



svd brothers
FORUM

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in the *Divine Word,*
we RENEW

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SVD BROTHERS FORUM

is a digital forum written by its readers. On behalf of its Publisher (Fr. Rogelio Bag-ao, SVD-PHS Provincial Superior), the editors asked members of the Arnoldus Family to reply on the questions on RENEWAL (in our vocation and religious life).

1. What **OUTDATED FEATURES** of SVD (Brother) life have you observed?

2. Which of these should be **RETAINED**, which should be **ELIMINATED**, and which should be **RENEWED**?

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Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many institutions have been confronted with drastic changes, including our normal daily practices. Life must go on and yet we also need to address the challenges of our time. The thought of change can be scary, painful and sometimes it takes time to bring about a change. The process could be slow or fast-moving depending on how the individual, community or institution sees the need for change to happen. We might find ourselves having the need to adopt new ways of doing, in this so called new normal, as a consequence of the current pandemic situation.

There are moments when we are called to take collective action to address an ongoing dilemma. Normally, in the case of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), decisions are made during major meetings and gatherings. As a religious organization, the SVD has made considerable progress over the years. The sharing of ideas, knowledge and experience among confreres during assemblies, and collaborative discussions can bring a lot of positive change.

While there are many good practices that need to be retained in the SVD, there are also challenges that we have to keep on working, such as, the perennial culture of clericalism that is endemic in the Church. The Church normally shall be an agent of change and transformation. To address clericalism, it may require the adjustment of seminary training by purging certain practices in the current systems that may feed this kind of culture. A call to revisit the goal of formation in the seminary vis-à-vis the systems and renewal can happen if we take a deeper look at ourselves.

Allow me to narrow down and focus my thoughts on the plight of the Brothers. In 2010 there were 609 SVD Perpetually Professed Brothers. In 2021, only 502 Perpetually Professed Brothers remain. We all need to ask ourselves what we can do to animate our vocation. Our reality now is pointing to a diminishing number of Brothers every year. How can we remain in existence in the coming years? Society members in mixed congregations, like the SVD, have to get involved in this important issue. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26). Yes, we are all in this together. The SVD will have to discern and strategize on what to do about the dwindling number of our members especially, in the Brotherhood vocation. On a positive note, while Asia is still the hub of vocations in the Society according to Fr. Anbu Pushpa, SVD, the Secretary for Formation and Education, we should take this opportunity to tap vocations by strengthening our vocation promotion, and improving our formation programs.

During this special year dedicated to St. Joseph, we turn to him to be our intercessor as we follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ. We ask St. Joseph’s guidance as we seek to renew our commitment by listening and responding to God’s will in our discernment process.

I send my embrace, my prayer, and blessing to you all.

Br. Darwin Loro

National Director

SVD Brothers Formation in the Philippines



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THE DE-CLERICALIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Br. Carlos Jose Ferrada Montero (GEN)

General Assistant for Brother Formation, International JPIC Coordinator



Hello dear confreres, I am glad that the editor of the SVD Brothers Forum picked up questions related to renewal and transformation of our religious life in the congregation, in our communities. The last General Chapter, still fresh in our minds, invited us to enter into the spiritual process of renewal and transformation to rekindle our missionary commitment in this challenging historical time. One of the most important moments of the 18th General Chapter was the encounter of the Capitulars with Pope Francis, in that opportunity, he said to our confreres: “The world, as well as the Church, need to feel this fraternal love in spite of diversity and interculturality, which is one of the riches that you have. A community, in which priests, religious and laity feel they are members of a family, in which they share and live the faith and the same charism, in which everyone is at the service of others, and nobody is more than the other”.

I think that one of the signs of the current time is the urgent need of fraternity, Brotherhood. The latest Encyclic of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, it is a reminder of Jesus’ wish that all of us will be Brothers and sisters who live the

concrete and universal love. As missionaries of the Divine Word the essence of our call as religious is to become a Brother for everyone. And if we want to radiate the fraternal spirit to the world, we have to begin to live the spirit of Brotherhood in our communities. It is sad to observe communities where there are confreres who are not interested in community life, focused on their own commitments. In fact, we have many confreres who live alone in the parishes. It is totally outdated that there are still confreres who believe that they are the ones who make the decisions without consulting the other members of the community. Or that those who handle the money in the community do not account for the expenses to others. I find also outdated the use of titles among us and not our names: “Yes, father”, “How are you, Brother?”. Jesus called people by their names.

The words that Pope Francis spoke to our confreres encourage us to strive to develop in our lives the spirit of universal Brotherhood. One of the consequences of brother and sister relationships is equality. There are still confreres who believe themselves to be more important than others and look down on others—because of the country

where they were born, the color of their skin, their educational background or because “those” are Brothers. It is sad that among us some confreres feel discriminated and not trustworthy. Our Superior General, Fr. Budi Kleden, during his presentation in the recent ASPAC Assembly on Brothers Vocation, said: “This awareness of our primordial equality is important to fight clericalism, which is a virus that paralyzes the Church, which is sadly still a real danger in our Society. Being Brother is a permanent reminder to all of us that before anything else we are “a community of brothers from different nations and languages.”

I will end this reflection quoting again our Superior General: “All of us are equal in our religious vocation, and we are all Brothers. The vocation of a Brother does not derive from the vocation to priesthood. Being Brother as a gift from God is not less important and worthy than the call to be priest. (...) We are consecrated persons. The priesthood lived by SVD priests must be shaped by their being religious. This helps the de-clericalization of the Church as a whole.”

THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE SVD MISSION

Br. Alfonso José Berger (BRN)

I remember having met only few Brothers when I joined the SVD in 1982. In particular, I remember two in the community of Fatima, in Posadas (ARE): Brothers Luis Hartelt (German) and Theodulo J. Keller, from my hometown, Capioví, Misiones (Argentina). The first was dedicated to the house maintenance and the garden. In addition, he was a nurse and a member of the local council. The second was a good carpenter and in charge of a carpentry, near the aforementioned house, which formerly functioned as a minor seminary.

In that context, I perceived the Brothers well engaged in their work and also assiduous to the community liturgical celebrations. In the following years (1983-1984), I met three other Brothers, during Postulancy and Novitiate. Listening to their life stories and subsequent vocational reflection, in the light of the 1982 General Chapter, six of the 14 novices, we professed the first vows as Brothers, on 1st March 1985.

Then, in Buenos Aires, the Brothers studied a professorship in Religious Sciences, in a Marist institute, while the clerics continued their studies at another institution. On that occasion, I also got to know eight Brothers (four of them elderly). Their presence in community prayers was assiduous, alternating daily work with prayer ('Ora et Labora'). In district/house meetings and provincial assemblies, their presence recalled all our SVD identity: Divine Word 'Missionaries' and not the Divine Word 'Fathers'.

'Outdated' features:

Despite the positive aspects I commented before (assiduousness to the moments of community prayer, dedication to work and participation in meetings and assemblies), I would like to mention some 'limitations' of this 'model' of being Brother.

- It had a 'rather monastic profile', with little direct contact with people. (Thus the Brothers were little known to the people, which did not help to 'wake up' new vocations for that way of being SVD.)



- Liturgical participation was quite 'traditional' (following the breviary or vademecum, with little integration of daily life, social and ecclesial events). I make it clear that this characteristic was not unique to the Brothers, for it was a way of SVD praying.

- Mentality to value the Brother more for what he does, for his professional work. This way of perceiving the Brother 'goes into crisis' when the Brother can no longer do his job, either because of his advanced age or illness.

We should maintain the following characteristics.

- Experience of consecration to God through assiduous participation of the Brother in community liturgy (prayer/mass), taking inspiration from God and renewing his religious-missionary identity. Finding creative ways for those moments, integrating faith and life.

- Witnessing to fraternity, both in his community and in the professional/social/pastoral work he performs (way of being with others, marked by respect, dialogue and affection, in the manner of Jesus of Nazaré).

- Responsible and creative dedication to the work entrusted to him, preferably, in the field of his vocational training. For me, it is about seeing work as a 'mission', in response to God in a given historical place and moment, so we must do it well, in the best possible way, with our SVD charism.

We should set aside the following features.

- Living out the Brother's vocation from a 'monastic' perspective, performing only 'internal' services, without direct contact with people.

- Stopping the expression of the our opinion because we are “only a numerical minority” the current context of the SVD.
 - Competing with the clergymen; instead let us move from criticism to constructive remarks.
 - Appointments for jobs that are not in tune with the Brother’s given professional training. (This is important to protect the Brother from becoming a ‘plug hole’ in his Province/Region/Mission.)
- The follwoing features are to be renewed.
- Frequent participation in District/House meetings and provincial assemblies to share Brother’s specific input in discussions of issues being dealt with and in community projects that are assumed.

- Prioritization of the formation of the Brother so that he would have more direct contact with people, such as nursing, psychology, education, communication, among others.
- Taking care of the Brother’s ongoing formation: reading books, participating in training seminars (whether in classrooms or online), regular professional update through courses, whenever possible.
- Sharing information and experiences of life and mission, as in this Forum or by other means: meetings of religious, visit to the SVD formation houses, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, etc. (NB: with the covid-19 pandemic, visits and meetings were suspended).

„I AM A BROTHER AND YOU ARE A CLERIC!”

Fr. Oscar Alunday (PHC)

O utdated features? Here it is: “I am a Brother. You are a cleric. We are Brothers and you are clerics!” The over-emphasis of one’s identity as “Brothers” and so „not clerics” is so outdated! This attitude of putting stress on what separates the Brother and the cleric is actually promoting division and indifference. It does not promote community life and co-responsibility. It erases the meaning and understanding of the process of “being a Brother” to each person. It weakens efforts of building relationships. It becomes a virus that eats up blessings in persons and communities. It is divisive. The same attitude is also true with the Clerics: “I am a cleric and you are a Brother”. It is important to grow together as BROTHERS to each one – appreciating each other in consideration of the four characteristic dimensions which bind us together.

Which of these should be RETAINED, which should be ELIMINATED, and which should be RENEWED? Events and opportunities where confreres are Brothers to each other should be retained and renewed. This is felt and experienced in community meals and picnics, prayers and celebration of the sacraments, Bible sharing, days of recollection and retreats, working with mission partners as partners in mission NOT as competitors. Now that we have the social media and gadgets, we grow together in the use and update inthese gadgets (for the apostolates and ministries) so that the growing gaps between the juniors and the seniors can be minimized.

The gadgets are personified and confreres are commodified. A confrere’s worth in the community depends on the latest gadget (cellphones, laptops, recreation and health gadgets). As we adapt to so many changes in community life, in society, in the Church, we use these gadgets to upgrade our relationships and the witnessing capacity of each confrere and/or community. Renewal takes a good time in appreciating and knowing the cultures and roots of confreres, learning the languages of peoples where we are assigned, and working as Brothers to each one – a “kapatid” , “kauban” – companion, a co-responsible, a confrere.

