

# **SVD General Chapter 2018**

## **Patrice Rono (Kenya)**

### **PRESENTATION AT THE SVD GENERAL CHAPTER 2018**

#### **GUIDELINES FOR THE PRESENTATION**

- **THE UNDERSTANDING OF LAY PARTNERS WITH THE SVD AND YOUR ROLE IN THE MISSION OF GOD.**

After attending several seminars organized by the SVD, we have come to understand our role as laity in the mission of God specially in parishes served by the Divine word Missionaries. These seminars and our own interactions with the SVD priests have created a good working relationship between the lay persons and the SVD priests. We are gradually understanding our role as lay missionaries who are capable of spreading the gospel to those in need. As we understand our role as lay missionaries we have come to realize that it is not only the SVD priests who have the work of preaching and teaching the Gospel but also we the lay people have a serious role and duty together with the SVD priests as well as individuals to spread the Gospel in our locality, country and other parts of the world.

- **SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS OF PRAYER AND MINISTRY IN YOUR GROUP**

Before having heard the teachings about SVD society and its missionary activities, the lay people in our parish only had time to go to church mostly for Sunday mass to fulfill their obligations and they were contented with that. After the group, FRIENDS OF SVD, the Lay Associates of SVD, was initiated in our parish we have come to understand deeply our role and after sharing our experiences with the SVD missionaries serving our parish in Eldoret, Kenya and serving elsewhere, we have had significant moments in our spiritual life such as recollections, bible studies, prayer meetings and other activities. These spiritual exercises have certainly deepened our faith. During our Annual Conventions, which bring together many groups of FRIENDS OF

SVD, from different parishes in Kenya, we have managed to create a great spiritual bond among us the members. The Annual Conventions also strengthen our faith and our roles as the lay people to promote the work of the Divine Word Missionaries.

- **THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF LAY PARTNERS WITH THE SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD**                      **The joys of being FRIENDS OF SVD, the SVD Lay Associates, Lay Partners with the SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD, are many.**

- i. We the Lay Partners, by coming together and sharing our life experiences we have come to encourage and comfort each other. This has made us realize that every individual has got problems and sharing in our group can make a change in the way we approach our problems or challenges and possible solutions to such problems.
- ii. Meeting many SVD priests from different countries and cultures, listening to the sharing of their home experiences and traditions and the way they lead us during mass and prayers, bring in us great joy as we feel that we are all part of one human family irrespective of our different racial, language and cultural backgrounds.
- iii. Attending Annual Conventions of all members of the SVD Lay Associates has generated tremendous joy and friendship among us and this has brought out the diversity of our faith in different communities and strengthened our individual faith in our role as lay people in missionary activities of the church.

**The challenges of being FRIENDS OF SVD, the SVD Lay Associates, lay partners with the SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD, are as follows.**

- i. The SVD Lay Partners, even within one country, come from different tribes and backgrounds. So understanding each other's backgrounds has been a great challenge.
- ii. There is also a notion or misconception that a lay group like the SVD Lay Partners, is for those who have higher education or financially sound or a type of class of persons. The members join the group expecting to benefit individually either financially or materially. In other words some members have false hope of being members of the group. (Priests may face similar challenges in war torn areas like

South Sudan. Priests also face challenges during elections pitting candidates from different clans, political parties).

iii. There is a shortage of funds to facilitate movements of members to other parishes within Kenya / Tanzania province for exchange programmes, sharing of experiences and learning from other groups. We rely on members' monthly contributions to manage the activities of the group in each parish. Some members are unable to contribute even the little monthly contributions as they are very poor financially, but they have the heart and spirit to be members of our group.

iv. There is a general reluctance by other parishioners to join the group as it is still new and it is not that popular like other old Catholic movements like the Catholic Men Association (C.M.A), Catholic Women Association (C.W.A), Young Catholic Students (Y.C.S), etc. But we hope that our group, the SVD Lay Associates will grow with time.

v. Challenge of acceptability by our spiritual leaders. Some of our spiritual leaders namely priests, not those in our SVD parishes, do not wish to embrace the idea or the importance of the lay apostolate in their parishes, thus making the role of lay people difficult in giving their contribution to the well being of the missionary character of the church.

- **THE EXPERIENCES OF SURPRISES IN YOUR MINISTRIES AND HOW THESE SURPRISES HAVE SHAPED YOU IN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR MINISTRY.**

i. The experiences of surprises in our ministries are that after attending workshops, seminars and annual conventions of SVD Lay Partners, we have realized our responsibilities like spreading the Gospel among ourselves the lay people is also a mission and therefore we are also missionaries in our areas. This realization has also strengthened our resolve to join hands with our Divine Word Missionaries in their missionary activities.

ii. Our regular meetings with our SVD missionaries have helped us to understand that every person, be he a lay missionary or a religious missionary, faces challenges in life, specially in missionary

life and that we the lay and religious missionaries, need each other to spread the Gospel and for our own spiritual journey.

- **SHARING SOME EXAMPLES OF “GOOD NEWS” STORIES WITH RESPECT TO YOUR COLLABORATION WITH THE SVD IN THE MISSION OF GOD. As lay partners we can share a lot in respect of “GOOD NEWS” stories.**

i. Just like the example and experience of the first apostles to visit and pray for the sick, the needy and orphans, we the lay partners in our various parishes have been visiting the sick, praying with them, comforting them and supporting them with few basic needs. These visits have also enabled us to understand and support our own needy and vulnerable brothers and sisters in our parish area as well as the society at large.

ii. We have also stood with our SVD priests in times of difficulties and sad moments, like when they lose their family members. We the Lay Partners visit them, to console them, to pray with them and to encourage them just like the first disciples of Jesus did at that time.

iii. We the Lay Partners actively participate in the SVD celebrations like the perpetual vows, diaconate and priestly ordinations. We lead the bible processions, offertory, prayers of the faithful during such celebrations. Our active participation in such SVD celebrations encourages the young SVD brothers and priests, gives them joy and make them feel that they have a family or a home away from their homes in different countries. We also give them symbolic gifts as our appreciation for their commitment to the SVD Society.

iv. We continue our efforts to recruit new members for our group, SVD Lay Partners and promoting this group more vigorously in our SVD parishes.

v. We promote SVD spirituality and devotions in our lives and within the communities we live in.

vi. We listen, reflect and pray the word of God regularly as a group and in our personal lives.

