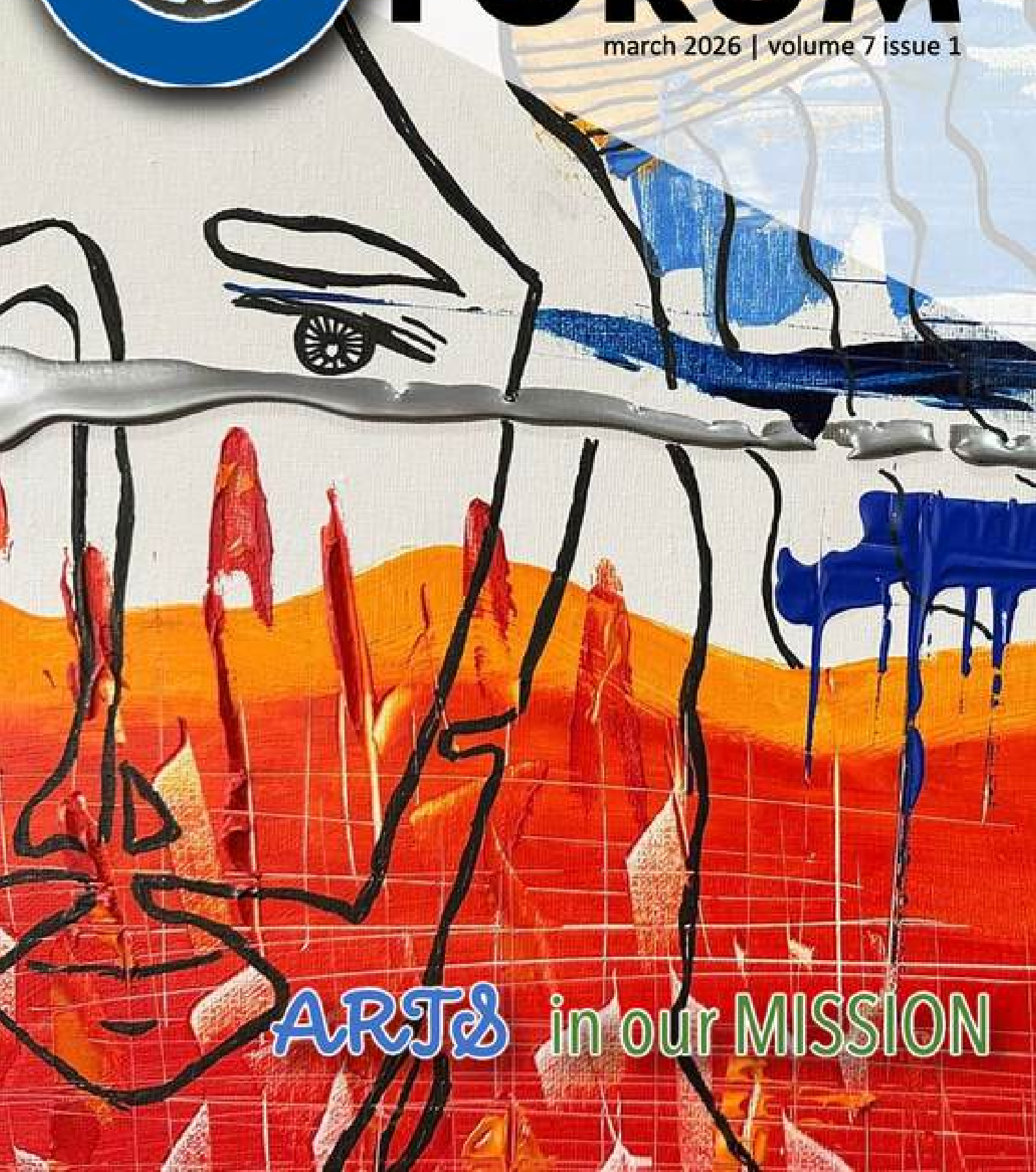




# svd brothers **FORUM**

march 2026 | volume 7 issue 1



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Art is a language of the heart. For missionaries, it bridges faith and culture, words and emotions, devotion and daily life. Through painting, music, poetry, and other forms, art becomes both a testimony of faith and a tool for evangelization. SVD Brothers Forum is written by the readers, the members of Arnoldus Family. Thus please respond to the following guide questions.

1. How has art (painting, music, poetry, etc.) influenced your missionary journey?
2. In what ways does art help you share faith or connect with people?
3. How has creativity deepened your spirituality or devotion?
4. What advice would you give to missionaries who want to use art in ministry?

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“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

— 1 Peter 4:10

Art belongs to all of us; it reflects our Creator and is found in every sketch, poem, song, photograph, and handicraft. For every SVD missionary and SSpS sister, this creative spirit lies at the heart of our calling—our lives become the canvas upon which the Divine Word is painted through service.

Among the many members of the Arnoldus family worldwide who use art to evangelize, Brother Othmar Jessberger, SVD, stands as a profound example. His “painted thoughts” transform his missionary heart for Indonesia into a bridge between God and humanity, rooted in justice, peace, and interfaith unity.