I am now in Vigan City back at the John Paul II Biblical Center for the Northern Philippines. I also help in the campus ministry assisting the President of Divine Word College of Vigan. The theme "renewal" is very much a theme for clerics as well.



STAGES OF FORMATION FOR THE SVD BROTHERHOOD

Br. Stephen Bonsu (GHA)

A Brother is a layman who has been called by God to the religious life so that he may enjoy a special gift of grace in the life of the Church, and may contribute to the saving mission of the Church. The religious formation to the religious life is also strongly affected by clericalism. Candidates aspiring to become religious receive little or no support in their interests to the Brotherhood at the time of their application to the congregation, even from their own families. Consequently, this lack of support from the dominant culture must be discouraged.

A debated features of SVD Brother life, that I have observed, is the length of formation for SVD Brotherhood that depends on what formation stage one qualifies to enter the congregation. For high school graduates the formation lasts for about 6-7 years (4-5 years college program, 1 year postulancy and 1 year novitiate); for college graduates or young professionals, 3-4 years (1 year associate program, year postulancy and 1 year novitiate). It may seem too long, yet when one is really called to this kind of vocation, the length of seminary formation is actually just enough.

Postulancy is a preparation period for the candidates before entering the novitiate. The main purpose is to help the candidate in their human-maturity, learn to live together with the others, to know better their

vocations, and also to find out their talents and interests. In details, the Constitution says that our candidates should be physically and mentally sound and healthy, sufficient ability and maturity to fulfil the tasks of the Society. A religious spirit corresponding to one's age, sociability, active participation in the life of the Church, interest in and readiness for the missionary vocation and its tasks. The clerical and the Brother candidates should have a common training in the Postulancy. This will help promote candidates for the priesthood and the Brotherhood. The formation structure and entry requirements for the clerical and the Brother candidates should be renewed.

Studying philosophy and theology should be retained in other to give proper exposure self-confidence to the ministry proclamation of the Word of God by Brothers as it is done in some provinces. The training of the Brothers should be intensify the idea of supporting Brothers to do further education in their various professions. Whatever the Society want Brothers to do, they must get the appropriate training for it. Brothers should not be used to only fill vacancies when emergencies occur. The mindset that Brothers are always or only technical men should be replaced with better theological view of Brother vocation. The Brothers can be teachers, theologians, counselors, lawyers, and doctors or practicing any other profession.

Image Credit: Br. Mark Paglicawan



ARE WE BEGGING OFF OUR EXISTENCE?

Br. Henong Sebastian (IDT)
Brothers Director of IDT

What OUTDATED FEATURES of SVD (Brother) life have I observed?

Reflecting of this question, I think there are some factors that would affect the declining the number of the Brothers in the context of Indonesia; particularly in East Nusa Tenggara. I believe the vocation to be a Brother is holy and unique yet as I observed so far this holy vocation is slowly faded away everywhere due to the following concepts.

1. Many people are not interested to become a Brother because the Brother is seen as second class, assistant of the priest, doing dirty work (farming, hog raising, etc....)
2. The Brother cannot become the superior in the congregation like Provincial etc. Honestly, there are many competent Brothers who are fitted for the leadership position.
3. In the 18th General Chapter, there was a resolution asking the leadership team in Provinces/Regions/Missions to use the word “confrere” and no longer “Father” or “Brother” while greeting the confreres in the community. From my point of view, it seems we are begging off our existence in the society. This resolution should be obliterated because since I

joined the SVD and become member of the society, we do have priest and Brother in our congregation to show the uniqueness of our congregation.

4. Many formators for the Brothers were not prepared to work in the formation. I would wish that all the formators should be prepared well before they are assigned in the Brothers’ formation house.

Which of these should be RETAINED, which should be ELIMINATED, and which should be RENEWED?

The following features should be retained.

- a. To become an SVD Brother is very unique and holy vocation in the society therefore, the Brotherhood identity in the society should be retained.
- b. International meetings and assemblies for the Brothers should be retained, if possible. We should increase their frequency in order to know and share strengths and weaknesses of each Province/Regon/Mission.

The following features need to be improved.

- I. Mission experience for the young missionary Brother. If possible, the first three or six years, the new missionary should not be assigned in his own country—so that he can learn about other cultures and languages.
- II. The Brother should know how to speak fluently at least one foreign language
- III. Intensifying the OTP of Brothers in different countries.



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SVD BROTHERS IN GERMANY

Br. Stefan Wuerth (GER)

Unfortunately, the Brothers' renewal is not that easy for us here in Germany. A few numbers: nine (9) Brothers in perpetual profession are younger than 60 years, of which one (1) is younger than 40 years. One Brother (1) is still in temporary vows—he comes from Austria, the Europe Central Province of the SVD. Those who feel Brother vocation don't apply any more to the SVD German Province. Only contemplative orders, like the Benedictines, for example, attract interested persons whereby there the age does not matter. But we maintain an age limit of 35 years! The mentioned Brothers are well integrated into various jobs. Three (3) of them work outside of the big SVD houses in special fields (including me). The German Province has not had any novices for a few years. That's how the situation is at the moment. This general information may serve the Forum readers' reflection.

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GET EDUCATED AND PRAY!