# Divine Word Missionaries General Chapter XVIII - 2018

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REPORT BY:

Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW)

*(A Lay Associate Group of the Society of the Divine Word,  
India Mumbai Province (INM), India)*

**Susan Noronha (INM)**

## **Introduction**

The Disciples of the Divine Word began in the year 1999 as a small group of lay volunteers who helped to propagate the programs conducted by Atma-Darshan, a SVD Center for Spirituality and Counseling, Mumbai, India. Gregory Pinto SVD, the then director of Atma-Darshan, initiated this group and Edward D'Mello SVD was instrumental in naming it, **Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW)**. In October 2014, DDW was recognized as a Lay Associate Group of the Society of the Divine Word, India Mumbai Province (INM).

The purpose of the group evolved over the years and today it has a three-fold purpose – (a) to know, learn and integrate aspects of Arnoldus spirituality relevant to our personal and family lives, (b) to grow as a team, and (c) to reflect over, pray for, and reach-out to the poor and marginalized. In the words of the founder director, Fr. Gregory Pinto, ***“A tiny seed that was sown with deeply motivated members has become today a big tree, reaching out to many poor and less-privileged people in society.”*** During the recent years, our membership has grown from 20 to 44 members who are dedicated and committed to the mission of St. Arnold Janssen. Our Spiritual Director, Fr. Gregory Arockiam SVD guides us and keeps us united as a team.

## **Lay partnership with the SVDs and our role in the mission of God**

DDW identifies itself with the Trinitarian and Missionary spirituality of the SVDs. This motivates us to be rooted in the communion of the Triune God and from there discover our call to carry forward the mission of God. In our interactions with SVD confreres in different provinces, it is our joy to discover a common platform of our spiritual orientation, which makes collaboration and working together easy. At the same time, we realize our life has a greater value than what we do. Our regular meetings, recollections and programs are geared to build us up as a community alongside and with the SVDs. We seek to emulate the ministry of Jesus through compassionate service and sharing the Word with others. Through the years, DDW members have learnt to appreciate the wonderful ways God worked in the life of St. Arnold Janssen and in the SVD congregation. In this communion of mind and heart, members have discovered God's gifts in their own lives and have generously shared them with others. All our projects are supported from contributions received from members, most of whom are retired and living on a pension, and from their friends.

## **Significant moments of prayer and ministry in our group**

### **1. Spirituality**

To deepen our spirituality, we have regular Bible classes, retreats, recollections and talks on Arnoldus Spirituality. Our meeting begins with prayer/reflection followed by Quarter Hour Prayer and ends with Eucharist and fellowship meal. These spiritual activities bind our group as one family and help us to realize that we all belong to one family of God. The faith experience

of each individual and the group, coupled with the worldwide missionary needs of the church, compels the group in reaching out to the people who are living on the fringes of our society.

## **2. Mission Support**

We promote and support mission awareness and nurture missionary vocations, in particular of the Society of the Divine Word. Many of our members through SVD Mission support offices, sponsor SVD seminarians for their formation at the various SVD Seminaries in India.

## **3. Mission Animation**

Members are involved actively in the different ministries in their local Parishes as well as in the Archdiocese of Bombay. To name a few, Bible apostolate, Small Christian Communities, Parish Pastoral Council, Prayer groups, Liturgy, Lectors, Music Ministry, St. Vincent De Paul Society, Justice and Peace Commission and many more. Some members are actively involved as resource people in assisting the staff of Atma-Darshan(INM) in their week-end programs, viz. Empowerment Retreat for Widows, Family and Couples Retreat, etc.

## **4. Reaching Out: Time, Talents, Treasure.**

Reaching out to the less privileged has been the hallmark of DDW activities. At the very beginning of DDW, on the invitation of Most Rev. Leo Cornelio SVD, Archbishop of Bhopal, some members visited tribal villages of Madhya Pradesh (INC) and reached out with financial help to the poor toward the education of children and healthcare. Currently, our members are reaching out not only to Mumbai Province (INM) but also to all four SVD Provinces and Region in India, addressing social, economic, educational and developmental issues, with a special focus on women and children. The members travel in small groups to visit remote SVD missions and to identify the immediate needs of the place. On evaluation, we carefully work out financial and other resources in consultation with the related Province Administration thus sharing our time, talents and resources in the mission of Christ.

*“For the past 18 years, with a heart filled with an attitude of gratitude, we reach out to the children and adults affected with Tuberculosis, Polio, and HIV/AIDS with our genuine loving kindness and try to build bridges between them and us. The children lovingly call us – ‘Mummy and Daddy’. The spiritual inputs at our meetings has drawn us closer to the Arnoldus discipleship, to be Christ centered and has motivated us with a desire to reach out to the less fortunate of the society at large.” – Carol & Peter Pinto, Pioneering Members*

## **5. Education for children**

Amid challenges and prospects, SVDs promote primary education of the poor tribal children of the inaccessible rural regions in India. Tribal children stay in the hostels to do their formal studies as their homes are in the distant hills with no access to transport. To empower these children with education, DDW is helping partially with finances, in the building of hostel facilities for children, computer lab rooms, library books, toilet and shower blocks, etc. in INM, INE, INC, INH and ING.

## **6. Healthcare**

DDW networks with Vikas Deepti (INE) to provide care and treatment that include physiotherapy, surgical correction of deformities to the disabled children affected by paralytic polio. Members are collaborating with Asha Jyothi (INH) to support and care for children affected and infected with HIV/AIDS. Visits to these missions by some of our members are on regular basis.

## **The joys and challenges of lay partners with the Society of the Divine Word**

*“No one has the right to be happy alone”* is the motto of DDW. We are learning to integrate our personal lives with Arnoldus Spirituality and to deepen our commitment to the SVD missions as lay partners. We believe in the ‘power of togetherness’. When the experience of unity is accompanied by confidence, we can work together; serve together and pray together, trusting in the Lord always.

