

Communities of the Word

STORIES OF THE CHICAGO PROVINCE



THE TECHNY STORY, 1899 – 2012

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BEFORE TECHNY

As in all telling of people and places there is a prehistory. We must begin our story of Techny in the time of this prehistory to understand more fully Techny's story and its memorable men.¹ In 1875 a young diocesan priest from Muenster, Germany, Father Arnold Janssen, opened the first mission house of the Society of the Divine Word in Steyl, a village on the Netherlands side of the Dutch-German border. Because Father Janssen was alive and active during the first fourteen years of Techny's history, he affected mightily the foundation of the Society in North America. These years set the pattern and basic direction for Techny.

The Founder set out to establish a missionary society primarily for Germans. To make this happen he had to make his new foundation known. He did this by setting up a press and publishing operation. By stimulating mission interest in his readers, he also was able to gather people around him to open a seminary to train young men for a missionary career. His efforts eventually led him to found a religious congregation consisting of Brothers and priests. Many of the Brothers were or became masters of their trades—well educated, in other words—and capable of passing on their skills to other young men. This was to be very important when the Society came to America, indeed as it moved to foreign mission countries.



St. Mary's Mission Seminary, Techny Towers.

MOVE TO AMERICA

How did it come about that this operation was expanded to America? The decision to begin in North America (the United States), took some time to firm up. The SVDs in Steyl recognized that the United States was an important country. It was big, situated between two oceans, with a growing population. Many Germans had migrated there and were still moving to this new country. Many of these were zealous, hard-working Catholics who were becoming well established in the country. But no one, not a bishop nor any other group, had invited the Society to come to America, something to which the Founder attached great importance as a sign of God's will. At the time, however, the United States was still a mission country, which might have been a point in favor of starting a foundation there.

Then the idea came up of sending someone to America to sell Steyl's publications. One generous benefactor of the Society told the Founder, "Money is plentiful in America, and easier to obtain there than here."² Father Nicolaus Blum, the treasurer general of the Society and the person in charge of the press and the Brothers, favored the idea. "Do you want me to take the necessary steps? In any case it can't hurt. We would have to send one of the Brothers there to start a foundation."³

In the meantime, one of the *Reisebrüder* (traveling Brothers) who went around German-speaking parts of Europe selling subscriptions to the materials coming from Steyl's press, whose name in religion was Bro. Wendelin (Joseph Meyer), was campaigning for this project. Actually, Bro. Wendelin was well qualified for such a task. He was educated and musical, and he had been an elementary school teacher. As a traveling Brother he was used to selling magazines, keeping records, handling money—doing all the things necessary for such a project. He was pleasant in demeanor, making friends easily, and solid in his vocation. He was also able, as the Founder desired, to write back clear reports of the areas he investigated for possible places to settle.

All in all, he was a good choice to begin work in the United States. Before Bro. Wendelin's departure, Fr. Janssen instructed all those living in Steyl to give Brother the addresses of any relatives or friends they might have in America. He himself compiled a list of the alumni of Steyl who had become priests in the meantime and were working in the United States. This would give Bro. Wendelin a start.

A CHRONOLOGY OF EARLY EVENTS

Without going into any greater detail, which can be found in the history of the SVD in North America, it would seem best to follow a chronology, highlighting the major events leading to the opening and early development of Techny.⁴



Brother Wendelin Meyer arrived in the United States in 1895.

1895

In October, Bro. Wendelin landed in New York. The first months were devoted to finding a suitable place to set up the business of selling magazines, learning English, getting acquainted, and making friends. Just one brief example of one of the problems he had to resolve: Where to live? A listing is instructive. He spent his first days in the Leo House in New York City. This was a place where many German immigrants stayed until they could find other lodgings or move further west. Then he was able to stay in the hospital of the Franciscan Sisters from Aachen, which the Founder had arranged for him before he left Germany. After this he stayed for a time with a German pastor, Father L. Hofschneider. In the meantime Bro. Wendelin had begun his travels selling magazines. He very soon realized that he needed help as well as companionship.

1896

The Founder answered his call for assistance in the person of Bro. Homobonus, who arrived in July. He, too, was an outgoing person and, like Bro. Wendelin, made good friends and benefactors for the Society. He held down the home front of the house that the two of them rented at 75 Harmon Street in Jersey City, New Jersey. They now had an address to which the *Almanacs* and magazines could be sent from Steyl. From there the magazines were forwarded to the subscribers whom Bro. Wendelin was lining up. In the meantime he also made inquiries regarding possible places where the Society might put down permanent roots. The two Brothers also continued to send back reports to the Founder describing their findings. Fr. Janssen typically requested more information, which was always to include maps of the areas, as detailed as possible.

The write-up of these early years, as preserved by Fr. Markert, are humorous accounts of their adventures.⁵ Bro. Homobonus, like Bro. Wendelin, had been a traveling Brother in Germany, so he also was used to selling the Society and its magazines. Between them they were very successful.

1897

In preparation for the next three SVDs to join them, the two moved to 317 High Street in Hoboken, New Jersey. On September

27, Frs. John Peil and Joseph Fischer and Bro. Michael Fecken arrived. These five pioneers can justly be called the original founders of the SVD in America and, therefore, of Techny as well.

Fr. Peil was designated the superior of what was now a viable community. Within days, he had come to the decision that New York and New Jersey were not places where the Society should settle down. It seems very likely that the Founder had discussed this with him before he left Germany. Milton in Pennsylvania offered a possibility. Again, Bro. Wendelin was the link. On one of his trips to Philadelphia, he had connected with two German diocesan priests, the Hammeke brothers, who were nephews of Father Francis Nies, an SVD missionary to China.⁶ Knowing that the SVD was still looking for a place to settle, Milton came up in the conversation. One thing led to another, and the decision was eventually taken to see what could be done in Milton for one year. The bishop did not object. Bros. Wendelin and Homobonus kept selling magazines, promoting the idea of the foreign missions wherever they went, and continued looking for another place.

Fr. Fischer went to do supply work in a parish for an extended period, learning English very quickly and very well.⁷ Fr. Peil also did supply work, made efforts to learn as much about America as he could, and took care of the small community of which he was the superior, all at the same time. Bro. Michael stayed in Milton, where Fr. Peil had rented a house. Bros. Wendelin and Homobonus continued



Fr. John Peil arrived in 1897 and was the first superior in the USA.

to sell magazines. In 1897 they sold 20,000 copies of the German *St. Michaelskalender*. Bro. Wendelin had also arranged with a Franciscan Brother to translate the German *St. Michaelskalender* into English—now called *St. Michael's Almanac*, which for 1899 had a run of 15,000 copies, all of which were sold.

All in all, the time spent in New York, New Jersey, and Milton—the first two years in America—had not gone so badly. The two Brothers made many good friends, contacts, and benefactors for the missions. These first two Brothers had come for three reasons: to sell magazines, to make the Society known, and to find a place where the SVD might settle down and begin the work for which it had been founded. Even in the third year they had been partially successful. It was clear to the small community and the Founder that New York and New Jersey, and now Milton, were not where the Society should settle. From the beginning it had repeatedly been recommended to Bro. Wendelin to look further west for a permanent place, and they now did.

1898

The next and last move also owes its stimulus to Brother Wendelin. On one of his trips to Chicago, while staying with a German parish priest, the discussion came around, as it usually did, to the question of where the Society might find a place to settle down permanently and what sort of work they might begin. Not far north of the city there was a farm for sale that belonged to a German orphanage. It turned out that if the SVD would open a technical school for the training of the graduates of this German orphanage, they could purchase the farm and begin in the town of Shermerville.

For the purposes of the Society, this location satisfied many of the Founder's criteria for location: near a large city, good transportation (a railroad ran along the west side of the farm); a very big plus was the fact that there were many German Catholics in the neighborhood and in the city of Chicago itself.⁸ The Catholic German-speaking population had twenty-eight Catholic parishes with about 125,000 parishioners. In some neighborhoods, German-speaking residents could get by for years with scarcely any English. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Bro. Wendelin reported to the Founder, had another concentration of Germans, about two-thirds of the population.



St. Joseph Technical School, Techny, Illinois.

1899

Brother Wendelin had learned about the 360-acre farm in Shermerville in early summer of 1898. After nine months of negotiation, every objection of the Founder had been mostly resolved—he was not one to be rushed. The contract was signed, sealed, and delivered. For \$42,000 the farm belonged to the SVD, under the condition and the promise that they would build and staff a technical school for German orphans. On May 9 the community from Milton arrived, a few days short of a year since they had settled in Milton.⁹

The idea of opening an orphanage or technical school in North America had come up repeatedly as a possible apostolate for the Society in addition to the Apostolate of the Press, providing good reading material for German Catholics. During these years orphanages were widespread, and work with orphans was generally seen as a noble and necessary undertaking.¹⁰ It was the condition that gave the Society of the Divine Word a reason for putting down permanent roots in North America.

1900

Ground was broken for the new St. Joseph's Technical School. By the fall of that year the first stage of the building complex was already on its way to completion. By October 15 a large part of the building was ready to have its roof put on. Money? No real problem for Fr. Peil. He felt he had good credit, and going further into debt did not bother him: It was the American way!

Money was coming from the sale of the almanacs and other publications that came from Steyl, the cost of which were put on Steyl's books for the time being. The priests also brought money in from their supply work, not an inconsiderable amount. And the German parishes were to help support the operation. After all, it was to help "their" orphans. Also there were the free-will donations that the faithful provided. Not to be underestimated was the free labor the skilled Brothers provided. By Christmas the community was able to move into a building to house and train orphans.