I have learned that creativity is a form of healing that requires only honesty. When we share these “painted thoughts,” we connect our personal journeys with others and fulfill our mission of uniting humanity in God’s love. I wish to thank each contributor to this edition of the SVD Brothers Forum for sharing their gifts and stories. Together, may our creativity continue to manifest His presence throughout the world.

Wishing you a blessed and transformative Lenten journey as we prepare for the joy of the Resurrection.



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

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Image Credit: canva.com

# The beauty of Jesus Christ, our brother.

Br. Raul E. Acosta | Generalate's Assistant for Brother Formation

We are invited to reflect on how art and artistic expressions help us to journey in our missionary life, in all their forms: music, painting, writing, literature—among many others—are means or paths through which we express our emotions and channel those aspects of our lives that need to be expressed.

In our spirituality and prayer life, these elements are very important, since they connect us with the central aspects of our human person and with our personal life history. Many times, they have helped us overcome difficulties or have been of personal benefit and placed at the service of others.

In times when we make spiritual exercises, we are often invited to reflect on a phrase or on the contemplation of an image or painting that represents a reality into which we wish to deepen and that transports us to another reality. These living metaphors in Christian life help us become more sensitive, receptive, and empathetic toward others. We, as missionaries, must continue proclaiming:

“To proclaim Christ means to show that believing in Him and following Him is not only something true and right, but also beautiful, capable of filling life with a new splendor and a profound joy, even in the midst of trials” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 131, Rome, 2013).

Pope Francis encourages us to communicate, to preach, and to proclaim the beauty of Jesus Christ, our Teacher and Brother.

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

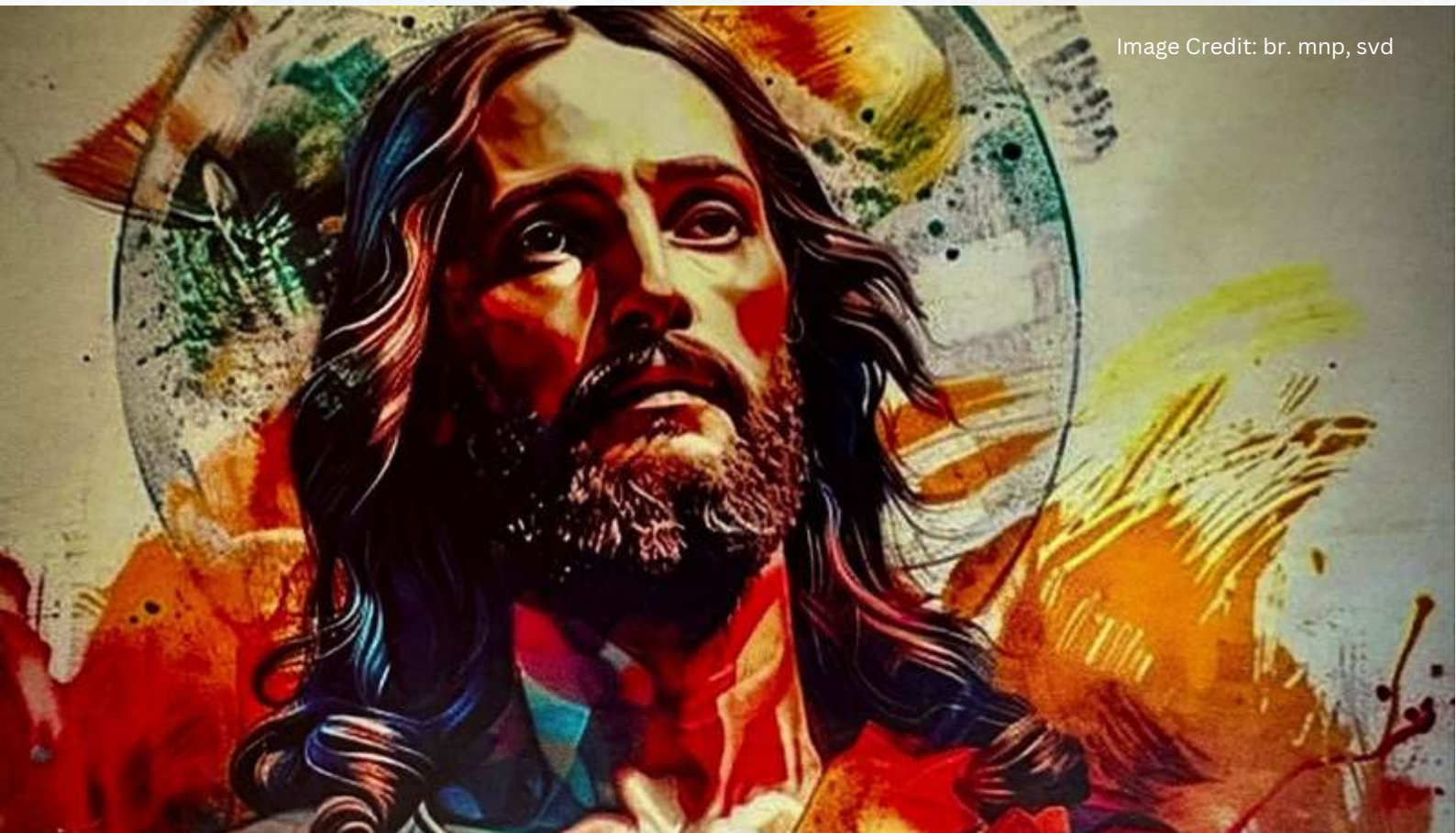


Image Credit: br. mnp, svd



At present, in our contemporary societies, art has regained a new meaning and is accessible to young people. It has also become part of the resistance to certain current issues; we could mention just a few: social justice, exclusion, and climate change. These realities, which may seem to belong to a more concrete sphere of news—on the radio, in newspapers, or on television—are today also the object of a new way of conceiving art and artistic production, fostering greater critical awareness.