A call to be a missionary is a call from Christ to deepen our own faith and share it with the people around us. Being a disciple is a challenge. We are also growing in our identity, as SVD Lay Collaborators into the spirit of what it means to be associate members of the SVDs. Collaboration is not always easy – sometimes amongst us, sometimes with the SVDs. Keeping the dialogue channels open has helped us in overcoming the communication and relationship blocks. What has helped us in the process is the strong faith experience that together we can do much and that in times of difficulties an answer always emerges. Many of the group members have truly felt the power of Christ to meet the challenges and move forward in the mission.

*“Opening prayer and the Quarter Hour prayer before the meeting, has helped my spiritual growth and I try my level best to give the poor all the happiness they need in their life. I encounter Jesus in various ways when I visit the missions. I experience His love through the poor people and I share my experience with my family and friends. This has brought positive change in their lives. As a DDW member, reaching out to the needy is my mission.” – Joyce Coelho, Member*

## **The experiences of surprises in our ministries and how these surprises have shaped us in our understanding of our ministry**

In the year 2013, DDW joined Janseva Society, Mangaon-Tala (INM) in the common mission of spreading Christ’s message of love and service to the most vulnerable tribe (Kathkari). These villagers work as bonded laborers and migrate to distant places in search of livelihood. DDW collaborates with Janseva Society and addresses the social, economic, educational and developmental issues of the tribe believing in participatory and right based approach. The empowerment of women through Self-Help-Groups benefits not only women, but also the

family and community as a collective action for development. Seeing the work of the SVDs first-hand and joining them in their many initiatives was an overwhelming experience for many members who were mostly used to an urban setting and had never come face to face with abject poverty and deprivation. Being a part of this empowering venture adds meaning and fulfillment to our lives.

As part of our outreach here, we made a dream come true for the poor tribal children when they visited Mumbai for the first time for two days, experiencing life away from their tribal villages. DDW members - Dominic and Sandhya Thomas, initiated this event on their daughter's First Holy Communion in collaboration with the SVD fathers. It was another opportunity we had to collaborate closely with the SVDs and work as a team and make this memorable event possible not only for the 125 tribal children but to all those who were a part of it.

*"Working in collaboration with the SVDs and reciting The Quarter Hour Prayer daily has helped me to understand and live the Word and Mission. "When you do it to least of my brethren, You do it unto Me" has become my motto after visiting the various missions, and their slightest 'wants' opens up my heart and I reach out even though it may be a drop in the ocean. The happiness I get after visiting the poor villages, handicapped children, the lepers, and the HIV/AIDS affected children is tremendous. God blesses me not a hundred but a thousand fold" – Henrietta Monserrate, Member*

## **Sharing some examples of "good news" stories with respect to our collaboration with the SVDs in the mission of God.**

### ***"A Historical Journey..."***

*With their humble beginning, DDW members have deepened their identity and mission as Lay Partners in the Society. During the past four years, the group has a vibrant and dynamic President with a highly motivated Core Team. The members are becoming more committed and there is greater fellowship and deeper bonding among them. There is generosity and good will among the members to reach out to the marginalized and to empower them. They generously contribute to the missionary needs and show great concern for the formation of the SVD Seminarians. As the Spiritual Director, I am awed by their spirit of sharing and generosity to the people on the margins. I draw much inspiration by their faith and sensitivity to the needs of the people. There is a deep hunger for the Word and a genuine desire to deepen their understanding in Arnoldus Spirituality. They have become a blessing to many and a sign of hope and empowerment. Personally, I feel blessed and they have touched me and helped in my religious and missionary commitment." - Fr. Gregory Arockiam SVD, Spiritual Director*

*"As a DDW member, I have grown to be more open with many moments in my life. In particular, the visits to the missions, outreach workshops and retreats have sensitized me to the world within me and around me. Joy results when I have been able to build a connection, a connection with my group members in spite of my limitations. There is a continuous epiphany going on*

## *Disciples Of The Divine Word (DDW)*

*within me. I encourage the members and the SVDs in their endeavors to make this world a better place.” – Ralph Pereira, First DDW President*

*“As a SVD Lay Partner, I have grown spiritually and rooted in the Word. Reading the Bible along with my personal prayer, taking part in the Eucharist, spending time at the Blessed Sacrament and reaching out to the poor has brought me closer to God and to people around me. I try to inspire people and create awareness about Christ’s mission around us. My ongoing visits to the SVD missions have made me aware of the suffering of poor people, especially children. Yes, I have grown. I motivate my friends and family to be generous with their resources. I feel belonged with the SVD community.” - Leena Xavier, Vice-President*

*“I joined DDW at a time when I was at the crossroads of my life. My first interaction with the SVDs was in the year 1998, when Fr. Gregory Pinto was my professor and mentor while I was pursuing my studies in counseling at the National Vocation Service Centre, Pune. He guided me at the time when I was discerning what the Lord wanted me to do, after I voluntarily retired as the Principal of a Diocesan School. The following year together with few more volunteers, we formed the “The Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW). During the same time, I lost my husband and it was here, I learnt how to cope with loneliness and how to move from despair to hope, from pain to power and from loneliness to participation. My first mission experience was my visit to Mangaon and Tala Mission, which was very enriching, and I continue to visit the various missions that deepen my life. Every year, I encourage the Diocesan Hope and Life Widows Association to contribute their ‘widow’s mite’ towards the need of various SVD missions. I am indeed very grateful to the SVD fathers for having journeyed along with me, and for having empowered me by inviting me to be one of the resource persons in the Atma-Darshan team, to conduct programs for widows, family and youth. The SVD fathers always made me feel at home, like I belonged to the Arnoldus family.” - Lorna D’Souza, Counsellor and Resource Person.*

*“I am a member of many associations in my Parish, but being with DDW was a call from God to be His disciple, to serve the poor, share my treasures and bring joy to them. My constant reading of the Word of God has given my life a deeper meaning and helped me to understand God’s greatest commandment, “love your neighbour as yourself”. Collaboration with the SVDs has helped me to realise the hardships of the poor and the work of the SVDs in the remote missions to give the poor people their rights and dignity to life. “Many are called, but few are chosen”. I am glad I made a choice to be a Missionary of the Divine Word.” - Hazel Mendonca, Treasurer*