1901

On April 20 the first ten boys arrived from the German orphanage. By April 28 there were twenty-five boys in the industrial school. It was off and running. It is noted that by the year 1907 the following trades were offered: "Steam fitting, Plumbing, Mechanics, Blacksmithing, Tinsmithing, Horse shoeing, Tending engines, Boilers and Electrical Mechanics, Carpentry Work, Typesetting, Stereotyping, Electrotyping, Printing, Bookbinding, Painting, Glazing, Artistic Decorating, Modeling, Carving, Shoemaking, Tailoring, Farming, Gardening, Butchering, etc."¹¹ These might have appeared in the Prospectus, but not all of them could have been offered all the time. In 1910 the Technical School enrolled 200 students, the highest number ever.

No wonder Fr. Peil kept pestering Fr. Blum for Brothers, and skilled Brothers at that. The group of Brothers sent over to teach these skills was one of the lasting benefits of the Technical School long after it was closed.

The Press

A few words should be said about the press at Techny. Just like the press that the Founder had built at Steyl, Techny's press was as responsible as anything for the SVD's success in North America. It made the SVD known, helping greatly to stimulate interest in the foreign and African-American missions. It attracted benefactors for the Society and its missions; it was useful to foster vocations; as in Germany, so in America, it also provided Catholics with good, interesting reading materials, now in English.

Already in 1899 Fr. Peil had begun to assemble parts for a full-scale printing press. Fr. Blum urged him to go easy: It was not so simple



Brothers working in the press.

to run a successful printing plant. Where would he get the skilled Brothers? In addition, he would need writers and editors and layout specialists, and all of this had to be done in English. Don't be hasty! This time the Founder had little to say. When Fr. Peil had presented his overall plans for the Technical School, space for a press was clearly included, and it had all been approved by Fr. Janssen. Of course, Fr. Peil emphasized the need for a working press to train the students in printing skills for their future work.

Over the years the press went from success to success. In three years the *Amerikanisches Missionsblatt*, a German magazine, had 10,000 subscribers, and the *Almanac* had a printing of 83,000 copies. *The Christian Family* magazine first appeared in 1906; by January it had 5,000 subscribers and quickly became popular.

1909

Meanwhile, pressure was building from all sides to open a bona fide seminary that would educate students to become missionary priests. The Society had already accepted Brother candidates in 1901, with the Founder's permission. Part of the building expansion that went on at Techny during these early years was also geared to the possibility of a mission seminary. Finally in a letter of October 28, 1908, the Founder wrote to Fr. Francis De Lange, now the Regional Superior, giving permission to open a mission house, meaning a seminary:

We spoke of your request in the general council meeting the day before yesterday, and we are not against your making the first trial and opening a mission house. May God the Holy Spirit bless this effort, and in this way, if it pleases him to show us that this foundation is according to his holy will.

Two days after giving his approval, the Founder had his first stroke. The permission to open a mission house in North America was the last major decision he was to make. He died on January 15, 1909.

With this things changed! Where should the seminary be located? The first students moved into the Technical School for a few months, after which they moved to the old farmhouse by the train station—not very ideal, especially during the winter. After a year and a half the seminarians moved back to the Technical School, in the fall of 1910.

Already in a November meeting with his council in Steyl, the Founder brought up the question of whether running a technical school for German orphans was really part of the charism of the Divine Word Missionaries. In America they were also beginning to question this. There was little chance of developing a mission spirit in the boys who were being prepared for a job after they graduated. It was difficult to get enough teachers for the trades. Some of the boys were delinquents as well as orphans, and in some cases parents simply brought their problem children to the school. Then, too, running such a school was very expensive, and the German parishes did not support the school as they had promised.

Finally, two institutions under one roof—two such diverse groups at that—proved very problematic. When Fr. Nicolaus Blum, who had succeeded Fr. Arnold Janssen as Superior General, came to America on visitation, the Technical School was officially closed. No new boys would be accepted, but those already there would be able to finish their courses.

Now the way was clear to do widespread propaganda for the new mission house and to collect on a national scale for the SVD missions. The new seminary was to be called St. Mary's Mission House (or Seminary).

By 1920 five clerics were to be ordained, the first fruits of Techny as a Mission House. Two of this first class, Frater Clifford King and

Frater Robert Clark, were sent to China and ordained in China in an effort to save the Society's missions there. These two men were the first Americans to go to the missions. Many more were to follow over the years. The other three in that first ordination class were Fathers Joseph Murphy, Peter Weyland, and Florian Haas. At the same time there were another twenty-four boys in the College Department.

The 1920s and Financial Facts

Let us jump to the early 1920s. The First World War had recently come to an end. In a letter of March 9, 1920, Father Peter Janser, the provincial at Techny, wrote to the generalate,

The Society is well-known as a mission society. People are acquainted with the pioneer efforts we made and they marvel at our activities. People also are well-intentioned towards us. . . . Great possibilities lie before us.

A little while later he wrote,

As far as our financial situation is concerned, I have no second thoughts for this year. During last year, for example, we took in over \$80,000 in annuities. So far in the first three months of this year (1920) we have already received over \$60,000.

On the now extended farm the SVD had 180 head of cattle, seventy of which were milk cows, 200 pigs, thirty-six horses, 1,000 chickens. Why such a big farm and so many animals? One of the Founder's principles was that wherever the Society went, the members should try to be self-sufficient¹² and, if possible, help the larger Society as well.

Another source of income as well as developing mission interest at the same time were the publications that were pouring out of Techny's press. By the beginning of 1921 the monthly subscription total of the combined German *Amerikanisches Familienblatt* and its English version *The Christian Family* magazine was 100,000. *The Little Missionary*, an attractive small magazine, was geared primarily toward grade-school children. This was first published in 1915 by

Father Bruno Hagspiel. This small magazine had a subscription total of 100,000. It grew dramatically and became a very popular young people's magazine. *St. Michael's Almanac*, an annual book-sized publication, appeared in 1920 in a run of 90,000.

Then there were the free-will offerings which people sent in. What was sent in for specific missions was sent to those missions, to the extent that Bishop Augustin Henninghaus, a German SVD missionary to China, could claim that America was responsible for keeping the China mission afloat during the '20s and even more, perhaps, in the '30s and early '40s. The Motherhouse at Steyl, and the Society in Europe as a whole, owed much of their basic survival after WWI to the Techny Province.

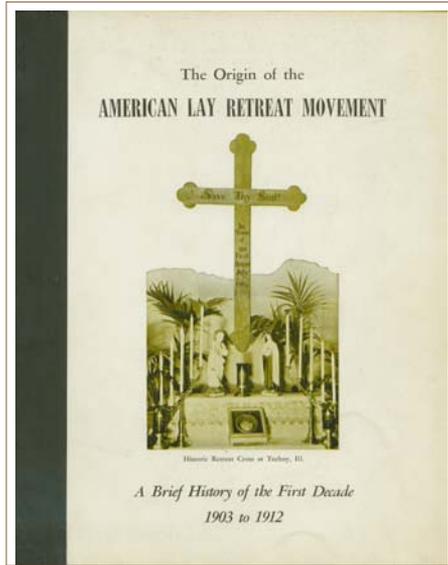
One more source of income for Techny, and not an insignificant one, were the many Mass stipends that were sent in by the faithful. Those masses that could not be said within a reasonable time would be sent either to the missions or to Germany or to whatever other branch of the Society might be in need. It was very fortunate that the Founder sent Fr. Peil and the other SVDs to America when he did. Techny quickly and richly paid the debt owed to Steyl.¹³

Another activity of the SVD priests who were assigned to Techny—and other houses as they were built—was to help out in neighboring parishes and convents, hospitals, and so on. This was called “going on” or “doing” supply work. Frs. Peil and Fischer, the first two SVD priests in America, were involved in this work from the very beginning. It was “missionary” work; it was a good way of stimulating mission interest and was also another valuable source of income.

RETREATS FOR LAITY AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

The Divine Word Missionaries in North America also started another activity that the Founder had advocated for his priests in Germany: retreat work. These retreats for laymen were started already in 1906 and were preached in three languages, German, English, and Polish. In the summer of 1920, 900 men attended weekend retreats. In the eastern states, this apostolate was later organized into a roving “mission band” composed of SVD priests whose task it was to preach retreats and missions.

There were other significant happenings in the early years of Techny's existence. In 1901 the first Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit



(SSpS)¹⁴ arrived in America and settled close to Techny. From the beginning they took over the laundry and kitchen for those living at the Techny Mission House, but soon they also established a grade school near Techny where they taught neighboring children. They also took over St. Ann's Home for the Elderly, the cornerstone of which had been laid by Fr. Peil in 1903. As Father Markert stated in his unpublished history of Techny's early years, "The Old People's home prospered from the beginning." This home grew over the years, with new buildings being added and more and more services being offered. (The doors to this home for the elderly were finally closed, however, in 1983, as state regulations made it too difficult to bring the eighty-year-old building up to code.)

On February 2, 1902, the first four Brother novices were accepted into the Society at Techny.

In 1905 Fr. Alois Heick, a white priest, was sent from Techny to Merigold, Mississippi, to begin what would be a most difficult African-American mission in the South. He soon had to leave surreptitiously or be tarred and feathered and kicked out of town. This was probably because he had stopped a white man from whipping a young African-American man. The incident almost ended the Society's work among the black population even before it got started. This home mission, however, was very important to the Founder and to Fr. Peil and Bro. Wendelin, who were the first two men in the States to seek



Techny around 1935.

this apostolate. Fr. Heick was convinced by the Founder to go back, this time to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where he met with much success. This, then, was the beginning of the Society's involvement with work among African Americans, especially in the South.

