



svd brothers  
**FORUM**

march 2025 | volume 6 issue 1

**Growing Old in God's Grace!**

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SVD BROTHERS FORUM is a digital forum written by its readers. On behalf of the Forum's Publisher, Fr. Rogelio Bag-ao, SVD-PHS Provincial Superior, we asked the members of the Arnoldus Family to respond to the following questions.

1. Is there a "retirement age" in your province/region/mission? At what age? With exceptions?
2. What are the usual activities of elderly confreres in your community?
3. How are elderly or sick confreres cared for in your place?
4. In some countries, the social safety net is weak, for example insurances reject people who are older than 70 years. How does your province/region/mission handle contacts to public health care services?
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Cordial Greetings...

I hope that the SVD Brothers Forum is reaching many of our Brothers and Fathers in the SVD mission zones. The stories, comments, and feedback shared with us could hopefully encourage us to reflect on our day-to-day life and, as a consequence, could possibly help us improve our daily operations and community living for the better.

The topic on “retirement age” is a significant and important part of any SVD life’s journey. We have seen and heard of confreres retiring due to various factors such as aging, fragility leading to disability in cognition, physical, sensory, or a combination of factors. While there is a stigma attributed to the word ‘retirement,’ other confreres’ experiences paint a quality of life even after retirement. This has been talked about on the table

during mealtime or in casual conversations among confreres who are still active in the ministry. With your participation in this forum, you can provide us information by sharing your personal experiences or suggestions on how we can learn from each other. Also, you might like to highlight some of the best practices in your PRMs, including what needs to improve in the provision of quality health care.

Let us cultivate an open mind and heart—taking in what is useful and beneficial. Let us find ways to create solutions to life’s challenges. Also, let us offer to God what we can’t change and let the Holy Spirit work for us and through us, transforming what may seem impossible to achieve. Let us dream of a future full of hope, engaging in healthy collaborations, united in love. May you have a blessed Lenten Season!



**Br. Darwin Loro | PHS**  
Brother Forum Supervisor

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Image Credit: canva.com/

# THE VOCATION REMAINS ACTIVE

Br. Stephen Bonsu (GHA)

The mandatory retirement age for SVD members in the Ghana/Liberia Province is 75 years. But confreres can opt for early retirement at any age due to their health issues. Some confreres who are working in the public sector and employees under the Social Security and national insurance Trust (SSNIT) pension scheme retire at the age of 60 years. These confreres continue to work until their health conditions does not permit them to work. The retirement home is at McCarthy Hill in Accra. The individual can choose the place of retirement with the permission of the Provincial Superior.

Elderly confreres typically engage in activities like the following.

**Prayer and Spiritual Life:** Daily Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, and personal prayer.

**Mentorship and Guidance:** Providing spiritual direction and mentoring younger members.

**Light Pastoral Work:** Assisting with sacraments, counseling, and community outreach.

**Reading and Study:** Continuing theological or spiritual studies.

**Community Life:** Participating in communal meals, discussions, and recreation.

**Hobbies and Recreation:** Gardening, writing, music, or art, depending on their interests.



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



In Ghana and Liberia, care for elderly or sick confreres varies depending on the religious congregation, region, and available resources. Many communities have dedicated infirmaries or retirement houses where elderly members receive medical care and support while remaining within their religious family. Some congregations partner with healthcare facilities or nursing homes if they cannot provide full-time care themselves. Spiritual and fraternal support is also a priority, ensuring that elderly or ill members continue to feel valued and included in the life of the community.

Among the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), elderly and sick confreres are typically cared for in retirement houses or specialized care facilities run by the congregation. These places provide both medical attention and a community-centered environment, allowing the confreres to continue living their religious life while receiving the necessary care.

There are the following common Practices for elderly and sick SVD Confreres.

***Healthcare Support.*** Confreres receive professional medical care, sometimes through partnerships with hospitals or caregivers. Some provinces employ nurses and caregivers within the SVD houses.

