months including learning Pidgin English. After that I worked in the Wewak Diocese at the main office as a finance officer for 10 years. At the same time I was praeses at Wirui Community for 9 years. In 2009 I transferred to Hagen Archdiocese in the Highlands for 3 years as finance comptroller in the schools, clinic, coffee plantation and the Fatima station. My 15 years in the mission in PNG made me happy and fulfilled as an SVD Brother.

**And how could today's SVD vocation ministry use my experience?**

When God call us into life, He calls us to embark upon a very special journey. This journey begins at the moment of our conception, and continues until the moment of our death. Our journey to growth and healing is necessary because it free. To become a religious is a process, a way of life, a quality of relationship, a depth of commitment which should be the mark of every person to follow Jesus Christ. This is Jesus who calls us to to go with Him to learn of Him, to be trained by Him and to become His disciple. I became Religious Brother because of my choice, my decision, and my love.

As Missionary Brother, I have to carry my professional skill as office worker or finance worker to serve and give witness to the people and the Church. I am a Brother because I have vows. On the other hand, I become a living symbol of the unity and diversity of the Church.

In this way I am capable of carrying out the missionary task of our Society. I have to be a witness of the Gospel not only to the people but also in my personal life, in my community living, and in my work place. As a witness to the Divine Word, I build up relationships with the people in schools, offices, clinics, parished, and the community where I serve. I am happy in my vocation as an SVD Brother and enjoy my work in finance and accounting. My vocation grew stronger after working for 15 years in the missions. Because I am faithful and dedicated to my religious life I am happy to be an SVD Brother. With our prayer and daily mass my vocation will last a long time. If you are an SVD Brother looking only for positions or jobs then your vocation does not stay long.

## **I WAS TAKEN INTO THE FOOTBALL TEAM**

*Br. Karl Schaarschmidt, KEN*



As a schoolboy I was a volunteer distributor of our SVD mission magazine in Germany the “Stadt Gottes” One day an SVD Brother came to visit me and ask me, what I intended to do after leaving school. I intended to become a craftsman. So he invited me over the weekend to visit our mission house in St. Wendel, to see our workshops and training centre. At that same Sunday the boys from the technical school played football again with the High School boys. I was taken into the team and scored the winning goal. After playing we went to the swimming pool, and that was great, since at that time there was no swimming pool at my home place. I was

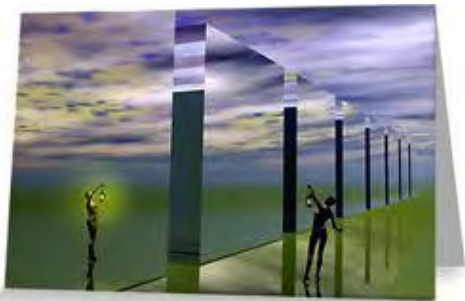
Cont. Br. Schaarschmidt,

so much impressed, that I went there for my technical training in Carpentry and furniture making.

Being there in the mission house, I met so many Brothers coming back on vacation from the missions who told their stories of mission life. Also, my aunt was a Mission-Benedictine sister, working in South Africa. All those inspired me to also be a missionary. After my 3 years technical training I decided to join the SVD as a Brother.

## FASCINATION MORE AND WORK

Br. Eugene Orog, PHC



My vocation story started with a fascination. I was fascinated by a holy calendar which my mother called it *kalendaryo sa pari* (a priest's calendar) because it came from a parish. Usually it had a picture of the Sacred Heart or that of a Blessed Virgin Mary. My mother used to hang it at our mini altar or at the receiving room of our house. As a child my impression was: this must be very important. It dawned on me that God is very important in life.

When I studied in the elementary, I lived with my grandparent. My aunt who was the sister of my mother used to bring me to a block rosary from house to house. And then she encouraged me to join the *Flores de Mayo* - a floral prayer offering to our Blessed Mother during the month of May. I dutifully attended all these - not that I was a pious soul but because of food (snack) that were served afterwards. As a child, I loved to eat.