The younger generation also challenges us and helps us reflect through their creative works and through their use of recyclable materials, or materials that surprise us because they stretch traditional or conventional forms to which we are accustomed.

The artistic expressions that we develop and create in our communities often bring us closer to our companions in mission, who are shaped by their histories and their wounds. Pope John Paul II told us:

“When the artist creates a work, he expresses himself to the point that his production becomes a unique reflection of his own being, of what he is and how he is. This is confirmed throughout human history, for when the artist creates a masterpiece, he not only gives life to his work, but through it, in a certain way, also reveals his own personality. In art he finds a new dimension and an extraordinary channel of expression for his spiritual growth. Through the works he creates, the artist speaks and communicates with others.” (Letter to Artists, 6, Rome, 1999).

Mission is always shared with other priests, brothers, and lay people; we are called to unity and to serve together. Therefore, we should encourage one another to create and to respect each other’s creations. At the same time, we should be humble and balanced in proposing pastoral initiatives that include art and its expressions, so that they may draw us closer to the Lord from the concrete realities in which we work and carry out our mission.

# BEAUTY IS POWER

Br. Peter Think | ARE

For me, art is an expression of beauty, and beauty has the power to attract people. In Vietnam, where music and traditional arts play a significant role in the culture, I find that music is essential in liturgies and retreats. I have experienced how music enhances the sacredness of the liturgy, allowing the congregation to enter more deeply into the rituals being celebrated. This is especially true during funerals or special commemorative events, where music conveys deep inspiration and evokes profound memories.

Music also has a strong appeal for young people. When offering classes in painting, music, or poetry, I have observed that they are usually very enthusiastic about participating. This creates opportunities for me to share about God and to express the love and care I have for them. Through sincere teaching, especially in music, I help them understand the selfless love that guides my mission. Using illustrations from Bible stories or songs that praise God has helped me communicate spiritual messages more clearly and deeply.

Art creates beauty, and beauty invites attention and reflection. In Vietnam, during worship services or sharing activities, the beauty of music and art allows people to momentarily set aside their daily worries and focus on the spiritual dimension of life. When people aspire to something greater, they often become more aware of God's presence in their lives. Musical performances that celebrate God's love, as well as retreats that incorporate music, help bring peace and calm to the soul.

Songs that praise God resonate easily with people, creating connections not only between individuals and God but also among members of the community. Art makes the worship space vibrant and welcoming, especially during religious celebrations such as Christmas or Easter, when artistic expression becomes a bridge that connects people's hearts.



Creativity helps prevent routine from becoming monotonous in worship and brings renewed energy to every activity. In Vietnam, with its rich diversity of customs and traditions, creativity allows me to explore new expressions of spiritual life. I often look for ways to express devotion through folk arts such as music, dance, or traditional performances. This not only fulfills my passion for art but also enriches worship and community activities.

I encourage missionaries to cultivate an artistic spirit that is open to the diversity of different cultures. In Vietnam, exploring local folk arts can open many doors for ministry. If possible, missionaries should learn to play an instrument or participate in local cultural and artistic activities. This helps deepen their understanding of the people they serve and allows them to contribute meaningfully to liturgical and community programs. In this way, they can connect more effectively with the community and share faith in a more engaging and accessible manner.



Image Credit: Canva.com



# The Living Scroll: Finding the Art of Mission in Japan

Br. Darwin Jaime | JAP

My journey to the mission land began with an unexpected pause. I left the Philippines on December 30, 2025, but the late arrival of my aircraft at Hong Kong International Airport meant that my connecting flight to Japan had already departed. What could have been a moment of anxiety became instead my first encounter with unexpected care: the airline provided an overnight stay at the Regal Airport Hotel, complete with warm meals. It felt as though the Divine Artist was granting me a final moment of rest before turning the “blank page” of my new life. I finally arrived in Japan on December 31, stepping into my assignment just as the world itself was turning the page to a New Year.

The transition was jarring—moving from the tropical warmth of home into the shibareru (しぼれる — the biting, “binding” cold) of a Japanese winter. Everything felt “other”: the architecture, the daunting language barrier, and the weight of being a stranger in a complex land. However, in this land of ancient traditions, I quickly learned that mission is not just a task; it is a series of living art forms.

## 1. The Art of Egao 笑顔 (The Smile)

Before I ever encountered sacred ink upon a wall, I witnessed the Gospel written upon the faces of my confreres. At the airport, I was met by Fr. Nikolaus Kondi, SVD (Fr. Nico) and Fr. Stephanus Mangga, SVD (Fr. Ephén). In the midst of the sterile terminal and my “first-day” worries, they offered me a radiant egao. In a mission land where words often fail, the smile is the first art form we must master. Their joy was a masterful brushstroke of grace—a universal calligraphy of welcome that required no translation.

