



# SVD LAY PARTNERS

NEWSLETTER OF SVD LAY PARTNERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD  
FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY

DECEMBER 2017  
ISSUE 5

## Merry Christmas & Happy New Year 2018



### Making our way to the manger...

**N**othing miraculous, nothing extraordinary, nothing magnificent was given to the shepherds as a sign. The angels had said, *“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”* (Lk 2:11-12)

The shepherds responded to the call of the angels and made their way to the manger and found the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. The sign at Bethlehem was one of absolute simplicity and poverty - a young ordinary looking couple, in an ordinary looking stable and the baby in an ordinary manger. But it was an extraordinary sign from God.

Similar signs are given to us today. In the everyday ordinary circumstances of life, it may be a baby, or an aged person, or somebody lonely or somebody sick. God provides us opportunities to visit Him by traveling roads that we would otherwise choose to avoid. The way to the manger is the way of discipleship. We are invited by the angel of God to see the child lying in the manger. He is asking us to take a tiny step of faith towards Him. When we do, He meets us right where we are.

We wish each of our SVD Lay Partners around the world a beautiful experience of Christmas. May the miracle of Bethlehem touch us. Merry Christmas!!

- Susan & Rosa, Editors

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December 2017

## TO ALL SVD LAY PARTNERS

### In re: 2017 Christmas Message

Dear SVD lay partners,

Christmas is a commemoration of God's coming into the world. He came for all of us: his birth is the message of hope and joy, and his presence is the sign of victory over evil and death.

By being born to poor parents, in an environment of extreme poverty, Jesus is telling us where he dwells – not in places of big mansions with glory and honor or glamour and power, but among the poor, the down-trodden, the neglected, the sick and dying, the hungry, the oppressed and in those we love and even in those we hate. In short, he is born as an ordinary poor human being.

Yes, Jesus has come into the world and is very much in our midst, but do we recognize him?

During this Christmas season, let us look around us and feel where Jesus is born, and recognize his presence in our living situations, in our day-to-day encounters, and in our relationship with others.

In the past years during my visits to almost all countries where the SVDs are working in, I am always moved by the enthusiasm of our lay partners – young, middle-aged and old and, above all, women. Working with lay mission partners in our ministries around the word is surely an important characteristic of the SVD. We truly value your contributions, appreciate your initiatives, and avail of your expertise – knowing that we could not do without you. For us SVDs, lay partners, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, are no mere “collaborators” but truly “co-responsible” for making God’s presence felt in our world. Asking our confreres in many parts of the world during my visits “What are the more positive developments in your place now?” many confreres answer that it is good working together with our lay partners.

You are doing valuable works together with the SVDs and at times have taken initiatives to do ministries with the charism of our Society. Many success stories of your works are seen, heard and experienced by many people. We are indebted to St. Arnold Janssen who inspires all of us and everyone to follow the Divine Word in our life context.

Let us celebrate Christmas this year bringing hope to the people by our meaningful interactions and interventions; let us bring joy to the poor and neglected persons by showing care and affection; let us create an atmosphere that we are followers of the Divine Word!

Together with the general council members, we wish you and all your family members a very JOYFUL CHRISTMAS and a BLESSED NEW YEAR 2018.

Fraternally in the Divine Word,

Fr. Heinz Kulüke, SVD  
Superior General



## USA: Lay Missionaries of the Divine Word (MLVD) - USW

Submitted by Mariana Flores

### My experience at the Workshop for Lay Partners

Hello, I'm Mariana Flores, a member of the Lay Missionaries of the Divine Word (MLVD in Riverside, CA) for 11 years now and my experience in the Nemi Workshop was very profound and encouraging. It was wonderful to witness and share how from different parts of the world, we the laity, are part of this great mission and spirituality of St. Arnold Janssen. Each of the presenters had a wealth of experience and knowledge to share with us.

A few of my personal highlights were: 1) Fr. Stanislaus Lazar, SVD motivating us to recognize that it is God's Mission and our responsibility to preach the Good News and to put it into practice 2) Fr. Jose Antunes, SVD teaching us about the correct attitudes of Mutual Respect, Humility, Fidelity and Openness for a Prophetic Dialogue and encouraging us to "develop our Right to be missionaries." 3) Fr. Arlindo Diaz, SVD emphasizing the SVD Mission, identity and presence in the world.