Due to scarcity of money during my high school days and with my hunger for more knowledge, I

became a certified BSP (*Boy Sa Pari*) - a convent helper of the Jesuits. During my free time, I liked to read books about various religious congregations and religious state of life in the Church. Gradually I was identifying more with the Church than with the secular life outside. During my fourth year which is a crossroad I asked myself with this question: what's next? The vocation as an SVD Brother became an option for me. With a sense of curiosity plus a passion to see the city of Cebu, I applied and got accepted.

I lived with the SVD Brothers in Talamban Cebu City. I got fascinated of Brothers who were preparing to become medical doctors or accountants. But I chose education because that was the easiest course in the University of San Carlos. With my provincial background, my basic education was not well founded. I felt insecure and yet hungered for more.

In the Novitiate, I had a conversion. That it was better to concentrate on the things of God than on Sciences. So I focused on Religious Education and eventually to Counseling Psychology. This prepared me for formation work. It seems the Lord had led me to this, so that I became a formator in the Society for 32 years as of this writing. As a formator, I realized that one has to have love for his work especially with the people whom he ministers to. He has to have a steadfast belief that this is the purpose of his life. In this way, he can trust the Lord by trying his best, and the Lord will take care of the rest. There should be no room for mediocrity in our vocation as Brothers. Then we can make a difference in others. As of now, I could no longer ask for more, but I remain fascinated by God's love for us. This is enough for a senior citizen like me, as I turn 60 of this year.



Every morning, praise the Lord!

## “WILLINGNESS TO SERVE IS A GIFT.”

*Br. Roy L. Lapingcao, PHS*



My vocation story starts when I was serving our parish during my childhood years. I became an acolyte for six years. Then, after studying in

college I went back in the parish and do actively in the youth organization. When the time I had a work, I was experiencing frustration in life. I feel I was the only person left standing on the train station. I told to myself “I have to do something at least one step at a time.” It was then I realize and asked myself ‘why not to try to enter in seminary’. However, I was working, then, in the cooperative located at the back of our parish in Poog, Toledo City. I was one of the youth leaders in our parish.

During that time, I met one of the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, one of the missionary sisters became our youth companion. It was through them I learned about the SVD congregation who is accepting both for priesthood and for brotherhood. During our sharing in a group, I disclose my desire to become a priest and plan to enter the seminary. Then, the sister shared to me and said ‘why not try to become a brother.’ Hearing from it I asked more questions to her. It was through them I appreciated the life of a brother. They were able to help me find and try to do something one step at a time. It was through them, I had learned that there is a brother vocation. So the sister explained it to me what is the life of the brother? What will be there works? Etc...

Thinking all those information, I was attracted and inspired to become a brother. I took my initiative to visit the formation which was located in the old formation center near Perpetual Succor Hospital.

But the formation center was already transferred at the back of the Sacred Heart Center and I asked help to my friend how to go there. Later on, Br. Roland Pontevedra, SVD arrived and fetched us in the old formation center. He brought us to the vocation office and I took my exam there. After few months, I received my result. I passed the exam but my mother refused to allow me to enter because I have to help them first. So my first attempt was not pursue. After a year, I asked my mother’s permission. Then by this time, she allowed me to attend the vocation jamboree when by that time I met again the brother’s vocation director. I took again the exam and passed.

What really makes me inspire to become a brother is my willingness to serve even I will be far away to my parents and siblings. This inspiration grows when I was actively participated in our parish activities. Then this motivation associates my long years’ experience far away from my parents care when I was studying in college in Mindanao for five years. Every time at the end of my work, I always visited the church to pray, to help, to organize and give seminars to my fellow youth living in remote places.

Today, as an SVD Junior Brother, I always look forward that the brother’s vocation may planted in the mind of people especially here in the Philippines and have to accept and understand it that it is a very special vocation. A brother varies in different needs in terms of ministry. It constitutes its own growth to use his profession in the field of mission. There are many areas that a brother essentially given an opportunity to grow and do his professional works.

