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Summer 2021

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## EDITORIAL

As we were compiling articles for this issue of *Mission Update*, it struck me that two of our mission projects—in different countries on different continents—were influenced by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. To paraphrase the encyclical's subtitle, Francis urges Christians take more conscientious care of our common home, the earth we share.

In Mozambique, Father Giang Nguyen SVD turned to solar energy to power the local mission parish. The priests there now enjoy a cost savings, no longer having to buy expensive diesel fuel. "It is not only ecological, but it is also economical to live *Laudato Si*," he says.

From the Philippines, Father Sam Agcaracar SVD writes about the new SVD Farm developed on property owned by the Divine Word Seminary of Tagaytay. He says the farm was "aimed at putting into practice the tenets of *Laudato Si*." One of the buildings on the property is called the *Laudato Si Kubo* (which stands for "cottage").

In recent months, I have noticed many other references to *Laudato Si* in the social media posts we have shared from our missionaries around the world. I am not surprised to see Divine Word Missionaries so inspired by the pope's encyclical. The emphasis of *Laudato Si* was already part of one of our core charisms: Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, which we often shorten to JPIC.

Our many efforts to take care of the poor often fall under the "Justice" of JPIC. In Chad, Father Thierry Koula SVD is working to build a parish hall for Sts. Peter and Paul, his church in Moundou. The building would be more than a gathering place for his flock. It would be a place where our missionaries could offer services to the poor in his area, including widows and those struggling to overcome problems with alcohol.

We recently began an ongoing campaign to help Fr. Thierry raise funds to complete his parish hall. If you would like to help, and we hope that you will, please visit

**<https://missionimpact.svdmissions.org/build-the-church-in-chad>.**

We thank you for your continued support.

Yours in the Divine Word,

Bro. Daniel Holman SVD  
Mission Director

Contact me any time, my email address is:  
[director@svdmissions.org](mailto:director@svdmissions.org)

**Thank you  
for your  
prayers & support!**

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Fr. Nguyen and friends in Mozambique

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The rugged, mountainous terrain of some mission areas often force our missionaries to travel slowly by foot to reach their remote outstations and visit the congregations.

This is where a motorcycle is most useful.

# Motorcycles <sup>for</sup> Missionaries



*Fr. Ziliak SVD, 1954*

*Missionaries on Motorcycles 1952*



*Fathers Edward Grzenia, Felix Eckerman, William Popp and Jerome Ziliak*



*Fr. Felix Eckerman and Fr. Jerome Ziliak, 1952*

## Can you help us provide 6 motorcycles?

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*Christ The Light Parish, Meghalaya, India*

Father Joby

90885.00 Rupee. **\$1,240.32**

We are in the remote village of Longshiwiat. The land is rocky and hilly. Our work takes us to 16 villages made up of 449 Catholic families. The people are mostly hardworking farmers.

*Holy Family Church, Pradesh, India*

Father Chennuru

94800.00 Rupee. **\$1,293.75**

Our parish was established in 1997. We reach out to six villages that have approximately 200 Catholic families. We conduct regular visit to each village. The terrain is dry and stony. With no public transportation available, a motorbike will help us bring medical attention, spiritual activities and social programs to the neighboring areas.

*Holy Spirit Church, Guntur Dist., India*

Father Savarirayappan

108000.00 Rupee. **\$1,473.89**

Holy Spirit Church is a new parish, erected in 2014. There are 90 families in our parish and thankfully the number continues to grow. Our parishioners are spread over a great distance and often we are not able to reach them quickly in their time of need. A motorbike would greatly assist our pastoral work.

*Arogya Matha Church, Medak Dist., India*

99473.00 Rupee. **\$1,357.52**

Father Varkey

We are a very small parish with 20 Catholic families. They all live very far from the parish. There are a few villages surrounding the parish. The people of these villages are poor tribals. Our pastoral activities take us to our parishioner's faraway homes, and our social work to the non-Catholic tribal people in the distant villages. A motorbike would be very useful in our ministry.