***Community & Spiritual Life.*** Even when sick or aging, confreres continue participating in prayer, Eucharistic celebrations, and community gatherings as much as possible. They are given pastoral tasks suited to their abilities, such as spiritual direction, writing, or simply praying for the mission.

***Integration with the Younger Generation.*** Younger confreres are encouraged to visit and assist elderly members, fostering intergenerational bonds and a sense of belonging.



Image Credit: br. mnp,svd

***Burial & Memorial Traditions.*** When a confrere passes away, the community holds special memorial Masses and prayers, ensuring they remain in the spiritual memory of the congregation.

In some countries, social safety nets are weak due to limited government support, bureaucratic inefficiencies, or privatized systems that prioritize profit. This can result in insurance companies rejecting claims, leaving people without financial protection in times of need. Issues like pre-existing condition exclusions, complex policies with hidden clauses, or high deductibles can make it difficult for people to access necessary healthcare, unemployment benefits, or disability support. The following factors may shape our relation to social safety nets.

***Lack of Formal Employment Status.*** Many religious missionaries work under the vow of poverty and may not have conventional employment contracts, making them ineligible for certain insurance plans.

***International or Transient Status.*** Missionaries often move between countries, which can make it difficult for them to qualify for local insurance policies.

***Religious Exemptions or Discrimination.*** Some insurers may not cover religious workers, especially if their activities involve high-risk travel or work in conflict zones.

***Limited Coverage for Missionary Work.*** Certain insurance plans may exclude coverage for injuries or illnesses sustained while doing missionary or humanitarian work abroad.

In many places where social safety nets are weak, missionary groups and religious organizations often develop their own solutions as follows.

***Community-Based Health Support.*** Some missions run their own clinics or partner with faith-based hospitals to provide medical care for their members and local communities.

Some religious orders have private insurance agreements that cover their members, even when they are older or working abroad.

***Relying on Public Healthcare.*** In countries with universal healthcare, missionaries may access public hospitals, though the quality and availability of care vary.

**Emergency Funds & Donations.**

Some missions set aside funds or rely on donors to cover medical expenses for elderly members.

Elderly or sick confreres can contribute to the mission of our Society in meaningful ways, even if they are no longer able to engage in active ministry. Their wisdom, experience, and prayerful presence can be a great source of strength for the community. Here are some ways they can continue to serve.

**Prayer and Spiritual Support.**

They can offer their prayers for the mission, the Society, and those in active ministry. Many religious congregations recognize the value of intercessory prayer as a vital part of their mission.

**Spiritual Accompaniment.** They can mentor younger members, offering guidance, encouragement, and wisdom gained from their years of service.



Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

**Writing and Reflection.** If they are able, they can contribute by writing reflections, sharing their experiences, or recording the history of the Society to inspire future generations.

**Offering Suffering for the Mission.** In a spirit of faith, they can unite their suffering with Christ's for the good of the mission, seeing their condition as a way of deepening their participation in the redemptive work of the Church.

**Community Presence.** Their witness of faith, perseverance, and joy can inspire and strengthen the confreres who visit them or care for them.

**Advisory Roles.** They can serve as advisors to leadership, offering insights based on their lived experiences in the mission.

**Correspondence and Encouragement.** Writing letters or messages of support to missionaries in the field can be a great encouragement to those serving in difficult places. Even in illness or old age, their vocation remains active, and their presence remains a gift to the Society and the Church.