The SVD vocation ministry can use my experience by assessing it: first, what will be my most interest in academics; second, how strong is my determination and motivation to become a missionary; third, how HOT (which means ‘humble, open & trustful’) I am in the community or to the confreres. The formators can see the individual character of the candidates and can help them identify their field of interest that they are fit to be in their future ministry.

## SOMETIMES THEY INVITED ME FOR BREAKFAST

*Br. Yohanes Lim Kahlasi, SIN*



My name is Yohanes Lim Kahlasi. I am an SVD Brother doing my missionary work in Taiwan, SIN. This is how I ended up in becoming an SVD Brother. I was interested in becoming an SVD missionary when I was in the third year of "Sekolah Pendidikan Guru", a vocational school that trained students to become elementary teachers. For three years I stayed in a dormitory run by this school and managed by diocesan priests and fraters. One of the regulations of this dormitory was attending Holy Mass everyday. By attending regular Mass everyday, I had chances to know parish priests, fraters, and nuns. In addition, becoming a sacristan and an altar boy helped me to discern my vocation more seriously. Each time, after the Mass, I was invited by the parish priests or fraters to have a chat and sometimes they invited me for breakfast. By socializing with them, I knew more about their lifestyle as religious people. Moreover, my vocation was deepened by the encouragement of my parents. Each time I went home to get my school tuition, board and lodging, my parents always said that if some of their children would become priests, nuns or Brothers, they would be very happy. Of course they always prayed for vocation. Finally, in the last semester of my study, helped by a priest, I was able to write an application letter to Father Provincial of SVD of the SVD Timor province. Then, he sent me a letter for an interview. After my final examination, I got a letter of acceptance and prepared to go to become a postulant. After a year in the SVD Brother formation house, I decided to become an SVD Brother and continued my formation study until I took my final vows in 1988.

In today's SVD vocation ministry, I think we all SVDs are vocation promoters. We should

invite young boys to help in our mission activities. These activities can attract and help them to discern their vocation. In addition, SVD communities should invite those who are interested in joining the SVD to experience our community life in prayer and meals. Moreover, we should always pray for vocation that the heart of Jesus lives in the heart of the young Catholics.

## THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF A MISSIONARY LIFE

*Br. Honoratus Sivo Keraf, IDT*



The vocation as a Brother in the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries is a grace from God. Therefore I must respond to that grace and dedicate myself fully to His will. I consider my vocation as a Brother as a call to actualize my love to God with determination and enthusiasm. For me, the obedience to the will of God is primarily the life and work which characterize my mission. I am only a servant who would carry out the will of the Master. Despite the many difficulties I have encountered in my long journey as an SVD Brother, my strength and courage to survive in my vocation come from the power and the love of God which have accompanied me along the paths of life. I'm very confident that God will not let me walk in darkness and distress. He is the one who calls and chooses me. He will always be my companion.

*Cont. Br. Keraf*

Sometimes people asked me why I remain faithful in my vocation as an SVD Brother in the Divine Word. The answer is very simple. The ultimate strength comes from Prayer and daily reception of the body and blood of Christ. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, I will celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my vows in the Society of the Divine Word. Because of the support from members of my family, friends, I can go on with this vocation.

The following are some happy events of my life as a Brother in the Divine Word Missionaries: 1). When I received the religious habit (attire) as a Brother Novice, family and friends were there. 2). When I professed my first vows. 3). When I professed my final vows in Onekore Parish in the presence of my family and friends. 4). When I was asked by IDT Provincial, Father Simon Bata, SVD to participate in the Nemi course. I am happy that I will be able to celebrate my 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my vows in Nemi Rome, Italy.

After undergoing renewal courses and 8 day guided retreat, I realized that God has poured blessings and grace to me because he loved me. He had called me because he loves me.