Br. Swaminathan Valiyavilayil (INM)

We, the eight Brothers of my batch made our first contact with clerical novices in 1973 in India for the two years of Novitiate. One candidate for the Brotherhood drowned in a water fall during the Novitiate, while three others dropped out. On the last day of our second year of Novitiate, four Brothers professed their First Vows.

My first role, as a professed Brother in the India Hyderabad (INH) Province (formerly India South Province - INS), was to be the farm manager of the St. Charles Mission Seminary in Trichy. The other three Brothers pursued higher education at the same time. A Brother left after his Final Profession. Two other Brothers switched to priesthood after their higher studies and Final Profession. One of the two Brothers, after reaching his silver jubilee in his sixties, became a priest.

After my First Profession, I have always been assigned either as a Treasurer or to oversee farms, although I spent two years in the Andhra Mission (then the INS Province). I believe that this is the kind of ministry given to Brothers—based on my life experience and observations of others. It may be because of a grave

need. Inadequate training, education, or qualifications could be the cause. It takes time for the Brothers too to become accustomed to their ministry, but eventually they are devoted, accustomed and satisfied with such efforts that they continue as long as possible.

In my opinion, the problem is that in due course, younger Brothers blindly follow and accept the responsibilities of the seniors regardless of their talent in another area. Even after the silver jubilee of the vows, these young Brothers started to think they needed to switch over to the priesthood if they wanted to do other types of ministry. In addition to this, both the Brothers and the provincial administration rarely think of any other type of ministry for Brothers for the next generation.

There's no better time than now to come up with some innovative ministries for the Brothers of SVD in India. It is difficult for the Catholic young people to join the Brotherhood under the present mode of ministry. In South India, my personal understanding is that the Catholics believe that Brothers are lifelong assistants to the Priests and are therefore reluctant to send their sons to the Brotherhood. The present type

of ministry is hardly visible to the catholic population, diocesan clergy and religious women (religious sisters) to promote vocations to the Brotherhood.

Brothers, I urge you to get educated, trained, equipped, and specialized to get involved in other ministries such as formation, preaching, pioneer

missionary training, education, spiritual animation, retreat preaching, and so on. In order to increase Brother vocations and to inspire others through our various ministries, we should pray to our Saint Arnold Janssen for intercession in encouraging our Brothers to venture into new fields.

SVD BROTHERS: THE SHIFT FROM TRADES TO THE PASTORAL

Fr. Eduardo Machado (MEX)

1. What outdated features of SVD (Brother) life have you observed?

It is interesting how our congregation began mainly with the Brothers, currently we are mostly priests. Formerly the SVD Brothers worked in tasks such as: kitchen, mechanics, carpenters, gardening, printing, Typing, photography, Bookbinding, turners, watchmakers, Electrician, baker, butchers, Tailor, Nurses, Dentist, Shoemaker, porters and builders. His work was always highly valued and necessary. They

lived in community, in fraternity and life in common, the simplicity of serving, praying with humility and cultivating personal prayer abounded in them. Later, with the expansion of the congregation to other countries, the SVD Brothers began to adopt more ministries, social and professional jobs, according to the needs of each mission to which they were sent.

2. Which of these should be retained, which should be eliminated, and which should be renewed?

All of the above are important, in religious life they are identity as SVDs. It is important to maintain a spirituality focused on human and psychic growth that makes a whole (full) person possible. That is why the SVD Brothers must maintain the initial essence that characterized them from the beginning of the congregation, obviously adapting to the challenges that concern them in the mission: the cultural environment, pastoral work and the use of technology. Within their renewal, the SVD Brothers must be involved in the needs of the local Church, but, above all, enhancing the role of the laity so as not to continue strengthening clericalism, and also, enter into social projects in which they can infuse the identity of being religious, Christian and missionary not only from ecclesial structures.

NO LOCAL BROTHERS IN OUR PROVINCE

Fr. Bill Burt (AUS)

I continue to be very impressed by the Forum editors' determination to ensure that our SVD Brothers get the best support possible as they live-out their vocation.

Sadly, Australia Province has not had any local vocations to the Brotherhood for many years. We have two Brothers working in Thailand, and one in mainland Australia. All are senior men. They are active and contribute much to the SVD mission, but there is no one to succeed them. Given this situation, I regret that I am unable to answer either of your questions.

BROTHER FORMATION IN THE SVD ENDE PROVINCE

Br. Fransiskus Bako (IDE)

Generally, I can say that putting the Brothers into a specific work or field is relevant. However as far as the formation house for Brotherhood is concerned, I think that many things need improvement.

1. First, the formators. In the Brotherhood formation house today, some formators are not prepared for such assignments and responsibilities. They are not well prepared and trained. For me, the formators for Brotherhood formation should learn or study philosophy, psychology, and psychospirituality so that they can guide and wform the candidates according to the needs and the guidelines of the SVD Society. Due to lack of knowledge, the formators form the candidates according to “their will and desire”, and not according to the needs and the guidelines of the Society. In another case, the formators become authoritative and do not listen to the suggestions and concerns from other people.

2. Secondly, Brotherhood formation is long. The formation time for Brotherhood vocations, as least before the candidate professes his perpetual profession is long. This long formation weakens the cognitive side of the candidates. That is experienced when they are sent by the Society for further study in universities and colleges. Psychologically they are mature but academically, they are weak and cannot compete with other students in the universities or colleges where are sent to study.

3. Third, lack of facilities. Our formation house does not have enough facilities for the candidates to develop their talents. Our rooms are unpresentable. They look like a “dormitory”. For me, the formation house for Brothers today should be shaped according to the signs of the times. It should be done in a way that is compatible with the backgrounds of the candidates who are millennials. It should prioritize the humanity of the candidates.