*Our Lady of Good Health Church, Trichy, India*

Father Paul

102177.00 Rupee. **\$1,394.42**

We are so pleased to announce we have 400 families in our parish! The downside is we continue to do most of our pastoral visits on foot. Our parish had grown since its inception in 1999, but today we feel we could do so much more if we had a motorbike for our pastoral use.

*Our Lady of Good Health Church, Anaimalai, India*

122852.00 Rupee. **\$1,676.58**

Father Anthu

We are a mission parish responsible for three mission stations 10 miles apart from each other. We are almost 38 miles from our diocesan headquarters. Our travels to visit parishioners, and meetings with the bishop, all involve long and often dangerous travels. The use of a motorbike would help us engage the neighboring villages and allow us to spread the Word as far as we can.

**\$1,240.32**

**\$1,293.75**

**\$1,473.89**

**\$1,357.52**

**\$1,294.42**

**\$1,676.58**

**Grand Total**

**\$8,336.48**

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# “Mustering” Cattle

**To get to know their parishioners, these  
two Australian missionaries hit the farm**

*By Debra Vermeer*

*Fr. Truc on the ranch: “I feel at home because  
my family (in Vietnam) are farmers...”*



**W**hen Pope Francis encouraged priests to “take on the smell of the sheep” by getting out and being with the people, he might not have imagined how two Divine Word Missionaries would put his words into actions by spending time on vast cattle ranches in rural Queensland, Australia.

Father Truc Quoc Phan SVD and Father Yon Wiryono SVD are based in Emerald in Queensland’s Central Highlands Region. They care for four churches at Emerald, Springsure, Blackwater and the Aboriginal community of Woorabinda.

Rather than stay put in their churches, which are situated hundreds of miles apart, they have been spending time with their parishioners, many of whom live on farmland outside the townships.

“It is part of our desire to be with the people, not only at church, but in their daily lives,” says Fr. Truc, who is pastor of St. Patrick’s



*Fr. Yon, pictured above: says he has been stunned at how far away the properties—which are a mix of cattle ranching and sorghum farming—are from their neighbors.*

Parish in Emerald. “When we go and spend time with them where they are, it builds up relationship and it tightens the bond between us and them.”

Every third week, one of the two priests heads out of Emerald to Springsure to say Mass on Sunday and to stay through the week.

“We have spent time on cattle properties, and we also visit people in the countryside before and after Mass,” Fr. Truc says. “So far we have been visiting our parishioners who come to church, but we are always ready to reach out to people, especially those who don’t have the chance to come to church.”

Fr. Truc says plans are in place to go and stay more regularly in

the Aboriginal community of Woorabinda to get to know the people there better, too.

When Fr. Truc visits the cattle properties, he feels at home despite the vastness of the land.

“I feel at home because my family (in Vietnam) are farmers and I’ve worked in the countryside before, in Thailand, so it brings back some old memories,” he says. “But I’m also amazed. These farmers have 10,000 acres, which is unthinkable for Vietnamese people. It’s marvelous.”

The priests have received a warm welcome from their parishioners.

“People in the countryside are very hospitable,” Fr. Truc says.



*Fr. Truc looking over the crops with the local farmer*





*Fr. Yon about to “muster” cattle from a helicopter.*

“They enjoy taking you around and showing you things, and I have really enjoyed being with them.”

Fr. Yon, who recently spent a week in Springsure, says he has found his visits to these cattle ranches remarkable.

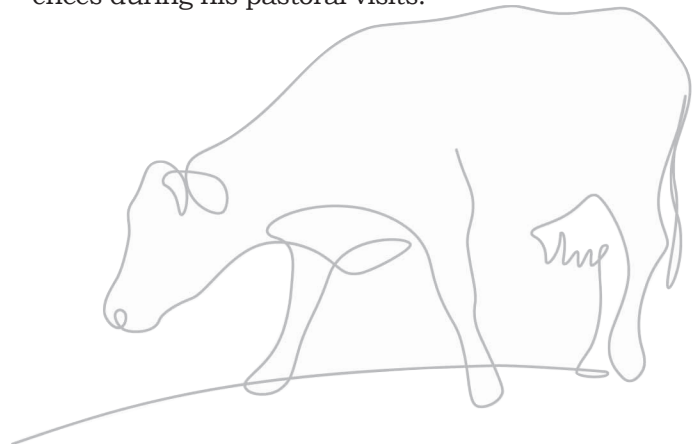
“I visited five of them last week,” he says.

