

AUSTRALIA PROVINCE

Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and Myanmar

Official Languages: Australia – **English**, New Zealand – **English and Maori**, Thailand – **Thai**, Myanmar – **Burmese**.

Vision Statement

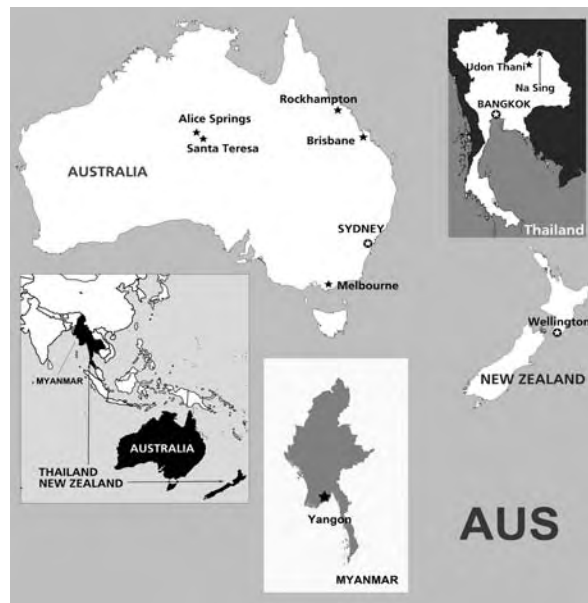
Like John the Baptist, we the Divine Word Missionaries of AUS Province seek to discover the light which is already shining among the people we are working with and to give witness to it. We do this in union with Jesus, the Word made flesh (Jn 1:14) who came not to crush the smoldering wick but to make it burn brighter.

Mission Statement

We give witness to our missionary charism through living in international fraternal communities. From this experience we reach out to the poor and marginalized, to faith seekers and to people of varied faiths and cultures. We do this with a desire to discern the will of God in a spirit of prophetic dialogue.

The Spirit of the Land of Smiles, the Land of the Long White Cloud and the Wide, Brown Land of drought and flooding rains calls us:

- *To give witness in multicultural cities and remote communities,*



- *To collaborate with the local Church in their prophetic promotion of lay ecclesial leaders,*
- *To minister in works of justice, education and interfaith dialogue.*

1. Societal Setting

Australia: Australia has the world's 13th largest economy and 9th highest per capita income. The country ranks highly in quality of life, health, education, economic freedom, civil liberties and political rights, however, Aborigines are still the most disadvantaged people in modern Australia. Their recognition as First Australians in the Australian Constitution and commitment to a continuous process of reconciliation seem to be essential to ensure a prosperous future of Australia as a nation. Australia's population is 25

million; the religious affiliations are Christians 52% (Catholics 22.6% and 29.4% Protestants), Islam 2.6%, Buddhism 2.4% and No Religion 30%. The religious make up of Australia has been changing with the trend toward non-Christian and “no religion”. The ethnic groups are Anglo-Celtic 65.2%, Aboriginal 5%, and others 29.8%.

New Zealand: In 1840 Britain and the Māori chiefs signed the famous Treaty of Waitangi, and New Zealand became a colony of the British Empire. Today the majority of the NZ population is of European descent. It is a developed country and ranks highly in international comparisons of national performance, such as health, education, economic freedom and quality of life. New Zealand’s population is 4.6 million. Religious affiliations are: Christians 47.6% (Catholics 12.6% and 35% Protestants), Hinduism 2%, Buddhism 1.2% and No Religion 41.9%. Like Australia, the religious make up of New Zealand has been changing with the trend toward non-Christian and “no religion”. The ethnic groups are: Anglo/European 74%, Maori 14.9%, Pacific peoples 6.9%, and others 4.2%.

Thailand: Thailand is a constitutional monarchy and has switched between parliamentary democracy and military junta for decades. The Thai economy is the world's 20th largest by GDP at PPP and the 27th largest by nominal GDP. It became a newly industrialized country and a major exporter in the 1990s. Manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism are leading sectors of the economy. The country’s population

is 68.2 million. Religious affiliation consists of Buddhism 94.6%, Islam 4.3% and Christians 0.7% (Catholics 0.52% and Protestants 0.2%).

Myanmar: Myanmar, also known as Burma, for most of its independent years has been engrossed in rampant ethnic strife and its myriad ethnic groups have been involved in one of the world's longest-running ongoing civil wars. In 2011, the military junta was officially dissolved and a nominally civilian government was installed. In the landmark 2015 election, Aung San Suu Kyi's party won a majority in both houses, however the Burmese military remains a powerful force in politics. The population of Myanmar is 54.8 million. Religious affiliations are: Buddhism 87.9%, Christianity 5% (Catholics 1% and Protestants 4%), Islam 4.3%, Hinduism 0.5%, and Tribal Religions 0.8%. Major ethnic groups are: Bamar 68%, Shan 9%, Kayin 7%, Rakhine 3.5%, and others.

The Catholic Church, together with all other religious, social and political entities, has committed herself to the task of rebuilding the nation.