## 2. The Art of En 縁 (The Connection)

They say the first three months for a new missionary are the most difficult, filled with the shadows of homesickness and the steep climb of cultural adjustment. Yet, under the supervision of Fr. Ephén, I have been guided by a sense of En—the providential connection that brings people together for a shared purpose. As our Director at the Xavier House Community, he fosters an environment of kazoku (family) care. He checks on my well-being, asking the vital question: “Genki desu ka?” (How are you?). He reminds me that the first work of a missionary is simply “being well” together in the community God has gathered for us.





This sense of En was made even more visible through my classmate from Novitiate formation in the Philippines, Br. Dai Toyoshima, SVD. Now living in the same building, he has offered his time to guide me through this unfamiliar landscape. From visiting SVD Parishes and attending Tagalog Masses with the Filipino community to exploring temples, museums, and sharing bowls of delicious ramen, Br. Dai has been a bridge. Through him, I am beginning to understand the Japanese way of life—not as a stranger, but as a brother.

### 3. The Art of Kikubari 気配り (The Attentiveness)

At the dinner table, I witnessed a different masterpiece through Fr. Matsumoto Katsuo. I watched, mesmerized, by the sacred precision with which he peels and slices ringo (apples) or kaki (persimmons) to distribute to every confrere present at the table. To watch him is to watch a silent liturgy;

it is the art of kikubari—the thoughtful attentiveness of ensuring everyone is nourished and seen. Through his hands, a simple fruit becomes a gift of communion.

### Art as a Missionary Compass

During the dinner of December 31, 2025, to celebrate the New Year, I was introduced to a community of different nationalities. Men from different countries, speaking a tapestry of different languages, had gathered in one spirit. Amidst this diversity, my eyes were drawn to a framed calligraphy on the wall, placed in the center of the Dining Hall of the Divine Word Seminary in Nagoya, Japan:



### "若き日に汝の造り主を覚えよ"

(REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF YOUR YOUTH — ECCLESIASTES 12:1)

It reminded me that even when I struggle to navigate the "linguistic wall," I am first and foremost a child of the Creator. Art spoke when grammar failed, proving that the Spirit communicates through beauty long before we master syntax.

#### Mastering the Stroke

I have now begun language studies under Takeda Kazuyo Sensei and Emy Sato Sensei. I arrived facing a blank white page, but I am being initiated into the sacred geometry of the three scripts: Hiragana (the flowing curves of grace), Katakana (the angular call to a foreign land), and Kanji (the weight and wisdom of the Word).

Even at home, Fr. Nico gently traces the characters with me. As I trace these curves, I realize every stroke has a beginning and an end—much like our own missionary journeys. My shaky hand is a humbling reminder that the Divine Artist is patient with my "rough edges."

#### The Living Scroll: A Vocational Summary

As a Religious Missionary Brother, my vocation is a "work of the hands." In the quiet labor of service, I realize that I am not the master calligrapher of my life, but the medium through which a greater Story is told.

- **The Ink:** This represents my daily efforts—the messy "blots" of my mistakes, the steady lines of my studies, and the small, often invisible acts of service for my community.
- **The Canvas:** This is the texture of my life in Japan—the "rough edges" of the stroke provided by the biting cold and the daunting language barrier. These challenges do not ruin the art; they give it character and depth.
- **The Artist:** The Divine Word, who holds the brush. I have surrendered the need to control the narrative. I am simply the paper, waiting to receive the next stroke of His grace.

# A Missionary's Personal Prayer

Br. Darwin Jaime | JAP

Image Credit: Canva.com

## Divine Word,

You who spoke the world into being with beauty, thank  
 You for the "silent welcome" I found in the ink of the  
 ancient scroll and the warm smiles of my confreres.  
 In the quiet struggle of my studies, when my tongue  
 feels heavy and my memory fails, help me to hear  
 Your voice in the silence. Grant me the grace to be like  
 this calligraphy: a clear, bold, and humble reflection of  
 Your Truth.

May my life here be a steady stroke of Your love—a  
 message that the people of Japan can read upon my  
 heart, even before I have found the words to speak it.