“It’s great to get out and see where our people live on these big properties,” Fr. Yon continues. “That’s their life. And for some of them it’s been handed down from generation to generation, so it’s all they know. They love the life. They don’t like living in cities. They find it peaceful out here, even though it’s hard work.”

Fr. Yon, who is from Indonesia, says he has been stunned at how far away the properties—which are a mix of cattle ranching and sorghum farming—are from their neighbors.

“It’s pretty isolated and it’s a big business on these properties,” he says. “It’s not farming like they do it back home, where they use human power. Here, they use big machines to harvest the crops and motorbikes or helicopters to muster the cattle.” [Editor’s note: Americans would call it “herding cattle.”]

Fr. Yon says he has had some amazing experiences during his pastoral visits.



"I like reaching out to people and I like adventure," he says. "I've been up mustering in a helicopter, which was fun, and I've been horse riding."

Fr. Yon considers it beneficial for the priests to gain a deeper understanding of how their parishioners live.

"They are our parishioners and it is good to reach out to get to know them and their struggles," he says. "As SVDs we see mission in terms of presence, of being there with the people and listening to them. And the people are really good at telling stories about the land and the way of life, so it's really interesting to listen and learn."

"And the people appreciate that we come," he adds. "They appreciate that we drive quite long distances on dirt roads and we come to see them and see their life. Then we see them again at church we know their place and how they live and that means a lot to both us and them."

Reminded of the pope's "smell of the sheep" comment, Fr. Yon demurs a bit. "We're not so much smelling like the sheep, like Pope Francis said, but we're smelling of the cattle." ♦

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## PLAN & BUDGET

To sustain our mission programs overseas, it is an undeniable necessity to use these two words, "plan" and "budget." Budgeting is the only way to ensure consistent funding.

Preaching the Gospel, feeding the poor, providing medical attention to those in need and helping families around the world become self-reliant takes a lot of planning. These long-term investments in the future of struggling Catholic faith communities can be done only with consistent and planned monies coming in.

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the world!**







## Fr. Frank Budenholzer SVD: At the Intersection of Religion & Science

*By Jeffrey Westhoff*

Many people draw a sharp line between science and philosophy, but Father Frank Budenholzer SVD is not one of them. Fr. Budenholzer began his academic career at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan in 1978 teaching chemistry. Today he teaches courses in philosophy.

Not that Fr. Budenholzer, 76, has strayed far from science. His courses often focus on the intersection of religion and science. “I’ve always been interested in philosophy and religion and science,” he said during a recent visit to the Techny Mission Center.

That interest goes back to his days as a seminarian studying to be a Divine Word Missionary. He graduated from Divine Word College in Epworth, Iowa, with a major in philosophy and a minor in mathematics. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry two years later at DePaul University in Chicago.

Fr. Budenholzer continued his education after his ordination to the priesthood in 1972. In 1974, he got his master’s degree in systematic theology at the Chicago Theological Union. He received his doctorate in physical chemistry at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1977. While working toward his doctorate, he also took philosophy courses at UIC.

Fr. Budenholzer’s academic career at Fu Jen, the university operated by Divine Word Missionaries in Taipei, was interrupted only once by a year’s sabbatical to Berkeley, California, from 1997 to 1998. Even then he split his time between science and philosophy as a visiting scholar to the University of California at Berkeley’s chemistry department as well as the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences.

*Fr. Budenholzer standing in front of the famous Shandong tree.*





*Fr. Budenholzer with students in Philosophy of Science class.*

The Chinese students who study at Fu Jen are fascinated by science, and Fr. Budenholzer noted that it is fitting for a missionary institution to teach science in Taiwan. "Science was brought to China and Taiwan, in many ways, by Christian missionaries, Protestant and Catholic," he said. "They were gentlemen of broad range, Renaissance types, and many of them started schools, and they taught Western science."

