

# Communities of the Word

STORIES OF THE CHICAGO PROVINCE



## THE CARIBBEAN STORY, 1972 – 2012

*Rev. Edward Herberger et al.*



The task of writing the history of the Society of the Divine Word in the Caribbean was graciously accepted by Father Ed Herberger, a longtime missionary to the area. He had retired to the Techny Residence where he continued to make himself available in whatever way he was needed. Unfortunately, he died on February 9, 2012, before he could finish the story of the missions in the Caribbean. May he rest in peace.

While others have come forward to finish this story, it is far from complete. This chapter merely touches the surface of the work done by Divine Word Missionaries in the Caribbean District. There is an

abundance of material in the Chicago Province Archives at Techny that should be a springboard for a more comprehensive telling of the story.

## **BEGINNINGS IN THE CARIBBEAN**

Several historical events made the presence of the Society of the Divine Word possible in the Caribbean. Without these, there would not be a Caribbean District in the Chicago Province today. The first event was the opening of St. Augustine Seminary in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, in 1923 to train African-American men interested in the priesthood and Brotherhood. At the time no other seminary in the United States admitted black students.

Nor were there any seminaries in the islands of the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean until 1943. The bishops in the region were primarily from religious orders of the colonizing countries and referred interested young men to the seminaries in their own countries, but distances and high costs were major deterrents in sending young men to those seminaries. Over the years it became known in the Leeward Islands that there was a seminary at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, specifically for black (African-American) students. This facility was much closer to the Caribbean.

The second event began on Christmas Day 1927 when Joseph Bowers<sup>1</sup> left his home in Massacre, Dominica, for Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.<sup>2</sup> He was born on March 28, 1910, to Sheriff Montague Bowers (originally from Antigua) and his wife, Mary. His father was for many years head teacher of the Massacre Government Primary School and organist at St. Ann Catholic Church. When young Bowers left for Bay St. Louis he was 17 years old; he would have completed the equivalent of high school in the United States. There were 42 high school students at the time in the seminary at Bay St. Louis as well as two post-novitiate students.<sup>3</sup> He was 21 years old when he entered the novitiate of the Society of the Divine Word at East Troy, Wisconsin, in 1931. He took first vows in 1933 and returned to Bay St. Louis to complete his theological studies.

Father Bowers was ordained a priest in the Society of the Divine Word in 1939 and assigned by the Society to the British territory of the Gold Coast in West Africa (now known as Ghana). Father Bowers had been working there for 13 years when he was named bishop of the Diocese of Accra in Ghana in January 1953.

In 1957 the Gold Coast gained its independence from Great Britain. A powerful movement had been underway for some time before independence to have local people take over leadership positions in the country, civil government and the churches, including the Catholic Church. Aware of this, Bishop Bowers sent Father Dominic Andoh, a diocesan priest of Accra, to Rome to obtain a background in canon law, as his predecessor, Bishop Adolph Noser, had sent him. Father Andoh was being groomed as a possible successor. And in fact, on October 3, 1971, Father Dominic Andoh became the first indigenous bishop of Accra, Ghana, consecrated in Accra's Holy Spirit Cathedral.

Meanwhile, the prefect (head) of the Congregation of Bishops, after consultation with the papal delegate in Haiti, recommended to Pope Paul VI that Bishop Bowers be transferred from the Diocese of Accra in Ghana to a newly created Diocese of St. John's in the Caribbean. The territory of the new diocese was to be taken from the Diocese of Roseau, Dominica. So it was that earlier in that year, on January 16, 1971, Vatican Radio announced the erection of a new diocese called St. John's, Antigua, carved from the Diocese of Roseau in the Leeward Island of the Caribbean. Bishop Joseph Bowers was named the first bishop.<sup>4</sup>

### **GROWING PAINS OF THE NEW DIOCESE**

On July 4, 1971, Bishop Bowers was installed as bishop of St. John's, Antigua, in the small St. Joseph's Church, which became his cathedral. His diocese consisted of the islands of the former British West Indies: Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat, St. Kitts-Nevis, Tortola, Virgin Gorda and Anguilla. Antigua, the largest of these islands, had at this time fewer than 5,000 Catholics in an overall population of 66,000 people. The predominant religious denomination was Anglican.

Bishop Bowers, with the approval of the General Council of the Society of the Divine Word, brought two young Divine Word Missionaries, Irish-born Father James (Seamus) Langan and Jamaican-born Father Frank Charles (a graduate of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi), from Ghana to work with him in Antigua. Appeals were made to the Generalate for additional personnel for the new diocese. On May 23, 1971, Father John Musinsky, then the Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word, wrote to the apostolic delegate in Haiti:



Divine Word Missionary Bishop Joseph Bowers.

We at the Generalate discussed your letter of May 23 [sic] describing the dearth of priests in Bishop Bowers' Diocese of St. John's asking whether it would be possible to assigning [sic] at least two more SVD Fathers to work with him. We find it difficult to send any more members at this time.<sup>5</sup>

The Society was unwilling to help with more personnel. The General Council did not consider the West Indies to be a place for "primary evangelization." On August 27, Father Musinsky wrote to Bishop Bowers, "Personnel is not abundant. For the time being I am afraid that the Society will be represented by just three men, you and the two Fathers just appointed: Langan and Charles."

When the bishop of Dominica, Redemptorist Arnold Boghaert, was officially informed that a new Diocese of St. John's in Antigua would be carved out of the Diocese of Roseau, he explicitly told the apostolic delegate in Haiti that there was not sufficient clergy to cover two dioceses.

Thus, the lack of personnel immediately faced the new bishop. There were other serious problems as well. He had no residence, and to make matters worse, the diocese had a debt of \$250,000 for the new Christ the King High School.<sup>6</sup>

St. Joseph Church, now the cathedral, was considered the “white man’s church,” dominated primarily by the Lebanese merchant class. Some of these felt so “insulted” at having a black bishop that they began going to St. John’s Anglican Church. Then, too, there was a “pew rent” in existence in the “new” cathedral. Blacks who were not affluent enough were not welcome. They could not pay the rent.

Not too far away there was a small wooden church in Ovals, made from used lumber. This building was called “Our Lady’s Church,” and it was for the “colored.” While the majority of those who attended Mass in Our Lady’s Church were black, this had more to do with location than with color. This church was primarily attended by those who lived in the Michael’s Village, Martin’s Village, Grey’s Hill, Green Bay, and Donovan’s area, and most of the people were black. However, there were also Portuguese living in these areas, and a few of these Portuguese and Lebanese people liked to attend Mass in Our Lady’s Church. This was especially true for the wonderfully attended Christmas novena. While the custom of this novena was brought to Antigua by the Portuguese, it was taken on very much by the local community, and both city churches were full in the very early morning for the nine days before Christmas.

As in all new enterprises, there were continuing problems. The established Catholics did not feel the need for a new diocese or a new bishop. Following upon the pioneering service of the Redemptorists, the new bishop and the new religious congregation, the Society of the Divine Word, did not seem to be sufficiently committed to the work on the islands.

