



svd brothers
FORUM

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The Bearers of
HOPE

Table of CONTENTS

FOREWORD_1

Br. Darwin Loro (PHS)

CONTRIBUTIONS:

W-U-H-A-N: MY LIFE-JOURNEY DURING E.C.Q/E.G.C.Q_2

Sr. Meriam Legaspi, SSpS (PHS)

A YEAR OF NEW BEGINNINGS AND RENEWALS_4

Br. Stephen Bonsu (GHA)

REVALUATION_5

Br. Angelo Figueroa (COL)

2020 WAS A YEAR OF CREATIVITY_6

Fr. Luis Antonio Vergara (CAM)

SUFFERING_7

Br. Kim Bong Jong (KOR)

ANXIOUS AND GLORIOUS_7

Br. Ruel Bancoro (PHS)

TO BECOME AN ANCHOR IN CORONA TIMES_8

Br. Stefan Wuerth (GEN)

ENJOY LIFE HERE AND NOW!_9

Sr. Maite Knomawi (Cebu)

“ACCEPT YOUR IMPERFECTION“ IS A POIGNANT ONE_10

*Br. Rolland Andriamampionona
(KEN)*

MANY SURPRISES!_12

Br. Ludwig Scharenberg (BRN)

FULL OF GRACE_12

Br. Legisius Oki (IDE)

A NEW NEST_12

Br. Bela Lanyi (PHS)

LIVING AND LEAVING THE WILDERNESS_13

Br. Bernie Spitzley (USC)

TIMES OF NEW DISCOVERIES_14

*Sr. Fernanda de Fatima Manuel,
SSpS (Cebu)*

AN ILLUMINATING EXPERIENCE_15

Fr. Eduardo Macho (MEX)

A YEAR OF RESETS_16

*Sr. Iva Dica Aginiveitala, SSpS
(Cebu)*

REACTIONS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE_17

Fr. Larry Nemer (AUS)

FAREWELL TO OUR DEAR BROTHER EGAY_17

Br. Darwin Loro (PHS)

LAST WORDS FROM THE EDITORS_19

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 to the questions below:

1. Give 2020 a name! 2020 was a year of...
2. What experience in 2020 contributed the most to your vocation and identity?
3. How did 2020 shape our Society, in particular the Brothers in it?

The EDITORIAL TEAM

Br. Bela Lanyi

Editor

Translator (German and Polish)

Proofreader

Br. Carlos Ferrada

Translator (Spanish)

Br. Hubertus Guru

Translator (Bahasa Indonesia)

Br. Mark Paglicawan

Art Director

Mr. Crisfer Autentico

Layout Artist

Br. Carlos Milos Bulilan

Br. Darwin Loro

Supervisors

Fr. Rogelio Bag-ao

Publisher

FOREWORD

Many of us missionaries have been devoting our time, serving in various ministries. We have become bearers of hope in the midst of pain and affliction. We have discovered our real calling, to comfort and minister to those who are in need. We continue to pray for guidance as we dedicate our lives. We hope to remain steadfast and seek to maintain an intimate relationship with God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God.” Indeed, despite the challenging times, we are not left alone, because God is always with us.

The year 2020 was plague with a lot of uncertainties big or small alike. The most dominant reminder for me of last year was the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that paralyzed almost all countries and territories in the world. Daily news showed how case numbers were growing at an accelerating pace. Every person and family was affected in different ways.

The consequences of the lockdown like suspension of classes in the school where I am stationed, were enormous. The people were left feeling stressed, anxious, and powerless. Many became hypersensitive to different issues aside from sickness and loneliness. Some of our family members and relatives, lay partners, SSsP sisters, including SVD confreres, have been infected with Covid-19 and recovered. Sadly, there were also some individuals who have succumbed to the virus. We become more aware of our own mortality with news readily accessible through radio or television networks. The internet has been the most popular source of media stories. On a positive note, we have capitalized on social media and internet to stream. Masses and provide other means of spiritual nourishment. Our physical health, mental and social well-being are richly blessed when we pray and find a way to reflect and commune with God.

Although, we are still in the midst of this health pandemic, we know for sure that there is a silver lining awaiting us if we open up our hearts and heed the call to action. Governments and health authorities have issued guidelines to help protect us from contracting the virus. Pope Francis' third encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* (All Brothers), calls us to unite. We are invited to build a better, more just and peaceful world through universal fraternity and social friendship. Therefore, let us continue reaching out to build healthy communities, and we, too, need to be healthy ourselves.

May this Lenten spiritual journey nourish us and prepare us for the coming Feast of Christ's Glorious Resurrection.

Keep well and take care!

Br. Darwin Loro
National Director of SVD Brother Formation in the Philippines





Image Credit: <https://theconversation.com/>

W-U-H-A-N: MY LIFE-JOURNEY DURING E.C.Q/ E.G.C.Q

Sr. Meriam Legaspi, SSpS (PHS)

COVID-19 which originated in **WUHAN** made everyone and the world anxious, worried and in panic. No Covid-19 could stop me from believing that with the Corona (Crown) of Christ who has risen, the pandemic will come to an end. In faith, I am certain that **Christ Overcomes Virus Infectious Disease** in God's appointed time.

Let me share with you my ECQ (Enhanced Community Quarantine) and EGCQ (Enhanced General Community Quarantine) journey since March 16, 2020.