We had great presentations affirming the four characteristic dimensions of the congregation: Communication, JPIC, Mission Animation and Bible Apostolate. But I must confess, my favorite workshops were: 1st the presentation on Arnoldus Spirituality given by Fr. Tony Pates, SVD not only did it reaffirm what I have been taught throughout the years but I was profoundly touched, renewed and strengthened in my own spiritual journey. Secondly I was extremely grateful for the workshop on Team Building presented by Fr. Gregory Pinto, SVD. It was exceedingly beneficial for me to acquire important skills for group management and learning to differentiate between mature and immature responses to conflict. Lastly, it was also very significant and important to hear from various priests speaking about how clericalism has caused so much damage to the Church and encouraging us to work together, side by side: the laity and priests.

Overall I came home with a very grateful heart, renewed spirit and the burning desire to continue fervently sharing the Good News through our lay missionary work. We are hopeful that in the future there will be more dialogue on the fruits of this workshop and that our collaboration may be strengthened. May our Triune God continue to bless us all.

## GERMANY: SVD Partner

Submitted by Maria Wego

### Prayer Bridge on World Day of the Poor 2017!



A family in Mexico, a girls' hostel in Albania, a parish in Kenya and a prison in Indonesia – these were some of the pillars of the Prayer Bridge on the first World Day of the Poor held on November 19th. It fills us with hope to see so many people caring for the poor and believing in the power of prayer. Not only did the Prayer Bridge unite many people in various countries, but their worthwhile stories also made it such a special event for all. We will continue to keep you informed.

In 2017 the Prayer Bridge connected people around the world and it will connect people in 2018 as well! We, the SVD-Partners, invite you to pray with us and become a pillar of the Prayer Bridge for the next World Day of the Poor on November 18, 2018! I would also like to say THANK YOU to all who helped invite people to participate in the Prayer Bridge and who helped spread the idea! For the friends of statistics: There has been 232 pillars in 31 countries in 4 continents.

## PARAGUAY: Laicos Verbitas

Submitted by Elena Ortiz

### “Knowing the Bible”



With great success we have finished the Fourth Edition of the biblical class entitled "**Knowing the Bible**" organized by the *Bible Animators* of San Roque González de Santa Cruz Parish in *Encarnación-Paraguay*. This took place on 8<sup>th</sup> October, as a closure to the month of the Bible as well as closure of the workshops on *Lectio Divina*, under the auspices of *Bible Animators*. This was given to the 10 communities which includes the Parish. It gave an emphasis on the participation of young people, children and adults. The themes of the contest were: the Book of Daniel, the Letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians and Galatians. The Biblical animation team is composed of Father Maximilian Kolbe, Froilan Armoa, Carlos Cabral, Ana Vergara, Ceferino Mereles, Perceverando Pinto, Lourdes Torres and Carlos Román.



### IV Congress of SVD Lay Partners

Submitted by Fr. Joaquin Li, SVD

The IV Congress of the SVD Lay Partners held in the province of Paraguay took place November 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, in the city of *Encarnaicon Paraguay*. There were 84 participants who came from different parishes and schools where the missionaries work. In the three days conference, they developed topics and work-



shops to transmit the SVD spirituality and dimensions as well as learned about the history of Congregation, and were also given a brief history of the secular group initiated in 2014; they also took a look into the future. Froilan Armoa Gonzalez who participated in the international workshop held in Nemi, Italy also shared his enriching experience of this meeting. We finished with the Holy Eucharist, in which we distributed the missionary cross to all who with much enthusiasm are entrusted to share mission where they live as they serve and live the Gospel.

*Wishing you a joyful Christmas season. Many blessings to you and your family as we rejoice in the birth of our Saviour. Merry Christmas!!*



## ECUADOR: New Initiatives

Submitted by Fr. Nevil D'Silva, SVD Mission Secretary in Ecuador



A newsletter entitled, ***Sent by the Word***, has initiated in December 2017 to encourage the Missionary efforts within the country through sharing, informing, thanking and documenting the different activities and missionary initiatives within the Province. Information regarding the activities of the Lay Missionaries serving within their Province was included in this newsletter.



First Edition Highlights from ***Los Ríos*** include: The Mission Secretary met with a group of 15 lay people from the three parishes of the Los Ríos District. The laity expressed their firm motivation to form a group of lay missionaries to live the charisma and spirituality of the Congregation in Los Ríos. They demonstrated their interest in continuing to meet and expect to be accompanied. Fr. Jorge Franco, will be

the companion of this group. It is expected that over the period the SVD lay partner groups will gradually be formed in districts that have not yet formalized membership.

