



Chicago Province Mission Statement

Called by our God
Empowered by the Word
Animated by the Spirit

Inspired by our founder
Enlightened by our heritage
Enriched by those we serve

We Divine Word Missionaries of
the Chicago Province
Serve the Kingdom by

- proclaiming the Word of God
- inviting collaboration in Mission
- journeying with our dialogue partners
- caring for one another
- calling and training new members

Approved by the 2009 Provincial Chapter

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE CHICAGO PROVINCE A COMMENTARY (2011)

Introduction

At the 1991 Chapter of the Chicago Province, one of the items on the agenda was a review of the goals of the province, as articulated in the *Chicago Province Organizational Handbook* of 1988 (pp. 4-5). As the Chapter began to reflect and discuss these goals, it was suggested that a smaller subcommittee be formed to draft some kind of vision or mission statement. When the committee met, the idea surfaced that what might be worthwhile would be to express the province's vision or mission in a few concise lines—somewhat similar to the statement of SVD spirituality provided by the Thirteenth General Chapter in 1988.

The statement is concise, and short enough to be easily committed to memory; it is, the Chapter believed, simply and elegantly stated; it is inspiring. It was hoped that it might be something that could be framed and hung on the walls of the offices and rooms of the members of the province.

Since, however, the statement is so compressed, the Chapter thought that a more ample commentary would be helpful for the members, especially for those who were not involved in drafting it. The 1991 Chapter appointed Steve Bevans and Roger Schroeder to draft a kind of meditative commentary, which was published in 1993.

The 2003 Assembly of the Chicago Province provided a process for both small group and plenum discussions of the mission statement and commentary. While the mission statement was basically still reflective of the province's vision, the commentary needed to be updated in light of developments in the province and the General Chapters of 1994 and 2000. The Provincial Council asked Steve Bevans and Roger Schroeder to address this concern, and they wrote a 2004 revision of the commentary.

The 2009 Chicago Province Assembly and Chapter considered proposed changes to the Mission Statement that emerged during a process of reviewing and discussing it by local communities and districts. After significant discussion in the Assembly, the Chapter then officially approved the addition of the phrase “journeying with our dialogue partners” to the Mission Statement. This revised statement appears on the cover, as approved by the 2009 Chapter. In 2010, the Provincial Council in light of this revision once more asked Steve Bevans and Roger Schroeder to write a revision and update of the Mission Statement Commentary, which appears below. Other commentaries could be written, from various perspectives. This is a reflection from two theologians and missiologists.

What will be noticed right away is that the statement is divided into three parts: it starts with what members of the Chicago Province have in common with all members of the Church; then it focuses on what they have in common with all SVDs; finally it zeroes in on what they have in common as members of this specific province.

As members of the Church, we share in the common ministry that has both its origin and goal in the community-in-mission that is the Trinity.

As members of the Society we share the heritage of Saint Arnold Janssen and the thousands of men who have gone before us, men of the caliber of Saint Joseph Freinademetz, Wilhelm Schmidt, George Proksch, Wendelin Meyer, Francis Wade, José Vicente Braganza, Louis Luzbetak, John Musinsky, William Ross, Henry Heekeren, and

Johannes Schütte; we share the ethos of internationality, hard work and personal dedication; we share the history of Fu Jen University, pioneering in the African-American community, the writing of Vatican II's *Ad Gentes*.

While the description of our work as members of the Chicago Province sounds very general in the statement, what we wanted to state is that—first and foremost—our work in the province is that of proclaiming the Word. In today's world we cannot anymore consider ourselves a "home province" in contrast to "mission provinces." We see our work in our province as direct and valid missionary work: we want to be on the cutting edge of the Church, in dialogue and solidarity with the poor and the marginalized peoples of the ghettos and barrios, speaking prophetically to our civil and church leaders, and caring for the victims of our violent and war-torn world who have sought refuge in our country and in our province. Because the Church is missionary by its very nature, and all Christians are called to mission, our task as Divine Word Missionaries is one of constantly calling the people who live within the boundaries of Canada, the Caribbean, and the U.S. Midwest and East to contribute to the missionary effort both here and abroad by their prayers, their financial help, and—where possible—their active collaboration. As religious men, some of whom are lay and some of whom are clerics but all of whom are brothers, we are signs of God's presence in our world by the quality of our lives together, and by the care and respect we give to our sick and elderly members. Last on the list, but by no means least dear to our hearts, we recruit and form new members. This ministry was placed last because only if we are zealous in preaching the Word, tireless in calling people to collaboration and overflowing with love for one another can we dare call and train others for our life and ministry.