2. Ecclesial Setting

Australia / New Zealand: The Catholic population is the largest single religious group in the two nations. The Churches in both countries are self-supporting. Traditionally Catholic life has been rather conservative, with a principally Irish flavor. The rich migrant mix of the last sixty years has not yet found expression in the liturgical lives of the communities, although there

are isolated expressions of this. The new faces of Australia and NZ are changing them into multi-cultural nations. Formation houses for dioceses and religious congregations have few local formandi.

Thailand: There is a rich and long Buddhist tradition where temples and shrines are evident at all levels of rural and urban society. Buddhist monks enjoy a venerated and privileged status. Christianity (and Catholicism), though small with regard to practicing members, is well accepted within society. There is a small but steady flow of young people joining religious life and priesthood. The local Church has sufficient funds in large cities; however, it struggles to be self-supporting in rural/regional areas.

Myanmar: Evidence of Christianity in Myanmar (former Burma) was found in the form of frescos containing crosses of Latin and Greek origin dating from 1287. After having established in Goa, India as the sea port to the East, the Portuguese came to Myanmar by 1510. Christian communities established by Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits were concentrated mainly in the south of the country where, even today, names are found dating to the era of Portuguese rule.

The 19th and early 20th centuries saw the British taking full control of Burma, until its independence in 1948. However in 1962, with a coup, the country came under military rule, and from 1962 to 2011 almost all dissent was brutally suppressed as the military junta wielded ab-

solute power despite international condemnation and sanctions. Catholic schools were nationalized and all the missionaries who arrived after independence were expelled in 1966. The harsh rule of the military regime, however, did not stop the growth of the Catholic Church in Burma, thanks to the faithful and their staunch faith. Today the Catholic community in Myanmar consists of 16 dioceses, more than 750 priests, 2,500 religious sisters and brothers, and approximately 750,000 faithful who count for 1.3% of the total population, with a high concentration of ethnic minorities in the tribal areas.

SVD Integration into the Local Church

Australia/New Zealand: Our confreres are involved in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic parish ministry in nine locations. The fact that the majority of our confreres are migrants is well understood by our partners in dialogue in the parishes as many are also migrants. Working with migrant communities as ethnic chaplains is therefore the key focus of our province and one of our ministry priorities. As full time and part time chaplains we minister to Vietnamese, Indonesian, Cantonese and Mandarin speaking Chinese, Filipino, Slovak, Thai and Laotian communities. The challenging ministry with indigenous Australians, the most disadvantaged group within Australian society, is shared with other religious and lay ministers. The SVD is well regarded within the Diocese of Darwin.

Thailand: Local clergy in Thailand are not easily disposed to minister in some of the more isola-

ted parts of the country. Religious women and men are working in these difficult locations. The SVD has initiated a significant ministry with people who suffer with the AIDS virus in the northeast (poorest area) of Thailand. Our high school education and parish ministries provide constant opportunities for contact with the poor and marginalized of the region.

Myanmar: As this new project is still in the preparation stage, it will be a challenge and an opportunity for SVD to get involved in specialized areas such as Bible ministry. While the Church in Myanmar is blessed to have good numbers of local clergy and religious, they are more in need of professional formation in Bible, interreligious dialogue, and mission.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2011 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	26	38.2	32.2	14.8
Education	4	5.9	6.4	13.9
Schools	1	-		
Universities	3	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	3	4.4	8.0	5.6
Administration/ Support	6	8.8	18.0	15.7
Other Apostolates	12	17.8	12.5	17.6

JPIC	1	-		
Bible	2	-		
Communication	1	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	7	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2011 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	7	10.3	10.4	5.6
Retired/Sick	8	11.8	9.3	13.9
Others	2	2.9	3.2	13.0

Missionary Activities

Interreligious Dialogue: The Janssen Spirituality Centre (JSC) for Interreligious and Cross-Cultural Relations was established in 2008 in Melbourne as a joint initiative of the SVD and SSpS AUS provinces. It is “dedicated to mutual understanding and enrichment, respect and collaboration, between the followers of various cultures and faith traditions.” Adult Education Programs have been developed “to assist in educating and motivating Christians and other faith community leaders to take up the challenge to participate actively in interreligious dialogue and cross-cultural activities” (from the goals of the JSC). A board of specialists in religion and culture gathers to provide advice to the executive of the JSC who institute programs inclu-

ding courses/retreats in Cultural Anthropology, Christian Scriptures and Meditation, Western and Eastern Mysticism, and the Buddhist Understanding of Compassion.

HIV/AIDS Ministry: Mother of Perpetual Help (MPH) Centre in Udon Thani Diocese, Thailand is a base for ministry to individuals and families living with HIV/AIDS. An orphanage has been established at the Centre and is staffed by the Missionaries of Charity. A hospice caters for critically ill and/or dying patients. Teams of lay people move out from MPH to rural areas attending to the needs of patients living at home. These teams are also active in HIV/AIDS education programs in government schools across the local province.

