



Superior Generalis
Societatis Verbi Divini

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01 September 2025

P07/2025

TO ALL SVD BENEFACTORS, LAY COLLABORATORS, AND FRIENDS

in re: Gratitude and Appreciation for 150 Years of Collaboration and Support

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A year ago, we began the SVD Jubilee Year. Before the final event, which will mark the beginning of a new cycle in our history, I would like to address with affection and respect those who made possible the mission that we Divine Word Missionaries have carried out during these 150 years: our benefactors, collaborators and friends.

The celebrations of this jubilee have allowed us to take up once again the original charism of Fr. Arnold Janssen, source of our identity and inspiration for our current mission. We also return to Steyl, the place chosen by our founder to establish a missionary house. This small village became the cradle of the first community, which over time transformed into a worldwide missionary congregation under the leadership of Fr. Arnold Janssen himself.

At our founding in 1875, the fledgling congregation had four members, including the founder. However, the missionary movement that began that year quickly attracted many young people, supported by numerous lay people and families. By 1909, when Fr. Arnold Janssen died, the missionary work already had its three branches: the SVD Priests and Brothers, the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) and the Contemplative Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration (SSpSAP). During his lifetime, Father Arnold sent nearly a thousand missionaries to fifteen countries on every continent and established six of the leading missionary houses in Europe. In January 2025, the Congregation of the Divine Word had 5754 priests, Brothers, novices, and scholastics, spread over 79 countries.

Steyl's missionary work greatly benefited from lay collaborators who supported the Society of the Divine Word. Many dedicated lay men and women from the beginning, providing essential financial and human resource. Josef Althoff was the first lay helper, pious and simple, he kept the house in order. He was followed by Josef Stute, a typographer who became an important assistant to Fr. Arnold. By late 1881, there were 60 lay workers in Steyl. Fr. Arnold had the intention of establishing a "Third Order of the SVD" knowing the value of lay collaborators. In this 150th anniversary, we also celebrate all of you benefactors, lay partners and co-workers in our missionary endeavours. Without you, our efforts to contribute to the quality of life of thousands of people, especially the most vulnerable, would have been most difficult, if not impossible.

Furthermore, about half of our provinces, regions, and missions still receive subsidies, and, without the help of our benefactors, we would not be able to maintain our missionary presence in economically poor and developing countries or in areas of conflict and war. Many vocations are awakened, especially in Africa and Asia. The participation of the laity is essential in this stage of formation for missionary life and, thanks to your specific donations for this purpose, we are able to send about 100 young missionaries each year to our provinces, regions, and missions around the world.

Synodality, the wave of change that is still taking place within the Church, recognizes and values the leading role of the laity in evangelization. Today we also speak of "*Missio Dei*", that is, of the mission that is God's, in which we are all participants and co-responsible in the divine salvific plan. We are all missionary disciples. Some are called to consecrate their whole lives, others are called to contribute what they have received and can share in the form of time, professional dedication, specific services, monetary contribution, missionary collections, etc. We are all artisans of this great mission. Today it is you who contribute to our mission with prayers, gestures of detachment, fraternal attention and generous donations.

We want to be witnesses of the Light that came into the world, the Divine Word, the Life and Light of humanity (Jn 1:4). We have been gathered from everywhere by God's love and grace and sent to all people, with our eyes fixed on the wounds of our contemporary world and attentive to the needs of creation. We are not alone, for we have always been accompanied by our benefactors and collaborators, who, scattered throughout the world, also radiate the light of Christ, often silently or anonymously. Each one of you, as we are, is moved by the same Spirit that motivated St. Arnold Janssen: may the Gospel be a source of light and life from all peoples and for all people.

To each of you, our deepest gratitude and prayers that God will pour out blessings on your lives, your families, and your jobs. May the Holy Triune God live in our hearts and in the hearts of all people.

Fraternally in the Divine Word,



Anselmo Ricardo Ribeiro, SVD
Father General



Maxwell Wullar, SVD
Secretary General