God has been and is continuously **calling/inviting** me to:

Worry Not .God said to me: *"You are worth more than a sparrow".*

The situations of being in Lockdown, in ECQ paved the way to a deepening of trust to the One who said: "Don't WORRY... WORRY NOT because "I am worth more than a sparrow". I am worth protecting and sparing from danger. This powerful words of Jesus kept on haunting my consciousness and assured me time and again and became my unending consolation and comfort. There is no other way than to put my TOTAL TRUST in this GOD. "Worrying is never a solution in life".(as of March)

Use God-given 3Ts (TIME, TREASURE, TALENTS & Skills) for deepening of **connections**. What a paradox: I am isolated yet pretty sure connected. The ECQ which started in March 16 (Cebu City) invited me to make use responsibly and creatively of the gift of time, treasure, talents-skills that I have. I had more time to intensify and deepen my personal relationship with my God in varied and creative forms. Opportunities such as community prayers and twice a day adoration, personal adoration @ dawn, regular time for silence and solitude with fasting 2-3x a week and other ways to connect with God and the world were made possible with the guidance and inspiration of the Spirit within. Planning and facilitating distribution of "goodies" (3x) for our hungry sisters and brothers, in spite of the situation, all has been made possible. No protocols could stop me/us from reaching out to the most affected in this time of pandemic. All of these experiences have challenged me/us to do what I/we ought to do and entrust our safety and security to the only **One Source, the God of Life and Relationships/Connections** whose law of love holds no bounds and time limits.

Hope in God/**H**old on to God

Like anyone else in distress in this time of pandemic, I tremendously struggled deep within me even with just thinking that "life" moves the unusual and unpredictable way. I felt I was "locked in" (deep inside). I was "hindered" to travel, to go out of the convent because of ECQ and the many protocols to follow and for the fact that my schedule to fly back to Tacloban City has been cancelled many times.

My flight was rebooked for eight times already as of April 2020 and I began wrestling and quarreling with God; and questioning God's ways. The many times I went to the *Barangay Health Center* for my travel

authority pass, etc. walking (to and fro) under the heat of the sun, taking a bath right after and isolate myself for a day or more when I get home have been literally a “calvary” experience” for me. All the unusual and unfamiliar experiences I’ve been through have turned my “inner world” upside down. As if I were in the company of those who journeyed with Jesus all the way to his crucifixion. A fitting time anyhow before the Holy Week 2020. No giving up, no turning my back away from the process, that was the recurring melody in my heart because I was convinced of the God who is true to his promises. Truly, God made me endure and graced me with the consciousness that all that I’ve been through are “redeeming sacrifices”. God during these days has been inviting me to keep me rooted in Him, have hope and faith in him, let go of what has been, deal with and live the present time which we call “the new normal” and with all its uncertainties. HOLD ON to God/HOPE in God who is the Absolute in-charge and in control of everything. God is the only CERTAIN in this uncertain time. God’s word through the prophet Jeremiah keeps ringing in my heart today: “I have plans for you, plans for your welfare and good future and not for disaster”. What an assurance!

Acknowledge and Appreciate with gratitude the many channels of God’s care, generosity and love. The people, events and the many tangible opportunities to see/experience God’s abiding and providential love. I acknowledge the members of my family (loved-ones) in Mindanao, Philippines who regularly updated me and are continuously keeping me posted up to now about the situation in my home province.

I thank the SSpS Provincial House community with the Provincial Leadership Team for being my companion during the 3 months in quarantine (2020 March 16-June 16). The quarantine birthday celebration treats on March 28, carefully expressed in varied forms, enabled me to see anew the most “essentials” in my life. Thanks to the SVD confreres-LVD community, Tacloban City who adopted my sister-companions, considering them for the time being as members of their community while I was miles away from them.

Indeed, God has a plan for me. On June 16, exactly three months of being physically disconnected from my mission place, I was able to “fly” back home, to Tacloban and reconnected with my community –the SSpS Blessed Josepha Community, my home-away-

from HOME and back to work at Liceo del Verbo Divino with the SVDs- St. Paul community. Life indeed is filled with blessing and so I’m called to continue appreciating/acknowledging God’s blessings in my life.



Newness of perspective/outlook in life, in my personal life, and in community life brought about by the pandemic.

Newness of ways to connect to the Mystery, to the Source of all LIFE.

Newness of expression of my Personal Experience of God, of faith, hope and love for God and God’s beloved (the anawim of our times) and creation.

Newness of Being in and Doing mission/ministries as SSpS

Newness of Living out my vowed life as SSpS

Newness of approach in Relating with self, God, creation and others especially the “needy” “inside our religious communities (SSpS and co-workers) and outside the four walls of our convents. An an ending invitation to be and live.(Easter...and as of May)

The **W.U.H.A.N** of my journey in 2020 was, is and will continue to be an invitation to be mindful of the experiences of the **E.G.C.Q.**

(**E**-xtraordinary ways of **G**-od,
C-oncretely communicating
to me **Q**-ualitatively and quietly.)

Image Credit: Ms. Dionelou Queen Bellista



A YEAR OF NEW BEGINNINGS AND RENEWALS.

Br. Stephen Bonsu (GHA)

The name for 2020 is considered a year of new beginnings and renewals. 2020 was heavily defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to global social and economic disruption, mass cancellations and postponements of events, worldwide lockdowns and the largest economic recession since the beginning of the pandemic. 2020 was a terrible year. But the world is in better shape than you might think.

The pandemic, for instance, stalled efforts to solve any number of scientific achievements. But it also covered up a string of accomplishments -- and ensured that we spent far more time focusing on a new health crisis, rather than celebrating the fact that others are slowly but surely nearing an end.

The empty year. The year of no traffic. But the streets were not always empty. So was it the year of protests. The year of human lives, the year of justice deferred, or all three? The lockdown year, layoff year, the year of the long vacation for students. The year of solitude. We must not overlook that it was the year of the election in Ghana. We could call it the year of the nose mask, or perhaps the year of no mask, or even the year of righteous indignation, although cable news has been selling that commodity for a lot longer than a year.