*“I joined DDW purely on the insistence of a friend. My intention was very clear – would oblige them for one or two meetings and then excuse myself. Subconsciously something kept me hooked during the initial years and before I knew it, I had become a part of a new family. Very simple people influenced me; many of them elderly, who contributed in humble ways their time, their thoughts, their prayers and network. Over a period from reluctance, my involvement is transforming to one of being inclusive. I have talents, energy and resources that can be fruitful for those who are in need and helps me grow too in love and faith. The DDW experience has made me see personal and social relationships with more compassion. It has also helped me on*

*my journey to accept and understand my relationship with God. Truly speaking, my mission journey has just begun..." - Anupama Subodhanan, Member*

### **And the journey continues...**

Miracles also happen every day! This is what the very practice of doing things together has taught us. From one perspective, there may not be anything extraordinary about our members. From another perspective, extraordinary things are continuously occurring amidst us. The value of internationality and interculturality of the SVDs has certainly rubbed off on us. Though the DDW members come from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, there is an energy and enthusiasm that is contagious. It is a joy to be a part of DDW. It is a joy to give. It is a joy to receive the smiles and blessing from those we work with. Together we have learnt and grown. Despite everything, including the struggles and disappointments, we have learnt to sustain the togetherness with the presence of the Lord in both our home and outreach lives. Therefore, it is with conviction that we reiterate the prayer of our founder, ***"May the heart of Jesus live in our hearts and in the hearts of all people!"***

**Susan Noronha**  
**President, Disciples of the Divine Word, INM**

**Place: Mumbai, India**  
**Date : March 29, 2018**

**SVD General Chapter XVIII - 2018**  
**SVD-Partner - the associated lay group of the German SVD**  
**Sophie Wego**

**Preparations and Foundation**

First preparations to establish an associated lay partner group started in 2012 with a commission of members of the SVD, SVD-employees and friends of the SVD convened by the then superior of the German province, Fr. Bernd Werle. In the time from September 2012 until March 2013 the commission worked out guidelines for lay partners in the German province. The province council dealt with the guidelines but didn't complete this work because in May 2013 a new leading team was elected. So the work on the guideline was interrupted until September 2013. At this time they were returned to the commission to rework them because in part the guidelines didn't correspond to the resolutions of the 17th General chapter. From July 2014 onwards twelve interested people – all of them with a long-standing relationship to the SVD - were contacted personally. In November 2014 the province council was asked to name a contact person and spiritual director for the group. The province council named Fr. Jürgen Ommerborn, the director of the Arnold Janssen Secretariat in Steyl.

These twelve people were invited to a first meeting in Steyl. It took place at 1th of March 2015. Eleven joined the meeting. Except for two the group knew each other because for several years they spent the days from Maundy Thursday until Easter Monday together in Steyl. At the end of the day all agreed to start becoming associated lay partners of the German SVD. A few weeks after that meeting three left the group because of lack of time. From March 2015 until January 2017, the month of our commitment, the remaining eight met in Steyl for several times, always from Friday to Sunday.

They are: Petra Linchet, Sophie Wego, Birgit Scharpei, Sabine Hennes, Maria Wego, Michael Pöner, Lourdes and Rudi Scholz.

The fact that the meetings have taken place in Steyl has several reasons.

1. Fr. Ommerborn lives in Steyl
2. Most of us live near to Steyl. The distances are between 50 and 120 km. That means a travel time from 40 minutes to one and a half hour.
3. We all have not only a long-term connection with the SVD but also a strong emotional connection to Steyl. Therefore it was no question for Lourdes and Rudi Scholz to travel every time 400 km (roundabout 4 hours) from their home to Steyl.

During this time Fr. Jürgen Ommerborn explained to us the spirituality of Arnold Janssen and the root of his spirituality, gave us an overview of his biography, and held a lecture about the Prologue of St. John. We recited the Liturgy of the hours and celebrated the Eucharist only in our group as well as together with the community in Steyl, had time for contemplation and time for get-togethers. During these two years the group became a community although we do not live together or nearby. As a symbol of this community we decided in spring 2016 to fix a prayer unit as a special prayer of our group. The unit consists of the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John, the Quarter Hour Prayer and a special blessing prayer for our group. We pray this unit every Monday. Therefore we called it "the Monday Prayer". This "Monday Prayer" together with the "Prayer to the Sacred Heart", a prayer to the Holy Spirit, our commitment, our guidelines and a list with all days which are important to the SVD as well as days with special intentions are put together in a leaflet which accompanies us in our daily life.

On 12th of December the group was associated by the province counsel. With this association we got the permission to use the official logo of the German SVD with the subtitle “SVD-Partner”. On 15th of January 2017 we celebrated our commitment in Steyl and shared the day with our families, the community of Steyl and a lot of friends of the SVD, who came every year on this day to Steyl celebrating the Arnoldus feast. It was a great and moving day for us.

### **Life and work as SVP-Partner**

After being busy for two years to find ourselves as a group and to prepare us for the new part of our life as SVD-Partner, we could now think about how we could strengthen the SVD spirituality in our life and also how we become outwardly visible as a SVD-Partner.

Already before the 15th of January 2017 or already before the 1st of March 2015 stamped the spirituality of the SVD our life, even not so intensely as today. We exerted ourselves for the preservation of the creation by deliberate contact with resources or by leisure time activity, e.g. as a beekeeper. We supported the work of the SVD by foundations under the roof of the Steyler bank foundation. We were involved in our parishes in the parish councils and parish administrations, as lectors and Eucharist ministers and leaders of services. We do this also even today, everybody at his/her place, as a quite personal mission.

### **The “Prayer Bridge”**

However, besides the personal activities we had also to find common activities which were to be realised without meetings. Our first action which we began last summer was the “Prayer Bridge” – A campaign to make the “World Day of the Poor” more public. By talks we found out that this world day - although it was proclaimed by Pope Francis at the end of the “Year of Mercy” - was not really known with Catholics. During an email correspondence with Fr. Valentine Dung Dung SVD in India the idea of the “Prayer Bridge” was born. Thus we invited people whom we knew or from which we thought that they could be interested to become a pillar of the “Prayer Bridge”.

To announce the initiative, we made a flyer, spoke with many people, sent e-mails and wrote articles which were published in the international newsletter of the SVD lay partners and the Arnoldus Nota.