There are also points to be maintained.

For me, things to be maintained are the quality and human maturity of the Brothers amid Modern challenges and vast development in almost all sectors of human life. The Brothers must be sent for studies in the fields that are relevant today. If it is possible, they can be sent for further study such as postgraduate or doctorate.

What points are to be removed from Brotherhood formation?

The point to be taken into consideration or to be removed is the system or form how formators are assigned for Brotherhood formation without considering the quality or the background of the designated formator. It is inadvisable to put the formators who do not have enough knowledge and understanding of the nature of Brotherhood formation. It is also inadvisable to put someone in the Brotherhood formation just because he was a formandi and underwent Brotherhood formation. We need to consider the background of the confrere before he is assigned as a formator in the formation house of the Brothers.

Points to be improved are those points that I have mentioned above. Those concerns especially with regards to our formation program ware based on my observation as a Brother candidate who is undergoing formation now.

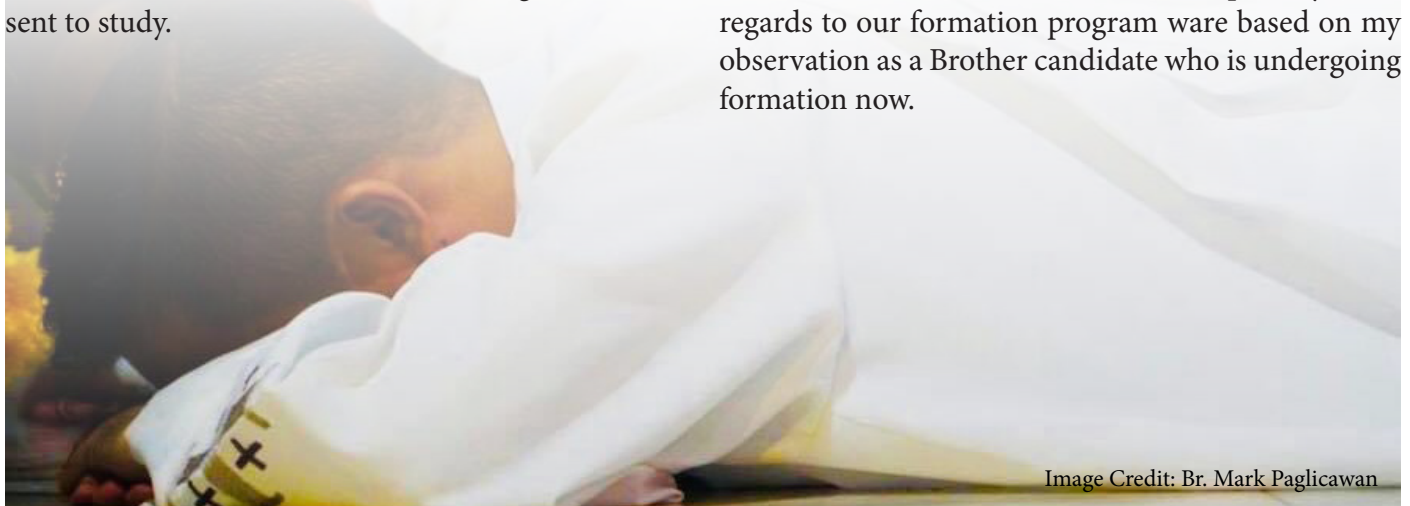


Image Credit: Br. Mark Paglicawan



THE FORGOTTEN BROTHER...

Br. Ron Fratzke (AUS)

Image Credit: Freepik.com

Over the years, the outdated feature(s) of the SVD Brother that I believe has done the most harm, is the image of the “good Brother” that has been conjured up, and perpetuated by Brothers and priests alike. That being the quiet, humble, the silent and hidden Brother. The Brother who is at the service of the entire community, first in the chapel, and last to leave, the Brother who doesn’t mind cooking the meals, washing the dishes, and taking care of the Fathers without voice, and without complaint.

I don’t remember how many SVD events that I have attended over the years, whether jubilee celebrations, vows celebrations, ordinations, funerals, church dedications, the Provincial, Rector or pastor gets up to welcome the attendees. “Welcome, Bishop, SVD Fathers, dear Sisters, friends and mission partners to this celebration...” But guess who was forgotten? The SVD Brother(s) in attendance, who, chances are, are the ones who made all the arrangements for the celebration or may have physically set everything up, prepared the food and beverages. “The forgotten Brother” should be eliminated from the SVD.

The other practice that should be eliminated from the SVD, is that a Brother must receive an indult from the Vatican/Sacred Congregation before they can be appointed to leadership/Service positions in the SVD. We hear it all the time, that it’s not a problem for the SVD to appoint a Brother to a position of leadership,

but that it’s a problem from the Holy See. And I know that the SVD Generalate was “brave” in the past to actually appoint wa Brother as Provincial, but of course the Holy See knocked it back. If this “problem” or “issue” effected the appointment of priest confreres to leadership positions, the Union of Superiors General would be camped out at the Vatican until the problem was “fixed”.

But the problem will be “fixed” soon enough, as there will not be any Brothers left in the SVD to appoint as superiors because they’ll be either dead, or too old to serve. There are now less than 500 SVD Brothers in the Society, and of those remaining there would be not many more than 250 Brothers under the age of 50 years old in the SVD, if you have a quick look at the most recent 2021 SVD Catalogus. Please eliminate the need for an indult, it’s an insult and belittling.