Of course we could keep it simple with the year of the Pandemic. Or even just the year of death. The crying year. Should it be the year of healing? The year of understanding and compassion. The year we learned charity one for the other. The year of mutual aid. The year of hope. I Think 2020 has been bad so far. For example, those who saved, survived. Despite the challenges, thousands of small businesses farms, shops, and taverns did manage to survive.

Vocation is one's response to a call from beyond oneself to use one's strengths and gifts to make

the world a better place through service, creativity, and leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic has given me an experience in 2020 that contributed the most to my vocation and my identity. I always advised my students to observe the coronavirus protocols frequent washing of hands, using the hand sanitizer, and wearing of nose masks. This will help reduced the infection. I tried my best to give hand sanitizer to some students who dont have. Talking to my students about their health and the environment. I deem it great fulfilment in this experience as I am involved in this particular task in helping the students in seeing the dangers of COVID-19.

COVID-19 and other outbreaks of disease have transformed many lives. 2020 has shaped our Society, in particular, the coronavirus has made the brothers to take care of their health by observing the coronavirus protocols frequent washing of hands with soap, using the hand sanitizer, and wearing of nose masks. The 2020 shape our Society, in particular the Brothers have increased their state of giving charity to the poor and needy who lost their jobs.

REVALUATION

Br. Angelo Figueroa (COL)

2020 was a year to re-evaluate the importance of life in all its realities: spiritual, economic and social. Recognize that our life is fleeting and very fragile, and that everything acquired in economic terms did not help us buy health and happiness in the face of this global debacle.

I believe that 2020 was a year where as a society we could feel the need of each other help; that altruistic tendency that we carry as human beings was awakened at the moment of accepting that we live in community and that as a community we must remain united.



Image Credit: Mr. Crisfer Autentico

This year I was able to experience even more the value of life, and the grace of God in the passing of my life as a religious missionary. Knowing that there is a God who accompanies me in every step I take and the experiential richness that I am acquiring every day. Being alive by the grace of God motivates me to continue proclaiming Him in every space around me through my words and my actions.

The solidarity manifested in 2020 gave us to understand that, despite being from different cultures, ideologies, religion or races, we are all: brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same creator.

It has been a very interesting year, since it brought us closer together, both in prayer and in community life; valuing in this way the wealth of each confrere in the construction of a more fraternal community.

CERTITUDE AND COURAGE

Br. Eugenio Orog (PHC)

2020 was a year of doubts, uncertainties and or even fear. Because of pandemic we were losing out our grip of identity and anatomy. Authorities are telling us to do this, avoid that, accept this reject that maintain this, give up that, wear face mask/shield, and stay at home unless very very necessary to go out. It seems they are depriving us to decide on what we truly

believe and value. Then we simply have to parrot what we are told or what we hear, are we becoming a robot? On the other hand, we are fearful that we might be the next victim.

We must understand that the Lord of life is not the coronavirus nor its medical science. God has given us the gift of reason and discernment. He allows us to discover new medications. So this the reason of our optimism and resilience. However, we ought to follow precautions to prevent the spread of the infections. Thus at the same

time human effort is only temporary thing. We must learn to entrust ourselves to Christ. He is the only one who is certain. Understandably we are afraid that we might be the next victim—resulting to paralyzing fear and/or even suicide. Suicide is not the permanent solution to a temporary problem.

The bible says the source of all fear is the devil. He wants us to be anxious, fearful, depressed and uncertain. And Jesus assures us: "Fear not I have overcome the world." We only try our best and He will do the rest.

Our Society is shaped now to be more trusting with Jesus—the Divine Word. Concerted efforts are necessary than ever. No more "lone ranger" style of doing our mission. We need each other as one body of Christ. Is it not this is our vocation as Brothers, Brother to all people in thick or in thin? But this can only be possible if we have that faith conviction and communitarian mindedness. No doubt the pandemic has brought us back to the basics of our religious missionary life. And Jesus assures us: "I am with you always until the end of time." Courage



2020 WAS A YEAR OF CREATIVITY

Fr. Luis Antonio Vergara (CAM)

The experience of the year 2020 contributed to my vocation. We have to break away with the ordinary routine to be able to reach out to all our parishioners. All year round we had Bible courses using the online zoom platform.

The Eucharist was broadcast using YouTube, and two other online radio stations. Since our parishioners couldn't come to Mass, we arranged to have communion express at the carpark. There were people who were ready to help those who couldn't get enough food. They were assisted as they were provided with food parcel, medicine or transportation.

On the other hand, we were amazed to see that many refugees left their homes to search for food. The situation made us aware of another social reality that we had ignored. The year 2020 shaped our SVD identity as priests and Brothers; we were challenged to get out of our comfort zone to serve others.

SUFFERING

Br. Kim Bong Jong (KOR)

2020 was a year of suffering due to Corona Pandemic. No activities and ministries. Cloistered to the house most of the time.

It gave me a lot of time to pray, think, loneliness and get deeper into my vocation after the challenges of loneliness, void and no ministry.

Since there was no much activity/ministry the Society was in a kind of sleeping stage. But from the perspective of community, there was more interaction, sharing and at times conflicts.

ANXIOUS AND GLORIOUS 2020

Br. Ruel Bancoro (PHS)

We get anxious for something we do not know; we fear anything unknown. That was 2020 for us! It was an anxiety-filled year, a year of never-ending questions. I was halfway in my second year of OTP in Kenya-Tanzania SVD Province when a series of life-changing events took place. The first was the eruption of Taal Volcano in our province of Batangas (Philippines). Our house is short of a kilometer outside the 14-km radius where people were advised to evacuate. The prospect of leaving our houses was stressful indeed for my family. And for me, I wanted to take the next flight home. That was not going to happen though because of the novel coronavirus looming around South East Asia. Taal volcano ashes gave way to Covid-19 virus. That means that the people in our town had been wearing masks way earlier than the rest of us did.