Fr. Budenholzer has held several leadership positions at Fu Jen. He was director of the Graduate Institute of Chemistry from 1980 to 1984, dean of the College of Science and Engineering from 1984 to 1990, vice president of the university from 1990 to 1997 and academic coordinator of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion from 2001 to 2008.

Then in 2008 Fr. Budenholzer was elected provincial of the China Province. Overseeing all the missionaries and ministries in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong and Macau left him no time to teach. He remained provincial for nine years, and when he returned to Fu Jen in 2017 he no longer taught chemistry but concentrated on philosophy courses.

Many of those courses focus on the teachings of Bernard Lonergan, a Jesuit priest, theologian and philosopher considered by many to be one of the leading Catholic thinkers of the 20th century. Fr. Budenholzer discovered Lonergan while studying at the seminary and has been an admirer ever since. At the Chicago Theological Union he did his master's dissertation on Lonergan.

He especially appreciates Lonergan's thoughts on the nature of religion and

science. "He has one of the best understanding of contemporary science of any of the Thomist background philosophers," Fr. Budenholzer said. A Thomist subscribes to the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas.

No longer a full-time professor, Fr. Budenholzer is on Fu Jen University's board of trustees, and the two titles he still holds with the university are resident trustee and executive trustee. The latter means he acts as a liaison between the board of directors and university administration. It also involves him in the operations of Fu Jen Catholic University Hospital, which began accepting patients just four years ago. "Starting a hospital is a big deal," he said.

Fr. Budenholzer is one of only two American missionaries living in the Divine Word community at Fu Jen. He said it is a "very international" community with 18 confreres from Asia, Europe and the Americas. "It's a very nice community," he said, "very supportive."

Originally from Chicago, Fr. Budenholzer was on home leave to attend a family reunion in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. So it was a joyful coincidence that the missionary based in Taiwan happened to be in Wisconsin when one member of his family—his cousin Mike Budenholzer—coached the Milwaukee Bucks to their first NBA championship in 50 years.

The family gathered in their hotel to watch the last two games of the Bucks' final series against the Phoenix Suns. "You can imagine the whole Budenholzer clan was in the bar on the first floor cheering wildly for the Bucks," he said, smiling broadly. "The reunion was captivated by the Milwaukee Bucks." ♦

*Fr. Budenholzer celebrates Mass at family reunion.*







EVERY YEAR,  
SOMETHING  
WONDERFUL HAPPENS  
on the next-to-last  
Sunday of October.

WORLD MISSION  
SUNDAY unites all  
Catholics of the world into  
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recommit ourselves to our  
common vocation, through  
baptism, to be missionaries.

## MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR WORLD MISSION SUNDAY 2021

*"We cannot but speak about what  
we have seen and heard"*  
—Acts 4:20

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Once we experience the power of God's love, and recognize his fatherly presence in our personal and community life, we cannot help but proclaim and share what we have seen and heard. Jesus' relationship with his disciples and his humanity, as revealed to us in the mystery of his Incarnation, Gospel and Paschal Mystery, shows us the extent to which God loves our humanity and makes his own our joys and sufferings, our hopes and our concerns (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Everything about Christ reminds us that he knows well our world and its need for redemption, and calls us to become actively engaged in this mission: "Go therefore to the highways and byways, and invite everyone you find" (Mt 22:9). No one is excluded, no one need feel distant or removed from this compassionate love.

To read the entire message  
scan this QR code or go to:



[www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/missions/documents/papa-francesco\\_20210106\\_giornata-missionaria2021.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/missions/documents/papa-francesco_20210106_giornata-missionaria2021.html)





A poster for World Mission Sunday. The background is white with several large, colorful, crumpled paper hands reaching out from the edges. The hands are in various colors: blue, red, green, orange, yellow, purple, and grey. In the center is a circular globe with the text "World Mission Sunday" written in a black, cursive font. There are three inset photographs: a young child with dark hair and bangs, a woman in a tan shirt and straw hat crouching in a field, and a woman in profile wearing a beaded necklace. The date "Sunday October 24 2021" is in the bottom right, and the website "www.svdmissions.org" is at the very bottom.