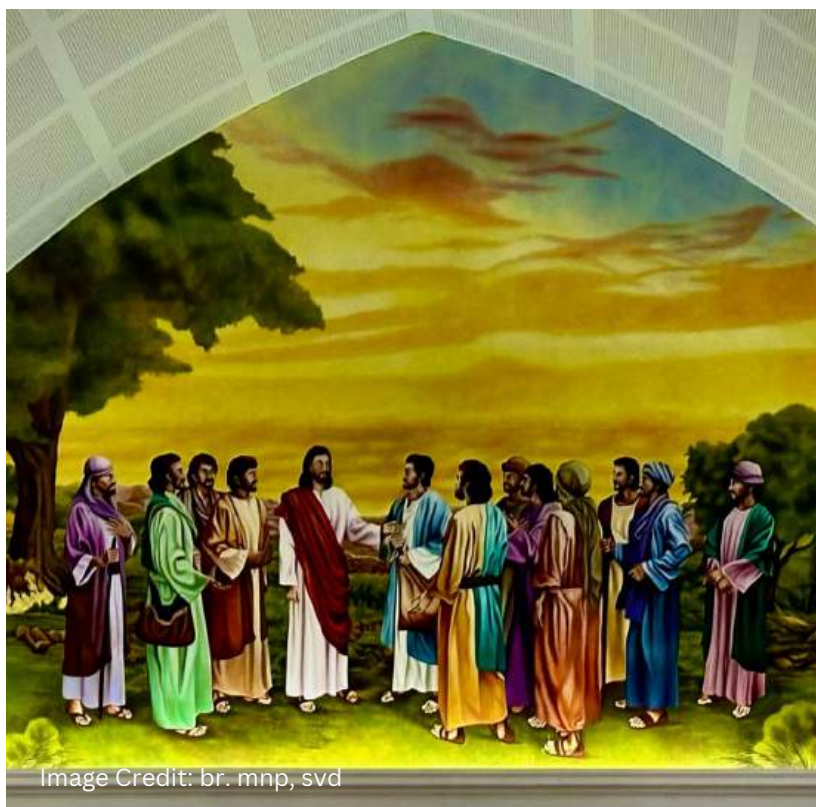


Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

# WELL-ESTABLISHED FACILITIES IN JAPAN

Br. Justinus Mau Bau | JAP

Greetings from Nagasaki, the city of the Church in Japan, in the last few centuries named as the mini Vatican of Japan.

As member of the Divine Word Missionaries the word retirement age may not apply to us, as we must continue serve the Divine Word for life in prayer and work. However, it is applied for the confreres who serve in educational institutions, government institutions or other legal institutions. A few years ago, the Japanese Government set the year of retirement at 65 years. Some educational institutions allow the employees to retire at the age of 60, and he or she may extend until 65 years. At the present, some confreres over 65 years old do still active work in our schools and university. We highly respect their endless dedication.

Our senior confreres who retired from educational institutions continue actively making research in various academic fields.

Some are active in study groups such as Bible studies for parishioners, spiritual directors. They give seminars, conferences, act as retreat masters They are role models of ora-et-labora in the community.

The Japan Province recently prepared some well-established facilities for the elderly confreres in Nagoya and Tajimi who are sick. Some do not want to disturb the community as long as they can still help themselves. However, for confreres who cannot help themselves or who are bedridden and need intensive care, our Province provides professional health care staff. They are encouraged to stay in nursing homes.

The Japanese Government has a well-established social insurance system for the elderly who reside in Japan, regardless of age. The Japan Province manages to participate in this health insurance.



Image Credit: canva.com

# LIFE IN THE HOME FOR ELDERLY

Fr. Paulus Koko Tolang | BRS, Provincial

The following is based on my experience of three years working in a home for the elderly. Our province BRS, has several elderly confreres. There are 2 people who are 94 years old (from Brazil), 1 person 88 who is years old (from the Netherlands), 1 person who is 85 years old (from Brazil), and 2 people who are 82 years old (from Poland). They are already in the home for the elderly in Ponta Grossa - PR Brazil. Others up to 68 years old are still active in the parish or other mission tasks.