One thing I always remember and believe is that God does not forget me. It is similar to what is said in Isaiah: 49:15-16a..... "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

## **WHAT I STUDIED AT THE UNIVERSITY WOULD USELESS, UNLESS...**

*Br. Ashadi Sandy, ROM*



My vocation began when I was studying at a university overseas. At that time I felt that I had to do something more meaningful in my life. I actually did some social works but that wasn't enough. Finally it came to my mind that I should join a missionary work. That idea came because I read some brochures about Christian Missionary activities which I found at my parish church. I contacted my parish church saying that I wanted to become a missionary. The parish church then told me to contact another priest. When I contacted the priest he told me to meet a young SVD seminarian who was doing some pastoral training. I visited the seminarian and we talked. I then became interested in joining the SVD. First I did not know anything about the SVD although I was baptized by an SVD priest back home in Indonesia.

At the beginning my mother was quite upset about my decision to become a missionary because I am the only child and I cannot get married if I enter the religious life. But luckily my father was supportive about my decision. After some time my mother allowed me to follow my vocation.

I went to the SVD Novitiate in Batu – Malang to experience the spiritual life there for a few days. I really enjoyed staying at the novitiate because I could feel a strong sense of brotherhood and I could deepen my prayer life there. After I did some reflections I decided to join the society. First I wanted to become a priest. Then I realized that what I studied at the university will be useless therefore I decided to become a Brother instead. I wanted to become a Brother so that I could use my skill for the mission.



*Cont. Br. Sandy*

For the vocation ministry I would suggest that the role of Brothers in the society should be introduced to the public because in my experience I did not know anything about Brothers in the society until I came to the SVD. And priests who work at parishes should give suggestions to candidates who just finish their graduate study to become Brothers so that they are able to dedicate their skills for our mission. And vocation promotion for brother should be held occasionally at the parishes because it is a place where a lot of people gather together.

## **MY CALLING TO BE AN SVD BROTHER**

*Br. Bernie Spitzley, USC*



I am an ordinary person who did ordinary things (good and bad), and yet I was fascinated with missionary work and foreign countries ever since I was in Grade School. My dream was to become a Brother, go to Papua New Guinea and run a plantation. The first step I took to make this dream come true was to accept an invitation to Divine Word High School, in Perrysburg, Ohio. There I met a number of Divine Word Missionaries, who fed my dream with stories of their experiences working in a variety of countries. Encouraged by the priests and Brothers there, I continued my studies at Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa. It was there that I grew in awareness that my fascination for the missions was more than a dream. I began to experience the joy of the vocation of a Brother with men from many cultures and nations.

Next I found myself in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi where I enjoyed a year without the demands of academics, and I could explore this religious call more deeply. August 17, 1975, I became a Divine Word Missionary Brother. As time passed I realized that the call I had did not include my dream of being a plantation worker. Instead, God wanted me to be a teacher. So I finished college and accepted the job of seventh grade teacher at St. Rita's school in Indianapolis.

This was an enjoyable experience for me. I realized God blessed me with gifts for being a teacher. So after two years, I went for further studies, made my life commitment as a Brother and began to teach at our Seminary College in Iowa. While there I helped young men discern if God was calling them to Missionary life as a priest or Brother, or married life. Soon it became clear that God had other plans for me. With the support of my religious community, I accepted the job of Dean of Students at Divine Word College. This ministry lasted for six years, and was followed by another challenge, another response to God's call; to be the Director of Wendelin House, for our young Brothers and Brother candidates in Washington D.C. While there I was able to develop my passion for Justice and Peace and worked as a lobbyists at NETWORK, the Catholic Social Justice Lobby. This experience taught me to put my faith into action, by speaking out and advocating for those who do not have a voice on Capitol hill.

After 18 years of formation work, teaching and other "side ministries", I sought for and was granted hands on missionary experience. Not in Papua New Guinea, as in my dream but in the small Island of Jamaica. Jamaica the place where many of the tourist will go, with her splendid seashores, and sand. However, the reality for many Jamaican's is abject poverty, poor schools and inadequate housing. With the help of the social relief agency, Food For the Poor, I helped many obtain housing, food and clothing. These hands on ministries lasted for 13 years. While serving as the Human and Social Development person, I also began to work in the Biblical Apostolate.