2020 started with a threat to the physical and mental well-being of people. Trump contributed somehow in international stage; local politicians as well. The uncertainties linger until now. What with all the questions about vaccines, the mutating variants and the unpreparedness of local and national governments. I remember that at the end of 2019 I wished that the coming 2020 will provide some kind of clarity to our circumstances as I compared it to the medical definition of 20/20 where normally visual acuity is at its



Image Credit: <https://www.canva.com/>



sharpest when measured at a distance of 20 feet. But at the end of 2020, I realized that we just experienced the most uncertain period of our life and we have not seen any silver lining as of yet.

2020 is a game-changer for religious-missionaries. It made us wear what we do not want to wear (masks) and took us where we do not want to go (or stay when and where we are most uncomfortable of staying still). A reminiscent of Jesus' words to Peter that he will be dressed of clothes not of his own choice and be led to a place where he does not want to go. It was to indicate how Peter ought to die and would glorify God in the process. May our experience of anxiety from 2020 be a ground work for a more glorious future as religious-missionaries as we face the common challenges ahead and remain steadfast in our hope for holistic healing.

In early 2020, I was officially allowed to shift to clerical track from brotherhood formation and transfer to another province (Australia). I would have to write pages upon pages to even start to narrate how I get to that point. I think the shortest way to put it is that with God's grace, I realized that He calls us in different capacities, in His own different times and in His own different purposes. The theology of being Brother was

reinforced in me along the way and it secured me well in my formation and ministries. I can say that I will always be a Brother in my heart. But after my 2-year brotherhood formation in Cebu where I immersed myself as an outreach physician and after my 2-year OTP in Africa in urban slums and some bush mission



exposures, I am resolved that I am being called now to start my formation to be a cleric. When I applied for this change in status, I also reflected that I should allow God to lead me wherever He wants me to go. After all, He is a God of surprises and He will eventually lead where I want (or does not want) to go. I ponder it will always be for my best interest and it soothes my anxiety somehow. I can only hope that it will always be for His glory.



TO BECOME AN ANCHOR IN CORONA TIMES

Br. Stefan Wuerth (GEN)

A retrospect on the year 2020 of my work with addicted and long-term unemployed people, regarding the pandemic that has changed the life and work of each of us. It is about the recognition, what we did out of the difficult situation. And about the way how we understood what really matters now, especially for us Christians and religious!

In mid-March 2020, the lockdown was suddenly in Germany there. Our work was stopped. Many questions came up and only a few answers were there. As a community in Hamburg we put ourselves together and implemented new rules according to the requirements. Since we are used to rules in the Order, this change was hardly a problem. I have Lent, Easter and Pentecost experienced more clearly and intensely than in previous years! I wasn't allowed to be active with my participants until mid-May but I could still use the time well for repairs and meetings with our new socio-educational specialist. I was also with some participants often in telephone contact. The work restarted again in mid-May, with a clear hygiene concept and time-shifted working hours (50% started at 7 a.m., 50% at 8 a.m. and each of them worked five hours). As a result, we instructors were kept busy and there was also overtime. Starting in mid-July we were able to go back to our normal daily routine. Of course, the hygiene concept has now become an important part and it will remain like that still for a long time. By now there has been no case of infection among us, we have been spared. This was also a question of good luck. During my assignment as an instructor I'm the first at the location in the morning (5 a.m.) and the first participant arrives at 5:30. Then little by little all the other ones arrive. They know that I am there and this gives them security. On the question of a participant where I get the strength and security for that, I answered the following. I am a believer and this faith gives me the strength to be in stay calm and patient in this time. With this foundation of life, what I have built up so far, I have found an inner balance for myself. He meant then, I would be a kind of anchor for him and others. I think this is a new task for us in now pastoral care today: being an anchor for people around us. And this can lead to new paths open up for us to approach people again, precisely because of and despite social distancing caused by Corona!



ENJOY LIFE IN THE HERE AND NOW!

Sr. Maite Knomawi, SSpS (Cebu)

What experience in 2020 contributed the most to my vocation and identity? The COVID-19 crisis and self-reflection on this new world. As I continue to practice social distancing, use coverings, wash my hands, disinfect, I am also able to look back with a crisp perspective on my past in Cebu.

However, as the first and as of now, the only Vanuatu-born SSPS. Born in the Republic of Vanuatu, one of the

tiny countries in the Pacific, I am happily spending my time in the Philippines during this time of the Covid-19 pandemic. I have been favoured by God with a call to the religious-missionary life.

Last year, I had the privilege to join the International in Cebu, Philippines South Province. We were 8 in the group. We all made our final vows in Cebu in July 25th 2020. During the lockdown in Cebu, my companions and myself go out to the people who are most vulnerable and in need of food in the area.

My active involvement in the apostolate at the service of our poor brothers and sisters brought me great inner joy. I became to a sign of love among a segment of those whose lives in danger in the street. This sign of love has taught me to give witness to the great love of God for the poor.

The language was a barrier for me, but it did not diminish my enjoyment being with my brothers and sisters in the area of Cebu. Every time they came to partake of the food that I helped to prepare for them. The action of giving out food during the Pandemic was the beauty of being re-connected with the people.

God continues to invite me to participate in the mission of love. Crossing borders and encountering my brothers and sisters around the street is an opportunity for a mutual exchange of the joy that comes from living the Gospel. I do not evangelize others with words, but just by being present.

I am grateful to have this opportunity in this time to share my smile with the people. Every little gesture, I do each day for the people taught me to build bridges of friendship. I have learnt to bloom where I am planted, and to enjoy life in the present moment.



“ACCEPT YOUR IMPERFECTION” IS A POIGNANT ONE.