### Lay Missionaries of the Divine Word – Guayas

Submitted by Reinaldo Pazmiño

We are Lay Missionaries of Divine Word, an entity of religious character, seeking to build the Kingdom of God, respecting multiculturalism, co-responsibility and participation, promoting communion and fraternity in and for the world. Announcing the Gospel which becomes a reality for everyone through intimate union with the Lord, bearing witness to a true Christian life. We are willing to live in our ordinary life, our baptismal commitment, from our lay vocation, to insert ourselves in the essential dimensions of the Congregation of the Divine Word (mainly in the efforts of promoting justice and peace, missionary animation, Bible and communication), so that in the charism and spirituality of St. Arnold Janssen we may actively participate in the Mission of the Church in Ecuador and the world. In this period we are becoming aware of, are being awakened to and are encouraging



members to realize dimensions of justice, peace and the integration of creation so as to be empowered with the knowledge of the various dimensions of the Divine Word. Our planning was viewed from these three sectors: - community life - the life of prayer - pastoral life. In the end, we concluded that the service

provided was limited in the parish of *Santo Hermano Miguel*, which encourages us to open our borders.



## PANAMA: News of Flourishing Lay Partners

Submitted by Ana Luisa Vásquez C.



The Divine Word missionaries and lay missionaries had a wonderful celebration of Eucharist on



8<sup>th</sup> September, 2017 in the Mother of the Divine Word chapel, as we celebrated the 142 anniversary of the Congregation of the Divine Word and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This was a meaningful celebration and we are energized with the grace of Mother Mary and the support of the SVDs.

### Celebrating the Perpetual Vows of Lourdes María Camarena

On this special day in which we celebrate the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Foundation of the SVD Congregation, we also celebrated with joy the perpetual vows of Sr. Lourdes Camarena, who was part of the lay missionaries, in a very active manner along with her parents. The ceremony was presided by Msgr Jose Dimas Cedeño; concelebrated by Fr. Mikhael Malik, Fr. Martin Mitán and Fr. Luis Vergara. The ceremony was held in the Monastery of the Visitation. The entire SVD family, most especially the group of lay missionaries from Panama, rejoice in this total "YES!" to call of the Lord.



### Mission to the Community in Malvinas

On 29<sup>th</sup> October, we completed a mission in the community of Malvinas, with the objective of encouraging our community members to welcome into their homes the pilgrims who will visit us for World Youth Day 2019.

### Mission to the Community in Dolega, Province of Chiriquí

The first mission to Dolega, in the Province of Chiriquí, was held from November 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, in St. Francis of Assisi Parish, which has 42 communities. During the travels to the different communities, we were able to identify different needs of the residents: both in the spiritual and social aspect of their lives; in order to better provide them support according to the required needs.



### Induction of Ministers and Delegates

On November 26<sup>th</sup>, in St. Jerome's Parish, in the midst of the celebration of Christ, King of the universe, we celebrated the induction of new delegates of the Word and Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, which included two members of the SVD Lay Missionaries. The celebration was officiated by Fr. Ricardo Crisostomo, accompanied by Bro. Pedro Azuaga, who trained them.

## MEXICO: Misioneros Auxiliares Del Verbo Divino

Submitted by Gianini Sahagun

### National meeting of the SVD Auxiliary Missionaries



The 33rd national meeting of the SVD Auxiliary Missionaries, attracted 250 participants who gathered for 3 days at the MARY IMMACULATE VILLA, located in the magical town of TEPOZTLÁN in the State of Morelos. Among the participants of the Assembly were active lay members, invited members, former national coordinators and SVD priests, seminarians in various stages of formation, and Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit; achieving a true Union of the Arnoldus family.



The meeting was a great celebration of the 35 years of life of the missionary movement in Mexico; the 25 core groups of the 6 regional areas were enriched by the 3 days filled with Holy Hour, praying of the Missionary Rosary and Eucharistic Celebration. The Trinity in the life of a missionary was the theme. Fr. John Benas, SVD Provincial Superior in Mexico shared a message of gratitude and support emphasizing the future of the Church's mission is in the hands of the laity.

We are thankful for the 250 laity who work unceasingly as they are inspired by our SVD founder, St. Arnold Janssen.

**MAY THE HEART OF JESUS LIVE IN OUR HEARTS AND IN THE HEARTS OF ALL PEOPLE.**



## CHILE: Experience that Speaks

Submitted by Elena Ortiz

**MISSIONARY TESTIMONY: "Send me, Lord!"** I am Luisa Oyarzún, an active lay woman at San Cayetano Parish. During the month of November, I was able to live one of the most beautiful and rewarding experiences for any layperson; which is to share and live the mission, crossing our borders. The Lord invited us to share our faith with our brothers and sister in El Salvador and Guatemala. It was an unforgettable experience! In El Salvador beyond the guerrillas, we met very friendly people and above all protective; there were many gangs, but also communities with much religious preparation and biblical studies. The youth know much of their history and when foreigners come, they study the history of the visitor. It is a country of many martyrs Archbishop Romero, Rutilio Grande and many children; there have been communities massacred in their Churches; there are five thousand inhabitants in the country and two thousand who had to flee the country. They protect the sea and its products from its largest predator: the human being and the garbage they waste. We were involved in the release of recently hatched turtles, which was exciting. In Guatemala we experienced poverty firsthand, surviving with those who have nothing, who are marginalized by the wealthy, with those who work today in order to eat tomorrow; within such poverty, they go out of their homes to surrender it to the missionaries.