## **INITIAL PERSONNEL AND PARISHES**

From 1972 through 1982, the Divine Word Missionaries serving in the Caribbean Islands were listed in the *Catalogus* under the U.S. Southern Province (USS).<sup>7</sup> Father John Bowman, then provincial of the Southern Province, accompanied by Father Francis Theriault, visited Bishop Bowers in Antigua within the first year of the establishment of the diocese. What Bishop Bowers most needed was more personnel and money, and the Southern Province was not able to help him with either at that time. Father Terry Steib, who had become provincial after Father Bowman, went to Antigua at the invitation of Father Laurence (Larry) Finnegan for the occasion of Bishop Bowers’ fortieth anniversary as a priest. Still, little assistance could be offered.

Yet by 1976 six Divine Word Missionaries were assigned to the Caribbean mission: Fathers Seamus Langan and Frank Charles who came with Bishop Bowers as mentioned above, and then from Ireland, Fathers Patrick O'Reilly and Donal Broderick. Father John Valentine, a veteran India missionary, who came from the United States by way of Mexico, was the sixth member of the pioneering band of missionaries.<sup>8</sup>

While the first group of missionaries worked predominantly on the island of Antigua, alongside the bishop, Father Valentine was sent almost immediately to a new parish: St. William's on the island of Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. In 1977 Father Donal Broderick was sent to St. Patrick's on Montserrat. He took over the parish from Father Langan, who had been there the previous year. Two others were assigned to the Caribbean by 1978: Fathers Laurence Finnegan and Frank Power.

There were now five priests from Ireland working with Bishop Bowers. It was natural, therefore, that the bishop should write to the provincial of the Irish Province suggesting that he might agree to the amalgamation of the Caribbean with the Irish Province. The Southern Province of the United States continued to be unable to give much support.

Nonetheless, the situation of the Diocese of St. John's was showing signs of improvement. There were viable parishes in Antigua (the cathedral parish), St. Patrick in Montserrat, and St. William on Tortola. Still there was concern. The work in the various island nations was difficult due to a lack of regular gathering of the Divine Word Missionaries. The Catholic population was always in a decided minority, and other religious groups looked with suspicion on them. A few Redemptorists, who had worked on these islands for many years, had remained. Now, however, they were anxious to return to their own community.

Bishop Bowers made it clear to the two priests working on Montserrat that they would not be left there. After Father Langan returned from his home leave (he had gone there in 1977), one of the two should come to Antigua. But at that stage, Bishop Bowers was not ready to say which one it would be. Father Seamus Langan had not been off the island of Montserrat in three years and was totally exhausted. One month after their arrival, Father Langan finally left for his home leave in Ireland.

Ever so gradually Bishop Bowers was able to make headway in the diocese. He named Father Finnegan administrator of the cathedral parish with Father Power as the assistant. He also named Father Finnegan vicar general *pro tem*. Father Broderick was appointed pastor on Montserrat. After only a few short years Father Power was recalled to Ireland, but at about this time two Americans, Fathers Stephen Szmuto and Joseph Bates, arrived after serving many years in the Philippines. Both were warmly welcomed by Bishop Bowers. Father Szmuto was asked to look after the parish of Tyrells, Antigua. Father Bates was sent to the Sandy Point parish on the island of St. Kitts as pastor.



The church at Tyrells, Antigua.

Father Edward Herberger arrived in 1980 from the United States for a one-year “working sabbatical” and was initially sent to Montserrat to take Father Broderick’s place while he returned to Ireland to deal with some health issues. Father Herberger was brought back to Antigua after another Irish missionary had to return home because of health. By the end of 1981, 12 different Divine Word Missionaries had been assigned to work in the parishes on various islands of the Caribbean.



Father Edward Herberger, missionary to the Caribbean for 23 years.

Bishop Joseph Bowers had worked tirelessly for more than ten years in a most difficult mission. On March 28, 1981, he submitted his resignation. It was accepted by Pope Paul VI. Those ten years had been filled with difficulties for Bishop Bowers. There were constant worries about finances. The problem of obtaining sufficient personnel to fill the many pastoral needs was always in the forefront, especially considering that the Society of the Divine Word, on the province level (the Southern Province), was not able to provide much assistance with finances or personnel. The Generalate continued to be reluctant to put more assets into the Caribbean efforts.

After Bishop Bowers retired, he lived in Nevis for a time and then on the island of Dominica where he had been born. He returned to Ghana in the late-1990s to be with the community of religious Sisters he had founded and died there on November 6, 2012. He is buried in Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra.

### **BISHOP REECE AND THE SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD**

When a new bishop was assigned by the Holy See to the Diocese of St. John, it signaled a new era with many changes. On July 17, 1981, Father Donald Reece, the Vicar General of Jesuit Archbishop Samuel Carter of Kingston, Jamaica, and rector of Kingston's St. Michael's





Bishop Donald Reece and Father Kevin O'Toole.

Seminary, was named the new bishop. Father Reece was ordained bishop in ceremonies at St. Joseph's Cathedral, Antigua, on October 8, 1981.

St. Joseph Cathedral had been a rather small parish church until the diocese was established in 1971. It held only 350 people. During the ordination ceremony, Bishop Reece dreamed of a new cathedral. Eventually, a new cathedral in honor of the Holy Family was solemnly blessed and opened on January 20, 1987. At the same time, in recognition of the importance of the island of St. Kitts, the name of the diocese was officially changed to that of "St. John's-Basseterre": St. John's being the capital of Antigua, and Basseterre the capital of St. Kitts-Nevis. With the change in the name of the diocese, the church in Basseterre became the Co-Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

With the appointment of Bishop Reece, a local West Indian, the question was being raised: Would the Divine Word Missionaries now leave the Caribbean as was widely expected? In the diocese at the time, Divine Word Missionaries served on the islands of Antigua, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Tortola. Three Redemptorists from previous times had remained. They were on St. Kitts and Nevis. The other islands were without priests. If the Divine Word Missionaries were to depart, that would leave the new bishop with seven islands to administer, assisted by two retired bishops, Bishop Bowers and Redemptorist

Bishop Antoine Demets, and three Redemptorist priests – not an enviable prospect for a new bishop.

Shortly after assuming his duties as bishop of the Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre, Bishop Reece answered this question. He wrote to Father Kevin O'Toole, then rector of the new Divine Word house in Glasgow, Scotland, and invited Father O'Toole back to Antigua in order to succeed Father Joseph Bates as the administrator of the cathedral and to take up duties as judicial vicar. Father Bates was appointed to Sandy Point, St. Kitts, to succeed Father James McCrudden, who had died in his home country of Ireland.

Any remaining uncertainty as to personnel was clarified with a visit to the new bishop by the General Visitator, Father Joseph Connolly. He saw the predicament the new bishop would be facing were all the Divine Word Missionaries to leave. He went back to Rome, advising that the Society of the Divine Word enter into a three-year contract with the diocese, revocable by either party upon six months' notice.