Br. Rolland Andriamampionona (KEN)

“**S**pirituality is most often painted as a path to virtue, purity, and perfection...If you take it too seriously you may get obsessed with the pursuit of perfection, which is one of the most torturing and disempowering traps your spiritual ego can set for you,” I heard.

I realized that how much of my own path of growth in the past was a cover-up for what was just a desire to be perfect. Far from being some noble pursuit, my perfectionist tendencies were about looking for a "get out of jail free card" from spiritual dryness. My

confused logic went something like this: if I always do the right thing, think the right thought, be my best, and become everything everybody ever wants from me, I will never need to be disappointed, hurt, or suffering within me...

The fact that this game plan was quite impossible didn't seem to deter me off from trying. I don't think I've entirely given up if I'm totally honest. For that reason, I have to be constantly watchful that it doesn't sneak in and entirely take over my spiritual learning in the SVD.

“Calling out of the Box”

Life is a precious gift that must be cherished forever. Life itself is nothing short of a wondering, from the moment of conception, birth, growth span, life's experiences, aging and death. It is the life experiences that an individual encounters throughout their lifespan that may be the most important contributing factor towards how a person lives out their lives. The life experience of a person and I especially during the year 2020 and the early years will become that individual's perception of life. Because most of us cant visit our loved ones as the lockdown upon in our country....So, our human behavior is influenced by many contributing factors such as how our parents raise us, economical circumstances, our healthy or diseased bodies (COVID-19) whichever may be the case, and what a person experiences daily.

So many people have told me that it's really difficult to set life goals while we're going through a pandemic. Bro!!!!

I can figure out why they say this.
These are very uncertain times “the year of 2020”.

There are many external forces beyond our control that shape our life choices. But in the face of all of this



Image Credit: Br. Mark Paglicawan

uncertainty, I believe that The only way to make sense of out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance. It sounds very simple for some of us but a profound statement.

We can live normal lives and be shaped by all of the chaos around us. We can strive to fit in. Or we can find a way to dance with the chaos. From my own experience, I got whole the Covid-19 symptoms and, I was indoors for two weeks with my 39.6 temperature. But after all those things passed away from me, two weeks later the community organized a massive test, then I became COVID-19 positive without any symptoms like headache or the like but, now I move with the chaotic situation and dance with it....If you're able to dance with the chaos, I want to congratulate you.

There is no better way to live your life. It's incredible to feel unbreakable in the face of all of this uncertainty. But if you feel like it's difficult to dance in the face of pandemonium situation, I want you to know something really important. It's not your fault.

From a young age, we're molded by external forces.

Think about it. We're taught to obey our parents

We go to school and we're rewarded for being obedient students and punished when we do something wrong. We enter the Society and are expected to do things the same way everyone around us is doing. We're expected to be normal. No wonder that when a pandemic comes around we feel stressed in the face of all this uncertainty. We're not used to having to think for ourselves and go in our direction. But that's why it's so important to find a way to live a life free from all of this conditioning. It requires being able to set new goals for 2021 that come from a deeply real place.

If what I say resonates and you want 2021 to be full of authenticity, I have an invitation for you...

I'd love to invite you to build an authentic relationship with your true self by trusting GOD and having the highest level of spirit that always can find a way to dance with the chaotic situation around us; like good Missionaries....

It is a calling out of the Box.

MANY SURPRISES!

Br. Ludwig Scharenberg (BRN)

2020 was a year with many surprises and much time for rethinking. What strengthened my vocation was a trust in Divine Providence and the Holy Guardian Angel. A strong dependence on other people characterized the life of SVD Brothers and of the whole Society.

FULL OF GRACE

Br. Legisius Oki (IDE)

The year 2020 for me is the year full of grace. The most striking experience in 2020 is that I was sent to have my further studies where I can deepen my knowledge. While studying in Major Seminary in St. Paul Ledalero, I was so happy where I can show my identity as an SVD Brother in the community. I easily adapted to the life there. I study together with the fraters. Besides, I was glad too that I got the full support from our confreres for persevering in this beautiful and meaningful vocation as an SVD Brother.

2020 has brought to the SVD the need to achieve certain goals: educating new members of the Society, doing apostolates in the education sector, in business etc. I hope that in the future the SVD will be more shining as it would develop by the grace of God and the patronage of St. Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz.

Thank you Lord for the wonderful vocation poured upon me to join the SVD as a Brother.

Image Credit: <https://canva.com>



A NEW NEST

Br. Bela Lanyi (PHS)



Most birds build a new nest each year, though some refurbish their old nests. To which one are we, humans, similar? Every new day provides us with a new chance to restart our life. Then, every period in our Society also gives us a new opportunity to review what we have done. This was my afterthought when Fr. Heinz Kulūke, former General Superior explained in a lecture how each of his predecessors added something to the Society's thinking. With that, each of them changed the previous views. Consequently, those changes had to be rearticulated and expressed in new narratives (to be a bit philosophical), whenever a new General Superior took over the leadership. The year 2020 brought me to this restart and a true reorientation.

The original „SVD Brothers Bulletin” (2007-2019) in its basic idea („One heart, many faces”) was based on the idea of at least two faces: stronger SVD Brotherhood shall cooperate with a stronger SVD Priesthood to contribute to the one heart of the Society, the stronger common identity: SVD Missionary Consciousness. That Bulletin was rooted in the spirit of the XVI SVD General Chapter (2006, Rome) and the 2. General Assembly on SVD Brother Vocation (2009, Cebu City, Philippines). Although during both big events we heard strong voices for „political correctness”, meaning the call for not only one heart but also one face for the Society—the Bulletin could maintain its original option. Then the new SVD General Administration (2012) started distancing itself from the Bulletin. Once the recent General Administration (2018) took over leadership, very soon (2019) turned out that they don't want to be involved in the Bulletin. However, they acknowledged „past merits” of this publication and so upon the Generalate's initiative, the Bulletin underwent a Society-wide survey. Which turned out rather positive, to great surprise of me, the editor. Since I could not overhear voices for „political correctness” which called for an increasing removal of

differences between „Fathers” and „Brothers”, I reported the Generalate (2020) that the survey should not deceive us because there are critics who just did not want to write down their critical position.