**Amen.**

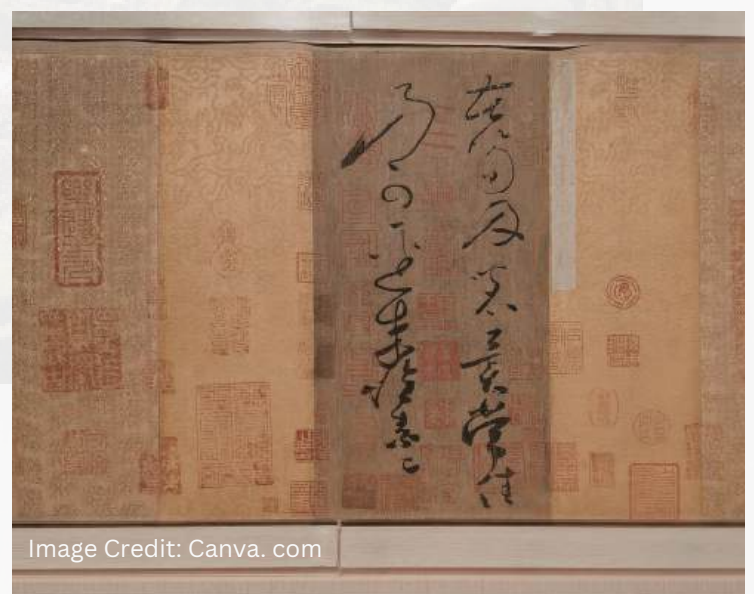


Image Credit: Canva.com

# MUSIC IS A CALLING

Br. Karlus Andryanto Fone | PHS

My hobby is playing music. Playing music is a powerful social tool for building relationships, collaboration, empathy, and non-verbal communication. Through playing music or singing, I learn to listen, cooperate, and build trust. Music becomes an emotional language that connects me with others, improving my social intelligence and strengthening my bonds with others. Playing music is not only a talent, but I recognize it as a calling. A calling to comfort others through music, bringing them comfort through stress and loneliness. Playing music helps build relationships, empathy, and trains my emotional skills and teamwork. Playing music also helps build bridges of social interaction between me and others and also God.



# SVD ARTISTS...

Br. Franz Schneider | GER



I'm sending you an article about Brother Ottmar Jessberger. God bless the Brothers' Forum. Beyond Br. Othmar, I could give you two more exemplary SVD artists: Father Josef Büttgens and Brother Frankus Kästner. But they've both passed away.



*The faces of Flores live on in his memory, looking out at him from his photos and his paintings.*

# THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

## How Brother Othmar's Last Painting Traveled the World

Image Credit: canva.com/

Steyl Aktuell, February 1, By Fr. Vaclav Mucha (GER) and Petra Graf



*Brother Othmar Jessberger traces God's presence through his painting. His thoughts and feelings are often with the people of Indonesia, whom he has grown fond of as a missionary.*

Brother Othmar Jessberger has been a Divine Word Missionary for 70 years. Until a few months ago, he painted with great devotion. For health reasons, he has now had to lay down his brush. Before doing so, he completed his final work: *The Motherhood of God*. The painting traveled around the world and reunited him with the people of the Indonesian island of Flores, whose faces appear prominently in almost all of his works. In his last painting, he rendered some of the faces entirely from the heart, as his eyesight is failing. The painting is now on display in one of the chapels of the St. Wendel Mission House.

**A meditation by Sandra Kuhn from the pastoral care team invites reflection and prayer. It begins with the Bible verse,**

“As a mother comforts,  
so will I comfort you” (Isaiah 66:13).

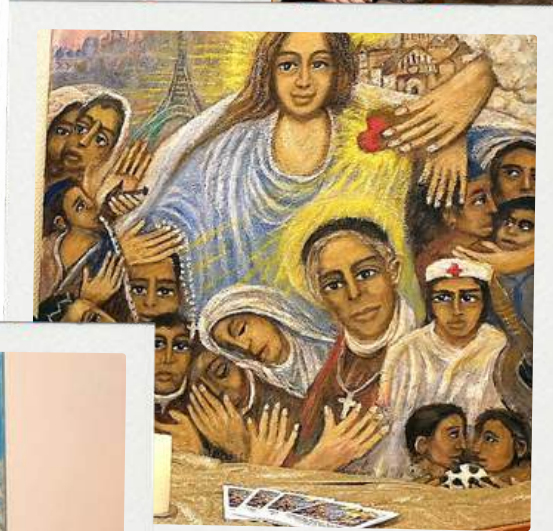
“In the upper left of the image,  
we see Mary and John weeping over  
Jesus’ suffering at his pierced hand.

On the cross, Jesus says,  
‘Son, behold your mother.  
Mother, behold your son.  
Here, God’s maternal love—tender,  
warm, caring—is revealed through Mary.

Jesus, too, experienced this love  
and passed it on to his apostles.

God is not only Father,  
but also Mother:  
merciful, patient, loving,”

**explains Sandra Kuhn.**



*The faces of Flores live  
on in his memory,  
looking out at him from  
his photos and his  
paintings.*



In an interview with *Steyler Aktuell* while working on the painting, Brother Othmar said: “I perceive that we have neglected the emotional, the maternal aspect in our preaching—that God is not only Father, but also Mother. God has no gender. God is Spirit. And I am convinced that God can be both maternal and paternal at the same time.”

The story of the painting spread around the world. Photos of Brother Othmar working on his portrait, which were published on social media, did not go unnoticed. A young woman first contacted the press office of the German Province of the Order via Facebook. Her family had long been searching for Brother Othmar.

Petra Graf, a caregiver at the Wendelinusheim nursing home, maintained contact with Flores and organized video calls so that Brother Othmar could reconnect with the people who had cherished him since childhood and never forgotten him.

One of these people is Hans. We are permitted to quote from one of his messages: “Brother Othmar is like a grandfather to me. He is a strong, steadfast personality with great dedication. He is not only a leader, but also a professional mentor, a helper to the poor and marginalized, and a father to all the children on Flores. He loves and cares for all the children equally, without distinction. [...] Brother Othmar always advised us: ‘Become like Jesus. Do not be afraid of death—death is not the end. We will all rise like Jesus and one day be reunited.’”