**MISSIONARY TESTIMONY: "Available for God":** my name is Patricia Lizana Quezada and I am a single mom. At this time, I serve the Lord in the community of Saint Matthias the Apostle in Holy Spirit Parish in *El Pinar*. I am part of the spirituality team of the Southern Vicariate. Today, I can clearly see all I have lived has allowed me to be here witnessing my service to the Lord in this Missionary Church we are all part of today. Many, many years ago, the Christian Cursillo Movement, recorded in my heart a special key phrase "Evangelize in all places, when it is convenient and inconvenient". And such is how, with the grace of God, my life began the path of conscious transformation. My desire to search for God deepened every day, as I discovered everything led me to be of service to others. Then suddenly I found myself serving: in the Claretian school where my son attended, at my work site in the Bank, I formed part of pastoral banking and pastoral workers team, in the prison of San Miguel I was part of prison Ministry and Juvenile Hall as well as in the hospital *Barros Luco*, as part of volunteering for *Caritas Chile*. Obviously, every service in its own time. Today, I am under the auspices of the SVD Missionaries, from whom I have learned the great love of our one true God and also that "The Word" is always at the Center. Just as its founder St Arnold Janssen on one occasion said, "The most sublime expression of love for each other is to announce the Gospel". Under this beautiful motto, I was also formed in my early days as part of the group *Alma Verbita*, a group of lay missionaries at the service of the mission, for which I had to take a step aside as a result of new ways of service to the Lord. For me, it is amazing to discover how the Lord is daily opening new missionary opportunities for me. As any mortal human being, on more than one occasion,



I have felt the desire to leave when faced with difficulties. Yet, here I am. If it is the will of God, everything continues. Today I give my service as a spiritual companion and accompany others living Ignatian retreats. It once again leads me to discover the suffering Christ present in each one of the people who I accompany, as well as to also discover the hunger and enormous need which exists in today's society: which is to find and discover that "something more", which certainly is the presence of God in their lives. Through the years of service to the Lord, I have also discovered constant training is vital because without it, I can hardly continue to know the historical Jesus and the risen Christ present in the world today. As a sign of this, I am completing a course of study in the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius. In closing of this testimony, I can only say "Thank you Lord!" for loving me and give me this deep desire for You.

## SOUTH AFRICA: SVD Lay Association, Polokwane

Submitted by Edwina Mbite

Dear Friends,

Greetings! I have been to pilgrimages, retreats, camps with peoples from my home town/country in search of deepening my Faith.

From the 14<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> October 2017 I was privileged to participate in an international workshop of the SVD Lay partners at Nemi-Rome, with twenty seven beautiful souls from all over the world with different background, cultures & languages. Although the programme was intensive, we had the opportunity to learn the Charism of the SVD and from the lay groups of others religious orders. We shared our work and cultures as lay partners.



At the arrival what captured me the most is the warm welcome, the surrounding of the Centre with an exclusive natural design, all activities well organised to the point. Food and accommodation was amazing. The organisers, oh! "We give thanks & praises to our Creator". I Am speechless. At this point I understood where my Spiritual Director, Rev. Fr. Sunny John SVD , the founder of our lay group came from.

Each day of our workshop was filled with graces & fun. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist brought us specific topic to think of and was crowned with the reception of the Body & Blood of Christ. At the end of the workshop we were sent out as missionaries to our countries with the Franciscan Cross.

Apart from the beauty of the environment, I was moved by the fact that we the people discovering each other there connected so well and created an awesome atmosphere between us. Where you could sense the Love of Christ, respect, joy and understanding strengthened by the Holy Spirit. All these are motivations for me that with the desire & God's Grace everything is possible.

I am so grateful to have been part of this experience and hope and wish that we continue to reflect the light of Christ to all our brothers & sisters we meet in our small ways. "May the Holy Triune God live in our hearts and the hearts of all!" Stay blessed my friends...!

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

By Jean Paul Nico Luketo

### A child affected by the violence in Kasai

Have you ever let tears roll down your cheeks while listening to a child talk? For me, that happened a few weeks ago, when I met Justine. (*name changed for privacy*).