# World Mission Sunday



Sunday  
October 24  
2021





# Let there be light

**Priest in Mozambique turns  
to the sun to power mission station**

*By Jeffrey Westhoff*

*Fr. Nguyen and local  
assistant install  
solar panels.*

**W**hen Father Giang Nguyen SVD arrived in Liúpo, a village in northern Mozambique, in 2016, he was greeted with the news that the mission station's generator broke down.

The diesel-powered generator supplied electricity to St. Francis Xavier Parish, pumping water from the well and keeping the lights on at night. The missionaries in Liúpo decided that rather than repair the old generator, they would replace it with something more efficient.

Fr. Giang found guidance in a prayer familiar to Divine Word Missionaries:

"May the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief vanish before the light of the Word and the Spirit of grace."—That prayer was like a wakeup call for me," Fr. Giang says. "That was the inspiration for me to find the light. Physically, I was trying to keep the lights going at night."





*Fr. Nguyen sends photos from Mozambique*



He “did some digging around” on the internet and discovered the best option for the mission station was a solar-powered generator. That discovery changed not only the fortunes of the mission in Liupo, but also the nature of Fr. Giang’s ministry. “That is how my experience, my journey, with solar energy began,” he says.

Even though he had little prior knowledge of it, Fr. Giang is now an advocate for solar energy. The priests at St. Francis Xavier Parish were able to share energy produced by the solar generator with a school operated by Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (SSpS), and now girls in the dormitory are able to

study at night with the lights on. In addition, Fr. Giang helped local families buy and install simple solar systems in their homes to supply electricity and heat their cooking stoves.

He has continued to learn about solar energy, and now extols the virtues of hybrid converters—devices that collect surplus energy and store it in batteries. The batteries contribute to a more stable energy supply than the missionaries had with the diesel generator. Fr. Giang procured a supply of solar batteries and sold them to people in the area at a low cost, which earned him the nickname “Father Battery.”





*"I am just a simple missionary that has an interest to find a solution to everyday problems."*

"With the knowledge I gain in the mission, I share it with other missions. I'm not a solar expert, I am a consultant," he says. "I am not a qualified technician. I am not a qualified electrician. I am just a simple missionary that has an interest to find a solution to everyday problems. I think it's a joy when you're able to find a solution, when you're able to light up a mission."

But lighting up the mission wasn't the only benefit of the solar generator. The diesel generator was noisy, smelly and produced noxious smoke. The solar generator is quiet and nonpolluting. The initial investment in the new generator already has paid off, Fr. Giang says. The missionaries no longer have to buy expensive diesel fuel.

"Not only saving the money," he adds, "but we are saving time. We don't have to go far away to buy the fuel."

Another benefit is that the water well now also operates by clean energy. Without the well, villagers would have to trek far to collect muddy water from the nearest river and carry it back in heavy jugs. Now the sun does all the work. "As long as the sun is up, it's able to bring this precious liquid—water—to help us and our neighbors," Fr. Giang says.

Fr. Giang is especially passionate about solar energy because it is renewable. It doesn't harm the environment and follows the teachings that Pope Francis set out in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. "It's a blessing," Fr. Giang says, "that new technology allows us to capture energy from nature and use that energy in a way that is sustainable and ... productive for our life—for our missionary life and also for the people that we serve."

He points out there are also practical reasons to follow *Laudato Si*. "You can have a better quality of life, but you can also make a cost savings. It is not only ecological, but it is also economical to live *Laudato Si*, to care for our common home. It makes sense!"

Fr. Giang adds that Divine Word Missionaries have been using the earth's resources wisely since the days of St. Arnold Janssen.

"Sustainability inspired by the pope and the Church is something that is not new, something our Founder and the early missionaries had been doing: making the best of the resources we have and caring for the environment at the same time," Fr. Giang says.

"To be an SVD is knowing how to make the best of the resources we have in our hands. ... Learning to work together, learning to collaborate and make the best of our resources has been a tradition for the SVDs, and something that I try to continue to do."

Earlier this year Fr. Giang was transferred from rural Liúpo to Maputo, which is Mozambique's capital city and also its most populous. He continues to advocate for solar energy, but because Maputo—unlike Liúpo—has an established electrical grid, he is encountering some resistance.