In that situation I was glad that Br. General Councillor Guy Mazola threw us a straw to save the initiative of a platform on SVD Brother vocation embedded in our missionary call. So the year 2020 brought the opportunity to restart

the „Bulletin” under the authority of the SVD Philippine Southern Province. Truly, a NEW NEST! To my pleasure, the local authorities (Fr. Provincial Rogelio Bag-ao with his Council and National Director of Brother Formation Br. Darwin Loro) accepted this challenge and so the former „Bulletin” is here under the new name „SVD Brothers Forum” to give an opportunity for everyone to be the „face” of the Society for creating one „heart”. Not every contribution is „aligned” with

a supposedly correct Agenda of the Society. Presenting differences in the 6000-man membership of SVD enwidened with SSpS and SpsAp, this is now a „Forum” instead of „Bulletin”. Written by the readers, it shows the diversity of the Arnoldus Family upon the background of a common missionary vocation. And I love that diversity and plural approach! Having experienced this transition means for me the amazing beauty of the year 2020.

LIVING AND LEAVING THE WILDERNESS

Br. Bernie Spitzley (USC)

The year 2020 was a year of living in the wilderness. With the lockdowns, curfews regulations prohibiting gatherings yes, it was like being in the wilderness. Separated from the people was very difficult. Making visits, delivering food stuffs by leaving the package goods on the veranda and praying from a distance so as to abide by the various protocols, of distance, sanitation etc.

Yes, we did try connecting with virtual Eucharistic celebrations. The intentions meant well, but for me it was a far cry from being with the people during the consecration.

I need others to pray with, It is hard to follow Jesus, the demands of consecrated life, when my prayer experiences boil down to viewing a worship service from a far. Separated from others, so sterile so unnatural.

At the mass, especially a Jamaican liturgy there is plenty of clapping, swaying and being immersed in the celebration! Sitting in my chair starring at the computer screen was a far cry from celebrating!

The highlight for me is the consecration. At the mass my ordinary life and the lives of the congregation are taken up together. The mother whose son is serving a life sentence, the young married couple, the troubled single parent who struggles to parent her teenage child, etc. etc. All of us are united as one with the consecration we all are transfigured, into the Paschal mystery. When I sit alone in my room all of these elements of the Eucharist are lost. I'm so glad that we can have the Eucharist again. I am now regaining the joy of communal celebrations---Yes, I'm leaving the wilderness.

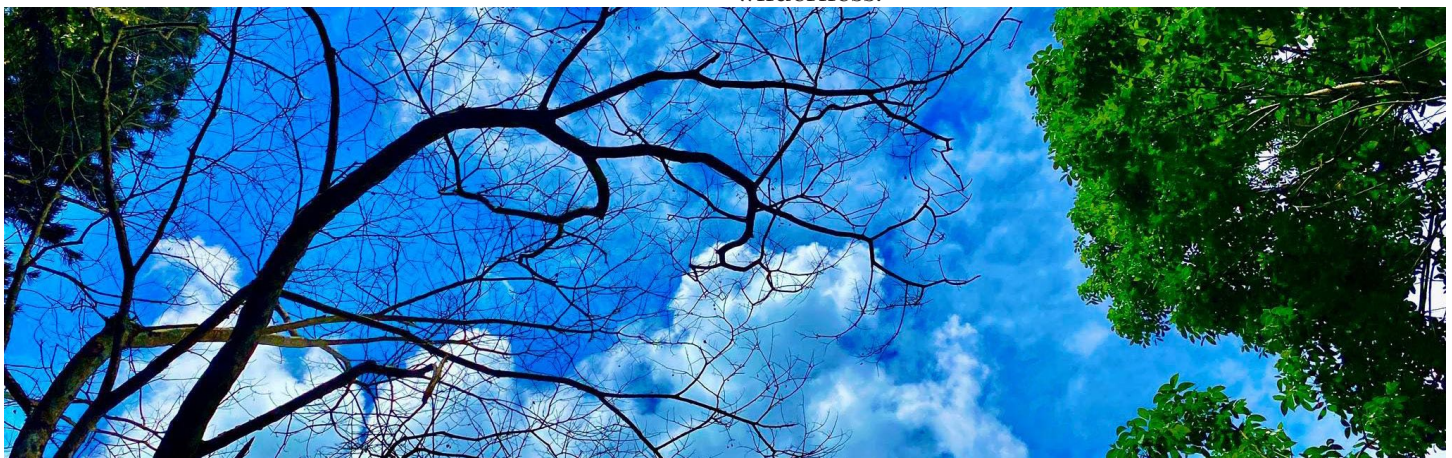


Image Credit: Br. Mark Paglicawan

TIME OF NEW DISCOVERIES

Sr. Fernanda de Fatima Manuel, SSps (Cebu)



(Born in Huambo, South of Angola, Africa, Permanent Mission Country Botswana – South Africa, Region, now in the Trinity Province, Philippines South, Temporary assignment for further studies.)

In response to the questionnaire above I will focus on answering only the Question number 1. Give 2020 a name.

For me the year 2020 can be named as an Invitation to “Live from the hour to hour and to leave the future in the hands of God” -Mother Maria Helena.

As a student of BSSW (Bachelor of Science in Social Work) at University of Southern Philippines Foundation, last March I was supposed to write my final exams. But on the same month was the beginning of the lockdowns in the country as a result due to the pandemic. All the students had to stay at home. Two weeks after the ECQ was implemented, I got an email from the Dean of the College of Social Work, saying that our final exam would be done online. This was my first experience. From then on, all the school events like the new enrollment for the following semester and other businesses, should be done on the same way. I was wondering how was I to manage it? But with help of some sisters in the community, I was able to do so.

