

SVD PARTNERS in MISSION

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SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD, CHICAGO PROVINCE

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Prophetic Dialogue



Proclaiming the Gospel with Bold Humility

Mission Sunday is Every Day!

Dear Partners in Mission,

In the first issue of our *SVD Partners in Mission* newsletter, we introduced you to the 2012 General Chapter that was taking place outside of Rome. The Chapter has challenged us to become “interculturally competent” in both our missionary work and our community life. Indeed, in our increasingly multicultural parishes and neighborhoods, don’t we all need to become more competent at understanding and communicating well across the boundaries of culture?

In this issue, Roger Schroeder gives an overview of how the Divine Word Missionaries view our missionary work today. The General Chapter of 2000 described our SVD mission as “prophetic dialogue,” which Roger summarizes in his article. Roger notes that the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, as found in John’s Gospel, encapsulates how Jesus himself engaged in “prophetic dialogue.”

World Mission Sunday is October 21st this year. It is interesting to note that Pope Benedict also has referred to the Samaritan woman in his message for Mission Sunday. The Pope notes that humanity “is hungering and thirsting for God and must be invited and brought to the bread of life and the living water, like the Samaritan woman who goes to Jacob’s well and converses with Christ... she meets Christ, who asks her for a drink but then speaks to her of a new water which can satisfy thirst for ever.” The woman eventually comes to see Jesus as the Messiah, and Pope Benedict then quotes St. Augustine, who asks: what else could this woman have done other than leave her pitcher and run to the village to announce the good news?

Mission Sunday is an opportunity for all of us to be reminded of our mandate to share the faith we have been graced to receive. Indeed, like the Samaritan woman, having

received such incredible good news through faith, what else can we possibly do but share it? As Pope Benedict states, proclaiming the Gospel “must never remain on the margins of ecclesial activity and of the personal life of Christians. Rather, it must strongly characterize it, in the awareness that they are those for whom the Gospel is intended and, at the same time, missionaries of the Gospel.”



As *SVD Partners in Mission*, you have already shown that you are concerned with the church’s mission. You share in the SVD mission through your interest, your prayer, and your activity. Mission Sunday reminds all followers of the Word that we are all missionaries of the Word as well. To be effective, we all need to grow in our “competence” to witness to the Word and share the Word across the boundaries of culture. May the Light of the Word and the Spirit of Grace help us all!

Mark Weber, SVD
Mission Secretary, Chicago Province

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SVD Mission: Asbury Park, NJ

The SVD presence in the Asbury Park area of the Trenton Diocese goes back to 1943, when the Society began staffing St. Peter Claver parish. Over the course of time, the New Jersey apostolate expanded beyond the African-American community to reach out to Latino peoples as well, including staffing Our Lady of Providence parish in Neptune since 1981. Ever-shifting demographics has brought a new configuration to our mission there during this past year, and our confreres Miguel Virella, George Koottappillil, and Florencio Lagura are now immersed in a multi-site, multi-cultural parish ministry.

Both St. Peter Claver and Our Lady of Providence parishes had to abandon their church buildings in 2005, moving to Holy Spirit parish which was staffed by diocesan personnel. Meanwhile, the Trinitarian congregation announced that, due to dwindling personnel, they had to leave nearby Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish, which they had staffed for nearly a century.

Thus, this past July saw the beginnings of a new configuration, following consultations



among the parishioners and pastoral staffs of the parishes involved and the diocese. St. Peter Claver parish officially merged into Holy Spirit parish, while Our Lady of Providence merged into Mount Carmel. Miguel Virella has been appointed as pastor of both re-configured parishes, which are “twinned” under his leadership. It is likely that there will be one parish with two sites in a few years.

With this new configuration, our confreres now are in a pastoral setting which includes not only African American and Latino communities we’ve served for many years at St. Peter Claver and Our Lady of Providence, but also European Americans (including the largely Italian-American community of Mount Carmel), as well as a sizeable Haitian community at Holy Spirit and smaller populations of Liberians, Nigerians, and other cultural groups. Quite a mix! Missionary projects for the area’s poor of all cultures, such as Our Lady of Providence’s clinic and a planned outreach center at the St. Peter Claver site, will continue.

The challenge our confreres face in this new configuration is how to form one faith community from the many cultures represented – how to move from the fact of being multicultural to becoming a truly *intercultural* community. As a pastoral team composed of SVDs from Puerto Rico, India, and the Philippines, along with a Haitian priest, the team itself is an example of what *intercultural* community is all about!



Global SVD Mission: Moo-ving Families Forward

Damien Lunders, SVD

Courtesy of Divine Word Mission Center, Techny

Each day the Mother of Perpetual Help Center in Nong Bua Lamphu, Thailand, meets the immediate needs of many children and adults through food and medicine distribution programs, and its orphanage and hospice center. The staff and I began to realize that so many of these families we have come to know have long-term needs that must be addressed.



Seven years ago, we launched a cattle program to help families become financially self-sufficient. Five families in each of the seven civil districts in Nong Bua Lamphu Province were given a cow and a calf.



Today each family that participates in the cattle program signs a contract to return some of the proceeds of their small operation so other families will be able to receive cattle

in the future. From their first cow and calf, a family can increase its herd by keeping a male offspring for breeding or by cooperating with a neighbor who has a bull. The family who owns the bull will make extra money by renting him to a neighbor.

The cattle help provide a steady income for the families. Our hope is that the families will become more financially self-reliant and have a better way of life.



Damien Lunders, SVD is from Salem, South Dakota. He entered Divine Word Missionaries in 1961 and professed perpetual vows in 1969. After many years as a missionary in Papua New Guinea, Brother Lunders founded the Mother of Perpetual Help Center in Nong Bua Lamphu, Thailand, in 2000.