I. Rooted in the Trinity

Before we are members of the Chicago Province, before we are SVDs, before we are Brothers or priests, we are "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (cf. LG 4)—first and foremost we are Church, which is "missionary by its very nature" (AG 2), a community-in-mission. The first section of the Mission Statement comes out of the conviction of the deeply ecclesial dimension of our SVD vocation. We are called by our God, empowered by the Word, animated by the Spirit. As members of the Church "we witness, and help to build a loving communion of all humanity, and a communion of humanity with the Triune God who loves us" (Thirteenth General Chapter, 1988, Spirituality Document, p. 45).

called by our God

Our Mission Statement begins with the reality of grace. Being Christian is never something earned or deserved; it is always a response to the graciousness of God, who calls us out of darkness—the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief—into God's marvelous light (cf. 1Pet.2:9). Our vocation as Divine Word Missionaries, as religious, as priests or laity, has its roots in the fundamental call to be partners in creating the world (cf. Gen.1:27) and re-creating it in the image of Jesus the Christ (cf. 2 Cor.5:17-20). Our God, from the beginning of creation, has been intimately, passionately involved with the world: even before humanity emerged in history, God's Spirit was present as stars and planets and life on earth began to form.

In the history of Israel, God called Abraham so that in him all nations would find a blessing (cf. Gen.12:3); God called Israel out of slavery in Egypt; God called Joshua, the judges, the kings, the prophets, the "suffering servant" (cf. Isa.42:1-9).

In the "fullness of time" (Gal.4:4), Jesus was called by God's Spirit to preach, serve and

witness to God's Reign on earth (cf. Mk.1:9-15; Lk.4:14-21), and through him God sowed the seeds of the Church (*ekklesia*=called forth), which blossomed after Jesus' resurrection (cf. Jn. 20:22), and through which God calls all men and women from all parts of the earth, from "every nation, race, people and tongue" (Rev. 7:9).

Throughout our history as Church, God has called men and women as diverse as Ignatius of Antioch and Priscilla of Rome (cf. Rom.16:3), Augustine and Monica, Louis of France and Margaret of Scotland, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, John Neumann and Elizabeth Seton, Joseph Freinademetz and Maria Helena Stollenwerk, Martin de Porres, Martin Luther King and Katherine Drexel—all called to give of themselves and so discover the paradox and mystery that in giving one receives, in stretching boundaries one finds new worlds, and in dying one finds a new dimension of life.

Members of the Chicago Province are first and foremost members of the Church; they all share in the fundamental equality of all those who are baptized into Christ (cf. LG 32); their vocation as religious priests or religious laity comes out of, is rooted in, and is ordered to God's special, chosen People. And it is as members of the Church that "God's loving grace has gathered us from various peoples and continents into a religious missionary community dedicated to the Divine Word . . ." (*SVD Constitutions*, Prologue). We are called by our God.

empowered by the Word

God graciously calls men and women into community and partnership; men and women are empowered by God's Word—in the midst of history, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church's tradition, in the variety of the world's cultures and religions, but especially in the Word made flesh, Jesus the Christ (Thirteenth General Chapter, 1988, Spirituality Document, p. 48). But God does not simply call; God empowers. God's Word challenges, it inspires, it motivates, it consoles, it excites, it nourishes, it gives strength. Like a two-edged sword, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says, God's Word penetrates a person's very being (cf. Heb.12:4); it taps into people's deepest desires, stirs up their hidden energies and gives them glimpses of reality that they had never even imagined. God never forces assent, but so insistent, so alluring, so strong is God's Word that the prophet Amos spoke of it as well-nigh irresistible (cf. Amos 3:8).

Humankind has never been without this empowering presence of God's Word; early Christian theologians recognized this when they spoke of "seeds of the Word" sown in every age and culture (cf. EN 53). God has not only spoken, however, in hidden ways. God's Word guided the history of Israel, calling forth Abraham, freeing Israel from slavery, challenging Israel through the prophets, being present in the Scriptures.

