

**8th Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO)
National Conference
25-26 August 2026
Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney, NSW**

1. The presence of the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) in Australia

Overview:

The Society of the Divine Word missionaries also known as the SVDs are working in the different dioceses in Australia. They are engaged in the different ministries serving the people of God: parishes, chaplaincies, formation, First Nation Peoples, Formation, Inter-cultural Dialogue and the SVD Characteristic dimensions – Mission animation, Communications, Bible, and JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation).

As SVDs, where are we in Australia?

- We are in the Archdiocese of Sydney where Arnold Janssen is situated in Epping Road, Marsfield. We are serving the people within the vicinity. Then, the Chinese community gathers every Saturday for their liturgical service and fellowship.
- In the Diocese of Wollongong, we are serving in two parishes: Mary, Mother of the Church Parish, Macquarie Fields and Holy Family Catholic Church, Ingleburn.
- In the Diocese of Darwin, we are serving in the following: Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish, Alice Springs, including the Arrente Catholic Chaplaincy. Then, in Sta. Teresa Parish, Alice Springs for the First Nation People. In Tiwi Islands: Bathurst Island and Melville Island, also for the First Nation People.
- In the Archdiocese of Brisbane, we are serving in the following: St. Mark's Parish, Inala, the Queen of the Vietnamese Martyrs, Inala, for Vietnamese chaplaincy, in St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish, Marsden, and in St. Joseph's Parish, Murgon.
- In the Diocese of Rockhampton, we are serving in St. Patrick's Parish, Emerald, and in St. Brigid's Parish, Longreach.
- In the Diocese of Townsville, we are serving in the Ministerial Region of the Good Shepherd, Kirwan, in St. Anthony's Parish, Townsville, and in St. Anne's Parish, Palm Island.

- In the Archdiocese of Melbourne, we are serving in the following: Sacred Heart Parish, Preston, including the Indonesian Chaplaincy, in the Our Lady of Perpetual Succor Church, Surrey Hills for the Chinese chaplaincy. There are also other ministries in the archdiocese: Inter-religious dialogue at the Janssen Spirituality Center, Boronia, and in Dorish Maru College, Box Hill, for our formation house.
- Lastly, we are in the Diocese of Broome (Bishop Tim Norton, SVD): Cathedral of Our Lady of Queen, Broome, and in St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus, Aboriginal Community, Balgo.

The presence of migrants in every parish and community is a reality that needs to be addressed accordingly. They give new dynamics in the life of the Church. They bring the richness of their faith experiences, practices and their generosity in the parish or community where they belong.

2. Reasons for Migration:

As a missionary, I worked in the different countries where I served as a migrant chaplain and I worked with the asylum seekers and refugees, too. In journeying with them, I found the common denominator why they left their country of origin and migrated in another country.

a) Search for greener pasture

When I asked them the question, “What is the reason for working or coming here?” The simple answer is for their family. They wanted to give the best for their loved ones and to cut the chain of poverty. For others, they find a better opportunity in this country for their professional career and earn a better compensation. As we say that the grass is greener in the other side of the fence.

b) Family re-unification

Firstly, a member of a family will migrate. In the due course of time, when that person is already stable and if there is an opportunity to petition the other members of the family back home, they apply for it. Secondly, the family will migrate and be re-united at once. They will start anew to their new community, adapt to the new environment and share their culture in their adoptive country. Thirdly, a new generation of migrants will emerge.

c) Inter-marriages

Before the emergence of social media, the common practice is the exchanging of letters via post office where they will nurture their friendship in a distant relationship. If they find each other compatible, marriage is not far behind between them. The other common practice is through personal acquaintances. Both of them will be introduced to one another by a common friend or a relative. When marriage is administered, the other party will live to the country of their choice. Now, in the era of social media, dating site is common. They can search for a future partner and get married. Inter-marriages become revolutionary in the social, political, cultural, religious, and economic realm of the society.

d) For higher education

The influx of foreign students is evident especially in the tertiary level. These students opted to enroll in a foreign university for their own academic advantages. Others, they go for further studies like taking up Master of Arts degree, Doctoral degree or field of specialization. Again, if there is a chance to practise their expertise in that country, they will stay behind and start their own career.

e) Conflict in their country of origin (asylum seekers and refugees)

I worked with the asylum seekers and refugees in Thailand and Africa. I heard a lot of stories why they fled their country. Accordingly, they have to flee because of tribal conflict, political harassment, religious persecution, sexual orientation, poverty and others. They know that it will be challenging to leave and traverse an unknown country. Despite this, they have to take the risk for their safety.

3. Contributions of Migrants in their respective parishes/communities in a Synodal Church:

Once these migrants integrate themselves in their new community, they share their faith, culture and norms in their new found home especially in the church where they belong.

a) Leadership (Parish Pastoral Council)

When I stayed in our SVD communities in my capacity as Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Provincial coordinator or as a support-priest, I had the chance to attend in the Parish Pastoral Council meeting. I observed the presence

of migrants in the leadership team. They share their thoughts, ideas and expertise for the life of their parish. The leadership team becomes vibrant and open new doors to intertwine the different charisms they can put in the table.

b) Formation

Before migrating to Australia, others were catechists in their respective parishes back home. They wanted to continue to serve in their new parish as catechist helping in strengthening the young in their faith and beliefs in the Catholic church. They allotted their time for free for the service of God's children.

c) Liturgy and Ministries

Same with the catechists, other migrants served as lectors, commentators, choir conductor, choir member, altar servers and Eucharistic ministers in their parishes back home. They wanted to continue their ministry in their new parish as well. In this regard, the liturgy serves as a catalyst to unite the children of God in diaspora.

d) Cultural diversity – One Church, Many Faces

The Catholic church has different charisms. As a universal church, she is gifted with a diverse culture coming from the four corners of the world. Now, in the context of the Catholic church in Australia, it offers a multi-faceted realm because of the presence of migrants. Though the Catholic church in Australia presents a variety of colors, languages, and ethnicities, they are bonded in one church founded by the Lord Jesus himself.

The people on the go, the people in diaspora will always be in the heart of the Catholic church where ever they will go. They will always find a home away from home, a parish and community that is always open to welcome them into their midst.

Presented by:

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