New SVD General Council

One of the tasks of every General Chapter is to elect the Superior General and the General Council, the highest governing body for the whole Society of the Divine Word. Our new superior general is Fr. Heinz Kulüke, a German SVD who had been provincial in the Philippines. Heinz has a deep commitment to the poor. The vice-superior general is Bob Kisala, a Chicago native who had been many years in Japan. The other council members come from Indonesia, Congo, Portugal, Brazil, and India.



Mission Theology Today: Mission and “Prophetic Dialogue”

Roger Schroeder, SVD

The last issue of “Partners in Mission” described the components of mission today, that is, the WHAT of mission. We are now turning to the HOW of mission, whether it is across the ocean or across the street. Some also would call this the spirituality of mission.



“Prophetic Dialogue”: Where Did the Idea Come From?

The Society of the Divine Word (SVD), the largest explicitly missionary congregation of men in the Roman Catholic Church, has a General Chapter every six years to reflect upon their missionary life and work around the world. At the 15th General Chapter of 2000, the SVD delegates from Asia described mission primarily as “dialogue” with the poor and people of other cultures and religions. Those from Latin America understood mission more as taking a “prophetic” stance on the side of the poor and against injustice. In the process of this five-week General Chapter, the term and idea of “prophetic dialogue” surfaced as a “missionary response today” in “listening to the Spirit” not only in Asia and Latin America, but around the world. The final SVD Chapter document put it this way:

“It is in dialogue that we are able to recognize ‘the signs of Christ’s presence and the working of the Spirit’ (quoting Pope John Paul II) in all people, that we are called to acknowledge our own sinfulness and to engage in constant conversion, and that we witness to God’s love by sharing our own convictions boldly and honestly, especially where that love has been obscured by prejudice, violence, and

hate. It is clear that we do not dialogue from a neutral position, but out of our own faith.” (*In Dialogue with the Word*, par. 44).

So mission is to be done with a spirituality of openness and listening to both how God is already present (*dialogue*) and how God is not yet present or recognized (*prophecy*). This idea didn’t come “out of the blue,” but rather it represents the real life experiences, aspirations, and reflections of the missionaries themselves.

More a Spirituality than a Strategy

Prophetic dialogue is first of all not a strategy, but a spirituality or attitude behind all mission activity—whether it is proclaiming the gospel, interacting with people of different religions, accompanying the poor, or quietly witnessing to one’s faith. Our spirituality of mission is of course founded on God. We recognize that God’s Spirit and love has been stirring within creation and the hearts of all human beings from the very beginning.



Therefore, we need to enter into *dialogue* and relationships with others with an attitude of respect for how they are already in various ways responding to God in their “world.” At the same time, people often resist or are blind to this call of God. Therefore, mission involves being *prophetic*, that is being against (denouncing) sin and pointing to (announcing)

the Good News. Of course, missionaries and all Christians have to also look at their own lives and acknowledge their need for continual conversion. In that way, we Christians constantly strive to be faithful witnesses to God's plan and hope to draw all people back to God. Prophecy and dialogue can be done with or without words. It doesn't necessarily require standing on a "soap box." Gentle words can be powerful, and people believe more what people do than what they say anyway, don't they?!

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

A wonderful example of Jesus living out prophetic dialogue was his encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:6-42). We recall how Jesus as a Jewish man got into conversation with a Samaritan woman. He talked with her about her married life, her religious beliefs, her cultural identity, and her deep yearning for the Messiah. They had a dialogue about the real issues of life. At the same time, Jesus prophetically spoke with her about the "living water," worshipping "in spirit and truth," and the arrival of the Messiah. The woman was so excited about this that she left her water jar—symbolic of "letting go" of worldly concerns—and ran into the village to share this Good News with her neighbors. This "living water" was much more important than the "water jar." Jesus has shared the message of God's life with the woman through a process of both dialogue and prophecy, and now the woman did the same in her own situation. Missionaries and all Christians are to continue to share in God's mission with the same attitude, dedication and spirituality today.

"Bold Humility": Another Way of Saying It

Bringing together dialogue and prophecy as "prophetic dialogue" is similar to a phrase by South African David Bosch over 20 years ago. He said that mission is to be done with "bold humility." "It is ... a bold humility—or a humble boldness. We know only in part, but we do know." (*Transforming Mission*, 489) We are to have a spirit or spirituality of boldness or confidence in what we do know about what God is calling us and others to see and change. This requires a prophetic spirit. At the same time, we need to

be humble in all aspects of mission because we cannot know all the wonderful ways God is working in others and in the world. This requires a spirit of listening and dialogue. In terms of the prophetic dimension, Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians wrote: "... we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition." (2:2) This is followed by a beautiful image of the love and vulnerability underlying dialogue: "But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our very own selves, because you have become very dear to us." (2:7-8)

Closing Comment

Being both prophetic and a person of dialogue—or both bold and humble—on one level is contradictory. But on a much deeper level, it implies a delicate balance of recognizing the truth that God is already present *and* also missing within ourselves and others. To use a common phrase, the cup is *both* half-full and half-empty. Missionaries and all Christians need a spirituality of prophetic dialogue to acknowledge and respond to both.



Roger Schroeder, SVD is Professor of Intercultural Studies and Ministry and holder of the Bishop Francis X. Ford, MM, Chair of Catholic Missiology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He is author of *What is the Mission of the Church? A Guide for Catholics* (Orbis Books, 2008), and co-author with Stephen Bevans, SVD, of *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Orbis Books, 2004) and *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Orbis Books, 2011).