Petra Graf describes the video calls that connected continents as follows: “These moments show once again how profoundly Brother Othmar’s simplicity, his humor, and his kindness continue to shape people—even after many decades. This year he will turn 91. No matter how he is doing, he loses neither his faith nor his sense of humor. The maternal love that he brought to life in his paintings lives on in his character, in his final work *The Motherhood of God*, in his prayer, and in every encounter with others.”

*Text and image: Petra Graf, Sandra Kuhn, Fr. Václav Mucha SVD*



# THE GOSPEL IS NOT NEUTRAL

Fr. Kristoforus Muit | BRC



Source: the authors themselves. Muit and Tolang (2005).

The work should not be read merely as an object of aesthetic contemplation, but as an open theological text, in which colors and forms articulate missionary praxis in the twenty-first century. The central objective of this reflection is to decipher how the work synthesizes missionary theology and the guidelines of contemporary ecclesiology, positioning itself as a vital point of intersection between art, faith, and Christian mission on the frontiers of modernity.

The theoretical foundation of this work affirms that sacred art is one of the highest expressions of the human spirit and an essential instrument of evangelization. Grounded in the magisterium of Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis, the artists' vision maintains that the Christian image creates a real space of encounter between the divine and the human, transforming abstract dogmatic truths into a perceptible language that challenges the faithful.

As a direct fruit of the SVD spirituality, the canvas draws inspiration from the guidelines of the XV General Chapter, integrating the centrality of Christ with the pillars of modern mission, such as commitment to the poor and interreligious dialogue. Manifesting through an expressionist aesthetic, the composition is organized radially, moving from the mystical center toward social peripheries. At the central axis emerges the Cosmic and Incarnate Christ, whose outstretched arms transfigure the pain of the crucifixion into welcome.

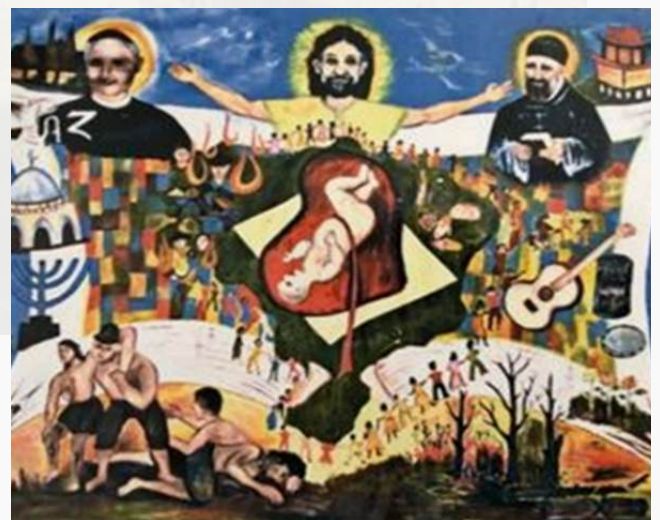
The most innovative detail lies in His womb, where the Child Jesus resides, suggesting that all humanity is being nurtured within the body of Christ. Flanking the central figure, Saint Arnold Janssen and Saint Joseph Freinademetz hold, alongside Christ, the “Blanket of the Word,” symbolizing the Holy Scripture extending over diverse human realities, uniting the sacred with everyday life.

The composition functions as a mosaic of diversity, articulating the tension between the universal and the particular through local incarnation. The first pillar of this construction is the embrace of religious pluralism, integrating symbols from major spiritual traditions, such as a mosque, Eastern temples, and the Jewish menorah, indicating that mission is carried out in harmonious coexistence.

This universal vision is grounded in the geography of Latin America, where the map of Brazil is formed by intertwined hands, symbolizing popular solidarity. The pinnacle of this inculturation is the depiction of the Virgin with indigenous features, reinforcing that the Gospel must speak the language and bear the face of the people who receive it. At the base of the composition, the painting culminates in a powerful social critique. Structural sin is exposed through images of environmental degradation and parched land, symbolizing the agony of creation. Yet this scene of death serves as a contrast to the scenes of resistance and justice marches emerging from the chaos.



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# ART SPARKS DIALOGUE

Fr. Peter Matthias Platzer | GER

I am pleased that art is being discussed in the SVD Brothers Forum. I would like to contribute a few watercolors and an etching (see attached). I prefer not to explain the individual images in detail. Each viewer should feel free to engage with them and develop their own reflections. I simply offer a general orientation through the titles.

Most of the watercolors presented here were created during my novitiate. They reflect my engagement with biblical themes in connection with my personal emotions and life experiences. This engagement has given rise to a variety of (religious) dialogues between myself and others.

Unfortunately, the photographs are not of high quality, as the works are framed behind glass, which has resulted in unwanted reflections.