The home for the elderly is called SVD Mission House or Casa Missionária SVD. All of us in the province have health insurance, which the Province monthly pays. Those who are above 65 years have a pension according to Brazilian law. With this pension money they help the congregation, specifically for home needs, medicines and personal needs. The rest they give to the Rector of the house. Some also donate for social work. They do activities to maintain personal health, with routine check-ups every year or if necessary. Their treatment is always through a hospital or clinic. If someone is seriously ill and bed-ridden, we have to contract a special 24-hour nurse (Cuidadora) which is not cheap to pay because they are professionals. They also do periodic physical exercises, physiotherapy, take care of toenails and fingernails, cut hair and others.

Our elderly confreres also have personal activities such as planting, raising birds, raising worms for fertilizer—these are their hobbies. In the spiritual part, they have morning Mass every day. Beyond their personal prayer, there is community prayer, and a rosary prayer every Tuesday for vocations and missions. There is adoration of the Blessed Sacrament every Friday.

Each Father is given the task of leading mass and adoration. Brothers take care of the liturgy, opening and closing all the doors and windows of the house in the morning and also at night. Every day they are always together, from morning mass until dinner and after dinner. If there is no special evening prayer of the rosary, they relax or watch TV together in the TV room. They do this together, although each of them has a TV in the own room. Some play canasta and drink wine for their pleasure, without being excessive.



Image Credit: br. mnp, svd



In short, the situation was very pleasant during the 3 years I was with them. It is now continued by the current rector. As provincial, I still visit them especially on their birthdays. The rest of the house is well maintained, there are gardens and vegetable gardens. There is a Grotto of Mary, a statue of Saint Joseph and sacred places that provide conditions for them to live well, both in terms of spirituality and physicality. Food and drink are also prioritized, according to the principle that we must not be frugal in taking care of our elderly.

In short, we take care of and care for them since they have given their lives for God, others, and the Congregation. Therefore, it is natural that we must take care of them well, especially in their old age. In addition, the elderly confreres always receive visits from the congregation and their acquaintances in the place where they used to serve.

In closing, I would like to answer the question, how do the elderly contribute to the Mission and Society? For me, based on my experience with the elderly, I always tell them that they have done a lot for the Mission and our Congregation when they were young. Now it is the time to continue praying for all the confreres who are still actively on the mission, because they have a lot of time to pray at the Mission House. In addition to hearing confessions of the faithful who always come to the Mission House, they also give testimony through their lives with necessary activities. If there is a parish or community that needs them, they are also always ready to help, especially those who are on vacation in their homeland or in Brazil itself. They also help our Province financially with their pensions. Thank you, may we remain united in the Word.

# WITH 85, I STILL SERVE A PARISH

Fr. Arnold Plum | JAP

## 1. Is there a „retirement age” in your province/region/mission? At what age? With exceptions?

Yes, at 75 - but unwritten. The bishop has entrusted me with the small parish of Mizunami with its huge hinterland—that was in 2018 and I am now 85 years old. I have been living with old and sick Japanese brothers in Tajimi since 2018. Almost every day, I drive 13 kms to the small parish church.

## 2. What are the usual activities of elderly confreres in your community?

They help in places like seminaries or SVD houses—respectively during services on Sundays in the neighboring area or in a small circle of friends.

## 3. How are elderly or sick confreres cared for in your place?

Yes, in Nagoya, for example, the SSpS Sisters have a hospital.

## 4. How does your province/region/mission handle contacts to public health care services?

Public health care services are satisfactory in Japan.

## 5. How can elderly or sick confreres contribute to the mission of our Society?

As long as you are able to work, in the parishes and other pastoral work...