*"It was around midday when panic broke out in our little village. My father spoke to me, my sister and my two little brothers. "We can't save ourselves with you four..". I no longer heard what he said, and I begged my father not to abandon us. Before closing the door and leaving with my mother, he prayed to God to keep us safe. From the inside our house I could see huts of our neighbours on fire. We had to save ourselves! We left through the window with people who were fleeing. We slept in the forests under the stars. I haven't heard any news of my parents, my sister and my two little brothers."*

Justine is not an isolated case – many thousands of displaced children in Kasai need humanitarian assistance in the Kwilu and Kwango provinces. For one year, crisis has raged in the Kasai region, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The conflicts between the Kamwina Nsapu militia and the security forces have made Kasai a region with one of the highest number of internally displaced people, among them, thousands of children. Justine, a young girl of 15, is one of these children. UNICEF supports getting children back into school in the region of Grand Kasai through outreach programmes.



***Jean Paul Nico Luketo is SVD Lay Partner from Congo (DRC). He is working with UNICEF since 2006, in DRC's Bandundu Province. We pray for God's blessings and wish success in his mission.***

## SWITZERLAND: Steyler Missionare - Freundeskreis Schweiz

Submitted by Philipp Hautle

### Glimpses of St. Arnold's Spirituality

#### Prayer life

As a boy of 15, I entered the SVD Mission House, Marienburg, Switzerland. I am grateful to the Society of the Divine Word that has led me to a habit of prayer; morning, midday and evening prayer, Quarter-hour-prayer, singing in the choir, singing the Gregorian-Chant and Holy Eucharist. Today, a *Kyrie*, a *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, or *the Our Father* is so often on my lips.

#### Worldwide SVD family

From 1962 to 1965, many missionaries – brothers, priests and bishops – from all over the world visited Marienburg. They told about their life and their missionary work. Swiss missionaries were sent out to other countries with the *Ave Maris Stella* (*Marian hymn – Hail, Star of the Sea*). These were my first experiences with the global world.

With trust in God, courage and openness and with the inspiration of Arnold Janssen, the Divine Word missionaries reached out to all nations – *"Make disciples of all nations!"* (Mt.28.19). I experience the same wonderful SVD family today, especially in the Workshop for SVD Lay Partners in Nemi, in the community at the SVD Generalate in Rome, and of course in our Freundeskreis, Switzerland!

#### One hair

Each community has its troubles and conflicts. All our fears, wishes, expectations, worries and influences hunt us, and sadden us. The Mass on St. Arnold Janssen's feast day in 1969 gave me a motto for my life: *No matter how bad it is, just improve it by one hair! Like St. Arnold, go on step by step and God is always with you.*

#### Testimony of life

Missionary work starts not with words but by our testimony of life. I remember Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975): *"Above all, the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. ... Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them?"* (No.21). The marvelous testimonies of all the groups at the Workshop for the SVD Lay Partners, their activities, their reaching out to the poor and the marginalized brought me back again to ask and to reflect.



#### Remain in me, as I remain in you (John 15.4)

How true! Again and again, I listen to his Word, listen into my heart, into the events of my daily life, into the hearts of the others, into the silence of the tremendous powerful universe, into the depth of all depths, as St. Arnold and all the other Saints did.

How beautiful to belong to the SVD Family!



## INDIA: Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW), INM

Submitted by Susan Noronha

### Few moments into SVD Lay Partners Workshop at Nemi....

Superior General, Fr. Heinz Kulüke, who celebrated the Eucharist for us on the first day of our Workshop communicated in his homily; "The SVD vision in following the Divine Word together with our Lay Partners is that *"His Life is our Life and His Mission is our Mission"*. He also expressed to us, never to lose our sense of humour.



With the enthronement of the Word followed by the objectives of the course, we inaugurated the first international workshop for SVD Lay Partners. Inspirational morning prayers, bilingual Eucharistic Celebrations, presentations from participants, Bible sharing and social gatherings brought into the workshop a lot of creativity from different cultures and countries. We heard and understood the roots of the SVD spirituality and mission. We discussed in groups and shared our experiences, our challenges and our strengths. We also proposed our future plans and recommendations to be forwarded to the General Council members.



The concluding Eucharist was very symbolic and filled with emotions. Participants were dressed in their national attire. There was a clear and visible bond that was created among us, regardless of language barrier. During the Eucharistic Celebration we were given a Cross to continue our work as SVD Lay Missionaries in the Triune God for His Kingdom. It was truly a feeling of one big worldwide family with one big worldwide mission!