As the community continued to grow, the buildings expanded. The twin towers and the west wing were all completed in rapid succession. (The towers have been a landmark ever since.) On August 22, 1918, ground was broken for the large chapel that runs east from the towers. A renowned architect from Chicago, Mr. Herman Joseph Gaul (1869–1949), was retained to design and build the chapel. He had already built a dozen churches and a number of hospitals and religious houses in and around Chicago.

THE TOWERS AND THE CHAPEL

The many magnificent stained-glass windows were crafted by Franz Xavier Zettler of the Royal Bavarian Art Institute in Munich, Germany.¹⁵ The tile floors and mosaics were produced and installed by Villeroy and Boch, Mettlach, Germany. The chapel itself, dedicated to the Holy Spirit, is 177 feet long and 67 feet wide. It is in Romanesque style with rounded arches and a nave approximately four stories high. A unique upper gallery encircles the whole. The undercroft of the church¹⁶ housed the laundry room, kitchen, and several dining rooms used by the Brothers and seminarians of the community. These facilities had been available, however, much earlier than the chapel itself. And, although the chapel was not “finished,” it was sufficiently ready by June 18, 1923, to have the first Eucharistic liturgy celebrated there.

Two special items in the church need particular mention. The first is the marble altar with its crucifixion group soaring twenty-three feet over the high altar. This whole ensemble was carved in Italy from one piece of Botticino marble. It was paid for by the schoolchildren of America. Fr. Bruno Hagspiel suggested this in the *Little Missionary*, and his readers responded generously. On the back of the altar there remains to this day a plaque that reads, “This altar is a gift of the children of North America.”¹⁷ It was consecrated on April 7, 1927.

The second item is the magnificent organ in the chapel. On Pentecost Sunday 1924, this organ rang out for the first time. It is an instrument with 3,000 pipes and a four manual consoles salvaged from a fire that destroyed the Busch Temple Conservatory for Music in Chicago. It cost a mere \$500 and was installed in the choir loft, in the place that had been planned for just such an organ. Vienna-born Mr. Bartholomew Wiener and his son Carl, with the assistance of Bro. Norbert (Roman) Hertel, reassembled the organ together over three years (1924–1927). For the next sixty years, Bro. Norbert remained Techny’s main organist until he retired in 1994. It is still in place, used for liturgical services and organ recitals,¹⁸ gracing the liturgies of the chapel today, some eighty-seven years later.

Many hands with many talents went into the building, the decoration, and the furnishings of the chapel, which was finally finished in 1948. It is obvious that when all is said and done, much expense and many talents were needed to complete the Techny Chapel of the Holy Spirit.

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE AMERICAN CHURCH

One major contribution of the SVD seminarian community at Techny needs to be mentioned: the Catholic Students’ Mission Crusade (CSMC). This organization became the most successful Catholic youth movement in the first half of the twentieth century. It was the brain-child of a seminarian, Frater Clifford King, who, with the help of the other Techny seminarians under the guidance of Fr. Hagspiel, organized the first conference of the Catholic Students’ Mission Crusade held at Techny, July 27–30, 1918. This organization quickly outgrew Techny’s and the SVD’s capability of oversight and organization. It soon became an organ of the U.S. bishops and enrolled a million students from 2,800 educational institutions during the fifty-two years of its existence.¹⁹

GROWTH AND FORMATION

During World War I, communications between the German SVDs and the United States was often difficult, as can be imagined. At the end of the war, however, full communications were again established. Missionaries were able to be sent again, and personnel could be exchanged. When the delegates to the General Chapter of 1920, Frs. Peter Janser, Adolph Burgmer, and Alois Heick, returned from Europe, they brought sixteen priests with them. Some of these were missionaries who had been expelled from Togo in Africa, which had been a German colony.²⁰ Most of these Togo missionaries were sent to the new African-American mission stations in the southern states.

In the fall of 1921, over seventy new high school students entered Techny to begin their long journey to the missionary priesthood. This brought the number of seminarians to about 170 in all.

In the next decades, the Society at Techny continued to expand in numbers of priests, Brothers, and students. The primary concern during those years, as always, was the formation of the young men into dedicated religious and missionaries. It should be mentioned that the first SVDs to come to the United States brought with them obviously a European, and more precisely a German, model of education and formation.

Problematic, therefore, in the beginning, was the haphazard acceptance of young men of varying ages and educational background. Then, too, since most of the priests came from a German background, they followed the six-year ‘Gymnasium’ model of Germany for high school and junior college. These early years were difficult for the teachers as well as the students. Not every priest was qualified as a teacher, yet all the priests assigned to Techny ended up teaching all kinds of courses. (It was taken for granted that any priest could teach!) Situations like German-speaking priests teaching English to American students might be considered humorous today.²¹

Over the years there were, of course, the necessary changes in curriculum and educational methodology, but one thing remained constant until the seismic shift after Vatican II and its sequel—the lessening of the heavy emphasis on Latin. For years, all SVD high school seminaries were normal entry level into the Society. Soon after Vatican II this would change.²²

The development of the high school seminary system in the SVD was not random. As the years passed, the provincial administration at Techny felt that more vocations could be gathered for the mission cause if there were more seminary high schools. After the preparatory school at Techny (1909), other schools were opened—Sacred Heart at Girard, Pennsylvania (1912), followed by St. Francis Xavier at Miramar (Duxbury), Massachusetts (1922), and then St. Augustine’s seminary in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, for African-American students (1923).²³ These schools continued to envision four years of high school and the first two years of college. The two-year novitiate that followed was required for both Fraters and Brothers. (Fratr = brother in Latin. It was used to address the seminarians.) At first the novitiate was located at Techny; then, in 1921, at East Troy, Wisconsin.

This system, though, could not be sustained forever, given the need for well-trained teachers. Then, too, there was a push to Americanize the system. The Provincial Council decided on a common two-year college at Girard, Pennsylvania, in 1935. Techny, Miramar, and the newly opened St. Paul’s seminary in Epworth, Iowa, each became four-year high school seminaries. SVD schools built later followed this four-year pattern. The common novitiate at East Troy followed the two-year college at Girard. Through all these years, with the exception of Bay St. Louis, the two years of philosophy and four years of theology remained at Techny.

Another, and quite a different change, took place in 1937, when the two-year novitiate was placed immediately after high school. The reasoning for this change was to better the chance for the candidate to continue in the Society. At this younger age—eighteen rather than twenty—it was felt that the young men would be more open to the ideas and ideals of the missionary vocation. When they entered the novitiate, clerics and Brothers were invested with the distinctively tailored SVD cassock and cincture,²⁴ the official habit of the Society, similar to the garb worn by most priests and seminarians of the day.

OTHER MEANS OF FORMATION

There were, at Techny, many formation and development opportunities for the young seminarians and Brothers. There were the Saturday evening sermons usually given by the rector of the seminary

or by a missionary returning from some exotic, fascinating place. In this way missionary interest and zeal were fostered.

The liturgical celebrations of the Divine Office (especially Vespers and Compline) and the Eucharist (all in Latin, of course) were great inspirational influences on the whole community. On special occasions and feast days, the polyphonic choir would provide something special. The most impressive and moving liturgies, which everybody looked forward to, were those of Holy Week and Easter. All these experiences were part of the spiritual formation of the Brothers, novices, and seminarians, as well as the priests.

In addition to the official liturgies, there were many para-liturgical happenings, such as Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and processions of various kinds—for example, Rogation Days processions when the entire community walked through Techny's parks early in the morning, chanting the Litany of All Saints, beseeching God's grace on the fields and on the plants that the harvest might be bountiful. There were also processions on Palm Sunday, the Feast of Corpus Christi, Christmas Eve (the Founder's favorite), and the Feast of the Three Kings, when all of the doorways were blessed. What a formation in communal living and praying! All of this, of course, was also common in most other religious houses of the day.

Another source of formation for all segments of Techny's community, ongoing throughout the year, were the oral community prayers and devotions practiced from the beginning of the Society. Community prayers played an important role in the development of these young missionaries to be. Many of these prayers were particular to the SVD. One especially important prayer was the Quarter Hour Prayer. As the name implies, it was recited every fifteen minutes throughout the day, marked by the ringing of a bell. The bell would sound throughout the halls of the seminary, and all activity, work, or even play, would stop while everyone, alone or in groups, recited the following prayer:

*God, eternal truth,
We believe in you.*

*God, our strength and salvation,
We hope in you.*

*God, infinite goodness,
We love you with all our heart.*

*You have sent the Word as Savior of the world,
Make us all one in him.*

*Fill us with the Spirit of your Son,
That we may glorify your name. Amen.*

These prayers in common were very characteristic of prayer life of the time, and they worked precisely because they were part of the everyday lives of the religious men of Techny.

THE MAJOR SEMINARY (THEOLOGATE)

As the young men proceeded to the study of philosophy and theology at Techny, they found other interests as well. Studies were still the primary task of the major seminarian, but now they were more directly related to the priesthood and their future work. Their spiritual life and their intellectual work began slowly to merge. During the first two years of the major seminary (which were the last two years of college), philosophy was the core and primary subject. In the early years, and even until the mid-1960s, the Scholasticism of St. Thomas Aquinas was the primary focus, as was required in all major seminaries. In this system the various terms, concepts, and distinctions, the logic and style of argumentation to be utilized later in theology, were emphasized. Philosophy was thus viewed as the handmaiden of theology and, therefore, extremely important for the study of theology that would follow.