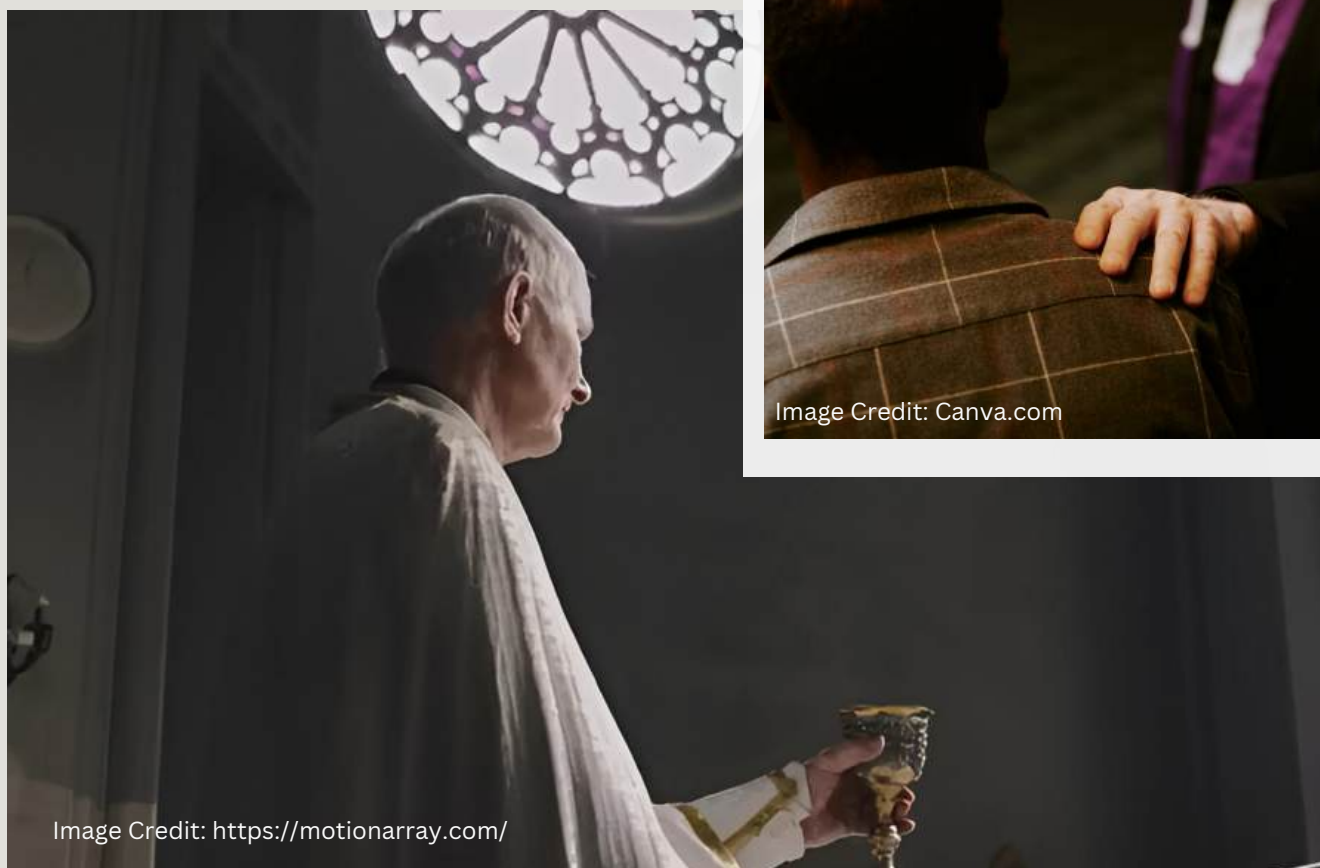


Image Credit: <https://motionarray.com/>



Image Credit: Canva.com

# The Vital Role of Elderly Confreres in the SVD Mission

Br. Dominikus Ranga Hayon | IDE

The presence of elderly confreres in the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) is not just beneficial; it is essential for the sustainability and richness of the mission. Their unique contributions—stemming from years of experience, wisdom, and spiritual depth—play a critical role in shaping the future of the organization.

## Mentorship and Wisdom

Elderly confreres serve as invaluable mentors to younger members. Their lived experiences provide a treasure trove of knowledge that can guide and inspire. According to McCarthy (2019), mentorship in religious communities fosters a sense of continuity and stability, allowing newer members to learn from the successes and challenges faced by their elders. This dynamic not only helps in personal growth but also strengthens the overall mission of the SVD by ensuring that core values and teachings are passed down effectively.



Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

## Spiritual Intercession and Direction

Moreover, the spiritual contributions of elderly confreres cannot be overlooked. Their dedication to prayer and spiritual practices is a profound source of strength for the entire community. As highlighted by Smith (2020), the power of intercessory prayer in religious life serves to unite members and create a supportive environment. Elderly confreres, even when facing health challenges, remain committed to this spiritual duty, reinforcing the mission's foundation and encouraging younger members to deepen their faith.

One of the key roles of elderly confreres is providing spiritual direction. Their extensive life experiences, coupled with a deep understanding of spiritual practices, make them ideal guides for younger confreres and laypeople alike. According to McGowan (2018), spiritual direction involves helping individuals discern their relationship with God and navigate their spiritual journeys. Elderly confreres, with their wealth of accumulated wisdom, are well-positioned to offer insights that encourage deeper reflection and growth.

This dimension of their role is particularly important in a rapidly changing world where many seek guidance and meaning. As noted by Smith (2020), elderly spiritual directors often draw upon their own life experiences to relate to others' struggles and aspirations. Their ability to listen empathetically and provide thoughtful counsel fosters a supportive environment that encourages spiritual growth.

## Healing Community and Enrichment

In addition to spiritual direction, elderly confreres play a vital role in healing the community. Their presence often serves as a stabilizing force, especially during times of crisis or transition. According to Johnson (2021), the wisdom and calm demeanour of elderly members help to create a sense of safety and security within the community. Their ability to approach difficult situations with grace and understanding promotes healing and reconciliation among confreres and those they serve.

Moreover, elderly confreres often engage in practices that promote communal healing, such as facilitating reconciliation processes, offering pastoral care, and leading prayer services focused on healing. Their emphasis on forgiveness and compassion is essential in building a unified community, as emphasized by Regan (2019). This healing aspect not only benefits the community but also serves to reinforce the core values of the SVD mission.

The enrichment of community life brought by elderly confreres is another vital aspect. Their presence fosters a spirit of connection and belonging within the SVD. Regular interactions, whether through shared meals or communal prayers, facilitate meaningful conversations and exchanges of ideas.

As noted in the Journal of Religious Leadership (Johnson, 2021), such interactions not only enhance communal bonds but also encourage collaborative efforts in mission work, creating a more vibrant and dynamic community.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of elderly confreres in the SVD mission is multifaceted and indispensable. Their mentorship, spiritual support, and community enrichment are crucial for the organization's growth and sustainability. As we move forward, it is essential to recognize and honour the contributions of these senior members, ensuring that their wisdom continues to guide the SVD for generations to come.

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Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

# THE WITNESSING OF THE ELDERLY

Fr. Jon Patrick Kirby | USW, Provincial

1. Our retirement age is any age (normally over 70) when a confrere feels he is no longer able to work in parishes or institutions.
2. The usual activities vary according to the propensities of the individual. One makes vestments, another stays in his room or goes out with friends, another cooks intermittently for the community. Some help out in cleaning activities, others do limited pastor work saying Mass and hearing confessions for the retreatants.
3. To a very limited degree confreres are cared for by other elderly confreres. We have no nursing or care personnel. When a confrere is unable to care for himself he is sent to USC province where he is cared for by the personnel at the Techny care facility.
4. We have good insurance with Medicare and Cigna for those over 65.
5. Where ever possible elderly confreres can give witness to young people and encourage vocations. They participate in community activities, the liturgies, meals and socials. The sick contribute through their prayers and sacrifices.