Parish Ministries: Many dioceses in Australia / NZ have approached the SVD for assistance in parish pastoral ministry. Our SVD preference is to minister in parishes with a strong multi-cultural and low socio-economic demographic. Our ministries in Darwin, Brisbane, Rockhampton Sydney, Wollongong Melbourne, and Wellington (NZ) are mission-focused. They are Word-centered and dedicated to partnership with lay people preparing them for senior administration roles in parish clusters in response to the declining number of local clergy. The SVD collaborates with lay pastoral leaders in these roles and promotes this ecclesial model.

Mission Formation: The SVD continues to provide lecturers at Yarra Theological Union (YTU), Melbourne, for education in missiology,

sacramental theology, Church history and associated fields.

Characteristic Dimensions

Biblical Apostolate: Bible formation and activities *ad intra* and *ad extra* continue to play a leading role in the life of our province. The AUS bible coordinator has developed and been promoting bible groups in SVD run parishes, chaplaincies and communities across Australia and New Zealand. Biblical recollection days and retreats for the SVDs and SSpS, as well as lay groups, have been and will continue to be offered. Biblical reflections are now an established feature in our AUS electronic and social media. Our new bible ministry in Myanmar will demand of us a more substantial commitment to this new project.

Mission Animation: The AUS mission secretary, together with his mission office personnel, makes every effort to promote missionary spirit among AUS members and our mission partners. Annual Mission Days, seminars and recollection days are offered to AUS communities, chaplaincies, parishes, formation programs and the local church.

JPIC: Our AUS *ad extra* ministries have a dominant JIPC dimension as a result of our commitment to the poor, the marginalized, disadvantaged and displaced, the victims and powerless. The JPIC coordinator develops and offers formation programs for members of our province as well as our partners in mission in SVD run parishes, chaplaincies and other ministries. Our communities are encouraged to be proac-

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Our communities are encouraged to be proactive, involved and informed about JPIC matters in the local church and all other secular forms of community life. The JPIC coordinator has also taken up a role in the formation of confreres in the area of professional standards, protection of children and vulnerable people. This involves the development of policies and guidelines that will improve the safety and quality of our ministries among the people of God in Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and Myanmar.

Communication: The communications coordinator facilitates, promotes, and offers formation in inter-personal and mission communication. He also coordinates publications and a variety of communication opportunities in our AUS mission ad-extra and ad intra. Our communications office works closely with the mission secretary and is responsible for producing a quarterly magazine (*Society Matters*) which treats a variety of mission-related themes. An annual mission calendar is also produced. These publications are responsible for raising significant funds that are made available for the generalate's distribution to mission projects across the SVD world.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

The Australian province has chosen the following Congregational Directions as priorities in its missionary endeavors: a) Primary Evangelization, b)

Migration, c) Indigenous and Ethnic Communities, d) Social Justice and Poverty Eradication, and e) Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue.

There were several stages in the process of discerning the CD's action plan in AUS. First, the provincial council discussed and suggested a process. Second, in a two-day workshop local leaders, together with the provincial leadership team and coordinators of AUS Characteristic Dimensions, learned the skills of guiding a community in the process of implementing the action plan locally. Finally, individual confreres were encouraged to share the successes and struggles of having and making efforts to implement the action plan.

There was some enthusiasm at the time of working out the process but eventually the fire cooled down and it is hard to go back to doing it again. Confreres seem overworked sometimes and perhaps genuinely focused on their ministries. They often forget that Congregational Directions would perhaps enhance or make their ministry more mission focused.

Collaboration with SSps

There is a spirit of collaboration, sharing of mission, and simple friendship between SSps and SVD in AUS. Apart from getting together for social events, we share ministry and mission in parishes, interreligious dialogue, initial and ongoing formation, and our common Arnoldus spirituality. Attending each other's chapters or discerning future missionary commitments are some of the examples of a good relationship

AUS

between SSpS and SVD in AUS. And yet, there is a desire to go further and explore and implement a new and more effective way of being committed to mission together. The 2015 AUS provincial chapter made a formal recommendation to explore new prophetic ways of being committed to mission as the Arnoldus family.

SVD Lay Partners

The 2015 provincial chapter, discussing proposals regarding SVD Lay Associations/Partners, made a resolution “to conduct a visibility study aimed at formally establishing such lay groups.” While this study is being conducted by a committee, our collaboration with our lay collaborators is being nurtured and nourished.

4. Intercultural life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Clerics	71	69	44
Brothers (final vows)	5	7	10
Scholastics	16	13	14
Total	92	89	71

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	53.0	55.4	50.7
Nationalities	21	19	21

The following steps are being taken to deepen *Ad intra life* in AUS based on the Congregational Directions:

- Workshops conducted on the community level on *ad intra* Congregational Directions
- Community recollections
- Leadership workshop
- Workshops in all AUS communities and districts on intercultural living
- Workshops for confreres in initial formation on intercultural living, finances, leadership and community
- Workshops and conferences on professional standards and protection of children and vulnerable adults
- SSpS and SVD combined retreats and recollection days