In conclusion, I wish to borrow three key words from the homily of Sonny de Rivera SVD; *OPPORTUNITY*, *GRATITUDE* and *ENTHUSIASM*.

Yes, it was an *Opportunity* that was given to me by my group members - the Disciples of the Divine Word (DDW) and the INM Leadership team, and with *Gratitude* I acknowledge being an active collaborator of the SVD Lay Partners. This workshop has gained immense *Enthusiasm* in me to continue the mission work with the spirit of St. Arnold Janssen and as a member of the Arnoldus Family.



**DDW Christmas Party for our special friends** - the poor and the lonely was celebrated on Sunday, 17th December, 2017 at Atma Darshan.

Holy Eucharist was celebrated by Donald D'Souza SVD, Cosmos Ekka SVD, Gregory Arockiam SVD and Albert SVD. After a short tea-break, our friends enjoyed games, dance and entertainment. In addition to the prizes for the winners, every guest received a special gift from DDW. The party was completed with a fellowship meal.



**To submit information and pictures for future publication, please send directly to editors.**

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*Submission deadline for next edition: March 31, 2018*

## A Peek into the SVD Lay Partners Workshop, Nemi, Rome October 14-29, 2017



**REPORT**  
**INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP FOR SVD LAY PARTNERS**  
**14-29 October, 2017, Nemi, Rome**

The first workshop for SVD Lay Partners took place in the *Ad Gentes Center* in Nemi, Rome from October 14 to 29, 2017. Twenty seven persons from very different countries, such as: Mexico, Chile, Poland, South Africa, USA, the Philippines, Paraguay, Spain, India, Angola, Kenya, Ghana, Germany, Congo, Switzerland and Panama (16 countries), representing 18 lay partners groups, participated in this workshop. We received a very warm and hospitable welcome from the local community. The moderators, Fr. Stanislaus Lazar, SVD and Fr. Tim Norton, SVD, made sure that we could feel good and at home at all times.

The main objectives of the workshop were:

- To promote greater participation of the laity in the missionary activities of the SVD.
- To have a deeper knowledge of the spirituality, mission and roots of the SVD worldwide and of its groups of lay missionaries.
- To have a more personal knowledge of our lay co-workers with a view to a greater commitment and mutual collaboration in the future.
- To be more committed to collaborate with one another and design an Action Plan of lay partners.

The workshop was opened with the enthronement of the Word, followed by a general vision of the workshop. Then Fr. Heinz Kulüke, Superior General, presided at the joyous inaugural celebration of the Eucharist; his homily – bilingual and with many “knowing winks” – emphasized the fact that one of the most important characteristics of the SVD is its work with lay groups, whom we do not consider as simple “collaborators” but as true “sharers of responsibility” in the Mission. The presence of the Superior General was a testimony to the personal conviction and commitment he has towards all of us. This workshop is a clear manifestation of how the Society puts great value in all the initiatives and work that the lay partners have been doing in carrying out the SVD’s vision through the years. More importantly, it wants to solidify this partnership and hear from the laity themselves how we can together move forward and “not to bury this treasure.”

The formative part was carefully prepared and accessible to all, thanks to the team of translators in English and Spanish (Fr. Reynaldo Román, SVD, Fr. Sonny de Rivera, SVD, and Fr. Gino Jiménez, SVD). The various talks were:

- *The Church, Laity and Mission* (Fr. Stanislaus Lazar, SVD): Earlier and present-day role of the laity in the Church.
- *Prophetic Dialogue* (Fr. José Antunes da Silva, SVD): The process of discovering how God speaks to us as friends and how the notion of “mission frontiers” has evolved – mission no longer signifies *going out*, but rather *entering into dialogue* with other persons.
- *The SVD in the World* (Fr. Arlindo Dias, SVD): A general view of the situation of the SVD in the world, and how mission has changed. In the past, missionaries from Europe brought Jesus to America and Africa... now Jesus is already there before their arrival. Europe is today’s missionary challenge.
- *JPIC* (Fr. Daisuke Narui, SVD): This is one of the dimensions of the SVD charism, molded in its love and respect for creation, for justice and peace through its ecological, political and social activities in the UN and VIVAT International, denouncing injustices.