Image Credit: br. mnp, svd



Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

# I AM THE ONLY ONE EIGHTY YEARS OLD IN KEN-TAN

Br. Karl Scharschmitt | KEN

KenTan Province is still a young province, I am the only one at 80 years old, there is no retirement age. Elderly confreres help in a parish, or have a project, like me, for example, with help from Germany, a school sponsorship project for poor and needy school children. We do not yet have any confreres who need care. Not much can be expected from the public government health insurance. The KenTan Province has therefore taken out additional health insurance for all confreres. In the SVD, elderly confreres can get involved wherever they are needed and live, in the parish or administration.

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

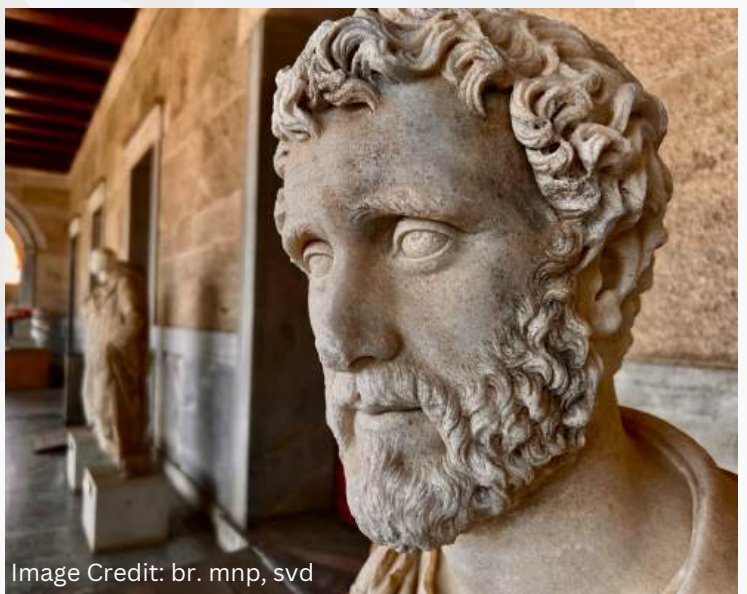


Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

# AGING IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE

Fr. Peter Claver Narh | GER, Provincial

Image Credit: canva.com/



With warm greetings from the GER Province, I would like to answer your questions. In our province, the topic of aging is of great importance, as we are working intensively to develop a sustainable concept for it. A resolution was passed on this at the Provincial Chapter a year ago and a working group was set up with the title "How do we want to grow old?"

But to your key questions in detail:

The retirement age in Germany has been raised progressively for several years and is now (for all age groups, from 1961) at 67 years. In the SVD, it is generally the case that confreres over the age of 75 take it easy and hand over tasks to younger people. However, those who can and want to work longer.

What are the usual activities of older confreres in your community? Light work in the house or garden (e.g. in Steyl), support of the confreres, helping out in pastoral work and above all the prayer apostolate.

Confreres are also active in administration, even in old age.

Older or sick confreres are cared for in your community in different ways: through outpatient medical services (e.g. in Steyl) or professionally in the German Province's retirement home, which is located in St. Wendel.

Regarding social safety, confreres in the GER Province have private or statutory health insurances. The costs of the contributions are borne by the Province. Medical care in Germany is generally unproblematic and very good. For additional services and aids, such as glasses or dentures, the individual patient must sometimes make additional payments. Elderly confreres contribute to our mission through their experience and their life testimony. Anyone who wants to can get involved and take on services.

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# APPENDIX

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*Thank you very much for sending the SVD Brothers Forum. It is always a joy to receive the reflections that all the SVD members share with us. I know that your tireless work in this year of the SVD Jubilee Year for 150th anniversary encourages us to continue sharing the Good News of Jesus to all corners of the earth. Greetings to all the Brothers in the 4 Zones who are making our universal missionary charism known. United in the Life and Mission of the Divine Word.*

**Br. Raul Acosta (ARE)**

*Thank you for your biblical reflections in the 2024/4 issue of the Forum. They will help me to deepen the contents of the Bible Course that I am going to do this summer. Thank you and blessings,*

**James Owusu Amankwah (CHI)**



Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

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# OBITUARY

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## Joaquin, a Brother to everyone: a Brother like Jesus of Nazareth

**Joaquin Ignaz Mních, SVD** was born on December 2, 1963, in Silesia, Poland, where he grew up with his twin brother and sister. He professed his first of vows in 1987. From 1990 to 1992, he undertook the overseas training program (OTP) at the parish of “San Fernando de Guadalupe” in Salto de Agua, Chiapas, Mexico. He professed his perpetual vows in 1993 in Germany.