*Regarding my artistic background, I provide the following information:*

*Peter Matthias Platzer, born 1956 in Brüggen on the Lower Rhine (Germany)*

*Student of: Monika Proppach-Voeste (pen and ink drawing) Franz Knapp (etching, watercolor, pastel) Johannes Waldeck (lithography) Heinz Knapp (etching) Self-taught artist (Japanese ink painting, Japanese watercolor) Participation in international symposia in Austria and Poland. Works in public and private collections both in Germany and abroad. (Belgium, China, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Netherlands, Austria, Peru, Poland, Switzerland)*



Image Credit: Canva.com



***My Lord and my God, my soul  
yearns for you, and with tears I  
seek you!***



***Emptiness is the highest fullness,  
but humankind has no right to  
know this. (Simone Weil)***



***The sun shall not be your light.  
(Isaiah 60:19)***



***The Lord God is a sun and shield.  
(Psalm 84:12)***



***Worry ages prematurely. (Sirach 30:26)***



*With firm, joyful steps, you must rise above the cloud of forgetfulness and with a heartfelt and sweet stirring of love, try to penetrate the darkness that is above you. Drill the sharp spear of yearning love into this dense cloud, and do not cease, whatever may happen. (Anonymous Carthusian, 14th century)*

*Jesus is born, who is called Christ. (Matthew 1:16)*





***Now go! (Exodus 3:10)***



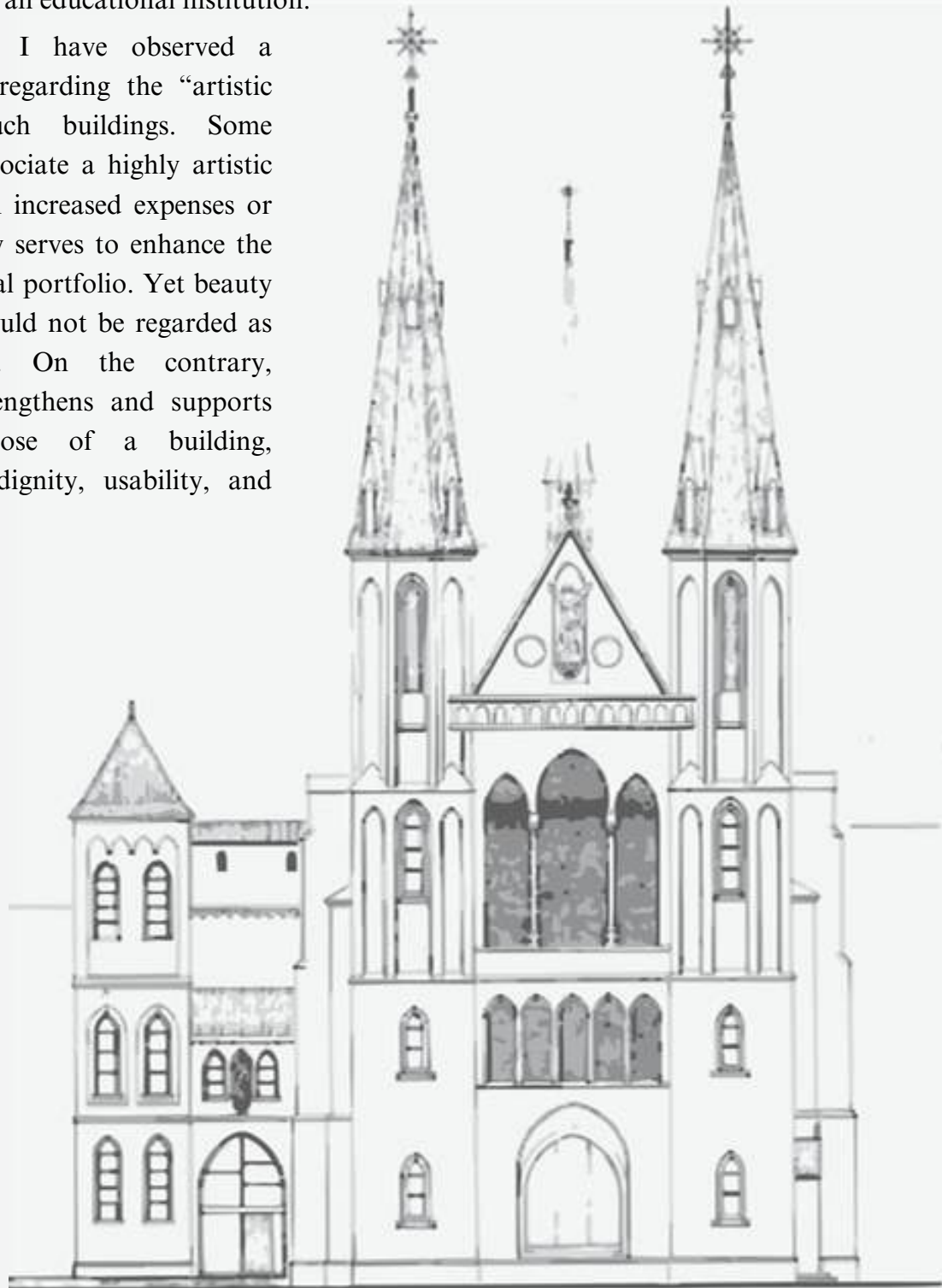
***Original etching: Between Two Chairs***

# LET'S BE ARTISTIC!

Br. Béla Lányi | PHS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Br. Darwin Jaime (JAP) for the guide questions presented in this issue. The fundamental question he raised, however, opened a broader and more reflective line of thought in my mind. As an architect in the Society of the Divine Word, I have repeatedly encountered situations in which we assume the role of construction investors. These projects may involve the building of a small chapel, a pilgrimage church, a religious residence, or an educational institution.