The bridge has started in July 2017 with two pillars in India and Germany. Up to the 19th of November 2017, the “World Day of the Poor” it grew on 232 pillars. They stood in 4 continents, 31 countries and 123 places. There took part cloisters, parishes, charity groups, schools, boarding schools, prisons and individuals. How many people it were we cannot say, because we do not know the dimensions of the groups. Beside the SVD and SSpS also took part the Benedictines of the Dormitio abbey in Jerusalem, the Benedictines of the Venio abbey in Prague, the Cistercians in Neuzelle (Germany), the Daughters of Saint Paul in Düsseldorf (Germany), the Servites in Düsseldorf and Hückelhoven (Germany), the Missionary Sisters of the Most Holy Redeemer with her mother's house in Munich and several cloisters in the Ukraine as well as the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood. The whole list and the worldwide distribution can be checked on our website. <https://www.svd-partner.eu/welttag-der-armen/welttag-der-armen-2017/list-of-places/>

### **Novena for people in war and misery**

On account of the always returning reports about needy people in war zones, during the last months increasingly from Syria, we decided that the publication of the German translation of the Dutch book “100 days in the cloister cellars of Steyl” could be the occasion to write a novena for people in war and misery.

At the end of the Second World War the Dutch inhabitants of Steyl sought shelter from adjustment of the German occupying forces and the bombardment of the allies in the cellars of the mission house Saint Michael and the Sacred Heart cloister of the mission sisters. The longer they had to remain there, the more difficultly became the situation. Food became scarce and could be procured only under mortal danger, because the place on the Meuse was under fire regularly. Finally, long 100 days the people had to endure in the cellars, until they were released on the 1st of March, 1945. To process this situation in the cellars many kept a diary. These diaries were published in 2016 and translated last year under cooperation of the SVD-Partner into German.

In January, 1945 their priests appealed them to pray a novena for peace and the quick end of the war. This novena was held from the 28th of January to the 5th of February. The “Novena for people in war and misery” takes up these novena of the Steyler population in 1945. The main topic of the novena are the seven works of mercy and escape, hunger, thirst, clothes, shelter, illness, captivity, funeral, deliverance are picked out as central themes. The novena encloses the rosary prayer, quotations from the diaries, different prayers as well as parts of the Gospel. We invited the SVD and SSpS, our families, friends and acquaintances to recite the novena with us in the time from the 28th of January to the 5th of February 2018. Not only in that time, but also whenever one thinks it is necessary, because this subject is unfortunately always topical.

This prayer initiative was limited to the German language area, because the diaries are not available in English or in Spanish.

### **Mexico aid – “Nuestros hermanos”**

However, our activities did not limit themselves to spiritual impulses, but we are also engaged in an auxiliary project. In September 2017 we began spontaneously a fundraising campaign to help the victims of the earthquake in Mexico. At our meeting in Steyl Lourdes Scholz described the situation after the earthquake. Informations and impressions as she had got them of her family in Mexico. Helping was for her as a Mexican a double concern. Their family had already started a private auxiliary program, and for our group it was naturally to help them financially at this work. Here we used all possibilities of fundraising in Germany as far as they were known to us. On this occasion the long experience of some members in fundraising by the endowment work was very helpful.

In December 2017 Lourdes and Rudi Scholz went to Mexico and helped in the care of the population in San Francisco Huilango close to Puebla. How so often small, remote places will be forgotten by the public aid. So also in this case. The help carried by us could up to now relieve only the worst need. More help to the construction of the village and the care of the people is necessary furthermore.

### **“Katholikentag” in 2018**

Every two years the “Katholikentag”, German Catholic Convention, takes place, every time in another city. This year it took place in Münster and had the slogan “Seek peace” – A topical subject, but also a subject which is connected historically with the city of Münster. In 1648 the peace treaty which finished the Thirty Years War in Europe was negotiated here.

On three days orders, church facilities, aid organisations and various catholic groups were presenting themselves in tents on the so called “Kirchenmeile” (church mile) and came in contact with the participants of the “Katholikentag”. We used the chance making our group more known.

On the “Kirchenmeile” the SVD had a tent 80 m<sup>2</sup> in size. In and before the tent members of the SVD, the SVD-Partner and employees of the SVD were on duty. Since March 2017 representatives of these groups had prepared the activities in every two months taking place meetings in Saint Augustin. An example of the cooperation during the preparations: The Bible machine. The idea was introduced by a member of the SVD; the practical realisation took over an employee and the choice of the Bible quotations a member of the SVD-Partner. On the “Katholikentag” passing people were invited to stretch a little slip of paper with a Bible quotation on the subject Peace and to take it along. By this invitation and because the Bible machine was something unknown one got easily into contact with the people.

During the three days in Münster we had a lot of various conversations. Some people only wanted to know the meaning of SVDP, the used abbreviation of SVD-Partner; others wanted to know why we are SVD-Partner. But we also conversed about religious questions or comforted people because we listened to them and gave them an opportunity to find peace of mind for a few minutes like the woman who painted a little angel for her dying mother.

### **Resumen and future prospects**

From the very beginning on we were esteemed by the SVD. This esteem was shown several times and gestures:

- the good and intensive spiritual guidance
- the invitation to the province chapter
- being part of the preparation team of the “Katholikentag”
- being a member of a panel discussion at the “Katholikentag” together with Fr. Michael Heinz, SVD

This esteem was not only shown but it was also said. More than once we heard “It is good that you exist.”

Also the experiences outside the SVD or better the Arnoldus family are good. People we spoke to were open and curious on our intensions, our way of life. People closer connected to the German Catholic Church were glad that something new came up, that the church in Germany isn’t only becoming smaller and smaller or even dying.

The first year of the SVD-Partner was a year filled with a lot of diverse and enriching experiences. These experiences encourage us to continue in our work. This year again we want to invite to the “Prayer Bridge”. After our Easter greetings, sent to the participants of last year, we got the first registrations. Up to now there are 23 pillars in two continents and four countries. We hope that not only the participants from last year will be a part again but that the number will increase. Next year we want to participate at the “Klosterfest”, a kind of street party around the cloister in Sankt Augustin. And we want to participate also at the future “Katholikentage” together with the SVD. To strengthen the future cooperation with the SVD Fr. Xavier Alangaram, the Mission secretary of the German Province, will join the meeting of our group in June.