- *Bible Apostolate* (Fr. Marek Vanus, SVD): This is another specific SVD dimension where we see different ways of involvement with the Word of God so as to make it the vital force in our own lives.
- *Communications* (Fr. Modeste Munimi, SVD): By virtue of being missionaries, we are called to communicate; we study how to dialogue, to share, to serve, and to listen according to the model of Divine Communication and the media at our disposal for spreading the Good News.
- *Missionary Spirituality* (Fr. Budi Kleden, SVD): Difference between spirituality and activism in mission; keys for working in such a way as to highlight the spiritual quality of our action; its characteristics and main elements; spirituality as a way of life, as the motivating and unifying dimension of a person.
- *The Mission of the Laity in Evangelii Gaudium and Amoris Laetitia* (Sr. Mary John Kudiyiruppil, SSpS): A detailed study of the two Apostolic Exhortations of Pope Francis and their symbols; how to be a living witness, both in the joyful presentation of the Gospel as well as in our family life.
- *The Spirituality of St. Arnold* (Fr. Tony Pates, SVD): Two sessions dedicated to the study of the spiritual and Trinitarian charism of Arnold Janssen; to understand the dynamics of “missionary mysticism”, the dynamic working of the Spirit – personal, communitarian and inter-communitarian – and how missionary identity is built based on this model.
- *Interculturality and Leadership* (Fr. Tim Norton, SVD): Concepts of culture and learning; individual work to find our own personal models for conflict resolution through group dynamics.
- *Group Development and Dynamics* (Fr. Gregory Pinto, SVD): The concept of a team, operational problems of a group, and qualities of a good leader.
- *Generating Funds for the Mission* (Fr. Andrzej Danilewicz, SVD): How can provinces/regions/missions (PRMs) generate funds for the mission as well as creative resources for funding mission projects?
- The various ways of other Congregations and laity, its organization, charisma, activities and challenges were presented by Lidia Rey (Lasalle), Rui Lopes and Ruth Anne Henderson (Dominicans), Claudio Mario Betti (San Egidio), and Arlindo Pinto (Combonian), presenting different visions of the same common objective – to be committed agents in the transformation of the world.

Every day began with Morning Prayer, and language was no problem for daily celebration of the Eucharist at 12 noon – a well-chosen symbol of the centrality of God in our lives. On successive nights, the various lay partner groups presented their local groups and their missionary work with slides, PowerPoint, songs, etc., adorned with their typical costumes. Many had brought along beautiful souvenirs of their countries as gifts for the participants. We had a festive celebration of our coming together on the first and last night of the meeting, to deepen our friendship and share the joy of being together for this very special experience. During the presentations, we expressed that we cherish the gift of being SVD lay partner and all the support that we receive from the Society, but some also pointed out that at times, there is a lack of support from the confreres and a lack of getting the laity to be enthusiastic with Arnoldus spirituality. But above all, the presentations made everybody realize one beautiful and important gift as partners belonging to an international community: there is unity in diversity. We may come from different cultures and contexts but we are bonded by friendship and love and we are all moving forward toward one mission – His mission.

However, one does not live on formation alone! We had a tremendous privilege of being able to participate in an Audience with Pope Francis, in St. Peter's Square – this was a moment of great emotion, knowing that for many it would never be repeated. We were also able to visit some of Rome's most important Basilicas: St. Mary Major, St. Paul outside the walls, and St. John Lateran, strolling through their corridors, marveling at the extraordinary beauty of their architecture and the contagious spirituality they emanate. One of the emotional moments of our trip was the celebration of the Eucharist in the Catacomb of St. Domitila – it was really an invitation to meditative spiritual reflection which permeates this sacred place of pilgrimage for millions of pilgrims down through the centuries. This was followed by a brief guided tour through a section of the 12 km of passageways of the catacombs.

We then paid a visit to the SVD Generalate and the Collegio del Verbo Divino, where we were warmly welcomed by the Rector, Fr. Nicolás Espinosa, SVD and the entire community, who welcomed us with drinks and appetizers and a fraternal meal together; afterwards we still had time for a tour of the different areas of the House.

We should also mention that we travelled to Assisi, birthplace of St. Francis; we visited the Porciúncula inside the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels and celebrated Mass in a beautiful crypt in the basement. Afterwards we walked through the streets of old Assisi, its monastery and places marked by the love and simplicity of St. Francis, preaching with love to the whole of creation.

Some of the topics discussed in our Action-Plan session were:

- What constitutes the identity of our lay members and what elements should be highlighted in their initial and on-going formation?
- How can we promote their apostolate and the international connection of their members?
- What suggestions would you like to make to the General Council with a view to improving communication and understanding between the SVD confreres and the SVD lay partners?
- How do we promote our ministry within the SVD?

During the concluding Eucharistic celebration, all participants, including Fr. Stanislaus Lazar and Fr. Tim Norton, received and wore a cross symbolizing that the bigger part of the journey has just started. The cross is a beautiful reminder for everyone – both the SVDs and the lay partners – that we need to continue “His mission”.