MISSIONARY FORMATION

When a young man decided to join the Society of the Divine Word, usually around the age of fourteen, whether as a Brother candidate or

as a seminarian, there was probably little thought as to what religious life was all about. Yet, it was eventually in and through the religious community that he could become what he wanted to be: a *missionary*. The main motive was missionary, and since the SVD community was missionary, it was the place to be. This constant notion was nourished, developed, and encouraged by missionary formation.

While spiritual and intellectual formation goals and procedures were clearly laid out and quite specific, formation for mission was not so formalized. Little time especially in a planned way was spent on mission formation. Yet the mission ideal remained foremost in the thinking of the seminarian. It was in the air that surrounded him. He may not always have been aware of it, but it was always part of the very environment of his life.

This missionary aura at Techny was developed on various levels. One would be urged, for example, to participate in sports or other activities, because one had to be healthy to be a missionary. Hobbies and extracurricular activities were encouraged, and the time spent on these were welcome breaks from all the time spent in prayer and study. Many were somehow geared to the missions, at least in the thinking of the participants. The Mission Book Brigade collected and packed books for the missions—for the libraries of the many schools and universities the SVDs conducted in Ghana and the Philippines and elsewhere. Other seminarians sorted and packed medicines to be sent



Shipping supplies to Missions.



In 1944 twenty SVD missionaries received their mission crosses for Papua New Guinea.

to the missions. Often it was the Mission Office that was responsible for collecting the books and medicines and whatever else might be needed in the missions, while the seminarians sorted these materials, packed them, and sometimes, through their own moneymaking activities, financed the cost of shipping. These efforts focused the minds of the seminarians on the needs of the missions and kept the fact uppermost in their minds that they themselves might someday go to the missions.

One of the main sources for developing mission awareness and interest for all members at Techny were the respective mission clubs. Each department within the community had its own. Each was considered a local chapter of the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade. They held meetings once a month. Every year new officers were elected, the preparation for which went on for weeks, as if they were choosing the president of the United States. These elections were fun and extravagant, complete with primaries, slogans, humorous mud-slinging propaganda, and platforms, but they also kept the idea of the missions in the forefront of everybody's thinking.

THE TECHNY CHIMES

One task that the Brothers' mission club took on was to keep the missionaries in the field informed and connected with the home front by means of a regular publication called *The Techny Chimes*.²⁵ This came out usually every month or so and was sent to anyone who desired a copy. To all American SVD missionaries around the world it was sent automatically. Not only was it chock-full of news and

happenings about the SVD in North America, it also published letters and excerpts of letters that missionaries sent in from around the world. It was eagerly awaited and read. The final issue, which was a kind of centenary number published in 1976, gives a good idea of this publication and its purpose when it started:

Back in 1931, St. Alphonsus Rodriguez Mission Club, the Techny Brothers' organization, decided to keep in touch with Techny's ambassadors (missionaries) around the world with a monthly, mimeographed, 4-6 page news Bulletin, *TECHNY CHIMES*. Except during WWII when it was not possible to reach most mission lands by mail, this communication continued, at least on a bimonthly basis, until the mission club (SARMC) finally disbanded.

So just for this once, it might be nice to produce another issue as a centenary feature. There is no mission club now, but the Mission Office has graciously agreed to publish and distribute the issue. Day to day events are not as varied and exciting as in the heyday of the *CHIMES*, but this issue will try to update the situation in Techny for its many missionaries, particularly remote foreign missionaries, who have lost touch.

MISSIONARY VISITS

Whenever missionaries came back for home leave, they always made a point of giving talks to the seminarians and Brothers. Spellbound, everybody listened with rapt attention. Often the missionaries brought with them pictures taken of the exotic places where they worked.

From the very beginning of the SVD in North America, missionaries had been sending back accounts of their work. These might be published in one of the early magazines, *The Christian Family*, for example, or in the *Amerikanisches Familienblatt* if it was in German. A description, often with pictures of the missionary and his mission, would sometimes be published as a separate, small pamphlet and distributed gratis in parishes where priests from Techny helped out on weekends, gave parish missions or preached Forty Hours Devotions.



An early version of the “Techny 9.”

In this way, mission zeal was spread from Techny to the churches in and around Chicago. In this way also, the seminarians and Brothers received a genuine, useful, very effective, and continuing mission formation from the beginning of their entrance into the Society.

Any activity undertaken by a Brother or seminarian could potentially be directed to future mission work. One never knew! Just in case, it was good to know how to make wine from raisins. Growing mushrooms in Techny’s subbasement—first as a way to make money for the missions, but then also as a source of needed nourishment—might also prove useful someday in the missions. (One may wonder if this project succeeded or was ever used in any mission field.)

Humorous research on other needs both community-wide and personal were dutifully reported on in the monthly mission club meetings. One never knew what one may need in the missions. Most of what missionaries had to say about their work, what the Brother or seminarian learned from letters and discussions among themselves, helped to convince them that someday they might find themselves in the mission depending on their own skills and abilities—which was not a bad lesson to learn—together with the lessons, illustrated for them time and again, that nothing really was impossible to them if they just set their mind and hands to it.²⁶

HOME-BASED MISSIONARIES

Every Divine Word missionary, whatever his position, has to be willing to go to the missions. This is part of the charism of the Society. Still, not every Divine Word missionary actually went to the missions. A significant number were needed in the home country to staff the various ministries and positions. Yet all considered themselves, and were viewed as, Divine Word missionaries.

Many Brothers had to stay their entire lives in the home country working at Techny. Without them, Techny simply would not be the institution that it is today. Several Brothers made all the cassocks that were needed and patched the shirts and trousers that needed repair, not a small task for the 300-plus men who lived at Techny in its prime. One Brother and a helper were shoemakers. There were Brothers who were carpenters, auto mechanics, press men, office workers, cooks and bakers, beekeepers and candle makers, farmers, butchers, gardeners, painters, porters and janitors, sacristans and bookkeepers, dairy men and poultry keepers, bus drivers, nurses, organists, and salesmen. There may even have been more. The Brothers busied themselves in so many tasks that it is hard to remember them all!

A marvelous medley! Surely these men saved much money for the Society, money which then could be sent to the missions. But much more important and valuable were the many fervent prayers that stormed heaven on behalf of the missions and the services these many Brothers offered the community. Truly, in this they closely imitated Christ himself, who gave us the ultimate example of servanthood! All of these, too, even those assigned at home rather than abroad, were acutely conscious of performing a truly missionary service.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

In the first several decades of Techny there was an almost constant construction and busy development taking place. In 1926 the new printing shop building was ready for the transfer of the updated machinery from the old plant. Its output continued to expand.

Any visitor to Techny surely remembers the Mission Gardens or nursery. Fr. Peter Oswald, who had an interest in horticulture, took on the task of overseeing a greenhouse and vegetable garden already in 1921. It grew gradually until by January 1, 1932, it totaled eighty-five acres. The total worth of this enterprise came to about \$70,000.

Continuing with this success, under the tutelage of Bros. Charles Reckamp and Vincent Keller and four or five lay men (and the seasonal help of the novices and seminarians), the Mission Gardens prospered. The Techny nursery became known throughout the Midwest not only through advertisements and catalogs but also through the development of many new species by Bro. Charles, especially of irises and peonies and *Arborvitae* trees. Many of these became very desirable and popular to the general public.

In the end, all of the time, effort, and money expended in training and education found its reward when a new class was ordained or when Brothers professed their perpetual vows. In 1930, ten men were ordained in the beautiful Holy Spirit Chapel by Bishop Karl Weig, a Divine Word missionary bishop from Qingdao, China. “All Techny rejoiced at the event, the more so that it was performed right here in our midst and by a Bishop of our own Society.”²⁷

VISITATION OF 1937

At the financial helm at Techny since 1935, Fr. Arthur Melcher (more about him appears later) successfully guided the Society in America through harsh financial times. I say “in America” deliberately because he also became responsible for many of the other SVD institutions besides Techny that were running deeply and dangerously into debt. Fr. Melcher’s investors did not call in their loans during the Depression; annuities kept coming in from benefactors, and the obligations from these were regularly met. Sooner rather than later he had everything under control. As during the First World War and after, it was the American branch of the Society that proved to be the salvation for the SVD Generalate in Rome and for many of the missions. Techny had much to do with making the Society of the Divine Word truly international.

In 1937, Fr. Joseph Grendel, then Superior General, made his visitation to the States. From this visitation several important decisions flowed. In 1937 the novitiate returned to Techny, while Holy Ghost minor seminary was started at East Troy, Wisconsin. It was difficult to have such a large group of young boys living in the same place as older seminarians, and with so many minor seminarians entering the Society, Techny was becoming overcrowded. After the shift was smoothly accomplished, Fr. Hugo Aubry, the rector, commented on how quiet and peaceful it seemed in the house.