**Lay Ministry and the SVD**  
**SVD General Chapter 2018**  
**Len Uhal – USC**

My Story – Briefly

It was the winter of 1965 when I was born on the Southside of Chicago to a refugee father who fled Hungary during the 1956 revolution and an American mother of English heritage whose family had been in the USA since the country's founding.

My family is quite small. I'm an only child, my mother was an only child and my father came to the USA with only one brother. My maternal grandmother always lived with our family since she was stricken with polio at an early age and later confined to a wheelchair and needed daily assistance. In the early years, it was just my mom, dad, grandmother and me. Later, my parents separated leaving just the three of us for many years. My dad died when I was 16 and my grandmother just before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday—leaving just my mother and me (she died in 1995).

I attended a Catholic primary school in Chicago where I felt called to the priesthood. I learned of the Society of the Divine Word at the age of 12 when an SVD priest visited my school and invited me and some friends to visit Divine Word Seminary in East Troy, Wisconsin. I eventually enrolled there as an SVD candidate and remained in formation with the Society for eight years, finishing high school (secondary school) at East Troy in 1983 and my BA degree (philosophy program) at Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa, in 1987.

I left formation, and in 1990 married my wife, Susie, and today we have three children and two grandchildren! My oldest son is married with two children (ages 3 and 6 months) and works at a Catholic parish as a liturgist (his wife is a primary school teacher). My daughter earned an associate degree in early childhood development and is working fulltime at a drugstore. My youngest son is still in secondary school.

With my degree in sociology/psychology from Divine Word College, I began a career in the social service field. I started working in Chicago at a group home for boys with behavior problems and later moved back to Iowa and worked as a counselor in a hospital-based drug treatment program for adolescents, which eventually led to working on the hospital's psychiatric unit.

In 1999, I was invited to work for the SVD Chicago Province as the Alumni Director, serving former students who had been in formation with the Society's many different formation programs in the USA. In 2003, the provincial asked me to add vocation ministry to my responsibilities, and I coordinated both ministries until 2008. Since 2008, I have served as the National Vocation Director for the SVD in the USA and the Vice President for Admissions at Divine Word College Seminary.

Lay Partners and the SVD

In the USA, lay men and women partner with the SVD in many ways. In the many parishes that the Society staffs in the USA, Canada and the Caribbean, there are lay parish council members, lay people on the finance committees, lay people serving as catechists and school teachers. In our SVD

houses and our province headquarters, lay people are hired to assist with administrative functions, fundraising, secretarial responsibilities, maintenance needs, cooking and other tasks and ministries. While some lay partners serve in paid positions and others serve as volunteers, both opportunities allow for lay women and men to work alongside Divine Word Missionaries in spreading the Gospel message and serving God's people.

In my role as Vice President for Admissions at Divine Word College, I am afforded the opportunity to help with the orientation process for new people hired to work at our SVD college seminary (philosophy level). We have lay people who teach, work in the kitchen or housekeeping and serve in professional roles such as budgeting and finance, public relations and development. Some of our lay employees are non-Catholic, but Catholic or not, most have never heard of the SVD or know very little about the Society's mission when they take the job.

I enjoy the opportunity to share with our new employees my small role in the "bigger picture" of the Society's missionary ministry. Many think DWC is just a small college in the middle of a cornfield in Iowa. Indeed, it is a small college, but connected to an organization with a much larger mission. I share with our new employees the Society's rich history since its founding in 1875 by St. Arnold Janssen, including Bro. Wendelin's arrival in the USA in 1895 and the development of many houses, seminaries, parishes and ministry sites in the USA over the years. I talk about the Society's work in over 75 countries around the world, noting our wide variety of ministries.

My ministry in the USA is a small contribution to the larger missionary mandate of the Church and more specifically of the SVD. My ministry is missionary right here and right now. What I do on a day-to-day basis contributes to prophetic dialogue around the world. In the past, I have described my role as a small cog in the big wheel that brings Jesus' message to others. I try to encourage others to see their role in a specific location as a small part of the bigger picture. Whether we clean the floors, cook food, repair cars, teach classes or assist with vocation ministry for students in formation, we are contributing to the missionary work of the Church. Our ministry helps prepare future Divine Word Missionaries to go around the world spreading the Gospel message. When they are sent, a part of us goes with them. Our missionary ministry "here at home" makes a difference here and now, but also there and then.

While my personal experience of lay partners working with the SVD tends to be with paid employees at various SVD houses, other lay partners in the USA are more parish-based and serve as volunteers. One of our parishes in the USW has a large group of lay missionary partners that serve at one of the parishes. They assist with many different aspects of the parish, from fundraising to parish social events to catechism and even vocation promotion. As I understand, they band together as a group to learn more about the SVD charism and mission, pray together, serve together and grow in faith as they build a vibrant parish community rooted in SVD spirituality.

Again, lay men and women partner in ministry in a variety of roles with the SVD in different ministry settings. However, our ministry cannot just be ministry with SVD brothers and priests and our SSpS sisters at certain locations and specific activities. As married men and women with families, our missionary ministry must extend into our homes and with our families. One SVD I know talks about "missionary mothers and fathers" and "missionary grandmothers and grandfathers." My connection with the SVD and my spiritual growth within the Arnoldus Spirituality does extend to my family—to my wife and children. How does my role as missionary extend to those closest to me—family and friends?

The multi-cultural community living of the SVD has always been attractive to me. I enjoy the variety of cultures that come together for a common cause—a witness to God’s kingdom and ministry to God’s people. As a child in primary school, I was the only Caucasian student in the 250-student school full of African Americans. Racial and cultural diversity is something I have always appreciated, enjoyed and embraced. Going to the minor seminary in East Troy was like inheriting 100 brothers of different mothers! As an SVD charism, I help bring this gift to my family and friends.

My wife and children have welcomed several SVDs and SVD students to our home. My family participates regularly in SVD activities—from vow ceremonies to Mission Sunday and Lunar New Year celebrations. We served as a host family for the FAN Club at DWC where we participated in the “adopt-a-student” for international students. We have welcomed exchanged students to our home from France and Japan. While some Americans are not comfortable around people of various cultural backgrounds, my family has been enriched by the opportunities to share in the multi-cultural community living of the SVD charism.