Father O'Toole writes about the situation,

The Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre, to which I returned in 1982 after twelve months absence, was in a different situation from when I left. The new Bishop was a man of great vision and foresight; a people's man with whom it was easy to relate. By this time the Caribbean was no longer a part of the Southern Province of the United States but had become part of the Eastern Province with headquarters in Washington D.C. under the leadership of Father Provincial Donald Mulrenan, SVD .<sup>9</sup>

The Society's status in the Caribbean was beginning to stabilize. The Eastern Province was shortly to be amalgamated with the then Northern Province to become the Chicago Province. With the greater resources of the new province the confreres in the Caribbean could rest a bit easier. A letter from the Superior General of March 29, 1982, states,

The position of the General Council at the moment is as follows:

- 1) a commitment should be made to the mission and our confreres who are working in Antigua;

- 2) the commitment should be in the form of a contract for a definite period of time, after which it should be reviewed;
- 3) an SVD commitment would mean that a limited number of younger confreres (two or three) would be assigned over a period of years.
- 4) it was decided to ask the delegates of the Eastern Provincial Chapter to seriously consider the transfer of the Antigua mission from the jurisdiction of the Southern Province to the Eastern Province.<sup>10</sup>

All of this would be put before the Eastern Province Chapter then in session. Yet for several years the Society's position in the Caribbean remained somewhat nebulous. Although the confreres belonged to an American province, they were still subject directly to Rome for certain matters. Given the opportunity, the confreres in the Caribbean opted to become a district of the Chicago Province instead of asking for regional or provincial status.

The quick turnover of personnel during the early years of Bishop Reece's tenure left a dark cloud hanging over the diocese. There were so, so many: Fathers Jacques Nyssen, Robert Myers, John Harpel, Edward Herberger, Edward Peklo, Robert Johnson, David Streit, Hugo McClure, Bernard Latus, Ryuzaburo Ishikawa and George Theruvapuzha. Others that come to mind are Fathers Laurence Finnegan, Frank Power, Donal Broderick, John Valentine and Tony Rebello; Brother Henry Miller; Fathers Tadeusz Panek and Ante Jeronic; Brothers Richard Morrill and James Zabransky; Fathers Roland Klose, Jan Pastuszczak, George Agger, Yoseph Keladu, Francis Kom and Gerhard Mellert.

Everyone who was ever involved with mission parish work will realize the difficulty in establishing stable Christian communities and viable programs of growth with all-too-rapid changes in pastoral personnel. With hindsight the question can be asked if it was not a mistake, detrimental to the growth and development of the diocese, to appoint confreres for only a short period of time.

A new challenge confronted the diocese with an influx of Spanish-speaking people from the Dominican Republic. No priest in the diocese spoke Spanish. The bishop who did some of his studies for the priesthood in Mexico was the only one who could care for these people and administer the sacraments to them. Fortunately, assis-



Father Gerhard Mellert cared for Spanish-speaking immigrants.

tance was at hand in the person of Father Gerhard Mellert, a German member of the Society of the Divine Word. He had been missioned in the Philippines but was called to work at the Generalate in Rome. Before going on to Rome, however, he had also spent some time in Colombia. Thus, he came to the Caribbean by way of Colombia. He visited the various islands of the diocese attending to the spiritual needs of the new Hispanic immigrants. Unfortunately, Father Mellert died unexpectedly. His place in the Hispanic apostolate was taken at first by Father Luis Lapus and then by Father Robert Ratajczak in Antigua.

## **GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

A personnel contract between the diocese and the Society had a significant impact on the growth of the diocese. During Father Raymond Lennon's time as provincial of the Eastern Province, the terms of the proposed contract between the Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre and the Divine Word Missionaries were formulated. The contract was signed by Superior General Father Henry Heekeren on behalf of the Divine Word Missionaries on February 18, 1983. It was signed a few days later by Bishop Reece on behalf of the diocese. This contract spelled out the rights and obligations of both parties. An appendix was added later, signed by Bishop Reece and Father Lennon, requesting

that certain articles dealing with finances be suspended because of the financial situation of the diocese. The renewed contract of 1988 signed by Bishop Reece and Superior General Father Henry Barlage stipulates that the Society of the Divine Word, whether working in a parish or in specialized ministries, gives priority to:

- 1) Evangelization.
  - 2) The formation of lay leaders.
  - 3) The biblical apostolate.
  - 4) The formation of basic ecclesial communities.
  - 5) The fostering of local religious and priestly vocations.
- (When necessary, members will receive special training in these areas.) To carry out this work effectively, the Society will strive to have ten confreres assigned to the Caribbean District.

### VISITATION PROTOCOL OF 1993



Divine Word Missionaries and diocesan priests gather with Bishop Reece (back row, center) in 1993.

Another event of special significance to the Divine Word Missionaries in the Caribbean was the General Visitation carried out by General Councillor Father Leo Cornelio. Questions about the

continued presence of the Society in the Caribbean were still being asked in the early 1990s. “The work done in the Caribbean is not in accordance with the Society’s priorities.” “The confreres in the Caribbean are not doing the work of primary evangelization” were some of the negative comments. Father Leo Cornelio laid aside all these concerns by writing in the protocol that there is no doubt that the islands in the Diocese of St. John’s-Basseterre still need our missionary presence. He expressed in writing:

According to the diocesan plan that has been formulated high priority is given to the formation of lay persons, collaborators in ministry. The confreres, too, are committed to the education of youth and children. Our SVD charism calls us to give highest priority to the Word of God. This the confreres do by advocating justice, promoting peace and integrity through the appropriate use of social means of communication. Efforts should be made to promote the idea of religious and priestly vocations for the Diocese.<sup>11</sup>

With the publication of this protocol there was an audible sigh of relief. Twenty-two years after the inception of the Society’s involvement in the West Indies, the work of the confreres was at last officially recognized and approved as work according to the priorities of the Society. The confreres were no longer peripheral or marginal. They were recognized as engaging in the missionary work done by the Society of the Divine Word the world over.

A practical spin-off resulting from this protocol was the idea of a “central” house in Antigua. Previously, while the Society’s presence in the Caribbean remained ambiguous, it was thought totally inappropriate even to consider building a house. The provincial treasurer, Father Chester Nowicki, advised that any property for the specific use of the confreres should be rented, in order to express that the Society’s presence was not permanent but only temporary. With the visit of Father Cornelio, discussion began in earnest about building a house specifically for Divine Word Missionaries. A suitable plot of land was purchased for this purpose from the diocese.

The building was intended as a residence for those confreres in specialized ministries but also to provide accommodation for confreres



Divine Word Residence, Villa Maria, Antigua.

passing through Antigua or vacationing in Antigua. These ideas came to fruition in January 2003, when Father Bob Johnson, then the district superior, took responsibility for supervising the construction. Father Jan Pastuszcak, judicial vicar; Father Gerhard Mellert, Hispanic chaplain; and Father Kevin O'Toole, vicar general, took up residence in the comfortable Villa Maria. They were soon joined by Father Xuan Ho, newly ordained, and Miguel Lopez, a Mexican seminarian doing his Cross-cultural Training Program (CTP). Villa Maria also provided a place for confreres coming to the diocese for the first time, while they were introduced to the cultural and historical aspects of the Caribbean Islands.