And God has spoken the Word even more plainly—God's Word has become flesh; God's Word has dwelt among us. In the light of this, the Letter to the Hebrews says, everything past was mere prologue: "in this final age God has spoken to us through the Son" (Heb.1:1). Everything that Jesus said, everything he did and was, speaks to us clearly of God. As Risen Lord, he lives among us: through the Christian community, especially when it gathers together in his memory, he continues to speak; and the Church has acknowledged his continuing presence as well in the words of the biblical witness, both in traditional Hebrew Scriptures and in other writings both before and after Jesus' appearance in history.

We members of the Chicago Province are companions of God's Divine Word, and so it is from the Word that we receive our energy for ministry. While every member of the Church receives life from God's Word, Henry Heekeren wrote in 1985, "we in addition receive our missionary vocation incarnated in our communities" (*Witnessing to the Word* 8, p. 11). The Thirteenth General Chapter of 1988 speaks of the Word of God as "the backbone of all our existence and action," and quotes Constitution 106: "It is by listening to the word of God and

living it that we become co-workers of the Divine Word" (Documents IV-XII, p. 5). God's Divine Word—the Son, the Gospel, the Scriptures (1885 Rule)—is present in our communities. As we listen to and are formed by that Word, we become ever more faithful to what we are. We are empowered by the Word.

animated by the Spirit

At the end of both morning and evening prayers in the SVD *Vademecum*, there appears the "Invocations to Our Special Patrons." The prayer begins with the leader saying "Incarnate Word of God," and the community answering "Give us life by your Spirit" (*Vademecum SVD 2008*, p. 17).

Life—that is the gift of the Spirit. God's Spirit is breathed into the first human being, says the Yahwist (cf. Gen.2:7); it was God's Spirit that marked the Hebrew prophet (1 Sam.10:10; Isa.61:1-3); when Israel was in the depth of exile, the prophet Ezekiel likened it to a valley of dry bones which would be restored to life through the action of the Spirit (Ez.37); and it was Ezekiel as well who wrote about the life-giving and healing waters of the Spirit that would flow from the right side of the Temple (Ez.47:1-12).

Mary gave life to Jesus through the action of the Spirit (Lk.1:35), Jesus was anointed by the Spirit throughout his ministry (Mk.1:10; Lk.3:22; Lk.4:14-21) and—in Johannine theology—poured forth the Spirit upon the world as he poured out his life on the cross (Jn.19:34; 20:22; 1Jn.2:25-27). In the theology of Luke's Acts of the Apostles, it is the Spirit who calls the Church to life, and who guides the Church beyond its boundaries to include all humankind.

Paul, too, attests to the life-giving animation of the Spirit: in the letter to the Romans, for example, Paul reflects on how the Spirit of Christ brings new life to men and women in Christ, and gives them new birth as sons and daughters of God (Rom.8). Popes Paul VI and John Paul II have both written that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization and mission (EN 75; RM 21). Like the prophets, like Jesus, like the early Church, the Church today is constantly brought to new horizons and deeper life by the Spirit's transforming and persuasive power.

The same Holy Spirit, "who does not abide by preset programs, but who moves and acts in full freedom" (*Witnessing to the Word* 8, p. 8), animated Saint Arnold Janssen to found the Society of the Divine Word (cf. *SVD Constitutions*, Prologue). Saint Arnold is noted for his devotion to the Spirit, but the word "devotion" should be understood as much more than what it usually meant in nineteenth-century piety. The Spirit gave the Founder the courage to move beyond his own limitations and the constraints of the Bismarck regime of the 1870s; the Spirit moved Saint Arnold to be a pioneer in insisting on the importance of "the sciences" in missionary training and work; the Spirit gave the Founder the vision of ecumenism and internationality.

It is this Spirit that animates us today. As the document on Spirituality from the 1988 General Chapter puts it—in a way that anticipates the 2000 and 2006 Chapters' expression of "Prophetic Dialogue"—"The Spirit opens our hearts to hear the Word especially in the cultures and peoples among whom we work. For the Divine Word Missionary, openness to the Spirit entails not only an attitude of prayerful attentiveness to the signs of the times, but also a willingness to be led by the Spirit into the desert. We leave the familiar to seek the presence of God on the frontiers of our faith. As a result, we find ourselves with the prophetic responsibility to allow the voices from the frontiers, voices that often go unheard, to be heard in the Church and in the world" (Thirteenth General Chapter, 1988, Spirituality Document, p. 50). We are animated by the Spirit.