In addition, the spiritual and faith dimension of missionary and ministry have “rubbed” off on my children. My 27 year old son earned a master degree in liturgy while studying alongside SVD and other students at Catholic Theological Union in Dubuque and now serves as a liturgist at a parish in the Sioux City Diocese. My 24 year old daughter is an active member of our parish and serves on the parish life committee and is a Eucharistic Minister. As I type this presentation, she is on a mission trip to New Orleans with a group of women sponsored by the Presentation Sisters of Dubuque. She has a giving spirit and is willing to help anyone at any time. My youngest son, who has some special needs, never fails to surprise me. Earlier this week while at a theme park, he was scared for people riding on some amusement rides and began praying the Hail Mary for each person’s safety (I didn’t even know he knew the Hail Mary prayer!). Finally, my wife is also an active in her faith and our parish. She serves on our parish’s liturgy committee and faith formation committee; and recently agreed to serve as a sacristan. For five years, my wife and I facilitated the baptism preparation class at our parish for couples planning to baptize their first born. Together, my wife and I have been participants in the same prayer group with friends for the last 26 years. Being a “missionary father and husband” was born in me through my SVD education and ministry, and I praise God for allowing me to participate in his mission of “family ministry.”

### Moments of Prayer and Ministry

Because my ministry is a fulltime position within the Tri-Province Vocation Office, every day is ministry! Some ministry activities are as a mundane as daily e-mails to candidates and referral sources and administrative meetings to help with the day-to-day operation of the formation program. However, a regular part of the ministry is interaction with candidates discerning their vocations. While I enjoy phone conversations with men asking general questions about a religious vocation and specific questions about the SVD, I really enjoy the face-to-face visits with candidates during the discernment process.

Two ministry activities come to mind as very meaningful. One is traveling to a candidate’s home and visiting with him and hopefully his family. This one-on-one encounter allows time to develop a close relationship with young men discerning God’s call. I recall one meeting with a young high school student who felt called to the priesthood and religious life. After visiting with him and his

parents a bit, we sat outside on the porch and talked privately. When a candidate trusts me enough to enter into conversations with such personal information about sexuality, chastity and thoughts of priesthood, but also shares dreams of contemplating marriage and having a family, I am humbled by the Holy Spirit's use of me as a vessel of God's presence. These opportunities of sharing personal experiences allow for others to reflect on how and where God is calling them.

Another step in the discernment process is hosting candidates to our college seminary for what we call a "Come and See" visit. During the 3-4 day visit, we gather the small group of candidates together one evening for a bible reflection/faith sharing time where everyone can share freely about how God has been at work in their lives. Again, I find these moments of ministry with the young men I serve to be powerful experiences of God's presence. Sometimes the young men feel that they are the only ones who feel the way they do. In the world they experience, few young men are talking about a call to religious life. Coming together in prayer with other like-minded men and being in an atmosphere where discernment of God's will is sought and cherished, amazing discussions happen and spiritual insight and growth is evident.

Opportunities for prayer are plentiful while working alongside SVDs. We have daily Mass and evening prayer, weekly vespers and Holy Hour, special celebrations and prayer services. While I am unable to avail myself of every opportunity for prayer with the community, I join when I can, particularly for special celebrations, including multi-lingual celebrations on World Mission Sunday. I appreciate our Masses for vocations and the reflections by our students in formation. I also appreciate the rhythm to the Liturgy of the Hours and join our various communities when I am able to do so. Last week was a treat when I prayed Morning Prayer two days in a row with the community in Riverside, CA, in the USW.

One special moment of prayer was several years ago when my daughter was in secondary school preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation. My entire family attended the celebration of the Feast of St. Josephine Bakhita at Divine Word College. Following the liturgy was a banquet and social with stories of Bakhita from Sudanese students attending Divine Word College. The whole event was truly a prayer celebrating the Bakhita's life. Most touching was the reflection of the life of Bakhita by one of the SSpS sister candidates. Long story short, my daughter was so touched by the life of Bakhita and the celebration of her life at that event that she chose St. Josephine Bakhita as her patron saint for her Confirmation! To this day, at least one SSpS sister still calls my daughter Bakhita. Yes...prayer with the SVD community leaves a lasting effect on the lay partners who collaborate with them.

### Joys and Challenges

Any ministry has its blessings and joys coupled with its struggles and challenges. As I reflect on the personal challenges that I have experienced in my ministry with the SVD, I think of three: Balancing my time in ministry with family time, telling a candidate who applied to formation that he was not accepted, and continuing to grow spiritually and in my personal prayer life.

First, telling someone who applied to formation, but who was not accepted is probably the worst part of my ministry. After walking with someone for a period of time in his discernment and that person feeling a sense of call to religious life and wanting to enter SVD formation, when I tell him he was not accepted, I see his pain, confusion, sense of rejection and of loss and he wonders "where do I go from here?" I know I tell candidates there is no guarantee they will be accepted and

over the years, I have told several they have not been accepted for one reason or another. However, it never gets any easier telling someone they will not be allowed to enter formation with the Society.

Second, as someone who helps others in their vocational journey and in trying to understand how God is working in their lives, it is important for me to also have a sense of Jesus in my life and a strong prayer life. As with other people, I have experienced a roller coaster of highs and lows, of ups and downs over the years. At times I have those “mountain top” experiences where I can clearly feel Jesus’ presence and the Holy Spirit in me. At other times, desert experiences seem to overshadow everything. Keeping an even keel is a challenge and making time for personal prayer with ministry and family obligations is always a struggle.

Finally, by far, the biggest challenge in ministry for me is to keep a balance between time at home with family and time in ministry. While most weeks are pretty steady and balanced, there are times when the schedule gets “crazy” and I am away from home for several days or evenings and things get out-of-balance. It can be a challenge to attend community events, but also be at home for evening meals. Some ministry activities require me to be away from home for 6 or 8 or even up to 14 days. I also have smaller trips of 3-4 days. Many of my ministry activities are over weekends when my family is home. I may get a day off when I return to recuperate, but my wife is at her job and my children were or are at school. All this said, Susie is an avid supporter of my ministry with the Society. She knows I enjoy and am passionate about what I do for the SVD and for the Church at large—I could not do my ministry without her loving support. The SVD has always been accommodating to my family and they have always felt a part of the larger SVD family. The community has been very hospitable and welcoming of my family and this has been extremely helpful in navigating the time demands and varied schedule of vocation ministry.