### **EXPANSION TO JAMAICA**

In the visitation protocol of 1993 it is mentioned that the Society would do well to expand our missionary work into Jamaica. For many years Archbishop Samuel Carter had campaigned to have the Divine Word Missionaries move into the Archdiocese of Kingston. General Visitator Father Cornelio, Chicago Provincial Father James Bergin and Caribbean District Superior Father Edward Herberger visited Kingston, Jamaica. The local conditions there convinced them that a

missionary situation existed. The Society of the Divine Word could make a positive contribution to the life of the archdiocese in line with the Society's charism.

Neither the Chicago Province nor the Caribbean District moved quickly or haphazardly into this new venture. A thorough study of the situation was done by Father Herberger over a six-month period, and only then was a formal request made by the Caribbean District to the Superior General.

In a letter to the Superior General dated April 12, 1994, new District Superior Father Frank Power made the following proposal:

We propose that we commit a team of three SVDs to the civic parish of St. Thomas for a five-year commitment.

This commitment would be on a contractual basis with the Archdiocese of Kingston. This team of three, which would include Father Ed Herberger who is already in Jamaica, would be made up from our own personnel resources here in the Caribbean District and would not involve any new Generalate appointments.

The following points were then made:

1. Evangelization, especially among the poorest would be a priority.
2. This evangelization, especially in the rural areas the SVD were asked to take on, would serve as a model for efforts by others doing missionary work.
3. Although this is a "new" venture it had already been recommended in the visitation protocol of 1993 and approved by the Chicago Province Chapter of February 1994.
4. There is a real benefit to taking the SVD mission into Jamaica: Because of its larger size Jamaica offers greater resources for the overall benefit of the Caribbean mission spiritually, financially, recreationally, and educationally.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of these presentations, the Church of the Assumption, Morant Bay, in the civil parish of St. Thomas – one of the most neglected areas in Jamaica – was designated as the Jamaican center of the Society's endeavors along with its dependent chapels of Yallahs and



Port Morant. Father Herberger became the first Divine Word pastor of Morant Bay. A contract between the Archdiocese and the Society was signed in 1994 and renewed in 1999.

In the Christmas newsletter of 1995, a confrere comments on conditions in the new mission:

The communities of Catholics are very small and consist predominantly of old and very young members. Most of them are recent converts to Catholicism, and they are scattered over the vast area – an area of great poverty. Many people are subsistence farmers. Since there is no major industry in the region, the result is widespread unemployment and the emigration of the young.

At times the poverty and struggle to survive makes these poor people feel hopeless, driving some to violence. The task of the missionary is to try to bring hope to the people, by building their self-reliance, self-esteem to help them see the communal and global aspect of their poverty.<sup>13</sup>

### **EXPANSION TO SINT MAARTEN (ST. MARTIN)**

In 2004, Father Thomas Krosnicki, Chicago Province provincial, received an invitation to the Episcopal ordination of Father Thomas Gullickson in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, who had been named Apostolic Nuncio to the Caribbean. The provincial was invited to represent the Divine Word Missionaries, who had been ministering in the islands since 1971. Father Krosnicki accepted the invitation in view of the possible influence the new nuncio might have on the Caribbean District of the Society.

Father Krosnicki's term as provincial would soon be over, so after the ordination he found himself awaiting a new assignment. One afternoon he answered the phone to find that Salesian Bishop Luigi Antonio Secco of Willemstad, Netherlands Antilles, and head of the Episcopal Conference of the Caribbean, was on the line. He explained that he was in need of an English-speaking priest to serve for one year as pastor of a parish on the island of Sint Maarten in the Windward Islands. In his search he had been in conversation with Bishop Reece in Antigua, who informed him that Father Krosnicki, who had finished

his term as provincial, might be available. The bishop got right to the point: “Could you come to help us in Sint Maarten for one year?”<sup>14</sup>

The new provincial, Father Mark Weber, readily gave Father Krosnicki permission to accept the position in Sint Maarten. By mid-July 2005, Father Krosnicki was on a flight to Puerto Rico with a transfer flight to the old airport on Sint Maarten.

The next day, a Saturday, he celebrated Mass for the first time in the Church of St. Martin of Tours. He knew nothing about the island, its culture, or the local church, but he expected the pastoral situation to be similar to that on the other islands where the Society worked. He was in for a great surprise! Sunday, unfamiliar with the 38-square-mile island, he was chauffeured to the two additional parish churches for the celebration of three more weekend liturgies.

The Catholic Church has a long history in Sint Maarten. It is reported that on November 11, 1493, Christopher Columbus gave the name to the island he saw off in a distance. He chose the name because, according to the liturgical calendar, it was the feast day of St. Martin of Tours, France (317–398). Originally settled by the French, the island was divided, in time, between the Dutch and the French, an arrangement that lasted more than 300 years. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1843, when the Catholic Church was established on the Dutch side of the island, St. Martin of Tours was chosen as its titular saint. The Church had been built in Philipsburg. Two other churches, belonging to the one parish, were established.

Father Krosnicki expected to remain for one year, but in time it became clear that the diocese had no one available to assume the pastorate of St. Martin of Tours Parish. His assignment was extended, and he served the large and diverse parish alone for three-and-one-half years.

This was indeed a large parish, different from the parishes on the former English islands where the Catholic communities are small. After the devastating hurricane of 1995, the number of Catholics increased significantly with new immigrants from many Spanish-speaking lands, seeking employment in the flourishing tourist industry on the “friendly island.” To make the challenge even greater, in the parish there are persons from more than 100 cultural/ethnic backgrounds who represent places as culturally disparate, for example, as the Philippines are to Nigeria and North America is to Palestine!

Father Krosnicki soon realized that his immediate task would be to maintain and strengthen the faith community, as many parishioners had drifted away from the Church. There was also a need to update the physical plants of the parish.

Eventually the Caribbean District Council was asked to consider taking on Sint Maarten as part of the district. Without hesitation, all agreed that the pros outweighed the cons. It would be a new mission area; the experience of Church was quite different from other parish commitments in the District. There was plenty of ministry to engage the men. It would be another diocese to work in and Bishop Secco was eager for the Society of the Divine Word to assume responsibility for the large, sprawling parish. The Provincial Council agreed and the contract with the diocese was drawn up and signed in 2008.

Father Krosnicki and the district superior, Father Adam Oleszczuk, realized that the parish could use, and would welcome, additional Divine Word Missionaries on a permanent basis. Thus, in 2008, Father Manuel Antao, who had been stationed in Jamaica, asked to be transferred to a place where there would be more sacramental ministry. St. Maarten offered him such an opportunity, along with ministry in the schools and hospital. He became the second Divine Word Missionary assigned to the island.<sup>14</sup>

## **RETREAT CENTER**

During the aforementioned visitation of Father Leo Cornelio, Bishop Reece had expressed his desire to open a retreat house in Antigua. A kind benefactor, Mrs. Alice Francis, gave Bishop Reece 30 acres of valuable land in perhaps the most idyllic part of Antigua. The retreat center became a reality. Mount Tabor Retreat House was solemnly blessed and opened on December 8, 2002. The first director of the Retreat House was Father Frank Power, who until then had been the parish priest of Tyrells, Antigua, for the previous three years. A Sister of St. Louis, Sister Mary Jo McKeefry, then took charge and put the retreat house solidly on the map.