II. Formed by our Community

In section two of the Mission Statement, we look specifically at our SVD vocation. "The Holy Spirit repeatedly raises up communities which place themselves at the disposal of the church to help accomplish its missionary task" (*SVD Constitutions*, Prologue).

inspired by our founder

As Divine Word Missionaries, we draw special inspiration from the life, vision, and spirituality of Saint Arnold Janssen, who founded our Society primarily for the evangelization of peoples, for whom the gospel had not yet been preached (cf. *SVD Constitutions* 102). An awareness of this charism within himself led Janssen to send the first missionaries to China and to found two religious communities for women. Later, after prayerful consideration of every request, he would not only send missionaries to evangelize the non-Christians in places such as Togo, New Guinea, and Japan, but likewise he would promote "the sciences," particularly the social sciences, in Europe, respond to the particular pastoral needs in the Americas, among African Americans in the Southern United States, and in the Philippines, and be concerned with ecumenism and Christian unity. Although this caused some tension in the early years of the Society, the striking openness of the Founder of Steyl to new situations of "mission on the margins" and the "demands of the hour" pointed to his broad and inclusive understanding of mission—an important element of his charism. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit prompted Janssen to gift the Society of the Divine Word with another unique dimension, when contrary to most Catholic mission-sending societies of the nineteenth century, it immediately extended its membership beyond a single nation. In the first section of the Mission Statement, we reflected upon central elements of Janssen's rich spirituality, which has likewise been handed on to us: the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and especially the Divine Word, from which we have received our name. We are to be companions of God's Divine Word, the Incarnate Word. We are inspired by our founder.

enlightened by our heritage

Over the years, the Society of the Divine Word has continued to discern and offer its religious and missionary charism to the work of evangelization. Most recently, in light of the renewal of Vatican II and mission theology, we identify our charism and vocation as proclaiming the Word of God to all, raising up new communities of the people of God, and promoting the communion and union of all churches in carrying out the universal mission of Christ (cf. *SVD Constitutions* 102).

Faithful to Janssen's own spirit of openness to new situations and the "signs of the times" (cf. *SVD Constitutions* 104), the Society attempts to face the challenges in mission of that particular time within both the world-wide dimension of mission and the local church context. Today for example, we are working in over seventy countries and are involved in such areas of concern as dialogue, inculturation, communication, ecumenism, education, preferential option for the poor, and integral liberation of the human person (cf. *SVD Constitutions* 103, 112-115). The increasing international and multicultural makeup of the SVD community (seventy-two different nationalities) continues to be an essential witness of our charism in the Church and world. Through this journey, Divine Word Missionaries have experienced and developed a rich heritage of spirituality, which since 1988 has been expressed in terms of "passing over," an expression which has been enriched since 2000 with the term "Prophetic Dialogue." We are enlightened by our heritage.

enriched by those we serve

In recent years, there is a deeper awareness that mission is not one-way traffic, but rather it is a mutually enriching dynamic, whereby individuals and communities involved in mission are likewise blessed and challenged by God through the people they serve. Our first task when we approach another people is to take off our shoes because the place we are approaching is holy. The "seeds of the Word" (cf. AG 11; EN 53) have already been planted within that culture, religion, and people. In the words of the United States bishops, "Even as we go out to other nations to announce the good news, we must remain open to the voice of the gospel speaking to us in a myriad of cultural and social expressions" (*To the Ends of the Earth* 36).

Today some people talk in terms of "mission in reverse," whereby ministers/missionaries open themselves to seriously listen to and learn from the people, they are evangelizing, and to allow them to be the leaders in the relationship and the work of mission. This implies a humble imitation of Christ, who did not cling to his divine privileges, but rather emptied himself to become like us (Ph.2:5-8). Such special moments within the work and spirituality of Divine Word Missionaries, when we are challenged to live the Paschal mystery and "pass over" to the "other," occur when we enter another culture, when we become one with the poor and oppressed, when we engage in dialogue (Thirteenth General Chapter, 1988, Spirituality Document, pp. 51-56), and when we humbly yet prophetically proclaim the good news or denounce injustice in word and deed. The Fifteenth General Chapter (2000) further refined the description of this SVD mission context and perspective in terms of "prophetic dialogue." We are enriched by those we serve.