This experience – which was profoundly multicultural – meant for all of us, as we have made manifest, a truly qualitative leap forward in our missionary life. This was evidenced both by how we were enriched by what we heard, shared and learned in the sessions, as well as by overcoming obstacles (such as language) to better understand each other, creating bonds of friendship and cooperation, not only among ourselves, but also making us feel a real and deep sense of belonging to the SVD family. Our hope is that this may be the initial step towards real communion in that calling which God makes to all of us to build up his Kingdom. There were some emotional moments too realizing the gift of God and gift of persons.

We thank sincerely the SVD Generalate to organize this workshop which was well organized with meticulous care and concern for each participant. Well, the greater responsibility is ahead – to continue as active participants in the mission.

[By Laura Díez Bilbao (Spain) and Mary Geraldine “GeeO” (the Philippines)]

**PARTICIPANTS OF WORKSHOP FOR SVD LAY PARTNERS**  
**14-29 October, 2017 – Nemi, Roma**

**Concluding Session**

**A. Challenges to the SVD Lay Partners**

1. Promotion of SVD lay partners in a province/region/mission (PRM) or in a country; showing the way to live a lay vocation.
2. Strengthening the relationship between SVD lay partners and PRM administration, mission secretary and other SVD confreres – challenges of communication, building trust and personal relationships.
3. Formation of SVD lay partners – to know more about the Founder, charism of the Society and the duties of lay partners.
4. Commitment to continue the SVD charism with other lay partners and the SVD priests and brothers.
5. Identity of SVD lay partners and being creative in doing the mission

**Suggestive Action Plan for Promotion of SVD Lay Partners**

**B. Promotion of SVD Lay Partners**

1. In the PRMs where we have SVD schools, the spirituality of St. Arnold could be included and the SVD lay partners can be spurred on to work both with the students and with the teaching staff.
2. In “SVD parishes”, the lay members can foment a group conscience in order to be visible and have the opportunity to make themselves known and draw attention.
  - Charitable works in a parish, T-shirts, mission visits, etc.
  - Arnoldus spirituality prayers could be said in SVD parishes to increase the awareness of the group.
  - Each group could formulate one or two prayers or slogan that could be recited by heart.
3. Contact SVD institutions to give a weekend session or retreat for lay partners.
4. Create mission awareness in the media (radio, events, solidarity concerts, the printed word, etc.)
5. Prepare special programs for Founder’s Day in our parishes.
6. Promote an apostolate in families, in such a way that all members can participate.
7. Make use of Facebook, Whatsapp and e-mail with a view to more personal contact and for sharing projects, guidelines, materials, advice, etc.
8. Create a Whatsapp group among the participants in this workshop; use it with prudence and be conscious of the motive for which it is created (avoid overloading it, as well as political or pointless commentaries).
9. Participate actively and support the SVD lay partners newsletter, edited and published by Susan Noronha and Rosa Gouveia.

**C. Strengthening the understanding between the SVD lay partners and the SVD confreres and promotion of SVD lay partners in the Society**

10. The leaders of the SVD lay partners should communicate their activities to the PRM administration. The lay partners are encouraged to maintain personal contact with SVD confreres.

**D. SVD Lay Partners Identity and Formation (initial and on-going) of Lay Partners**

11. SVD Lay Partners Identity: Every member understands and develops Christian vocation; he/she imbibes Arnoldus Spirituality, specially sustained by Trinitarian Spirituality; works with four characteristic dimensions of the SVD – Mission Animation, Bible Apostolate, Communications, and Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation; and promotes interculturality. One should clearly avoid clericalizing them.
12. Each member could have a period of formation before being recognized as a member of SVD lay partner group. The period of duration could be decided by the PRM administration in consultation with the local lay partner groups. Where there are no groups, PRM administration could decide on the duration of formation.
13. Each PRM and its lay partner group should have a manual for lay partner formation.

The initial formation could include:

- Gaining a deeper knowledge of the life of the founding generation, their charism and their work. It is only by studying and knowing them that we will be able to integrate them in our lives as missionaries and transmit them to others.
- The history of the Society and the history and development of the PRM.
- Distinct reality of the PRM or country, its special events and transformations.
- Special orientations of the Society to the present time.

Ongoing formation could include:

- Special attention given to prayers (The Quarter Hour Prayer, the *Vademecum*, missionary rosaries, etc.), Prologue of Saint John, Lectio Divina, spiritual retreats, Bible workshops, prayer groups, etc.
  - Study of the Social Doctrine of the Church as a basis for topics related to JPIC.
  - On-going formation in the four characteristic dimensions SVD.
14. SVD Lay partners are in need of booklets with practical ways on the Charismatic Dimensions and Prophetic Dialogue for SVD lay partners.