The last point being, is that I don’t understand why the SVD is rushing headlong into lay partners, elevating them as defacto members, when we have not even solved canonical issues with Brothers within the congregation, what status if any will lay partners have in the SVD? Let’s get our own house in order first. Much progress will be made when Brother Priests see the problems effecting Brothers, as problems affecting them as well.

I am truly proud to be an SVD Brother!

I WAS LITERALLY SHOCKED!

Br. Friedbert Ewertz (GER)

Greetings from the St. Wendel Mission House! I'm Br. Friedbert Ewertz, formerly in Steyl, now in St. Wendel in the SVD Retirement Home: I'm not here because of my age, but more because of my health. I am amazed at the effort the Editors of the SVD Brothers Forum have shown over the years for the Brothers in the SVD!

Without addressing the individual accents in this important topic, I would like to express my own personal opinion. If we do not develop a great appreciation of our vocation, and above all, a deep internalized relationship to Jesus, to God, to the Church and to the real urgency of bringing the people to Jesus, who is God himself, to our mission, then I see no future for us Brothers! You notice where I see my focus. I was extremely astonished when I came back from China after 18 years of work. I was literally shocked by the huge number of "Nulli stationi adscripti" confreres" to be found in the Catalogus ...!

What's going on there...? If we do not get enthusiasm for our calling, I see black ...!

There are a lot of social questions. What kept me and what kept me in my calling, also is my personal calling. This calling and relationship to Jesus must be cultivated, otherwise we will not find the strength to persevere in times of tension and crises! We know the statistics from the USA that marriages concluded before the government broke up in 50%. But marriages that were contracted in the church with partners who celebrated the religious service together on Sundays and prayed together at home divorced only in 0.02%. Isn't that an important and urgent learning for us SVDs as well? Social aspects and matters are not the most important thing in keeping the vocation. The spiritual, very personal bond to Christ has been in my mind as the most urgent thing to remain in our vocation. Perhaps it is possible to work on this with urgency—why would God then refuse our prayers for new SVD vocations?

As you can see, I have now sent you something from my heart. I think it is my concern to communicate this to the Forums' readers. I wish the Forum editors God's blessings in your work! May God keep you!

EQUAL RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Br. Kim Jong Bong (KOR)

What OUTDATED FEATURES of SVD (Brother) life have I observed? Discrimination between the Clergy and Brothers, especially in financial, liturgical and ministerial areas.

Which of these should be RETAINED, which should be ELIMINATED, and which should be RENEWED? Equal rights and opportunities should be retained. Discrimination in finances, liturgical opportunities and ministry should be eliminated once and for all.

Regarding us here, nothing special is to be renewed since things are going on well in Korea Region.