III. Committed to our Mission

Having reflected upon our identity and call as members of the Church and the Society of the Divine Word, this third and final section now focuses on the specific context of the Chicago Province. "The Divine Word became incarnate in a particular historical situation. Jesus announced peace and salvation to all those of good will, showing special predilection for the poor. This example of Jesus determines the way in which we participate in his mission. Therefore we try to insert ourselves into the actual situation of those among whom we work" (*SVD Constitutions* 103).

We Divine Word Missionaries of the Chicago Province

As members of the Society of the Divine Word, we are a missionary-religious community of brothers and priests, who live and work in the local churches within an area, comprising parts of the Caribbean, Canada, and the eastern and Midwestern United States. The province contains within it great cultural, economic, and religious diversity, and represents a microcosm of the world community and a challenging context for mission today. In this regard, a very important aspect of our charism and witness is our internationality. At the 1992 General Assembly of provincials in Brazil, it was discovered that we were the most international SVD province with thirty nationalities contributing to our richness, and our province membership still embraced thirty nationalities in 2004. With twenty-six nationalities in 2010, we are still one of the most international SVD provinces.

serve the kingdom by

As Christians and as Divine Word Missionaries, we focus our work and lives on the Kingdom of God, the primary goal of the mission of Jesus Christ and the Church. Mark's gospel presents Jesus beginning his ministry with the words, "The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News" (Mk.1:15). "As an evangelizer, Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the Kingdom of God; and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes 'the rest,' which is 'given in addition'" (EN 8). It is important to understand that this kingdom is "already, but not yet." "Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the Kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fulness" (RM 15). We participate in the mission of Jesus Christ, the Church, and the Society of the Divine Word in the following ways.

* proclaiming the Word of God

"Our foremost obligation is the proclamation of the Word" (*SVD Constitutions* 107), especially in those situations "where the need is perceived to be particularly acute, where others are not available for the task of evangelization and where people show greater openness to the word of God" (*SVD Constitutions* 102.1). No longer thinking of mission within geographical limits, but rather looking at "mission in six continents," we are challenged to carry out our fundamental responsibility for evangelization in today's situations of "mission on the margins" within the Chicago Province. Our missionary work is carried out not only by explicitly proclaiming the gospel, but also by speaking prophetically, witnessing to our vows, and serving the poor, marginalized, and refugees. Our life together in intercultural communities also proclaims a word of gospel hope in a world torn apart by cultural and national conflicts. It is this latter aspect of our preaching that our 2012 Chapter will address.

Evangelization in the Chicago Province includes ministry in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean: African-American urban parishes in the Midwestern and Eastern United States; Latino communities in New Jersey, Indiana, Chicago, and the Granby area; parishes among the poor in the Caribbean and West Virginia; communities of Polish immigrants in the Chicago area and of Vietnamese immigrants/refugees in St. Louis and Fort Wayne/South Bend; retreat ministry in Miramar; hospital ministry in Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C.; specialized ministries by the Bowman-Francis team; multi-ethnic ministry in Memphis within African-American, Anglo, Korean, Latino, and Vietnamese communities; pastoral work with the Portuguese in the Montreal area, and most recently, multi-ethnic ministry in Toronto; and chaplaincy ministry in educational institutions, prisons, and with the Holy Spirit Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Our elderly and sick proclaim the Word through their prayers and example in such communities as Techny and Bordentown; our communities like East Troy minister in the local church; confreres at Epworth and CTU devote themselves to the ministry of teaching and scholarship; SVD students in temporary vows work with refugees, AIDS patients, and Hispanic, African-American and Vietnamese youth; an increasing number of confreres preach the Word in scholarly and pastoral publications.