## **HOLY SPIRIT MISSIONARY SISTERS**

The position of the Divine Word Missionaries in the Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre having been solidified, it was time to think about the possibility of inviting the Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit

(SSpS), to join us in the apostolate. Negotiations began with the Holy Spirit Sisters leadership team in Rome and the provincial leadership team in Northfield, Illinois. One of the general councillors, Filipina Sister Eden Panganiban, and American Sister Rose Martin came to Antigua for a visit and discussions. This visit was followed up with a visit to the Sisters' Generalate by Bishop Reece. The Holy Spirit Sisters dream materialized in August 2002, when four American Sisters arrived from Techny: Sisters Marie Sheehy (community leader) and Mary Parady, Patricia Snider and Margaret Hansen. Sisters Marie and Mary became involved in Christ the King High School for girls, where Father Robert Johnson was the chaplain. Sister Pat Snider became involved in social outreach, and Sister Margaret worked with the Hispanic community. Two more Sisters from Indonesia joined them, and Sister Annita Walsh from Ireland was also missioned to Antigua.

The Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit were not the first religious women to work in the area. There had been a number of religious congregations of women working in the diocese over the years. The Daughters of Jesus had been on the island of St. Kitts. Some of their members were tragically drowned when the ferry operating between St. Kitts and Nevis sank with all lives lost. The Sisters of St. Martha from Nova Scotia, Canada, did great work on St. Kitts for many years. On Antigua the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters (ICM) had been in charge of the high school for girls.

The Franciscan Sisters of Philadelphia were invited to engage in social work on behalf of the poor. Two Presentation Sisters from Canada came to help in the school. There was, for a time, one Dominican Sister. The ICM Sisters left Antigua to return to Dominica or St. Croix, and a group of Nigerian Sisters came to work in the school. All of these, with the exception of one Presentation Sister and a Sister of St. Louis, have left the service of the diocese.

## **OTHER MINISTRIES**

Over the years the members of the Society of the Divine Word have found themselves involved with many different projects and enterprises. Besides the typical pastoral work of administering the sacraments and attending to the spiritual needs of the community, they have also been involved in education. They became heavily committed to Christ the King High School in Antigua.

Preparation for the reception of the sacraments was taken out of schools, when children automatically received their First Holy Communion or Confirmation upon completion of a certain class. It became the responsibility of the parish to provide adequate instruction through proper catechesis before receiving the sacraments. Miss Morvette Dyett (now Mrs. Morvette Thomas) was sent to Regina Mundi Institute in Rome for training in catechesis. She is now in charge of the catechetical programs in the diocese of St. John's-Basseterre.

By default, a Divine Word Missionary also had become Bishop Reece's judicial vicar. There had been many applications for decrees of nullity over the years. The diocese had no marriage tribunal to process these applications. Bishop Reece began to ask the assistance of Father Robert Flynn in Chicago. Father Flynn would periodically come down to Antigua and start the judicial proceedings necessary for a decree of nullity to be granted. When Father Flynn's duties in the Chicago curia increased, he found it impossible to come down to the islands.

The bishop requested that someone be identified to do the work of the judicial vicar. Father O'Toole, although no canon lawyer, was asked to take on the task. Father Maurice Walsh, the great canon lawyer in the Caribbean, agreed to give him a six-week crash course dealing with canon law on marriage. Father O'Toole was the only member of the tribunal. To him fell the task of calling witnesses, preparing sentences, and presenting cases to the defender of the bond and the bishop, who remained the official judge. In the course of his time as judicial vicar, Father O'Toole was responsible for doing the groundwork leading to about 40 decrees of nullity. Eventually, Father Jan Pastuszczak was sent by Bishop Reece to the Catholic University of America to get a Licentiate in Canon Law so that he could take over as judicial vicar.

## **A NEW DIOCESAN BISHOP**

On September 14, 2007, Rome announced that the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, had appointed Bishop Reece as Coadjutor Archbishop of Kingston, Jamaica. Bishop Gabriel Malzaire of Roseau, Dominica, was appointed Apostolic Administrator of St. John's-Basseterre until a new bishop could be appointed. The clergy who were in Antigua to welcome Bishop Malzaire were asked to vote their choice of a permanent delegate for the administrator. They chose a diocesan priest, Father George Williams, administrator of the cathedral.

Expectations ran high until eventually in November 2011 Rome announced that Pope Benedict XVI had appointed Monsignor Kenneth Richards, administrator of Holy Trinity Cathedral, Kingston, Jamaica, and former vicar general of Archbishop Reece in Kingston as the new bishop of the Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre. On February 8, 2012, in the Cathedral of the Holy Family, Archbishop Reece was the principal consecrator at Bishop Richards' Episcopal Ordination. Bishop Richards thus became the second bishop of St. John's-Basseterre and the third bishop since the establishment of the diocese.

### **LIFE ON THE ISLANDS**

If one were to believe the advertisements, life in the Caribbean is almost heaven. But one can't always believe what is said. If you live there long enough with little contact with confreres, with the threat of hurricanes from June through October, and when an "occasional" volcano erupts, then you can understand some of the difficulties the confreres in this mission have to face.

Added to these conditions there have been, over the years, financial worries for the men as neither the diocese nor the individual parishes were able to support them and their work. Matters of health also are a concern when adequate medical care is often not available to help meet even small medical emergencies.

Father George Agger writes in the spring edition of the *Caribbean Newsletter* in 1999:

An understanding of the geography of the District is important. The Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre is composed of 8 islands, and five different political entities. Add Jamaica to that and you have nine islands and six countries in our Caribbean District. (Be sure you have a large passport for all the visas you need if you want to visit a confrere).

Isolation and loneliness can be a problem. Some might call it a blessing, but it certainly is a challenge. Modern communication, e.g., e-mail, telephones, fax, etc. can help, but the companionship of confreres can be lacking. Community life or the lack of it is one of the difficulties of being a missionary here.<sup>15</sup>

Father Edward Herberger adds these comments in the same newsletter:

The section in our constitutions on community life opens by giving us a theological ideal to strive after. The Triune God is the origin, the exemplar and the completion of every human community.

[Nine small islands comprise the Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre.] These islands are not only small in size but the smallness is felt and experienced in various ways. . . . There is familiarity and warmth among the people on all levels of people who have never been to Church before.<sup>16</sup>

Another hazard the men face in the Caribbean is the aforementioned hurricanes. Since the Society has been involved in the mission, there have been more than ten hurricanes that have hit one or the other of the island parishes where we work.