Another major change was made at the same time. As noted earlier the Techny novitiate was placed immediately after high school. As stated above the novices now began wearing cassocks and gave up home leave for four years. Only after the second year of junior college were the students allowed a home visit of two weeks; with another after ordination, six years later.²⁸

In the meantime, in 1940, the one SVD province centered on Techny was divided into three. Techny was now the Western Province and included seminaries in East Troy, Wisconsin; Epworth, Iowa; and (later) Perrysburg, Ohio. Miramar in the Boston area; Girard, Pennsylvania; and Bordentown, New Jersey, constituted the Eastern Province, headquartered at Girard. The Southern Province was situated at St. Augustine Seminary, Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. The seminary there was opened primarily for African Americans. This Southern Province also took care of all SVD priests and Brothers working in black parishes in the South. Until this time, all of these efforts had been directed from Techny.²⁹

During World War II, communications between Europe and America slowed to a trickle. After the war, with correspondence now flowing more freely once again, major decisions could be made.³⁰ Europe was in ruins, so Techny again became the principal paymaster of the Society. Understandably there were other concerns brewing in the Society during the war that now could be faced. One of these was the issue of government recognized accreditation for the various educational institutions at Techny and elsewhere.

ACCREDITATION

There were many reasons for this emphasis on accreditation, one of them being the high-school-level minor seminaries. Many of the young men who entered at this level would leave before ordination or vows. Before accreditation, upon leaving the seminary, they often ran into the problem of being accepted for further education. So the first step to solve this problem was to seek accreditation for the high school seminaries. This eventually happened under the direction of Fr. Edward Norton, who had his doctorate in education from the University of Chicago. He was the moving force behind the effort.³¹

There were other reasons as well, as we will see shortly. This move was strongly supported in the 1950s and '60s and especially by the newly elected Superior General (1958), Fr. Johannes Schuette.

FATHER JOHANNES SCHUETTE

Fr. Schuette had a huge impact on the Society of the Divine Word as a whole, but especially on Techny. He was the first Superior General who had been a boots-on-the-ground missionary, in his case, in China. There he had become well acquainted with the American branch of the Society. After being expelled from China in 1952 (after the Communist takeover of the government), he earned a PhD in missiology. Then in 1955 he was appointed by his friend and mentor, Superior General Aloysius Grosse-Kappenberg, to a newly created position in the generalate, that of Mission Secretary. Soon after the appointment he came to Techny and stayed for eight months.³² During his stay at Techny, given his mission experience in China and seeing firsthand the formation of the seminarians, he recognized the need for change in the program for these future missionaries. The old form was dying away. Eventually, the whole thing fell apart, not too many years later.

CHANGE IN FORMATION

In negotiating the change in formation, at least initially, Fr. Schuette was very important and more influential than he probably could foresee. Having been a missionary he was well aware of what the life of a missionary is like: nothing like the structured life in the Techny Mission House. In the missions, the daily order must be very flexible. Community life is limited, reserved for the rare times the missionaries could gather for days of recollection or for a conference.³³

ACCREDITATION AGAIN

The early years of Fr. Schuette's tenure as Superior General were occupied with the continuing need to have our different schools accredited. The objective of accreditation was identified as "the religious missionary priesthood. Competency in a secondary profession should also be sought, but only to the extent that training for the secondary profession does not interfere with training for the religious missionary priesthood."³⁴ All of our seminarians from high school through theological studies should be well prepared academically for missionary work. The "Techny School of Theology" certainly needed to be accredited.³⁵

FATHER ARTHUR MELCHER

Because even many of the people living at Techny knew very little about Fr. Melcher and the kind of work he did, more should be said about him. In 1936 he was asked by Fr. Provincial Hugo Aubry to manage the provincial procurator's position at Techny. At the time he was house procurator (i.e., treasurer) at Miramar in Massachusetts. His was the only mission house kept in the black despite the ravages of the Depression. He was called to put his financial wizardry to work, this time on a much larger scale. The Society in North America and the contributions Techny made to the work of the SVD in other parts of the world is due in large part to Fr. Arthur Melcher. He deserves a greater deal of attention than we can give him here. He surely is one of the giants of Techny. He speaks for himself in the following several pages.

In his financial report to Superior General Grendel on March 15, 1938, he makes the following points, about a year and a half after he had been on the job.

The interest rate which we offer to our annuitants is on a very conservative basis. Figures show that on straight annuities about one half of the principle [sic] invested is paid out as interest. The other half represents gain.

Melcher always thought highly of annuities, the first contract of which was written with a priest from the Cleveland diocese for \$7,000 in February 1904. He continues:

There has been a marked improvement in our financial condition during the fiscal year, although figures do not yet show it and will not show it for some time. In spite of this improvement our condition is still very grave in so much as our very existence and the investments of thousands of our best friends and benefactors depend upon our continuing in the annuity business. If we are too severely restricted in the amount of annuities which we may take, we may never recover financially. Our annuity interest rates are very conservative and are not responsible for the present lamentable situation.



Fr. Arthur Melcher, provincial treasurer for 45 years.

On December 18, 1941, he wrote to Fr. Francis Mahon,

You are quite right; the war will not make things easier for us if people must give billions for guns and shells and battleships. There will be less left for Christ's case. The Lord must help, because it is His own work.

On October 2, 1943, he wrote to Fr. Bruno Hagspiel,

About that chalice of mine, I should explain that I have one—an ordination gift—here at Techny. I had three in all, and a fourth one offered to me by Mr. & Mrs. Kroell of Oak Park. If you have a strong temptation to use it as your own, why don't you keep it there for the present? I thought I would leave it there as I might not last long at this job! But I still have had no nervous breakdown, and business is really picking up, with some nice rent checks coming in from the large apartment buildings in Chicago. As things look now, I am positive we shall work out our salvation. In fact, we may actually be out of the red for the current fiscal year if things continue as they are going now. But please keep this confidential. Again for the current year would by no means eliminate the big deficit, but bring it down for the first time instead of adding to it.

On May 7, 1949, Fr. Melcher wrote Fr. Robert Hunter, reflecting on the time that Fr. Hunter had first come into his office:

Under no circumstances shall the SVD ever borrow from our Chicago banks! Our first class credit depends upon it and we shall maintain it. The bankers are extremely polite to you as long as you have money. When that runs out, they are ready to hang you. Just remember that!

All of our worthwhile properties were mortgaged when I came into office and I was fed up with the situation in just no time at all. We shall never start it at all.

A little later he gives a hint of where else the province (i.e., he) is paying money.

If you [Fr. Hunter] need your Trust Fund money, you can have it, gradually, after we pay the \$53,000 for St. Norbert's, and get the huge demands of the General out of our way. Right now, over the April, May, June period, we are paying \$65,000 to Japan alone, not to mention the large payments to China, etc.³⁶

One final comment concerning Fr. Melcher, showing his contribution to the SVD and Techny during his years as provincial procurator; this comes not from him but from Fr. Arthur Malin. He wrote to Fr. Melcher on July 1, 1939,

I don't know how to put this, but you know when your canonization comes up I'll be there fighting for you. You don't know how much weight you lifted off of my mind with that letter of yours. I was so happy I could have kissed you!

Fr. Melcher had included a check for \$25,000 in the letter he had sent to Fr. Malin. Who said he didn't have a soft heart?

A finding in a report of 1975–1976 refers to his stewardship. This was in preparation for his retiring and turning the office over to Fr. Chester Nowicki, his assistant since 1971:

To sum up, we are in a strong, healthy financial condition. . . . Very cautious now investments: . . . total value higher . . . than at any time since I started my stewardship on 7-1-36 . . . investments (counting loss of market this year) \$22,000,000. At 7% we earn \$1,540,000, plus \$90,000 donations and misc. income. Everything is covered by investments. Last year's income a total of \$1,322,000 on dividends and interests. Annuity expirations (brought in) \$500,000. As of June 31, 1975, Grand Total of investments: \$23,266,890.³⁷

When he handed over his office to Fr. Nowicki in 1977, Fr. Melcher was seventy-nine. He retired gracefully and probably gratefully as well, alert and able to move around until his death in 1988, five days before his ninetieth birthday. His obituary recalled that his life and ministry were characterized by integrity, reliability, steadfastness, stability, and fidelity: "More than anyone else, he made possible the growth and expansion of the Society in the States," and it must be said, of many other missions and other houses of the Society as well.

Although he had the responsibility for millions of dollars during his tenure as treasurer, he lived a dedicated religious life characterized by simplicity, and he spent very little on himself.

Fr. Chester Nowicki, another one of the stalwarts of the Society and Techny, continued the work as provincial procurator of the Chicago Province. He proved to be as capable as his predecessor and mentor, and as generous. For example, he helped the Polish Province and was largely responsible for financing the Common Formation Program at our SVD seminary in Kenya. For several years before his death he suffered from cancer and near blindness, always cheerful, keeping active and independent as long as he could. He died at the age of eighty-eight on March 29, 2007.

THE MISSION OFFICE: EARLY YEARS

There is another department that contributed to Techny's history and deserves mention, namely the Mission Office. This had its origin in the mid-1920s and was yet another brainchild of Fr. Bruno Hagspiel. He had just returned from a worldwide tour of all of the Divine Word missions as secretary and companion of the third Superior General, Fr. William Gier, who had been elected in 1923. The idea of the Mission Office came to full fruition only some years later.

Reflecting back in time, after World War I, by the mid-1920s the United States was again prosperous; money was plentiful. Missionaries, especially from Germany, were flocking to the United States to raise finances for their missions. This competition for Catholic funds for the missions became too much for many Bishops. Something had to be done.³⁸

The American hierarchy wanted to centralize all mission collecting under the aegis of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith. Some of the money would be sent to Rome, from where different missions would be financed. A portion would also stay in the States. The various mission-sending societies could then apply for whatever they could show they needed. The emphasis, it seemed, would be on the *American* missions—that is, the southern Black missions and the American Indian missions. Everything, even mission magazines, were to be centralized. This would have been a disaster for the SVD. How much chance would a German mission society have when applying for these funds? Probably very little. Eventually this idea was left to die on the vine.