Of the four characteristic dimensions of our missionary life and service, which were identified during the Fifteenth General Chapter (*Documents*, 2000, pp. 36-38), two are particularly relevant to this section. First of all, the biblical apostolate is very important for those involved in many of our parish-based ministries and particularly through the biblical outreach in Granby. Secondly, in terms of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, the

Chicago Province since 1997 focused intentionally on addressing racism through the peace and justice coordinator and committee and Angels Studio in Chicago. In addition, the Province has been a corporate member of the 8th Day Center in Chicago, which focuses on social justice, for many years. The 2009 Provincial Chapter recently highlighted the importance of addressing the issues regarding immigrants and immigration reform. Furthermore, the Province hosts the presence of VIVAT International in New York.

Both of these characteristic dimensions apply both to all of our SVD apostolates as well as to our own lives, that is, we also deepen our knowledge and experience of the Word in the scriptures through individual study and community Bible sharing, which was reinforced by an approved recommendation of the 2009 Provincial Chapter. Secondly, we are to respond to the challenges of peace, justice, and the transformation of all creation in our individual and community lifestyle and activities. Furthermore, mindful of the ever-present mission "*ad gentes*," we continue to send members of the Chicago Province to other provinces, in line with the world-wide SVD vision, the authority of the local church, and the spirituality of "passing over." The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) reminds us "that there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel and to establish new Churches among peoples and communities where they do not yet exist, for this is the first task of the Church, which has been sent forth to all peoples and to the very ends of the earth" (RM 34). In addition, we recognize that many of our ministries mentioned above respond to RM's call to engage in New (Re-) Evangelization.

* inviting collaboration in mission

"We seek to keep alive the universal church's awareness of its missionary responsibility...and support the missionary cause of the church both spiritually and materially" (*SVD Constitutions* 102.2). The other two characteristic dimensions of SVD life and service, that is mission animation and communication (*Fifteenth General Chapter Documents*, 2000, pp. 37-38), are likewise exemplified under this aspect of the mission statement. While each person and community in the province is involved in these dimensions, particular mention should be made of the work in areas like: mission animation, talks, and appeals, particularly by members of such communities of Pittsburgh, Bordentown, Techny, and Boston (in the past); *Divine Word Missionaries* magazine, *Word USA*, and other publications, whether popular or scholarly; websites, social media/networking, e.g. Facebook, and regular internet resources for preaching, biblical animation and JPIC education and action; fund-raising by the Mission Center for chapels and other projects; center for conferences and mission awareness at Techny Towers; care and support of missionaries on home leave from other provinces; role of SVDs at CTU to promote mission and global concerns; training leaders in their local church.

Collaboration with laity in mission includes our relationships with employees, alumni, benefactors, parishioners, and co-workers. In addition, since a decision made at its Assembly/Chapter of 1997, the Chicago Province initiated two partnerships with the Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM) in St. Anselm's parish and in West Virginia, and a member of the USC province continues to serve on the VMM Board of Directors. More recently, the province has strengthened its relationship with PAX-SVD, an association of Filipinos in the United States and Canada who were members of the SVD in the Philippines.

We collaborate with other provinces not only by sending personnel and material assistance, but also by providing the education and formation of SVDs from around the world. In 1992, there were forty SVDs in perpetual vows from other countries, who were studying in the Chicago Province. In 2010, there were eleven under the superior delegate and three studying ESL at DWC. At the same time, we also invite confreres from other

provinces to join the Chicago Province in our mission work, as has been the case in Hispanic ministry, Canada, the Caribbean, and other work at Techny.

* journeying with our dialogue partners

The General Chapters of 2000 and 2006 identified four particular groups of people with whom we Divine Word Missionaries are called to the mission of prophetic dialogue—with people who have no faith community and with faith-seekers, with people who are poor and marginalized, with people of diverse cultures, and with people of different religious traditions and secular ideologies (*Documents of the Fifteenth General Chapter*, 2000, pp. 31-36). The phrase “journeying with” speaks against any attitude of superiority or paternalism on our part, and rather reflects the key attitude of accompanying others in a spirit of respect for how we are responding positively and uniquely to God’s movement within all people. Dialogue in this sense demands mutuality. At the same time, this dialogue is also prophetic, in that we are called to witness to the truth as we understand it. It is prophetic dialogue.