The joys of ministry with the SVD are numerous. Maybe first and foremost is the ability to actively participate in the missionary work of the Church. There are many ways to be of service to God’s people and to be a witness to God’s kingdom, and my ministry and collaboration with the SVD has been a “perfect fit” for me and my family. I am truly blessed to have a ministry with a religious congregation that allows me to work fulltime and also be able to provide for my family. Being part of the “bigger picture” and the worldwide missionary efforts of the Church and the Society are truly a blessing.

More specifically, some of the joys of vocation ministry include helping candidates enter formation and begin that formal process of discernment as they seek God’s will in their lives. As students move through the process, watching them graduate from Divine Word College, enter novitiate, profess First Vows and Final Vows—these are all extremely joyous occasions to celebrate individual accomplishments, but to also see the fruits of my ministry efforts to help more men enter the Society of the Divine Word.

Collaborating closely with the SVD has allowed me to develop life-long friendships with members of the Society. I truly know people from all over the world. My life has been enriched by the people I have met from diverse cultures. I have developed friendships that have lasted a long time. When my wife and I married, a Divine Word Missionary priest presided at the liturgy and a brother read one of the readings. Two of my three children were baptized by SVD priests. I have developed some awesome friendships over the years with SVDs and many have been mentors and positive role models and examples of selfless service to others. These relationships with SVDs and more recently with some SSps sisters have brought abundant joy to my life.

## Surprises in Ministry

When I think about “surprises,” I generally think of pleasant experiences—happy moments that happen and are a delight. However, I guess that is not always the case—surprises can simply be unexpected things that happen, good or bad. As I spent time reflecting about surprises, a few stories came to mind:

- Being in vocation ministry is a surprise for me. When I began ministry with the SVD, I served as the alumni director. After about four years, the USA provincials asked me to lead the Tri-Province vocation office. That was “out of the box” thinking. When I was in formation, I worked two summers in the vocation office and always thought vocation ministry would be a “good fit” for me when I professed vows. Who knew I’d be a vocation director for the Society after professing marriage vows! Being in this ministry was a complete surprise.
- My ministry has afforded me the opportunity to travel a bit. Traveling and visiting SVD missions has been a pleasant surprise. Three trips come to mind:
  - During a visit to the SVDs in Sint Maarten a few years back, I was able to travel with my wife. I usually travel alone and I do not get to share most of my travel experiences with her. Being able to take her with me on that trip was special (and here to Rome as well!).
  - I was able to travel to World Youth Day in Poland in 2016. It was the first time representatives from our vocation office were going to attend WYD, but I was not scheduled to go. As things evolved, I did travel to Poland, and the opportunity to experience the worldwide Church in such a dramatic way was truly a blessing.
  - Back in 2003, I was blessed to be able to travel to Rome for the canonization of St. Arnold and St. Joseph. It was a chance in a lifetime to be present in St. Peter’s Square for the celebration.
- Good or bad, I am still surprised by people. Specifically, I am thinking of candidates who enter formation. Men who we think may struggle and leave formation after a year or two turn out to be solid candidates and profess vows. Others who seem serious about entering formation shock us with their “crazy” and “erratic” behaviors. I continue to be amazed and surprised as the formation process takes place in individuals and to watch the Holy Spirit work in our candidates’ lives.

Whether big or small, day-to-day surprises that come along continue to shape me and mold me. I grow in understanding of SVD mission and charism, in self-understanding, in intercultural competency, interpersonal communication skills and in faith. All these help me better serve as a missionary disciple.

## Good News Stories

I’d like to end with the following “good news” story—maybe the most powerful experience during my years of ministry with the Society. It dates back several years when I was also doing alumni ministry—working with men who had attended our formation programs in the past, but who left formation and followed other vocational callings.

Over the years, the SVD had several formation programs—from Techny in the north to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, in the south and from New York and Boston (Miramar) in the East to Riverside, California in the West. The Alumni Office hosts regional gatherings in order to connect with alumni who attended certain formation programs or who currently live in certain areas of the country. As alumni director, I hosted several of these events and always tried to get as many alumni to attend—both current SVDs who professed vows and past students who either were in vows for some period of time or never professed vows.

Over the years, some of the regional gatherings have become yearly events. With alumni from the 40s, 50s and 60s, getting older, they wish to gather yearly to make sure they stay connected. One alumnus had attended a couple of the events in back-to-back years and enjoyed reconnecting with his classmates. When he heard that a specific SVD was going to attend the event the following year, he refused to attend. Despite nearly 40 years passing, he was still angry and resentful towards this man for how he experienced him many years ago, and did not want to see him, talk with him or be anywhere around him. So...our SVD member attended the event that year, but the alumnus did not.

Fast forward another year, both men attended the event (the alumnus not knowing the SVD would be there that year). The two were “forced” to meet and talk at the small gathering. What could have been a very tense and awkward situation, turned into one of the most healing “therapy sessions” I ever experienced. Our alumnus friend met his former prefect who he resented and as adults, discussed what took place nearly 40 years previously. Without all the details, the two reconciled. I recall the alumnus saying, “This isn’t the same guy I knew back in high school. He’s a nice guy today.” Oh, how time has a way of changing people; and how the Holy Spirit has a way of touching people’s lives and healing pain. What a blessing it was to help facilitate that healing process and be a witness to the little miracles that happen every day.

### Conclusion

A word of gratitude...

Thank you to the many USA provincials over the last 19 years (and their counsels and province members) who have allowed me to be a missionary partner in ministry with the Society and have supported me in many ways over the years. I also appreciate the leadership at Divine Word College, including the three college presidents for whom I worked. Being able to visit many of the ministry sites in the U.S. provinces, I also am grateful to all the SVDs who have welcomed me to their houses, supported me in my ministry and continue to serve God’s people and be witnesses of the Kingdom. I am humbled to be nominated by the PANAM zonal leaders to participate in the 2018 General Chapter and approved by the Superior General and his council. Back in 1999 when I began my formal ministry with the Society, my wife commented, “This is your dream job.” There is no doubt in my mind that God called me to be a lay partner in missionary ministry with the Society of the Divine Word. Thank you for the opportunity to serve the Society and the Church.