In spite of being connected online, I do miss the face-to-face classes, the classmates, teachers and school building/campus. I have now to be confined at home and spend many hours attending the long virtual classes. During these uncertain times, I have learned to live more consciously of the present moment like our Co-Foundress, Mother Maria. By spending quality time with the sisters in the in Kasambagan community, praying together, helping with laundry for our elderly sisters, as well one of the sisters who would volunteer to go out to share the little we have with our brothers and sisters in need at the reclamation area. More over by the use of internet I have learned to be more creative in our common liturgy preparations in many different ways. I am also able to keep in touch with my family/relatives in Angola, with the sisters in the Region of Botswana and with friends etc.

This time also help me to realize how life can be so fragile due to the global pandemic and its consequences like, death, joblessness, hunger. To my mind, the most affected people are from underdeveloped countries. I try to practice awareness living more consciously the present moment, being thankful for each hour, day, month, that God allows me to live surrounded by my community of sisters and our personnel/staff members here in the provincial house.

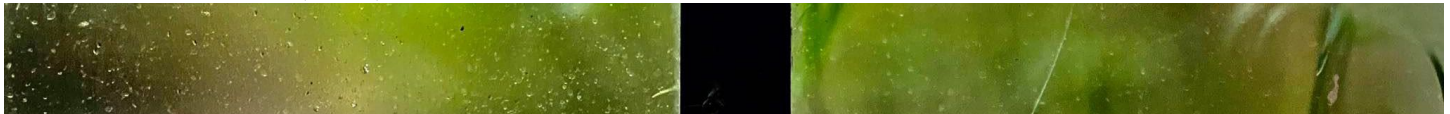
I am also discovering the talents I have and developing the skill of card making to be shared during different occasions (for Christmas, birthdays and so for) as well as crocheting. Finally, this time taught me to build a relationship with natural world by listening to the songs of the birds, enjoying the nature itself and trusting more in the Divine Providence.

Image Credit: Br. Mark Paglicawan



AN ILLUMINATING EXPERIENCE

Fr. Eduardo Machado (MEX)



The virus known as SARS_ CoV-02, caused us problems and many challenges in the formation and community life. We had to adapt to the new paradigm in formation. Many learnings, lessons and experiences acquired in the year 2020 on a personal, community and vocational level. It made me stronger than ever in my religious-missionary vocation and in my dedication to others. I became very sensitive and vulnerable when visiting sick people. I saw the face of the suffering Jesus in the face of the sick. Confinement helped me review my personal project, have more time to be alone with Jesus in front of the tabernacle, personal reading and more time for meditation and sharing personal experiences with others.

Although there were no face-to-face Masses, from the seminary we broadcast the masses and holy hours through the seminary's website and we included the people's intentions. As a formator, I had to make some modifications in the schedules and in our way of living with a healthy distance. At first it was not easy to adapt to the online learning modality. The pandemic changed substantially our lives, our daily activities, the way we live and participate in our community.



Many people got sick from Covid-19. We also had a couple of cases at the formation house. Brother Alberto and Mariano, a postulant, tested positive for Covid-19. Thank God they are now well and have recovered 90 percent.

I consider that the situation of the pandemic was an illuminating element for my vocation as a missionary of the Divine Word. Mainly, the impossibility of sharing the faith in person, motivated us to use the media to get closer to the faithful, who were in need of God and his word. "The Lord challenges our faith to do something new ..." expressed our founder, and it is, in short, what the Lord invited me to do in 2020.

Prayer was also fundamental last year, since, being in confinement, it was more than ever a propitious time to enter into prayer, strengthen trust in God and intensify the intentions of people, especially those who suffered the most the consequences of this situation that continues affecting the whole of humanity.



A YEAR OF RESETS

Sr. Iva Dicaú Aginiveitala (Cebu)

Greetings of peace and gratitude! My name is Sister Iva Dicaú Aginiveitala, SSpS. I've been asked to write a response to some questions as requested by Brother Darwin, SVD. Sorry for the late reply...I've forgotten the deadline. So I'm responding to the questions 1&2.

time when many would hide behind closed doors for fear of the deadly virus, my missionary heart was at its bravest making sure that our necessities were met, doing groceries for a community of 20 plus people and ensuring that everyone is healthy.

When our workers can't come to work for the entire lockdown, I discovered that I became the Jack of all Trades and master of none(lol). The saying of our two Foundresses became my motivator: "My heart is ready O God"(Mother Josefa, SSpS); "To me the burden, to my neighbor the benefit, to God the glory"(Mother Helena, SSpSAP).



Image Credit: <https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/>

2020 was a year of RESETS. The dawn of 2020 were greeted with various catastrophic natural and man-made calamities from massive bushfires to volcano eruptions, ravaged floods to earthquakes and wars. Things only get interesting at the outbreak of the deadly Corona Virus. Life at every level were affected, from personal to family/religious community, local and national and at the global level. We experienced massive changes at the emergence of the COVID 19. A resets was almost forced upon the whole humanity in order to adjust to what was becoming a 'new normal'. Was I ready for the 'resets'?

The changes brought about by the entire COVID 19 lockdown experience gave me a new consciousness of who I am as an SSPS when faced with the wind of change.

Being the youngest sister living among our vulnerable and elderly SSpS sisters in the Kasambagan community in Cebu, I immediately felt a sense of responsibility toward my fellow sisters when strict protocols were being put in place during the COVID 19 lockdown. A

Yes, my vocation as a Religious Missionary Sister has been strengthened and my faith deepened in the providences of the Holy Triune God. At the same time, my identity as a follower of Christ, the beloved of God was being affirmed when been tested in fire. I'm immensely grateful to the Holy Triune God for truly taking care of us and continue to work wonders in my life.