In many instances, I have observed a recurring hesitation regarding the “artistic appearance” of such buildings. Some confreres tend to associate a highly artistic design primarily with increased expenses or assume that it merely serves to enhance the architect’s professional portfolio. Yet beauty and functionality should not be regarded as opposing principles. On the contrary, aesthetic quality strengthens and supports the practical purpose of a building, contributing to its dignity, usability, and lasting value.

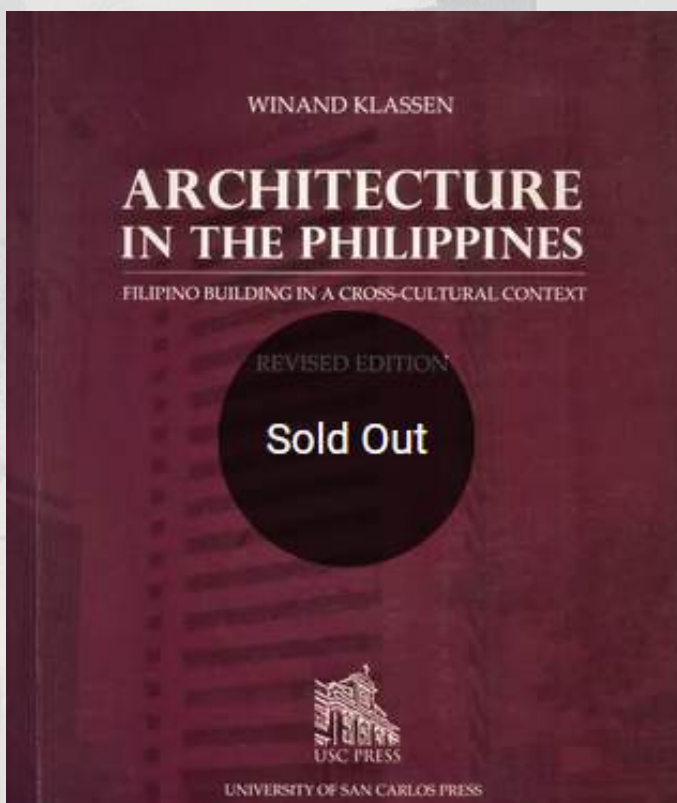




Another tendency may also be observed when construction projects unintentionally risk becoming personal “monuments.” It is important to note that such an outcome is rarely the result of deliberate intention. Nevertheless, awareness of this possibility remains necessary in order to preserve the proper spirit of service and mission that should guide our building initiatives.

In this regard, the SVDs may need guidance in recognizing the appropriate balance between artistic expression and purely functional considerations in construction. In earlier years, Fr. Winand Klassen, SVD, made a significant contribution to fostering a comprehensive understanding of both the artistic and the practical dimensions of SVD building activities. As head of the so-called “SVD Building Office (Baubüro)” in Nemi, Italy, he provided important leadership in this field.

Later, as a professor at the University of San Carlos in Cebu, he helped cultivate architectural taste through four influential books that shaped the reflections of many interested readers. His approach goes back to Saint Arnold Janssen, who combined artistic sensitivity with practical wisdom. Allow me to quote a sentence from Barbara Janssen, a chronicler of Arnold’s architectural ideals: I “Saint Arnold places great emphasis on the sacred character of the complexes, yet he always approaches the construction of his houses pragmatically.



Every concept, every floor plan, and every pathway is planned down to the last detail and calculated with the utmost precision.”

(1) (See the original, very meaningful German text below.) Today, our universities and colleges could take the initiative to continue Fr. Klassen’s pioneering efforts to foster artistic awareness.

We may also make use of contemporary technology to deepen this awareness and promote a more informed and balanced approach to architectural development within our Society—not only with regard to the past, but also in shaping future construction projects so that they are both artistically meaningful and practically sound.



(1) Here is the original German text. “Janssen legt einen hohen Wert auf den sakralen Charakter der Komplexe, dennoch geht er den Bau seiner Häuser stets pragmatisch an. Jedes Konzept, jeder Grundriss, jede Wegeanlage ist bis in das letzte Detail geplant und genauestens berechnet (sh. die Kapitel zur Bauphase der einzelnen Häuser sowie Kap. 6.1. Zum Bauverständnis).”

In: Janßen, Barbara: Die Missionshäuser der SVD und der hl. Arnold Janssen. Dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, Bonn 2017, S. 199. Online-Ausgabe in bonndoc: <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:5-49146>

# LAST WORDS FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Confreres,

Peace!

The Publisher and the contributors of the Forum thank you for reading these thoughts attentively. As through Lent the feast of Easter approaches, we wish you all a Blessed Lenten preparation and the joy of the Risen Lord at Easter.

If you would like to react to some sharing or send your own thoughts, you are most welcome. You may use English, Spanish, Bahasa Indonesia, German or Polish in your feedback.

In the Divine Word,  
Your SVD Brothers Forum Publisher and Editors

Image Credit: br. mnp, svd