"They ask, 'Father, why invest in solar energy when we already have electricity?' And I would tell them it makes sense. It makes economic sense, but also—going back to *Laudato Si*—it's taking care of the environment."

Fr. Giang does have one project lined up in Maputo. He is working to bring solar energy to the diocese.

san radio station, which he says wastes a lot of electricity because it must keep its transmitters running constantly.

Besides solar energy, Fr. Giang also advocates for education. He is assembling a library of digital sources, where people can access e-books and educational databases on low-power computers.

"To have access to education, it helps our people, no matter where they are at, to be free, to open up their life to look at new horizons, especially during this pandemic," he says. "The idea is to encourage them to learn, to grow, to gain confidence, to try something new."

Before he was assigned to Mozambique in 2016, Fr. Giang spent two years in this country on Africa's southeast coast as part of the Cross-Cultural Training Program. He feels at home in Africa, especially among its people.

"They're wonderful people," he says. "They are people of God. Whether they are Catholic, whether they are Christian, whether they are Muslim, whether they don't believe in any god, they are our people, and I have the blessing to work among these people. We have the joy of sharing life together."

Fr. Giang acknowledges that Africa, with its civil wars, with its poverty, with its droughts, often receives bad press. "When we talk about Africa, we always focus on things negative," he says. "I like to focus on things positive."

For Fr. Giang, nothing is more positive than hope.

"My hope as a Divine Word Missionary," he says, "is to bring hope. In a world where there are so many conflicts, so many divisions, so much bad news, I hope to continue this trend of not only talking about the Good News, not only preaching the Good News, but living the Good News." ♦



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loves a  
cheerful  
giver."**

-2 Cor. 9:7

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## **“LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”**

*In the words of this beautiful canticle, St. Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.*



Inspired by pope’s ‘green’ encyclical,  
Philippine seminary takes up farming

## **Harvest of Hope**

*By Sam Agcaracar SVD*

In light of our religious order’s mission of pursuing social justice and the integrity of creation and of Pope Francis’ urgent call to tackle the current ecological crisis by practicing sustainable lifestyles, our new SVD Farm was inspired to promote the ideals of the encyclical *Laudato Si*.

### ***Laudato Si, On the Care of Our Common Home***



*Sam Agcaracar SVD*

**T**he 12-acre farm is located on the property of the Divine Word community in Tagaytay, Philippines. It is being developed to grow organic vegetables, coffee, fruits and garden plants and also to raise livestock. The farm now includes a prayer sanctuary and *Laudato Si* trail to reflect on God's presence in our lives through creation.

The farm developed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the Divine Word Seminary of Tagaytay prayerfully thought of ways and means to financially support the community. As they prayed, a cottage was being built in the middle of the land as an additional place for community reflection and a venue for meetings. It was named the *Laudato Si Kubo* (cottage) because it is an ideal space to reflect on “our common home,” as Pope Francis refers to the earth in his encyclical. The cottage was built within the “Season of Creation” from Sept. 5 to Oct. 5, 2020.





*The market where visitors buy organically produced fruits and vegetables*



## FARM PLANS

Construction of the cottage led us to realize that these 12 acres of land, which are part of the community's 27-acre property, were going unused. The plan to develop the SVD Farm was then conceived. The idea was that the farm would espouse the teachings of the Church about environmental protection. It would be a farm that would provide sustainable resources to the community, support indigent families and promote ecological integrity.

With the approval of the Philippines - Central Province leadership team, and the approval of the General Council in Rome, members of the Tagaytay community began clearing and preparing the land for cultivation. A plan was designed to grow high-value vegetables and fruit trees and to also raise livestock. Additionally, a coffee shop would be built where one can get an afternoon caffeine kick, experience the sweetness of milk tea and savor different snacks. There would also be a market so visitors could buy the organically produced fruits and vegetables. Through the help of friends and benefactors, the plans were slowly realized.



SVD Farm blessing, which included the greenhouses, a grotto and chapel in honor of the Virgin of the Poor



Following four months of intensive land clearing, cultivation and building of the initial infrastructure, the SVD Farm was blessed and opened to the public on Jan. 29, 2021—the feast of St. Joseph Freinademetz. Besides the greenhouses, a grotto and chapel in honor of the Virgin of the Poor also were built and inaugurated.