### **VOLCANIC ACTION ON MONTSERRAT**



The most devastating event of nature disrupting all pastoral work came by way of a volcano on the island of Montserrat. Father Larry Finnegan gives us a feeling for being there:

September 21, 1995

Dear (.....)

Please forgive me for using a form letter but as the report of the volcano and the hurricanes are the same for all, I do not have the time or energy to keep repeating it. So let me do my best to fill you in on the whole situation which developed over the past two months or so.

Beginning on July 18, events have taken place that will more or likely change the shape of much of the future of our tiny 39 1/2 square miles island of Montserrat. I had written to most of you saying that it is like heaven here and it still is, but it can have its moments of anxiety and tensions. It was just after dusk that fateful day, when some people reported hearing rumblings coming from the Soufriere Hills. One of our supposedly dormant volcanos had come to life!

A new vent opened and grew wider with each eruption of ash or steam. Experts rushed to our island and our little nation was put on volcano alert. We were to be ready to evacuate to the northern part of the island, which was considered safe, as soon as the signal was given. A small bag, personal documents and food and water for two days must be ready at all times.

Some evacuations were called for the areas close to the new vent. The rest of us were to go about our daily routine, conscious of the smell and some ash. The experts felt that they could give the government at least 12 hours' notice of any major eruption. However, on August 21 at about 8:45 a.m. a heavy ash fall descended on the capital city of Plymouth without much warning. It darkened out the sun as if it was night for about ten minutes. People were scared, frightened, even a little panic for some. Places of work were



deserted as people rushed home to care for family, etc. After that heavy ash fall the scientists informed the government that they could not guarantee even a limited period of lead time.

So that evening of August 21, the evacuation of Plymouth and all the South and East was ordered. We all headed north to be housed there in schools, churches, halls and tents. The next morning we were allowed back to Plymouth and the South. I was in bed that afternoon having my siesta, making up for the night sleep which was lost when I got a phone call saying that the general evacuation was on again as the scientists were picking up danger signals from the volcano. So the hospital, the old age home, the prison and all of us were on the move again to the north.

One of our three churches, St. Martin de Porres in Salem, is in the safe area, so this became a shelter and my own home for the next 16 days. We had 57 people living in the small church with about 12 more sleeping in cars or mini-buses on the grounds linked to us for food and toilets. The north, which is the least developed part of the island became the home for all of us left on the island. Over the days, close to four thousand people left the island (our population is only 10,500) to seek refuge with family and friends on neighboring islands or to England and U.S. islands in the Caribbean. The American Medical School with its staff and student body of 700 also left the island.

In the early days, the volcano opened three new vents in all, with a constant emission of ash, gas and steam, and earthquakes were felt from . . .<sup>17</sup>

In the Christmas *Newsletter* from the Caribbean District of 1995, Father Finnegan continues his thought:

We slept or napped in our clothes on cots provided by the government, lined up for the toilet, ate whatever could

be had, wondered and waited. Was this to be the end of Montserrat? We even heard reports from foreign lands that Montserrat had already blown up.

To add to our woes, on September 4, Hurricane Luis headed for Montserrat. Curfew was lifted, and people went back to board up homes and shops. Luis came with 145 mph winds. We prayed, mopped up water, and moved from side to side in the church depending on the direction of the wind. For two whole days it blew and rained, exceptionally long for a hurricane, but our neighboring islands of Antigua, Sint Martin and Anguilla took a battering, resulting in vast damage to property with some lives lost.

This was like the Resurrection for our island. We had been next to finished, much of our population gone, but now people were coming back as fast as they could. All of a sudden Montserrat looked good again. We just have to learn to live with an active volcano.

We were cleaning up, when on September 14, a warning went out about Hurricane Marilyn. I opened our small hall. That evening as the hurricane began, about 30 people turned up to take shelter. Another night was spent mopping up water forced under doors by 120 mph winds. Again, our island was spared severe damage, while St. Thomas and St. Croix were laid flat.

It's hard to capture all the ups and downs, the experiences of close living, the fear, anxiety, hopes, of the whole experience of the past months. Certainly things, possessions, have no real worth as you grab a small bag and leave everything; house, clothes, jobs, church, school, not knowing if you will ever see them again. Just to be alive is so sweet. We feel God is there as King, as Lord, holding us in the palm of his hand. Our island is devastated economically with the loss of the American Medical University and other small businesses. Tourists cancelled out and savings were spent in airfare to get

the old, the sick and the children off the island. Yet our spirits are high again and we are getting our lives together again.<sup>18</sup>

## **THE MISSION IN JAMAICA**

On September 8, 1993, the 118th anniversary of the founding of our Society, Father Edward Herberger accepted the call by Archbishop Carter and began to minister in the Archdiocese of Kingston. On that day he became responsible for the civil parish of St. Thomas. The parish is 286 square miles of mountainous terrain, with the Catholic churches along the coast: St. Bartholomew in Yallahs, Our Lady of the Assumption in Morant Bay, and St. Francis of Assisi in Port Morant. The population is approximately 93,000 of which less than 1 percent is Catholic.

The following year Father Herberger was joined by Fathers Roland Klose and Bernard Latus, both from Poland. Along with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the pastoral team focused on developing “Basic Christian Communities” and outreach to various small cells throughout St. Thomas Parish.

In 1997 Father Latus became the pastor, and Father Pierre Tevi-Bennisan from Togo joined the team to replace Father Herberger who had moved to Anguilla. In 1997 the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary withdrew from the rural areas and focused on ministry within the city of Kingston. Father Klose departed in 1998, accepting a missionary assignment to Taiwan. This left the pastoral team with only two members.

However, the team would grow in size with the arrival of Father Adam Oleszczuk and Brother Bernard Spitzley in August 1999. This new pastoral team continued to focus on working with the various basic Christian communities and to serve the youth in the area with computer classes. After the 15<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word and the 2001 Archdiocesan Synod, special emphasis was made to establish Bible sharing communities. Each church had weekly meetings, and a new Bible sharing community in Golden Grove began in 2001.

Another focus was social development, specifically building houses with the help of “Food for the Poor” for the most destitute of the area. In addition, a food and clothing distribution center was established at St. Bartholomew, called the “Helping Hand Centre.” In



A tattered shack is replaced by a new home.

Port Morant, the Brother Kelly Centre emerged in honor of the pillar of that local community, Mr. Lesli Kelly.

Father Latus left for further studies in 2001, and Father Pierre Tevi-Bennisan became the pastor. In 2002 Father Joseph Gallic served with the team for one year. Under the direction of Fathers Tevi-Bennisan and Oleszczuk, special attention was given to the youth groups at each church. The result was our youth winning numerous awards at deanery and archdiocesan celebrations. Father Pierre served as pastor until December 2006. His replacement, Father Walter Mendonca, served as pastor from 2007 until September 1, 2009. Father Frank Power is presently the pastor.