"May the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief vanished before the light of the word and spirit of grace. And may the heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people".

Thank you kindly for receiving my responses/short reflection. God bless you and keep you you and your family safe.

As missionaries, we still have the poor in mind and heart and so, we continue to reach out to the Street Dwellers, poor communities closed by, victims of fire and our IP's evacuated in Talamban and helping our Assisted Students adjusting to the new education system.

REACTIONS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE

Fr. Larry Nemer (AUS)

I just finished reading your BROTHERS FORUM. It is very well done!. When Brothers talked about their celebrations I was struck by the fact that although we are all very different culturally yet most communities often celebrate in the same “SVD way”.

I found it interesting to read about how people were coping with Covid and responding to the limitations it puts on our normal religious lives. Some day a scholar may want to use all this information for a doctoral thesis on RELIGIOUS LIFE IN A TIME OF A PANDEMIC.

My thanks to the Southern Province of the Philippines for supporting this form of communication.

IN MEMORIAM BR. EDGARDO FAZ,
Former National Director
of SVD Brother Formation in the Philippines
Br. Darwin Loro



FAREWELL TO OUR DEAR BROTHER EGAY




Image Credit: Mr. Crisfer Autentico

Recently, after our morning community prayers and Eucharist celebration, I was enjoying my breakfast with a confrere. Our conversation led us to a topic we seldom talk about, ‘Life and Death’. It was a spontaneous conversation that allowed me to express and find someone to share with my thoughts

and feelings. Our conversation came out as a result of a recent episode whereby the SVD bid adieu to a dear Brother confrere. I have known and considered him as one of the persons whom I respect so much for his missionary commitment, simplicity and jovial personality. Indeed, it is a consolation to have someone

in a religious community who is ready to listen to with respect and sensitive to the needs of others.

The Society of the Divine Word, Philippine Southern Province, lost an admirable Brother who died of cancer. His name is Br. Edgardo 'Egay' Faz. Despite our loss, we know that he is now at peace and enjoying in God's Kingdom, free from sorrow, pain and sickness. In faith we can say that he is now finally enjoying his ETERNAL REWARD after many years of dedicated and faithful service to the Divine Word as a religious missionary Brother. We pray that he intercedes and accompanies us as we strive to walk on the path chosen by the Lord for us to tread and thrive. You are dearly missed Brother Egay. Your simple ways and cheerful attitude have brought many to thank the Lord for the life you shared with us. Your generosity and commitment made a unique difference.

Br. Egay was born on 29 January 1960 in Masaging, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, Philippines. He joined the SVD Novitiate and Professed First Vows on 14 June 1987. He took his Perpetual Vows as a Religious Missionary Brother on 22 December 1992. He was a former missionary to Botswana from 1993-2001. He served as the Provincial Procurator as one of his assignments in his mission filled. On his return to the Philippines, he was stationed at the St. Joseph Freinademetz Brothers' Formation House, Cebu City. He was given several assignments at various times being the House Treasurer, Assistant Prefect, and Vocation Director for Brothers. He became the General Manager of Steyler, Inc. in a period of time and was also given a responsibility as the Maintenance Officer of the University of San Carlos. He also served as the Chairperson of the Visayas Association of Religious Brothers (VARB) and Chairperson of the National Federation of Religious Brothers in the Philippines (NFRBP). In addition, he was elected as the SVD Philippine National Director of Brothers' Formation, a position he held for several years from 2011 until 2020. His last days were spent in the St. Michael's SVD Residence, USC Talamban Campus, Cebu City. He died at the age of 61 on the Feast Day of St. Valentine, 14 February 2021.

The following are "life statements" that manifest how Br. Egay has touched people's lives:

- "Thank you for the silent and faithful service."

- "I was so touched, he took good care of me when he was in Botswana. Rest well Brother Kabelo as we used to call him."
- "Another good man gone..."
- "Thanks for knowing you, thanks for everything Bro."
- "Thank you for being a part in my son's vocation journey."
- "Thank you for the chance to know you and to work with you even just for a short time during our past Formators' Assemblies! Thank you for the gift of your person and for the gift that you are to the SVD Philippine Southern Province, in particular, with the formation of our SVD Brothers! It's mission accomplished...we are proud of you and surely, you will be missed."
- "Energetic, generous, approachable, youthful"
- "My friend and classmate in the Novitiate"
- "Bro classmate Egay, you're a humble SVD Brother who departs from this earth but never truly leaves, for you are still alive in our hearts and minds. Through us, you live on. Surely you will not be forgotten."

As the Philippines celebrates this year's 500 Years of Christianity with a theme 'Gifted to Give', we thank the Lord for gifting us with the person of Br. Egay who gave all his life as a Religious Missionary Brother to the Church through the Society of the Divine Word. Certainly, the five-century influence of Christianity in the Philippines has produced many notable Christians and silent workers in the vineyard of the Lord. After all, the efforts of the first Christian missionaries who arrived in the Philippine were not in vain. THANK YOU, BROTHER EGAY and PRAY FOR US ALL!



This photo was taken during Br. Egay's last interprovincial meeting, held last February 11, 2020 at Liceo del Verbo Divino, Tacloban City. He represented the Brothers, being the National Director for the SVD Brothers in the Philippines. Also, the day he turned over to me the assignment.



Dear Confreres,

Peace!

Thank you for reading and contributing to this issue. The next issue will be published in June 2021. The guide questions will reach you on April 30, 2021.

For the meantime, you can 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 addresses: blanyi@usc.edu.ph

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

May we all have a blessed Lent and a happy Easter celebration.

In the Divine Word,

Your SVD Brothers in Cebu City