#### SEEDS OF EDUCATION

The SVD Farm is envisioned as a center for sustainable practices and knowledge. The six pillars of sustainability—farming, water, energy, livelihood, knowledge and lifestyle—are aimed at putting into practice the tenets of *Laudato Si*, supporting the livelihoods of underprivileged families surrounding the farm. The thousands of expected monthly visitors to the farm, including students on school tours, will be educated on sustainable farming techniques and technologies.

In terms of formation and mission, the SVD Farm serves as a laboratory for our seminarians to learn sustainable farming practices and entrepreneurship. More importantly, it also offers a space of encounter where seminarians can engage in prophetic dialogue with visitors coming from various places and walks of life.

PROPHETIC DIALOGUE means speaking boldly and yet humbly. It means that Christians can share the Good News of





Jesus—being prophetic, speaking God’s Word to those around us—but that we need to do it in humble conversation with other people, other cultures and other faiths.

While organic farming techniques and practices are now being applied on the farm, water and electricity sources are still conventional. In the future, we hope to be able to shift from conventional to renewable sources of water and energy to educate the visitors and communities around the SVD Farm on the value of justice, peace and integrity of creation.

*Laudato Si* states that “Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation.” All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents. ♦

***Pope Francis wrote in Laudato Si: “When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them” (Laudato Si, 87). The Divine Word community in Tagaytay aims to disseminate this message through the SVD Farm.***

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)



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*Something beautiful happens when we abandon our plans for God's plans. Meet Father Thierry Koula SVD. It wasn't until he became one of the most promising young teachers in Togo that he felt God calling him to something a little different—to become a teacher of God's people. His passion for improving education in Togo has developed into a passion for building the Catholic community in Chad as the pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish.*

## Empowering the Church in Chad

*By Thierry Koula SVD*



*To read more of Fr. Thierry's story scan this QR code or go to:*

**<https://stories.svdmissions.org/the-mission-post/empowering-the-church-in-chad>**



**Fr. Thierry is currently working to finish construction on a parish hall, which would greatly benefit the entire community. Here is what he had to share about the challenges and opportunities he and his parish are facing:**

### **A Priest Returns to Africa**

As a final-year student of theology in Chicago, I was asked by our superior general to give my three options for my first assignment, the eventual mission destination after the final profession in the Society of the Divine Word. The Chad Mission was one of the three. It was with mixed feelings that I put in that choice, a year before my ordination in 2016.

I was delighted to go back to Africa and fulfill my vocational dream: to serve God's people in the remote areas of Africa, the continent where I had my roots. I was born in Togo, a small country in West Africa. Africa probably needs more priests than other continents. Many Christian communities in Africa will go an entire year without seeing a priest. Thus, it was my deep desire to serve in Africa if God allowed me to be ordained to the priesthood.

And yet, I felt uneasy about going to Chad.

I still remember the reactions of some friends when I told them. Most were seriously scared and warned me that I made the wrong

choice! They said that Chad has a very hot climate and a high number of malaria cases and that it lacks basic amenities: running water, electricity, health care centers, food and internet connection. Terrorist groups such as Boko Haram operate from Chad's neighboring countries. Opting to go and live there, leaving the comfort zone of the United States, sounded and felt scary indeed.

Recalling the example of St. Joseph Freinademetz, the first Divine Word Missionary to China, gave me courage and hope. Trusting in the Lord's providential care, the call became easier and fear gave way to hope.

I was assigned to Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Moundou as the assistant parish priest. The church is full and vibrant on Sundays! Whether in the parish or at the outstations, all seats are occupied and many people are standing outside during Masses.

But I realized that the joyful people I met during the Eucharistic and other celebrations hid a great deal of anguish and turmoil. Parents are not able to take care of their children. Educational and health structures do not exist, and those that exist are not well-equipped. Alcoholism and HIV/AIDS are rampant among parishioners. The majority of teenage girls gets pregnant. In addition, there isn't enough infrastructure within the parish. In Chad, a priest is everything and this drains us a lot. Nevertheless, I am joyful to serve the people who are really in need. ♦

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