In 2002 we began accepting Divine Word seminarians in the Caribbean District for the Cross-Cultural Training Program (CTP). This program, part of the Society's formation program worldwide, is designed to help young members in temporary vows receive hands-on mission experience and grow in their vocation as a Divine Word Missionary. Frater Darrell Kelly (2002-03) was first, then Vinh The Trinh (2004-05), Ky Dinh (2006-07), Linh Pham (2006-07), Gilvaldo Miranda (2009), Alejandro Hernandez (2009-10), Jung-Che (Bobby) Yeh in 2011-12, followed by Hung-Sheng Peter Chen in 2012.

In response to the call of the Society to invite the laity to work with us, we began the SVD Alumni Association Mission Experience to Jamaica in 2001. This project was later expanded to include the Epworth Mission Experience, in which college-age students and staff of Divine Word College and parishioners of Divine Word parishes join us for a week doing hands-on missionary activities, like Bible sharing, visiting shut-ins, building a house or two, and so on. Both programs continue on a yearly basis with the alumni coming for a week in February and the Epworth group coming for about a week in May or June.

## **ECUMENISM IN JAMAICA**

The Divine Word Missionaries took on a new ministry in Jamaica in 2005. Father Adam Oleszczuk summarizes this ministry which has a unique ecumenical approach:

A couple of years ago, the Church of Reconciliation celebrated its 30th Anniversary under the theme: "That



all may be one.” A unique example of Christian unity, the Church of the Reconciliation is the spiritual home of two faith communities – one Roman Catholic and the other Anglican. For more than 30 years the two congregations have shared the same worship space and have engaged in joint spiritual, pastoral, social, and fund-raising activities.

To commemorate this memorable milestone of our ecumenical endeavor, both congregations organized numerous events. We gathered first of all to thank God for all the blessings we received as a church, secondly to reflect on our identity and the role we, as this unique church, have to play in the Jamaican society, which is divided so much politically, economically and socially.

A Methodist pastor was invited to deliver a message at one of our joint services. In his outstanding presentation on the theme taken from Jesus’ prayer in St. John’s Gospel – “that they all be one” – he reminded all of us, Anglican and Roman Catholic alike, that a church cannot exist only for itself. . . . It exists for the community in which it is erected and should become an agent of change and transformation. Challenged

by these prophetic words, joint committees have been established to look at various possibilities of outreach ministries to make the Church of Reconciliation vibrant, vocal and visible in the Portmore area.

After several meetings and reflection it became clear to us that we needed to start with our youth. Therefore, a decision was made to establish a joint educational outreach ministry for the youth in the area. Primary and high school teachers from both congregations were invited to undertake this project and make it a reality.

Meanwhile, since our Pastoral Centre was undergoing major renovation, a provision was made to expand one of the existing rooms and turn it to a Computer and Homework Centre. Thanks to a very generous sponsor from the United States, we were able to furnish the Centre with good computers. Now we are ready to start the “ministry of presence” to the young men and women in the Bridgeport community.

It is my hope that by the grace of God this little project will become a bridge between our church and so many boys and girls, who do not go to any church. Indeed we are called to be a living sign of the passage in St. John’s Gospel that prays “that they all be one.”<sup>19</sup>

## **AN INVITATION TO MINISTER IN THE CARIBBEAN**

The Divine Word Missionaries in the Caribbean have had a sometimes difficult history. Many men from many different countries have worked there. It might be best to hear from Father Larry Finnegan, who lived through the trauma of the volcanic eruption on Montserrat, to get an overview of the Caribbean mission:

Welcome to the Caribbean District:

Let me introduce you to some of the challenges and richness of our mission effort here in the Caribbean District. This is



Father Adam Oleszczuk in a Palm Sunday Procession.

just a simple effort to share with those who may be thinking about volunteering to minister here. It is good, I believe, to be aware of some of our experiences of living and work here before decisions are made.

The Catholic Church has been in the Caribbean areas for a long, long time. There is mention of Dominican Father Bernardo Boyle appointed Vicar Apostolic of the West Indies in 1494. In 1971 it was decided that the small islands attached to the Diocese of Roseau, Dominica, should be separated and grouped into a Diocese of their own called St. John's. Bishop Joseph Bowers, a native of Dominica, was transferred from his diocese of Accra, Ghana, to head this new diocese of small islands. When he took over the task, he found only one local vocation and a decreasing number of aging Redemptorist missionaries from the order's Belgian



Province. So he called on his own Society of the Divine Word to help him until a local clergy could be built up. Thus the Society became involved in the Caribbean directly. Bishop Bowers retired in 1981 and Bishop Donald Reece, a native of Jamaica, took over, and the diocese was renamed St. John's-Basseterre.

If you think of the West Indies, at least as far as the Society of the Divine Word is concerned, think small. Our islands (many of them now independent countries) are small, with populations from 7,000 people (Nevis) to 62,000 people in Antigua, the home of the bishop and the diocesan offices. The total Catholic population of the diocese is not much bigger than many urban parishes: 15,000.

On each island where we work, the Catholic Church is a minority Church. Christianity is widespread on all of the islands. Indeed some islands can have up to 35 Christian Churches or sects despite the smallness of the population. An ability and willingness to work in an ecumenical setting is essential. The Christian Council, a gathering of the main Christian Churches, is generally an important part of each island community. We are full members of the Christian Councils on all the islands where we work.

We are on small islands where the drive from coast to coast can be accomplished in twenty-to-forty minutes. In small communities where everyone on the island knows you, there is no place for you to get lost in the crowd. While every effort is made to have at least two confreres working together, you can be alone on your own little island. Generally you have to fly to get from island to island. A few have ferries, so travel is expensive and requires passport, customs and immigration.

There is a sense of being closed in, cut off and isolated – not on the cutting edge of the world or the Church. So it is important to have an inner peace with yourself and the Lord and to be at home with yourself, otherwise life will be most difficult.

In 1993 we opted to reach out beyond the diocese of St. John's-Basseterre and moved into Jamaica. We accepted a rural area, Morant Bay, in the Archdiocese of Kingston. Jamaica is one of the large islands with a population of over one million and so a new dimension was added to our apostolate here in the Caribbean. It is a young, independent country with all the problems of development, poverty, crime, drugs and need of the Gospel.

The Divine Word Missionaries are mainly assisting a local Church which for one reason or another has not developed sufficient local clergy. I would like to think that while we maintain and serve a local Church we are bringing the particular charism of our own Society to bear, by helping the local church become an evangelizing Church.

Local lay leadership and ministries have developed and our Bishop, a fine, warm hearted and hardworking man, puts a strong emphasis on this lay leadership. The ability to respect and work along with the lay leadership is important. Some islands will be stronger or weaker in this area than others. English is the language of all the islands where we work; a few have a small Spanish community.

Each island (often an independent country) has its own shade of cultural identity and is slightly different from the others. A warm-hearted wonderful people filled with the joy of life, they have a great ability to celebrate and offer an open door to the stranger, the visitor. Tourism is a major element of the economy of most of the islands. We have the super luxury of top class hotels housing hundreds of U.S. tourists to the more humble houses for rent.