There still remained the problem of the SVD's mission appeals. The American branch was beginning to send out its own missionaries, and the numbers, without a doubt, would grow as the years went by. Also, as noted, the American SVDs were becoming responsible for mission fields where the majority of missionaries were German. How to finance these far-flung missions?³⁹

THE CENTRAL MISSION OFFICE: FATHER FRANCIS KAMP

Over the years different men held the position of mission procurator (treasurer), but the office really took off when Fr. Schuette appointed Fr. Francis (“Frank”) Kamp to the Techny mission procure shortly after becoming Superior General in 1958. Fr. Kamp described Schuette's influence in the following way:

When Father Schuette, then the SVD Mission Secretary at the generalate, visited the United States in 1958, he reorganized the various mission offices operating independently in the four U.S. provinces. He convinced all involved in mission and other SVD promotional activities that there should be one central office at Techny with satellites or branches in



Fr. Francis Kamp, 1920-2011

the other provinces. His plan was adopted. This provided clearer goals, with more streamlined promotional methods, while avoiding duplication in approach to benefactors. This new office was called the “Central Mission Office” and was headquartered at Techny.

He then went on to describe his first mail appeal in which he encouraged benefactors to share their Thanksgiving Day dinner with one or more missionaries around the world by sending a suggested amount of money. This campaign took off and exceeded all expectations. Of course, not everybody could buy turkey, but all could at least have something special. Then he added, “One Brother in Ghana said he never ate so much ice cream!”

The Mission Office was assigned three tasks: (1) collect money for the missions; (2) promote the mission idea; and (3) help recruit vocations. This last task eventually was taken over by a separate central vocation office.

Fr. Kamp might be considered another stalwart in the Techny community. He was ordained in 1947 and was assigned to teach at East Troy but was later (in 1953) assigned as editor of the *Little Missionary*. He had written articles for this magazine as a seminarian.

Looking back from the perspective of 1997, Kamp characterized his appointment as head of the Mission Office and life as an SVD as follows:

This position became the turning point of my life as an SVD. The welfare of our overseas missionaries became the driving force of all my activities for the next quarter of a century or more. My work was accomplished by establishing a personal interest in missionaries around the world and attempting to meet their many needs by telling our missionaries' stories to as many people as possible and encouraging them to pray for and support them.⁴⁰

SUPERIOR DELEGATE

As times change and new needs develop, new solutions have to be developed in any organization. One had to do with the missionaries who returned on home leave. Often their visits were not well coordinated. Many required medical and dental care and, perhaps, longer rest than their official leave time allowed. Sometimes the missionary's superior in the missions wanted him back as soon as possible. Sometimes the missionary himself wanted to hurry back without availing himself of what he really needed. Moreover, nobody was really responsible for his well-being while on leave in the States. The director of the Mission Office was the person likeliest to be involved with this, but his primary task was to collect money for all the missions and to promote interest in missionary work. So a new office was established at the Mission Office at Techny, that of "Superior Delegate," whose task was to act as the delegate in the U.S. for the missionaries' own provincial or regional superiors and to see that their needs were met.

This superior delegate was (and is) responsible for all and any of the missionaries while they are on home leave, with powers delegated to him by the missionary's own superior in the mission where he worked.⁴¹ He is also the 'temporary' superior of those in the U.S. for higher studies.

In concert with the superior delegate, the mission director finds himself with another task. Every year the various Bishops assigned a certain number of parishes where someone from a missionary order would be allowed to preach and collect money for the missions. Often missionaries on home leave were drafted for this by the Mission Office director. (All money collected, by whatever means—direct appeals, maturing of annuities, or Mass stipends—were carefully allocated according to the intentions of the donors, avoiding any waste or injudicious spending.)

THE MISSION PRESS FIRE

A traumatic event took place in January 1960 that had a serious effect on Techny's history. On a cold January night, Techny's Mission Press burned to the ground. The cause of the fire was never determined. Did an electrician who had been working in the press not close out his work properly, or did some bales of wet paper suffer spontaneous combustion? Whatever the cause, the result was a total loss. What to do? Rebuild? This would mean replacing older equipment with modern, much more expensive presses and other equipment.

The insurance money paid out for the old press would not come close to replacement costs. Also to be considered was the fact that for some time now it had become clear that a new press would require more outside workers. The Brothers capable of running the press were by now few and far between. To hire these lay workers would mean a huge annual expense. Then, too, whatever printing Techny needed or wanted done could be done by outside presses. The decision to rebuild or not was not a hard one. Fr. Superior General Schuette flew in from Rome for the meeting to make a final decision. Fr. Francis Markert, the longtime director of the press, who was retired, was the first to suggest that the press not be rebuilt.



The Techny Press burned to the ground in January 1960.

DIVINE WORD PUBLICATIONS

Earlier on, a publication arm had been separated from the press. This continued in existence for some years yet under the title of Divine Word Publications. Initially it had been put under Fr. Kamp's capable supervision, but in 1959 it received its first full-time director. This publication arm of the SVD struggled along but eventually was able to find a home in its own facility. Today the Publication Department is gone, and the building that housed it stands empty. This happened in spite of the hard work of Frs. Vincent McMahon, Edward McGuinn, and John McHenry. The Society never seemed to be able to agree on what the real purpose of Divine Word Publications should be. Try as the directors might, they rarely turned a profit. Every year a subsidy from the Province was required, sometimes a hefty one. The Publication Department closed its doors in August 1972, the staff of twenty-three (mostly laypeople) were let go. This was the end of a long and very useful operation going all the way back to Fr. John Peil.⁴²

Still the Divine Word Missionaries continued to publish periodicals through other outlets. These magazines mirrored the changes going on in the SVD. In 1953, the *Little Missionary*, one of the most popular grade school children's magazines ever, begun by Fr. Bruno Hagspiel in 1915, ceased publishing. This seemed to have an adverse effect, as shortly thereafter there was a marked decline in vocation recruitment among grade school children. The magazine was replaced by *Missionary Youth*, which was developed to appeal to high school students. This, too, was closed in 1967. Two others are worth mentioning, *The Shepherd* for the missionary priesthood and *The Brother* for the missionary brotherhood. Nothing seemed to help. The large numbers of high school recruits characteristic of the late 1940s and 1950s were no more.

Something to help keep in contact with benefactors and to keep the missions and the needs of missionaries in mind was still needed. For this purpose Father Kamp started the *Divine Word Missionaries* magazine, which is sent gratis four times a year to benefactors and friends of the Society. It is a colorful, well-done magazine with pictures and stories of and by missionaries from around the world. This is still published regularly.

VATICAN II AND TECHNY

One significant event in the Church that greatly impacted the SVD

and Techny was the Twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Church, which opened on October 11, 1962, and closed on December 8, 1965. This “event” was, of course Vatican Council II. It had a major influence on so much that has happened in the Church and the Society of the Divine Word in the last decades of the twentieth century.

In several significant ways, Vatican II affected and directed changes in Divine Word missionary formation. Father Schuette’s influence became significant as he was personally and directly involved in Vatican II, especially in drawing up the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, known by its Latin title, *Ad Gentes*. Other Vatican II documents on the nature of the Church and on the liturgy also affected formation. In the liturgical document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, for example, the way was open for the use of the vernacular in the liturgy, which meant there need not be such a great emphasis on the importance of Latin.⁴³

As we might expect, the Techny theologate was also affected by Vatican II along with many cultural and societal changes taking place in the general public, which the Church of necessity had to take seriously into account. Big changes were afoot.⁴⁴

THE CLOSING OF TECHNY’S THEOLOGATE AND CONSEQUENCES

The theologate, which had always been at Techny from the very beginning of its existence in America, closed its doors in 1970, which is another part of the history told elsewhere in this book. Here I would just like to quote from Fr. Joseph Connors, who was the provincial at Techny when the decision to close the theologate was finalized. In a newsletter to the members of the Province he wrote the following reflection on Techny’s past:

Even in a brief account such as this, there must be place for one more thought. It is the thought of the sixty years of dedication and devotion that have gone into the theologate at Techny, and of its graduates all over the world who are even now doing the work of the Lord for which the Techny theologate prepared them. Over the decades, the Techny faculty and the whole Techny community have served them well, and it is hard to feel that what we have known and loved for so long is about to become part of our history. And yet, as time and circumstances change, as they have indeed

changed for theologates everywhere, and as the Church itself makes newer and greater demands in the theological education of priests, the Techny community and theological faculty can only be worthy of their own admirable tradition by now providing for our present and future seminarians the location and facilities which are necessary to equip them as well for the future missionary era as their predecessors were equipped for their own.

Father Provincial

May 10, 1969 (J. M. Connors, S.V.D.)

None of these currents spared Techny. The buildings were becoming practically empty and very expensive to maintain. Built in an earlier time, very few rooms had private washroom facilities. The east wing where the Brothers lived was in need of much maintenance. The north wing stood practically empty. All of the personnel who used to occupy this wing had long since moved away.

However, before anything further could be done with the buildings, the few people still living there and the administrators who still had offices there had to be moved. The solution was to build a new residence modeled on a Holiday Inn motel style structure. It has two stories and fifty residence rooms, each room comfortably furnished with its own facilities—a big change from the rather stark furnishings of the older buildings.

There is an infirmary in this new building with a nursing station and a dozen rooms set aside and furnished like hospital rooms. All meals are served cafeteria style, again a difference from the old buildings. All in all, this new residence at Techny has been well received. It is now, as of this writing, some thirty-five years old!

