

USA – SOUTHERN PROVINCE

Official Language: **English**

Vision Statement

May the heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people.

Mission Statement

We the confreres of the Society of the Divine Word in the Southern Province of the United States of America are called to work primarily among the African American community and with the poor and the marginalized and in particular the Hispanic and Vietnamese communities.

We strive to bring the Good News of Christ to those whom we serve through pastoral and sacramental ministries, spiritual and biblical formation, education and the promotion of social justice.

In our missionary apostolate we promote the knowledge of the lives and spirituality of Saint Arnold Janssen and of our first missionary to China Saint Joseph Freinademetz.

1. Societal Setting

The United States of America is a “melting pot” of diverse races, cultures and religions. This was due to the concurrent internal mi-



grations in the earlier years. In the 19th century people began migrating from the east to the west coast and from rural to urban areas. In the 20th century the migratory tide flowed earlier from the South to the Northeast and Midwest, then later shifted from the aging northern metropolises (cities with a million inhabitants or more) to the growing urban agglomerations of the South, Southwest, and West. Since the 1950s, a new major trend has been the progressive migrations from cities to suburbs that are making those same cities fuse into megalopolises (“conurbations” with 10 million inhabitants or more). To give just three examples of such super-cities: one

on the east coast stretches along the Atlantic from Portland, Maine, to Richmond, Virginia; another in the Great Lakes region is centered on Chicago and extends as large slices through Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana; a third in southern California reaches from Santa Barbara, through Los Angeles, to the Mexican border.

The USA is the world's foremost economic and military power, with global interests reaching to all continents, and its economic power plays a great role in the international organizations. The country is also a major source of entertainment: American TV, Hollywood films, jazz, blues, rock and rap music are primary ingredients in global popular culture.

The United States originated in a revolution which separated it from the British Crown. The Constitution, drafted in 1787, established a federal system with a division of powers among the 50 States which has remained unchanged since its inception.

The results of the 2016 presidential election have left many (especially women, people of color and immigrants) wondering with uncertainty and fear how the new administration would lead the nation. News outlets and social media accounts have increased reports of hatred and bigotry. The country continues to struggle with immigration policy, affordable health care, cultural and religious harmony, respect for life, and equality for all regardless

of race, skin color, gender and sexual orientation.

2. Ecclesial Setting

The Catholic Church in North America has experienced extraordinary growth in the number of Hispanic Catholics and Catholics from other minority groups (Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese, Indian, Korean, etc.) in recent years.

The local Church is challenged to provide resources and personnel to meet the needs of these groups. The majority of the Catholic dioceses are involved in some form of ministry to the Hispanic community. Even parishes that historically have been focused on a particular racial or ethnic group, African American parishes, for example, are encouraged and called upon to open their doors to serve Spanish speaking faithful.

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The steady decline of vocations and the shortage of priests have led many Bishops to turn to religious priests for assistance. In the Southern province of the US, our presence in the dioceses that we serve since our foundation has been to care for African American community. However, over the past fifteen years or so, we have taken parishes that are multicultural in nature. Fewer exclusively African American parishes are being offered to us.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

Those in Final Vows

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Parish	45	67.8	73.7	42.4
Education	1	1.5	0	0
Schools	1	-		
Universities	0	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	0	0	0	2.5
Administration/ Support	5	7.5	5.3	10.2
Other Apostolates	7	10.4	5.3	23.7
JPIC	3	-		
Bible	0	-		
Communication	2	-		
Mission Animation	2	-		
Others	20	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005 (%)
Studies/ Orientation	1	1.5	3.5	5.1
Retired/Sick	8	11.9	12.2	14.4
Others	0	0	0	0

We are ministering in five Southern States of the US (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and Florida) and in eleven dioceses (Houston, Beaumont, Fort Worth, Lake Charles, Lafayette, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Biloxi, Jackson, Little Rock, and Pensacola-Tallahassee). Since all our parishes belong to a diocese, we follow the diocesan policies regarding personnel, finance and law.

The ministry of the USS province is still centered on serving the African American community and other minority groups, namely Hispanic and Vietnamese. There are forty-four parishes/missions in the province. Thirty-one are African American and thirteen are multicultural parishes.

Characteristic Dimensions

The particular circumstance of our ministry has provided us with an opportunity to experience the Characteristic Dimensions as an integral part of our missionary and pastoral work.

We are constantly called to be reconcilers and bridge builders. Our parishioners are still struggling with prejudice and racism, even more so in recent times. In our multicultural parishes, the challenge is amplified with the new immigration policy of our government. Most of our Spanish-speaking parishioners are without legal documents. Fears of deportation and of families being torn apart are rapidly becoming a new norm.

We work closely with the dioceses in which we serve and with certain embassies to assist immigrants in our parishes. We use the pulpit and other venues to give a unifying message and to raise awareness of injustice and racism. As with our predecessors in the province, we continue to fight for equality and to uproot racism.

The monthly, online publication of “In a Word” and the writing of Fr. Jerome LeDoux continue to be resourceful in promoting dialogue and awareness of the gifts and talents of African American Catholics.