The extreme poverty often found in Africa is not present here, though a few areas like Haiti and Santo Domingo would be close. Most of the islands we work on can and do maintain the financial expenses of their own parishes. Yet because we are an area so often affected by natural disasters, mainly

hurricanes and earthquakes, we seem to be always rebuilding on one island or another and so stand in need of outside help for this. This year of 1995 has seen much damage on Antigua, Anguilla and lesser damage on St. Kitts, Nevis and Montserrat from two hurricanes that struck our area.

No, we are not on the cutting edge of the Church or an area of high priority for our Society, but we are very much on the missionary frontline. We struggle against the onslaught of confusion from the sects and “new Christian churches.” We struggle to deepen the faith and give birth to an evangelizing Church. We struggle to bring alive Christ’s invitation to come to Him, to those who are searching or are untouched by the Gospel.

We are a small outpost in the vineyard, but yet very much part of that vineyard and very much alive. The Caribbean is a wonderful place to minister with the most pleasant people to share faith with, and to cooperate with those who search for God and the building up of His Kingdom. It is a privilege to be here. Come and join us!<sup>20</sup>

### **THE MEN OF THE CARIBBEAN DISTRICT**

The Caribbean District flourishes today due in great measure to its interculturality as attested to by this listing of the current members and their country of origin:

#### **Antigua, Villa Maria**

Father Ante (Tony) Jeroncic	Croatia
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Father Robert Ratajczak	Poland
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Father Pierre Tevi-Benissan	Togo
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#### **Anguilla, Catholic Presbytery**

Father Pawel Czoch	Poland
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#### **Montserrat, St. Patrick**

Father George Agger	Ireland
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#### **St. Kitts, Co-Cathedral**

Father Manuel Antao	India
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#### **St. Kitts, Sandy Point, Sacred Heart**

Father Xuan Ho	Vietnam/U.S.A.
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The Caribbean District members gathered in assembly in January 2015. (Standing left-to-right) Yohanes Lunga Bally, Pierre Tevi-Benissan, Jan Pastuszczak, Paul Czoch, Robert Johnson, Thomas Ascheman (provincial), Bernard Spitzley, Bernard Latus, George Agger, Ante Jeroncic, Frank Power, Mark Schramm, Walter Mendonca; (Kneeling left-to-right: Xuan Ho, Manuel Antao, Miguel Lopez, Dominic Huynh Pham, Adam Oleszczuk. Robert Ratazczak was the photographer.

### **Virgin Gorda, St. Ursula**

Father Jan Pastuszczak	Poland
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### **Tortola, St. William**

Father Walter Mendonca	India
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### **Jamaica, Morant Bay, Our Lady of the Assumption**

Father Dominic Savio Pham	Vietnam/U.S.A.
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Father Frank Power	Ireland
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### **Jamaica, Bridgeport, Church of Reconciliation (Good Shepherd Church)**

Father Adam Oleszczuk	Poland
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Father Bernard Latus	Poland
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### **Jamaica, Kingston, Holy Rosary Church - Social Ministries**

Bro. Bernard Spitzley	U.S.A.
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### **Sint Maarten, St. Martin of Tours**

Father Robert Johnson	U.S.A.
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Father Yohanes Lunga Bally	Indonesia
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Father Miguel Efrain Flores Lopez	Mexico
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### **Newly Assigned to the District**

Father Mark Schramm	U.S.A.
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Father Vincent Wasaring	Papua New Guinea
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The story of Divine Word Missionaries working in the Caribbean is one of great care and sacrifice, and even greater trial. This ministry has been undertaken with concern and love for the various people of the islands. It is the hope that those who read this brief summary, especially the younger members of the Society of the Divine Word, may be inspired by the heroic efforts of our men working there and that these young men will think about making the missions in the Caribbean their first choice for their first assignment.

### **FOREVER ON MISSION IN THE CARIBBEAN DISTRICT**

Three members of the Caribbean District died and were buried in the Caribbean.

Father John Valentine died July 9, 1986; buried at St. Gerard's in Anguilla.

Father Joseph Bates died January 28, 1995; buried on the veranda of Our Lady Star of the Sea Church in Tortola.

Father Gerhardt Mellert died July 22, 2006; buried beside the church in Salem, Montserrat.

They remain forever on mission in the Caribbean District.

### **NOTES**

1. Bishop Joseph Bowers, Christmas letter to Madeline Johnson, in which the bishop reminisces about various Christmases.

2. Other Divine Word Missionaries from the Caribbean who studied at Bay St. Louis are Fathers Francis Charles (Dominica), Stanley Farrier (St. Kitts), Edwin Cabey (Montserrat), Victor Butler (Dominica), Hartfield Myvett (Belize), Arthur Kelly (Jamaica) and Brother Thomas Joseph (Belize).

3. The seminary at Bay St. Louis was named after the fifth-century bishop of Hippo in North Africa, St. Augustine.

4. The diocese grew over time. On February 27, 1971, the British Virgin Islands of Tortola and Virgin Gorda were transferred to the Diocese of St. John's from the Diocese of St. Thomas by the Vatican. Later, after Antigua and St. Kitts became independent nations, the diocese was renamed St. John's-Basseterre.

5. Father John Musinsky, letter to the apostolic delegate in Haiti, Society of the Divine Word Generalate Archives, Rome. Note the likely error in the date of the letter, presumably written some days or weeks prior to the meeting on May 23.

6. It is not clear if this is U.S. dollars or EC (Eastern Caribbean) dollars. The Eastern Caribbean Dollar (EC\$) (to distinguish it from other dollar-denominated currencies) has been pegged to the United States dollar since July 7, 1976 at a constant exchange rate of US\$1 = EC\$2.70.

7. The *Catalogus* is the name of the official Society of the Divine Word international directory.

8. He was waiting for a re-entry visa to India but never returned there. Father Valentine died on the island of Anguilla and is buried there.

9. Father Kevin O'Toole, undated manuscript, Chicago Province Archives. [*Editor's note*: At that time Father Raymond Lennon was provincial superior of the Eastern Province.]

10. Superior General Father Henry Heekeren, letter to the provincial of the Eastern Province, March 29, 1982, Society of the Divine Word Generalate Archives, Rome.

11. Protocol signed in Rome, January 1993.

12. Father Frank Power, letter to the Superior General, April 12, 1994, Society of the Divine Word Generalate Archives, Rome.

13. Father Bernard Latus, *Caribbean Newsletter*, Christmas 1995, Chicago Province Archives.

14. Most of the information about Sint Maarten is taken from an article by Father Thomas Krosnicki.

15. Father George Agger, *Caribbean Newsletter*, Spring 1999, Chicago Province Archives.

16. Father Edward Herberger, *Caribbean Newsletter*, Spring 1999, Chicago Province Archives.

17. Father Laurence Finnegan, letter to multiple correspondents, September 25, 1995. Chicago Province Archives.

18. Father Laurence Finnegan, *Caribbean Newsletter*, Christmas 1995, Chicago Province Archives.

19. Father Adam Oleszczuk, *Caribbean Newsletter*, 2011, Chicago Province Archives.

20. Father Laurence Finnegan, *Caribbean Newsletter*, Christmas 1995, Chicago Province Archives.