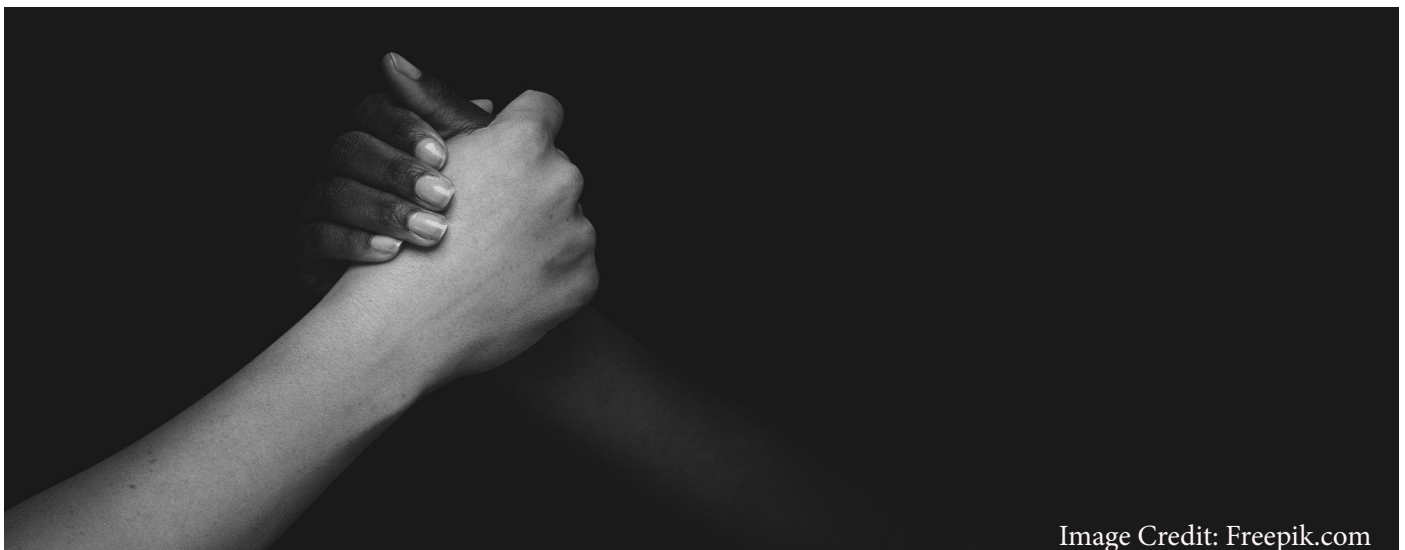


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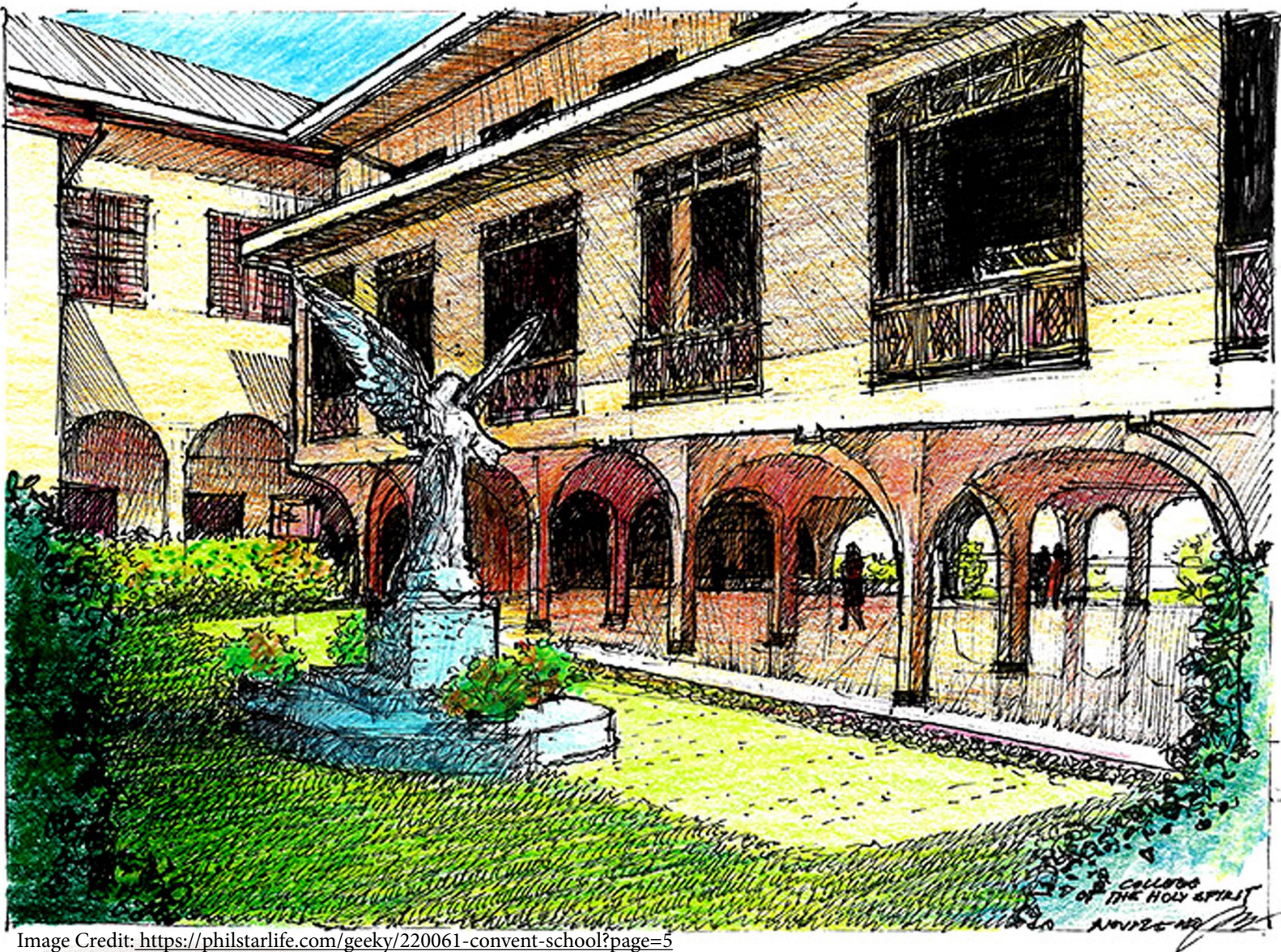


Image Credit: <https://philstarlife.com/geeky/220061-convent-school?page=5>

THE ANGEL COURTYARD AT THE COLLEGE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN MANILA

...AND WE ARE CHANGING WITH THE TIMES!

Br. Bela Lanyi SVD (PHS)

“*Tempora mutantur and nos mutamur in illis*”, said the ancient Latin adage. In English: “Times change and we change with them”. And this remains true. The most difficult challenges for that confront us in three fields. First: the people who lead us and our successors. Second: the built environment where we live. Third: the food that we eat. Let us take them one after the other. Why is so much challenge here? We love the way how our formator formed us—that’s why we are around. We love our formation houses as they were built. We love the food that we could eat when we were young. But times are changing and we have to give up some outdated ideals in order to find responses to the signs of today.

1. The first challenge is the outdated call for “full-time formators”, in particular in the SVD Brother Formation—when the number of formandi quickly decreases! If we have twenty five (25) formandi, before or after postulancy/noviciate, the care of a good full-time formator will mean a quality formation. But if the number of formandi decreases to just a few Brother candidates, the call for “full-time formators” is counterproductive. Formators without other tasks will just focus on “control” or would find own “apostolates” to fill the time. The move for full-time formators when the number of formandi is very small, can be traced back to an outdated adherence to “good old times” or to “a need for control”.

If it is so, then we can understand why the number of formandi decreases. Instead of forcing the presence of full-time formators, the signs of the times call for the presence of sensitive part-time formators who can be natural models for the formandi. At the end effect, the SVD Brothers are multi-tasking workers—and their formators should show how this multi-tasking work can be realized in the conditions of religious missionary lifestyle.