His first missionary assignment after professing his perpetual vows was in Mexico, where he returned in 1995 with a deep commitment to the mission. Once again, he was assigned to Chiapas. He dedicated most of his life as a missionary to providing devoted service and accompaniment to the Ch’ol people[1]. From 1996 to 1999, he served as the provincial coordinator of the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation dimension (JPIC). He carried out his pastoral ministry with great responsibility, always striving for the benefit of the mission, and the poor.



# OBITUARY



Joaquín (as we called him in Spanish) collaborated extensively in various ministerial services in both Mexico and Cuba. He took on the role of administrator of the Novitiate House in Oaxaca, and contributed on multiple occasions to the Provincial Council of the Mexico-Cuba Province.

In 2003, he was transferred to the Northern German Province to serve as part of the team at the St. Michael Motherhouse in Steyl, the Netherlands, where he managed the pilgrim house and hosted various groups. Later, he spent two years working at the Catacombs of Domitilla in Rome, assisting tourists until 2009. Afterward, he requested to return back to Mexico.



# OBITUARY

Upon his return, he assumed again the role of Provincial Coordinator for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). Beginning in 2014, he once again collaborated at the parish of San Fernando de Guadalupe in Salto de Agua, Chiapas. In 2017, with great dedication, he began working to support migrants coming from different parts of Central America, South America and even south of Mexico, collaborating with several international organizations such as the “Red Cross”, “Doctors Without Borders”, and “United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees” (UNHCR). In recent years, he worked alongside the SSpS at “Casa Betania” (Bethany House), a shelter that serves as an oasis for migrants in need, shelter that he himself helped build, establish, and promote.



Starting in 2023, he resided at the Provincial House in Mexico City, where he managed “Casa Betania” with deep dedication. After a visit to Chiapas, he began feeling very fatigued and experiencing stomach pains. He was admitted to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with liver cancer with metastases.

Our beloved Joaquín passed away on January 31, 2025 in Mexico City. We are profoundly grateful for his tireless service to the Mexico-Cuba Province, but most especially for his lovely dedication to the indigenous and migrants. His mortal remains now rest in eternal peace in Salto de Agua, the place he deeply loved and that deeply loved him in return.



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# OBITUARY

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May the God of Life grant Joaquín eternal peace, allowing him to rest in divine tenderness and everlasting love. We know that the God of Life, the God who incarnated as a poor and migrant human being, has already rewarded him with eternal love. As our founder once said, “Precious is the life given in mission”, and such was the life of Joaquín.

Thank you, Joaquín, for your life! Intercede for all our migrants who, in their journey to fulfill their dreams and seek better opportunities, risk everything. You knew the burdens their hearts carried and the cries of their weary bodies!

Thank you, Joaquín!

*Prepared by:*

*SVD MEX Province*

*Edson Real, SVD – (MEX)*

*Jonattan Plascencia, SVD – (PHS)*

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[1] The Choles are an Indigenous ethnic group that inhabits the Mexican southern states of Chiapas, Tabasco, and Campeche, as well as the Republic of Guatemala. They belong to the Maya culture. Their existence, together with their anthropology, are explained in relation to maize, which is considered a sacred food granted by the gods—the beginning and end of life. In other words, they are the "people created from maize."

# LAST WORDS FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Confreres,

Peace!

Thank you for reading and contributing to this issue. The next issue will be published in June 2025. The guide questions will reach you on April 30, 2025.

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](mailto: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 Forum Publisher and Editors

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