Another new building was put up to house various offices—the provincial and his staff, the provincial treasurer, and other offices as well. (Much of the lowest level of this building is dedicated to the Archives of the SVD in the United States.)

In November and December 1975, the remaining priests and Brothers moved into the new residence. In 1976 a remodeling of the mission house began. It was to serve another purpose. The east and north wings were torn down. As they were in need of much repair



Divine Word Residence under construction.

there were few who had any regrets. The small corner tower that joined the northern wing to the main building still stands. It was one of the first parts built and served as the church for a time. Later it functioned as the post office, as it still does today, and a very busy one at that. The western wing, which was renovated very creatively, houses the entrance to the building and to the Chapel of the Holy Spirit.

The rest of the building now contains guest rooms, each with their own private facilities. These rooms house various groups attending conferences, retreats, reunions, gatherings of SVDs or visitors. There is a kitchen staffed by an in-house catering service, which also caters outside events. Also there are several nicely furnished dining areas.

Fr. John (“Jack”) Farley directed the renovation. He used SVD manpower as much as possible and accomplished the task at a cost slightly under \$1 million, a remarkable achievement. Also included in the remodeling was a mission exhibit under the church structure, which was advertised as “World Alive” and was meant to promote mission knowledge and interest and, hopefully, stimulate vocations as well. It drew from residents of the North Shore as well as schoolchildren on outings from as far away as Chicago. In the days when nuns were still the majority of teachers in Catholic schools, the World Alive exhibit was quite an attraction, but having seen it once, the novelty of such an attraction was over. It had to be constantly changed and updated. This would become quite expensive. In the end, it had to be closed for lack of patrons. The number of visitors which had been optimistically projected were never reached.

Mass is still celebrated in the big church, and the liturgies are usually well attended by people from around the area, even though it is not a parish church. An SVD priest is always assigned to serve as chaplain to the Techny Towers Conference Center.

The only men still in formation at Techny are the novices who have a one-year combined brotherhood and priesthood novitiate. This now comes after the four-year college experience at Epworth, Iowa. Only after the novitiate year do the novices opt to go on to theology or into some other program in line with what they might see themselves doing as a Brother.

MORE CHANGES AT TECHNY

The Techny area now looks much different than it did through most of its history. The changes began in the mid-1970s. As the city of Chicago moved north, and the suburbs grew, Techny was soon surrounded by some of the wealthiest neighbors in Chicagoland. At one point the land at Techny was the largest piece of open land left in Cook County. By the 1970s much of it was just that—open land. The Mission Gardens closed in 1975. The farm was long phased out. The land stood idle and empty. In the mid-1960s negotiations had been ongoing to turn 133 acres of low-lying land, which had never been used for anything, into a sanitary landfill. By 1976 all objections raised by neighboring communities were legally solved and the landfill was opened. By 1992 it was full and closed.

On top of the huge mountain of household waste was built a nine-hole public golf course. Ironically this was the same piece of the Shermerville farmland that almost derailed the purchase for Fr. Peil. The Founder, Fr. Arnold Janssen, using maps sent to him, thought it was swampland. He had inherited a phobia for swampland from his mother. Now in the mid-1970s the landfill has proven quite profitable for the Society and in time will become available for purposes other than a golf course.

This initial move seemed to open the floodgates for the further development of Techny's land. By 1985 a Land Development Commission was formed, with Fr. Frank Kamp as chairman. This group was commissioned to look into different uses for the land and come up with recommendations as to how parcels of Techny's land might be put to appropriate use, always in harmony with the purposes of Techny as a religious institution.

After reserving 156 acres for its own use and after donating forty-eight acres to the village of Northbrook, the rest was leased out and zoned for various purposes. All of this has been done, and as a result Techny is now surrounded by private housing. Techny will receive a regular income from the lease of these properties. Education and missions will be two major beneficiaries of all this change. Another portion will be set aside to take care of the medical needs especially of the elderly members of the Society. (The purchase of so much land by the early SVDs was surely an act of Divine Providence.)

Most recently the exterior of the older mission house building of Techny needed a major overhaul. The building was tuck pointed, a necessary expense. The decision to do this was made in an extraordinary Provincial Chapter. As expensive as it was, the decision was not made overnight. Now Techny is ready for many more years of service not only to the surrounding communities but also to the Society of the Divine Word.

SIGNIFICANT FIGURES

Finally, it is important to mention some other significant people in the history of Techny. This list, given Techny's long history and the central importance of this institution to the presence of the Society in the United States, is very difficult to keep short. I can only give my own limited preferences. Although many men are mentioned in this chapter, I concentrated on some of the earlier important people. Some, who once might also have worked at Techny but later moved to other houses and did most of their major work there, I did not include. Others, I am sure, would come up with different names and probably more of them. Besides Bro. Wendelin, Bro. Homobonus, Bro. Michael (Emil Fecken), Fr. John Peil, and Fr. Joseph Fischer, who are the acknowledged pioneers of Techny, on my list I would place the following:

Fr. Herman Richarz (1867–1928). He was the person very involved with the technical school and the early days of the press as well as with the early publications of this press. He was also the first clerical novice master from the beginning in 1914 until 1928 when he died.

Fr. Peter Janser (1878–1959). Early on he was sent to Techny by the Founder to check the rumor that Fr. Peil might be taking steps to split the young American branch from Steyl (“No!” was the resounding

answer). Fr. Janser was also the one most involved, from the beginning, with the new seminary. As regards the early question whether Techny should restrict its applicants to youth of German ancestry, as some in the general council insisted, Fr. Janser's response was "absolutely no restrictions," otherwise we might as well close the new seminary now!⁴⁵ Father Janser as provincial was also positively involved with the early establishment of the African-American mission.

Fr. Bruno Hagspiel (1885–1961). Fr. Hagspiel was one of the best-known SVDs during his time at Techny in the first fifty years of the Society in America. Author, publicist, writer of popular pamphlets, and superior, he was well known by many of the bishops in America. He was a man of ideas with an optimistic and exuberant personality. As superior when the first African-American priests were ordained, he was very involved in getting them settled in their first assignments. He also became popular as a retreat director, in three languages: English, German, and Polish.

Fr. Francis Markert (1884–1961). Another writer and publicist, Fr. Markert was in charge of the press for many years. He was also responsible for establishment of Catholic Press Month. This was in 1920. This month is still celebrated in February in the American Church.

The next three people are important because of the long years each spent in formation. Fr. Gerard Esser (1882–1971). He taught philosophy at Techny from 1920 to 1960, with a break of three years when he taught philosophy and served as rector at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. He also wrote several textbooks—all in Latin—that he used in class to cover all the major philosophical bases.

Fr. Charles Michel (1882–1968). From 1922, with the exception of the eight years he served as the provincial, until 1962, Fr. Michel taught dogmatic (systematic) theology, always at Techny. Again the texts and lectures were in Latin—in the case of Michel's lectures, a more classical Latin.

Fr. Felix Glorius (1890–1966). Following Fr. Richarz as novice master in 1928, he retired from this position in 1958, after a total of thirty years!

Fr. John Musinsky (1918–2006). After completing his higher theological studies in Rome, he returned to Techny to become prefect of seminarians. He also taught theology and held other positions in other houses of the Society. In 1967 he was elected as the 7th Superior

General and was the one who successfully guided the Society through most of the renewal process mandated by Pope Paul VI after Vatican II.

Several Brothers also stand out for me.

Bro. Fabian (Daniel Quiter, 1877–1961). He was a master carpenter in Germany who, as someone once remarked, left his touch on every window of Techny’s building. Quiet, unobtrusive, and prayerful, he left his mark on the students in the Technical School who studied carpentry. He also had a hand in teaching carpentry to the junior Brothers in later years.

Bro. Disibodius (Franz Hageni, 1882–1967). As a master printer he worked for many years in Techny’s press. He also played the organ at St. Norbert’s parish during the time it was under the direction of the SVD.

Bro. Archangel (Jan Przybylski, 1881–1973). Anybody who passed through Techny probably remembers Brother Archangel, Techny’s baker. With a slice of his whole wheat bread, butter from Techny’s own dairy, and honey from Bro. Frederick’s (Heinz Hueleswische, 1879–1956) beehives, one could almost imagine eating a dessert, so tasty was the combination. (Bro. Frederick was a master beekeeper and known quite widely because of his expert membership in various beekeeper associations.) When Bro. Archangel “absentmindedly” left a cart with pies or cakes parked in the hall outside the bakery, it was a sign that any hungry resident of the house could take something. Any spare time he had, it seemed, was spent in the chapel.

Bro. Walter (James Ryan, 1912–2000). As the assistant office manager for Fr. Melcher for many years, Bro. Walter took a great interest in Brothers’ affairs, attending and contributing to various associations of Religious Brothers.

Bro. Cyril (Gerald Schoeder, 1913–). For the long time he spent as a typesetter in the press, he must have worked with a variety of machines and systems. He is an example of one who made a smooth transition to another work after the press burned. I knew him as Techny’s guest master, one who made sure that guests had a room, and if anything was missing or not working properly, he was the person to see. At age 101, as of this writing, Bro. Cyril is still alert and engaged in the ministry of prayer.

SOURCES

The archives at Techny are the major source of this story of Techny as are the many interviews and discussions I conducted in the preparation of my history of the Society of the Divine Word in North America, *In the Light of the Word: Divine Word Missionaries of North America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000). The original manuscript of this book contained much more material than what appeared in the book itself, almost twice as much, as a matter of fact. Because of the approach I took in this piece, I was able to use some of this previously unpublished material. This book also contains more bibliographic information.