Our Coordinators for Characteristic Dimensions are actively encouraging and offering resources for Bible Study, raising awareness of peace and justice issues, and presenting in the districts the importance of the SVD identity in our parishes. The majority of our parishes currently have active Bible study groups. Emails are sent periodically in regard to “JP Alert and JP resources for preaching”. The mission secretary visits districts and parishes to offer an SVD parish profile workshop, to give retreats for the youth at the historic St. Augustine Seminary in Bay St. Louis, to reintroduce SVD to the younger generations, and to give talks for the staff of all our parishes. A day of recollection in Bay St. Louis and a Parish Mission for Advent or Lent on “Arnold Janssen Spirituality,” also take place to nourish the spiritual journey. The first SVD Youth Gathering was organized in the province. Confreres in the district gather with parishioners to celebrate the feast of our founder.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

The USS province chose **primary and new evangelization, family life, immigration and integrity of creation** as priorities from the 2012 general chapter. These priorities are being implemented in the province through various activities and programs. Consensus was reached recently to focus attention on evangelization of the family and the formation of youth for the remaining years before the 2018 general chapter. The following directions are to be followed in our pastoral ministry.

- Be sensitive, welcoming and non-judgmental in ministering to all types of family in our parishes – father/mother/children, single and divorced parents, same sex parents and family of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender).
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- **Action Taken:** We assist parish groups such as the Knights of Columbus and or the Ladies-Knights of Peter Claver to promote and support family life in our parish. We acknowledge and reward the service/ministry of our youth in the parish, and promote children/youth liturgy and choir. We work with the diocese to provide support to persons with same sex attraction and open our Church for funeral service of any same sex couple/family who doesn't have a Church affiliation. For the “deaf” community, our Church and Church's facility are given for their monthly liturgy.

- Organize activities that center on the family – youth, support for single parent, seniors, homebound, sick and bereaved parishioners.
- **Action Taken:** Family Night, Senior Lunch and Parish Festival are organized. The Evangelization team visits families of newly baptized and first Holy Communion recipients. The Visitation team visits the sick and homebound. A parish appreciation dinner is held where new parishioners are introduced and welcomed. Daily Mass is celebrated at a retirement facility.
- Pay close attention to and speak up against domestic violence and abuse of children.
- Reach out to our youth through various programs – Youth Convention, Youth Retreat, Days of Prayer and Worship, youth ACTS retreat (Adoration, Community, Theology and Service), Youth Eucharistic Adoration, World Youth Day, etc.
- Continue involvement in a number of movements that assist and promote the growth of faith and relationship – Retroville, Charismatic groups, 12-step programs, Cursillo, and ACTS movements.
- **Action Taken:** One or more of these groups are active in some of our parishes. We also have confreres who are working exclusively with these groups.
- Almost all our parishes have active RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), marriage preparation, safe environment, and outreach

programs to help the poor and needy, such as St. Vincent de Paul, Food Pantry, Advent Basket, Blood Drive, Health Ministry, etc.

There has been an alarming trend in the recent years of Catholics leaving the Church in droves to join other denominations in the dioceses that traditionally have been known to have a very strong Catholic influence. Certainly, there are many reasons why Catholics are leaving the Church. As missionaries, we have made it our mission and responsibility to increase our outreach and evangelization efforts to meet the needs of our churchgoers, non-churchgoing parishioners and fallen away Catholics. There is still a need to be more involved in the life of our parishioners and to encourage them to take ownership of their parish.

Collaboration with the SSpS and Others

Our collaboration with SSpS is very limited. We don't have SSpS ministering in our province. The Sisters from Chicago visit a couple of our parishes in Arkansas/Mississippi district during the summer months to help with Summer Bible Camp for children and youth.

Collaboration with the diocese and with other religious orders is a constant rhythm in our missionary life and ministry. Just to name a few examples.

Annual renewal of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," which basically states that when an accusation is made against a clerical member of a religious institute, the matter is referred to the institute.

Meeting with bishops periodically to review our working partnership with the diocese.

SVD Lay Association

At the province level, we have the “Divine Word Alumni Association.” The group meets once a year in Bay St. Louis, MS. Their objective is to assist and promote the SVD charism and do mission animation among them. The first SVD lay association group was established recently in our province.

The lay faithful are very active in our province, mostly at the parish level. With the shortage of priests, our lay faithful are stepping up to take more responsibility in the life of the parish. They are educated, talented and confident. All our parishes have multiple lay groups that are actively involved in the life and the ministry of the parish, like the Parish Council, Finance Committee, RCIA, among others.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005
Bishops	2	2	3
Clerics	59	54	50
Brothers (final vows)	5	4	6
Scholastics	1	4	7
Total	67	64	66

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005
Average age	55.2	54.7	56.2
Nationalities	15	13	11

Spirituality: Confreres in the province demonstrate a strong spiritual life. We continue to make an effort to celebrate the feast days of our Society at our local communities together with other SVDs and with our parishioners when possible. We deem it important that our parishioners know about us – our mission and our charism.

Community: Most confreres in the province experience community life on the district level. Confreres are committed to attend district meetings and other activities where they can come together for prayers, Eucharist and social gatherings. Efforts are being made to create more districts in order to accommodate and facilitate a community living in the province. Participation in the annual province retreat scheduled in the first week of June is recommended for all confreres.

Leadership: Our province is committed to promote local leadership. Mentorship is still a priority in the province.

Finance: There is a financial transparency in the province. Accountability and living a simple life are stressed. Efforts towards achieving self-support and financial stability have shown positive results.

Ongoing Formation: Our province continues to support and encourage the practice of attending the Institute for Black Catholic Studies and other ongoing formations programs or workshops sponsored by the province and other agencies. We continue to participate in the three provinces’ ongoing formation such as COW (Cultural Orien-

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tation Workshop) for new missionaries and the First Five's Gathering for those ordained or taken their final vows within five years or less. We also continue to encourage "accent reduction" class and to attend the Institute of Black Catholic Stu-

dies at Xavier University in New Orleans, LA for new missionaries. In the last few years, we have begun sending confreres who have been proficient in English to learn Spanish.