Now, I have moved on from serving in the rural communities of Jamaica, to the inner city of Kingston. A ghetto area, with high crime rate,

Cont. Br. Spitzley

lack of job opportunities and little sense of 'community'. Here we are trying to form Bible Sharing communities. By using the Bible, we invite people of all ages to break open the scriptures and apply the life giving Gospels to their everyday life. Yes it is a far different ministry than running a plantation in Papua New Guinea, but it is where I believe God is calling me now.

So, as you can see, my call to SVD Brotherhood didn't always follow my dream or plans. In fact at times my vocation or call asked me to do things I felt impossible. However, by developing a daily prayer life, and embracing my community's charism I have come to see God's plan for me. Yes I am still fascinated with this call. It is no longer a dream, but a reality, that I live daily.

*Greetings from Kingston, Jamaica, where we survived hurricane Shirley, electric outages, and crashed computer..... November 26, 2012*

## MY FIRST LOVE FOR THE CALL OF GOD

Br. Angel Figueroa, OTP-PHS



My name is Angel Figueroa, from Ecuador, 36 years old. I decided to enter the SVD, when I was 29 years old. I have known the SVD since I was a boy (approximately 6 years old); at that time I knew some priests and a Brother who worked hard in our community (Las Naves and Ventanas). My curiosity about the SVD started when I was in a youth group (22 years old). I felt inspired by those Verbitas (SVD). Now, I am

following my own dreams and have been inspired to be a witness to the Divine Word.

## How could today's SVD vocation ministry use my experience?

I think all vocation is special and genuine because God has a way for everyone. But, for me, my story will be used as an invitation to come back to the beginning, where we all found our first love to follow the call of God and to find our own dreams in the SVD.

## I WANTED TO HAVE THE FREEDOM TO DO MANY DIFFERENT MINISTRIES

Br. Mike Decker, USC



When I was in high school from 1970-1974 I was being taught by Christian Brothers and I liked their lifestyle. I wanted to join them, but I found out that

what they did was great ministry by teaching in the classroom. However, I found out that they all taught and this was a lifetime commitment to teach all the time. I could see myself teaching, but not my entire life, I wanted to have the freedom to do many different ministries depending upon my abilities and training.

What moved me to be an SVD Brother: When I was in initial Formation in Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa from 1979-1983, I saw and lived with many SVD Brothers who have been in the missions, for example Br. Pat Hogan in Taiwan, Br. Andy Hotchkiss in the Philippines and I wanted to follow their example, to go to the missions. Later I was able to be assigned to the Philippines from 1992-1995, which I was so happy to have this opportunity as an SVD Brother to help the sick with my training in nursing.

*PS. My story has been used by the Vocation office in Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa and can be found on their website.*

# A LASTWORD, FROM THE EDITORS

*Dear Confreres,*

The SVD BROTHERS bulletin wishes to serve as a Forum on Brother Vocation in Society. It is written by the readers. It is about Brother vocation, but not only for Brothers. We are actually sad that this time no priest confrere responded to the questions, but we hope that the next questionnaire will find a greater echo. Please, join us and write for the bulletin!

The initiative for this bulletin was born at the 2006 General Chapter where a group of Brothers (and Fathers) decided to intensify communication among Brothers in order to highlight the many opportunities of witnessing through the Brother vocation. May an updated and an even more effective bulletin become a part of our contribution to the next General Chapter!

We continue counting on your voice. Please write to the following addresses: lanyi.svd@gmail.com or svd\_brothersphil@yahoo.com. You may use the following languages: English, Spanish, and Indonesian.

In the Divine Word,

*Your SVD Brothers in Cebu City*



*Merry Christmas!*

St. Pedro Calungsod  
Filipino Saint from Cebu, Philippines

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**Editors:** Br. Bela Lanyi, Br. Franco Luige Camasura, Br. Roy Lapingcao, Br. Joel Divinagracia  
**Translators:** Miguel Angel Monreal (Spanish), Br. Hubertus Guru, SVD (Indonesian)  
**Correctors:** Dr. Clarita Filipinas (English)  
**Technical Editor:** Ms. Joeriza A. Lim