2. “Unfortunately, the College of the Holy Spirit Manila (CHSM) is closing in 2022, probably because of the effects of the pandemic. Alumni of the school are concerned about the status of the school’s heritage buildings. Hopefully the sisters get to maintain the campus and its landmark buildings,” so *The Philippine Star* (see the image on page 14) I think it is not just by accident that the alumni of the school are „concerned” since there are abandoned (or half-abandoned) beautiful buildings which used to be run by religious congregations. I would say that we, Arnoldus Family, need a renewal regarding our approach toward real estate management and in particular, the adaptive reuse of our old buildings. This has a lot to do with us Brothers who invested so much physical work in these buildings. Having read my article in *Verbum SVD* on the partial adaptive reuse of Mission House St. Gabriel in Austria, an elderly German priest confrere asked me if I can see a hope so that the exemplary thinking of “Gabrielpers”

could spread in countries where we have underused buildings: heritage buildings or not heritage buildings. Courage is only one factor which has to be connected with a realistic assessment of these buildings. In fact, I could list up here many other practical activities of the Society that needs to be renewed. (*) <https://philstarlife.com/geeky/220061-convent-school?page=5>

3. Nutrition would also be an area for renewal, to a great satisfaction of the Treasurers since healthy food eliminates unnecessary medical expenses. Our confreres with medical education (nurses, medical students, medical doctors) sometimes try to convince us but their professional recommendation is frequently overridden by the voice of our cooks and the well-known taste of our usual (unhealthy) food.

It will be useful for our mission to consider the signs of the times coming from sober considerations.



BECAUSE IF I DON'T MAKE THE DECISION...

Br. Karl Schaarschmidt (KEN)

Brother Karl gave this message during the SVD Philippines Brothers Assembly. “I was in the Philippines from 1972 to 1984. Many of you were not yet born at that time. I liked the Philippines and I liked my work. We were three (3) Brothers in a big carpentry shop in Christ the King Mission House in Quezon City (National Capital Region, Philippines). Br. Richard, the founder of this carpentry was already old. Then Br. Wunibald, the general manager, and myself. The carpentry was growing to a factory with 300 employees. We made school and church furniture for the local market, and started to make export products for export Japan and the US. This was supporting the Seminary in Christ the King and the major seminary in Tagaytay.

In the year 1978 the General Manager Br. Wunibald left the congregation and I became the General Manager. Our production went on, and we were known for our quality products. We were even awarded a certificate in Hongkong, as the best and biggest wood products manufacturer and exporter in “Far East Asia”. But the time had come that the wood supply in the Philippines became scarce and we had to think about the future for this factory. We needed plenty of mahogany wood to fill the containers with wood products every month. In the year 1982, a Province Chapter of the Philippines Central Province took place where I together with Fr. Leo Schmitt submitted a document to elaborate during the meeting.

We recommended that we should sell this factory, because it had no future. The wood was scarce, the buildings were too old—so I would resign in 2 years. But the old Fathers did not want to close it. Because many of them were supported in their studies by this carpentry shop. But I felt that the time had come so that we have to close. Because if I would not make this decision, the issue will never come to an end. For many years, the carpentry was a good service to the Society, but the TIMES CHANGED and the Province had to make a decision. The best thing was to sell.

Anyway, two years had passed and so, in 1984 I went for my spiritual renewal to Nemi Rome. Fr.

Fuellenbach was the director of the course, and we had long discussions together about my future. Since I love the Philippines, I would have preferred to go back—but not anymore to that factory. Fr. Fuellenbach advised me: “If you do not want to go back to that factory, than don’t go back to the Philippines. You might be in a far away island, but if they get problems with that factory, they will ask you to come back. Since you are a religious, you can’t refuse. So you better do not go back.” That time it was hard for me, but I had to ask for a new assignment, preferably to be part of a new foundation.

Question from Br. Noel Tecson SVD: “Brother Karl, how was your transition? You were trained in woodworks. And you were convinced of the change and you went to another, less prestigious mission. Did you get another work there? Was that transition easy?”

“You see, in the Philippines, I was the general manager of a big factory. I used to be invited by embassy people and other high officials. Then, you know, I was going to Africa. There was an assignment to start a new mission station in the desert of the North Eastern province in Kenya. My friends were wondering and said, you came from a big town and now you go to the desert. But for me it was very nice and I liked it. The burdens of business fell away. The struggles and pressure every month to be ready for shipment. There was a lot of pressure in the factory, in the business. But now it was a different life. It is, actually, what I like. It was always my wish to go into construction and building in the mission, and to be creative. I felt again new strength and eager to do something new. The district in Kenya Garba Tulla was all Islamic and a difficult area for priests but a good place for Brothers to start a training center and teach the nomads other skills and with that to do basic mission work. I was 12 years in the Philippines and I enjoyed it. Now I am in a different world in Africa, already 36 years, still planning and building schools, hospitals, and churches—and I feel satisfied and happy.



LAST WORDS FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Confreres,

Peace!

Thank you for reading and contributing to this issue. The next issue will be published in September 2021. The guide questions will reach you on July 31, 2021.

For the meantime, please write comments on the present issue and/or suggest topics for the coming issues. We will be very happy to publish your insights. Moreover, we would deeply appreciate it if you could also attach some photos of you as you send us your articles.

Please do send your comments and suggestions to this email address:
blanyi@usc.edu.ph

You can write in any of the following languages:
English, Spanish, Bahasa Indonesia, German, and Polish.

In the Divine Word,

Your SVD Brothers in Cebu City