Also, going through the many materials I had gathered elsewhere, I found many items that were interesting and important to understand the history of Techny. I was more than happy to include these here as well.

In preparation for an anticipated 100th anniversary history of the Society, Fr. William Bonner, mining the archives of Rome, Steyl, and Techny, came up with a *Chronologium* that stretched from 1891 to 1946. It quotes many documents and letters, in German and English, which were written on a day-by-day, month-by-month, and year-by-year basis, dealing especially, but not exclusively, with correspondence related to the establishment of the African-American apostolate.

Another critical source for the early years of Techny's existence were the letters the Founder sent to North America: See Josef Alt, ed., *Arnold Janssen: Briefe in die Vereinigten Staaten*, Studia Missiologici Verbi Divini 57 (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1994).

Until May 21, 1940, when the southern mission became a province, this endeavor was under the province centered on Techny. The early years of this apostolate, however, are touched on only tangentially in the present essay. The remainder of the history of the SVD in the South must fall under a separate history of the mission house headquartered in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

One area deserved more space than we could give it here, namely the story of the Brothers and their work. May it happen that someday someone will tell this part of Techny's history—the history of the Brothers more generally, in much greater detail, starting with Bro. Wendelin and Bro. Homobonus.

We should also note the contribution that so many laypeople have

made and continue to make to Techny's history. It may be difficult to write such a story—to find the information from the early years—but an attempt would be worthwhile. They were important for the role they played from the very beginning.

APPENDIX

LIST OF PROVINCIAL SUPERIORS OF TECHNY

It might be interesting to list all the provincials who held that office at Techny. The usual term of a provincial is three years, with the possibility of being renewed for another three years. In rare cases, a nine-year period is permitted. After Fr. John Peil, who was the first superior of the community, came Fr. Francis de Lange, who served as regional until he was transferred to Indonesia.

The Techny Community (SVD in North America)

1899–1907 Father John Peil

Techny as a Region of the SVD

1907–1913 Father Francis De Lange

The North American Province

1913–1919 Father Adolph Burgmer

1919–1925 Father Peter Janser

1925–1928 Father Adolph Burgmer

1928–1934 Father Bruno Hagspiel

1934–1940 Father Hugo Aubry

In 1940 the one province based at Techny and dedicated to the Sacred Heart was divided into three provinces, with Techny becoming the Western Province (now dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary), the Eastern Province (dedicated now to the Sacred Heart), and the Southern Province (dedicated to St. Augustine).

The Western Province (headquartered at Techny)

1940–1948 Father Charles Michel

1948–1952 Father Louis Schaffhauser (the first U.S.-born provincial)

1952–1958 Father Lawrence Mack

1958–1964 Father Nicholas Bisheimer

In 1964 the Southern Province split to become the Southern Province (Bay St. Louis, Mississippi) and the Western Province headquartered in Riverside, California. Thus the “Techny” Province became the Northern Province. The following men were the provincials.

The Northern Province

1964–1970	Father Joseph Connors
1970–1979	Father John Donaghey
1979–1985	Father Donald Mulrenan

In 1985 the Eastern and Northern Provinces combined for a number of reasons and became the Chicago Province of today. (The year 2010 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the “new” province.)

The Chicago Province

1985–1990	Father Raymond Lennon
1990–1996	Father James Bergin
1996–2002	Father Stanley Uroda
2002–2005	Father Thomas Krosnicki
2005–2011	Father Mark Weber
2011–	Father Thomas Ascheman

Local Superiors/Rectors Who Served at Techny

1898–1907	Father John Peil
1907–1909	Father Francis De Lange (see above)

St. Joseph’s Technical School

1909–1912	Father Peter Janser
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St. Mary’s Mission House (Seminary)

1912–1914	Father Hermen Richarz
1914–1918	Father Hugo Aubry
1918–1928	Father Augustine Loechte
1928–1934	Father Aloysius Biskupek
1934–1940	Father Francis Humel
1940–1946	Father Anthony May
1946–1952	Father Lawrence Mack
1952–1958	Father Joseph Busch

1958–1964	Father Chester Nowicki
1964–1968	Father Paul Jacobi
1968–1973	Father Edward McGuinn

Local Superiors / Rectors of the SVD community at Techny
Divine Word Residence

1973–1982	Father John Fincutter
1982–1987	Father Donald Skerry
1987–1993	Father Leo Dusheck
1993–1996	Father Thomas Griffith
1996–2002	Father Kazimierz Garbacz
2002–2008	Father Walter Bracken
2008–2010	Father James Braband
2010–2011	Father Adam MacDonald
2011-	Father Quang Duc Ding

NOTES

For additional material as noted in footnotes please see the Supplemental Material at the Robert Meyers Archives at Techny (hereafter RMM Archives).

1. The name “Techny” comes from a shortening of “St. Joseph Technical School,” the name the Divine Word missionaries gave to their first enterprise at Shermerville, Illinois.
2. Ernest Brandewie, *In the Light of the Word: Divine Word Missionaries in North America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 11. Hereafter noted as EB with page number.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Markert, *Fifty Years in America*.
6. Father Nies was later killed/martyred in China during the Boxer Rebellion.
7. To “go on supply” meant helping out temporarily in a parish for a weekend or longer when necessary. This still is the common practice for the priests today and is a good source of income for the house.
8. In 1900 there lived in Chicago 1,698,575 people, of whom 585,420 had been born outside the United States. Of these, approximately 225,000 were from German-speaking areas of

Europe. (Arnold Janssen, SVD, *Letters to the United States of America*, ed. Josef Alt, *Studia Instituti Missiologici* Vol. 58, Steyler Verlag, Nettetal, 1998, Introduction, xxxv ff.)

9. For much more detail on all the negotiations and letters that went back and forth between Father Peil and the Founder, see EB, 29–41.
10. These were the years (1853–early 1900s) when the ‘orphan train’ movement was an attempt to deal with the problem. The Orphan Train Movement was a welfare program, run by The Children’s Aid Society and the Catholic New York Foundling Society, which transported orphaned, abandoned or homeless children from crowded cities of the United States such as New York to willing foster homes across the country. The children were transported to their new homes on trains which were eventually labeled “orphan trains” or “baby trains.” This experiment ended by the 1920s and was the beginning of organized foster care in America. (Source: Wikipedia)
11. Taken from the Prospectus, St. Joseph Technical School, Techny, Illinois.
12. This helped foster the monastic nature of the Society. This thinking was prevalent in most religious orders of the day.
13. Father Peil, to whom Techny owed very much, was recalled by Father Blum in 1909 to return to St. Gabriel’s to take up the office of treasurer, the same position he had held before his transfer to America.
14. This was a group of missionary Sisters also founded by St. Arnold Janssen.
15. This same company was responsible for the stained-glass windows in the Fort Wayne, Indiana, cathedral.
16. Officially this “church” is a chapel, not a church, because it is not connected to a parish, even though many faithful come to pray and worship there.
17. The high altar and the crucifixion group are still in place. The plaque can be seen today.
18. From Robert Flynn’s booklet “Church of the Holy Spirit,” which has marvelous photos and descriptions of the stained-glass windows and statuary in the chapel.
19. For further information regarding this movement, see EB, 120 ff. Also see a history of the CSMC by David Endres, *Under the*

Cross and Flag: The Catholic Students Mission Crusade and the American Quest to Christianize the World, 1918–1971: Catholic University of America, 2007, Washington, D.C.).

20. The Germans lost most of their colonies in the post–World War I treaties, including Togo in West Africa.
21. A further and more complete explanation of the early educational system of the SVD, and the emphasis on the study of Latin, can be found in Supplemental Material notes for this manuscript found in the Robert M. Meyers Archives (hereafter cited as Supplemental Material). This material is noted with the same number as the footnote.
22. See information on the minor seminary and Latin in the Supplemental Material.
23. Originally at Greenville, Mississippi, in 1920.
24. In the SVD it was worn with a firm white plastic collar around the neck, and a cincture, a wide cloth belt with two extensions hanging down the left side.
25. See Supplemental Material on *Techny Chimes, a Gem*.
26. See an example of can-do missionaries in the Supplemental Material.
27. See additional information about China in the Supplemental Material.
28. See Supplemental Material for further notes on this change.
29. See “Expansion” in the Supplemental Material.
30. See Supplemental Material for “Mission Assignments after the War.”
31. See personal note regarding accreditation in the Supplemental Material.
32. See Supplemental Material for Father Schuette, accreditation, and formation.
33. More thoughts on the need to change the formation model can be found in the Supplemental Material.
34. Taken from the minutes of a second day of a meeting devoted to the topic of accreditation held on October 14, 1949. The discussion dealt with seminaries.
35. See Supplemental Material for further thoughts on accreditation.
36. Most of the quotations are from reports or personal letters of Father Melcher.
37. Ibid.

38. See Mission Office and Funding in Supplemental Material.
39. See Supplemental Material.
40. Father Kamp died on August 27, 2011.
41. See Supplemental Material on superior delegates.
42. See Supplemental Material on publications.
43. See Vatican II impact in the Supplemental Material.
44. See Supplemental Material on dwindling vocations.
45. In the first class of five ordinands, there was one American of French Canadian descent from New York, one of Irish ancestry from New York, one of German American descent from Iowa, and the last of Eastern European ancestry from Indiana.