Of the four groups of “dialogue partners” specified by the 2000 General Chapter, the members of the USC province are most visibly engaged with two of them. First of all, we dialogue with “people of diverse cultures.” As noted above, we are working for example with African-American, Latino, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Polish, Korean, Anglo, and French communities. While this is very explicit in our pastoral ministries, this opportunity and challenge is relevant to all SVD as we encounter people of different cultures as employees, neighbors, care-givers, benefactors, colleagues, students, and yes, also as confreres. The second set of “dialogue partners” is the “poor and marginalized.” While this is most clearly evident in our ministries for example in Appalachia and the Caribbean, the poor and marginalized are present in many of our ministry contexts. Furthermore, JPIC efforts provide us with the awareness and avenues for journeying with the poor and marginalized and prophetically challenging the structures that keep them that way. We do this for example through advocating changes in legislation regarding immigrants and human rights.

The province members are generally not as intentionally engaged in prophetic dialogue with the other two “dialogue partners,” that is, with people of no faith community and faith-seekers, and with people of different religious traditions and secular ideologies. However, our confreres working for example in the Caribbean, Appalachia and within African-American and Latino neighborhoods are involved in outreach to the “unchurched”; those in parishes interact with faith seekers and people of secular ideologies; our confreres at CTU have Muslims and Jews as teachers, students, and colleagues. Perhaps these dialogue partners are people with whom, as missionaries, more of us need to become consciously involved. Such involvement could be particularly relevant as we have recently moved to form more missionary-oriented parishes.

With all four groups of “dialogue partners,” we are invited and challenged to “journey with” them in the spirit of prophetic dialogue. All of this requires establishing relationships through a process marked by respect, patience, and integrity.

* caring for one another

"The witness of a truly Christian life on both the personal and community level is the first step in the realization of our missionary service" (*SVD Constitutions* 106). The life style of the early Christian communities prompted others to remark, "See how they love one another." The quality of our community life should nourish, challenge and support individual members in their journeys as religious and missionaries. "Sincere brotherly love, more than merely living and working together, will make us truly one. We try to develop personal

relationships with one another so that all feel accepted and at home in our community" (*SVD Constitutions* 303). The Fourteenth General Chapter (1994) with its theme of "Our Mission at the Service of Communion" reaffirmed the important link between fostering communion within our community life and being instruments of communion within our mission endeavors.

Again, while this is the concern of each member, particular mention should be made of those involved in leadership, administration, and finances on both the provincial and local levels, as well as those involved with on-going formation, care of the sick and retired, and spiritual and human development. Finally, as a community of brothers from different nations and languages, we become a living symbol of the unity and diversity of the Church and world (*SVD Constitutions*, Prologue). Our 2006 Chapter reflected upon how our community life itself is a practice of prophetic dialogue (*In Dialogue with the Word* 6, pp. 31-36).

* calling and training new members

As missionaries, we "promote and prepare vocations for missionary service" (*SVD Constitutions* 102.2). Flowing naturally from our responsibility to proclaim the Word, invite collaboration in mission, and care for one another, we invite and prepare others to join us. First of all, while the recruitment of new members is everyone's responsibility, those in vocation ministry are most fully involved with and dedicated to helping others discern their calls as religious and missionaries, especially in the context of our SVD vocation.

Secondly, the task of formation is the primary focus of the formation staff and communities at Epworth and the Theologate, as well as the associate, novitiate, and Brothers' formation programs. As is the case in other areas of SVD life and work, likewise in this area of calling and training new members, the Chicago Province has made very significant shifts in becoming more multicultural and international. For example, both in 2003-2004 and in 2010-2011, there were representatives from ten different cultures living in the Chicago Theologate community. This again represents a significant sign of collaboration with other SVD provinces and local churches.

We are first of all Christians, who live out our baptismal commitment in the Society of the Divine Word. As members of the Society, we live and minister in the Chicago Province. We embrace mission as being missionary over doing missionary things. In this way we will put mission in the proper perspective, and state a basic truth about mission—that mission is first and foremost God's mission, that the principal agent of mission is God's Spirit, and that our call to mission is a call to collaborate with the Spirit in helping unfold God's ongoing dialogue with humanity. Our life and ministry witness to the truth that the Divine Word continues to take on flesh in our world.

January, 2011

ABBREVIATIONS

- AG** *Ad Gentes*. Vatican Council II, Decree on Missionary Activity.
- EN** *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in Today's World.
- LG** *Lumen Gentium*. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.
- RM** *Redemptoris Missio*. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on World Mission.