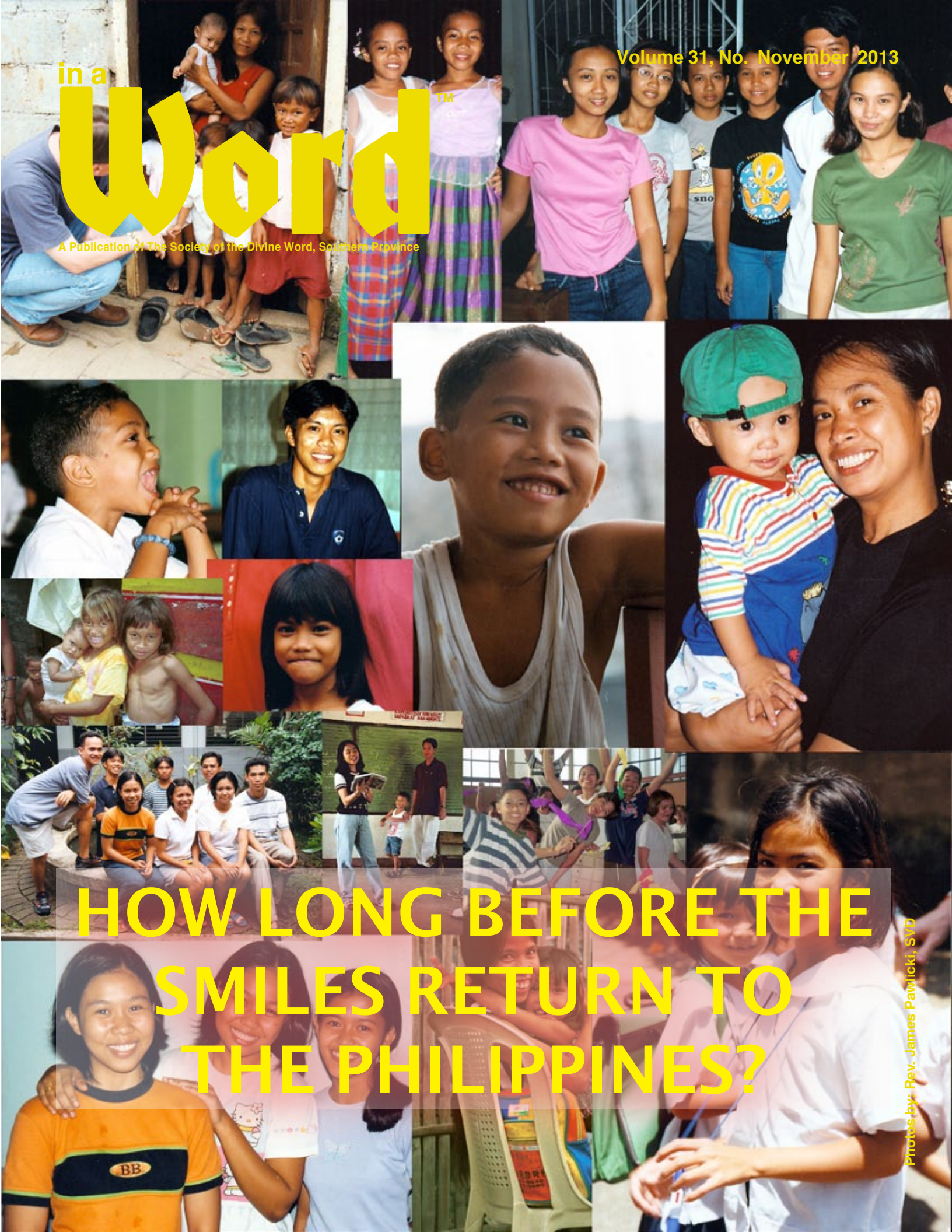


# in a Word

A Publication of The Society of the Divine Word, Southern Province



## HOW LONG BEFORE THE SMILES RETURN TO THE PHILIPPINES?

# THANKSGIVING IS NOT ALWAYS EASY

by

Father Jerome Ledoux, SVD

It seems that every loving, caring, sociable human being falls victim in some way to the annual holiday blues, anniversary syndrome or SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder. Yet, by spiritual highlights that speak of eternal life, each loss transcends temporal separation.

At Rose Hill Cemetery on November 7, in the middle of our prayers for the eternal rest and bliss of Vernon Azrie Newton, a freight train roared up, smothering my voice with its four diesel engines. Of course, I stopped and waited for the noise to subside. Everyone who knew Vernon well, especially his total obsession with trains, said, "That's Vernon!"

With her sister Dianne Tucker at her side, Delores "D" Newton decided to visit her son's grave on Veterans Day. Would you believe that a train passed during their visit? D and Dianne looked at one another in amazement and said again, "That's Vernon!"

While we were putting Vernon's homegoing celebration together, his wife Jodi asked a bit anxiously whether we knew the song, 'Heaven Is a Wonderful Place.' As it turned out, no one in the whole church had heard of it. Going online, I found a rendition by the Muppets that I emailed to Zenobia "Z" Collins, our music director at Our Mother Of Mercy Church.

Z emailed me back, observing LOL that Vernon must have been cracking up in heaven watching the Muppets teach us that song for his homegoing Mass celebration. All the folks in attendance at the Mass sang that unknown song with smiles and gusto. "That was another electric Vernon moment!" everyone agreed, especially Jodi.

"Vernon was so spiritual," D mused on the phone the day after Veterans Day. "He, Jodi and Ashten – self-named 'The Big Three' – read the Bible together every night. And he knew when to drive up to Indiana to visit Ashten one week before the end. When I objected because of his condition, he said, 'This is on me, mother. It's something that I have to do.'"

"They shot pictures galore between the three of them, and Ashten was always trying to get away from Vernon's bear hugs. He considers himself too big for hugs. But I'm sure that he cherishes every hug and every moment now, clinging to the wonderful memories.

"Vernon's last weeks of emails seemed to have a finality about them, a "Till we meet again in heaven" ring about

them. The prayer he composed for Thanksgiving of 2012 was printed on the back of the wake program. That prayer has the same ring about it. Vernon read it very movingly at our last Thanksgiving we would have with him."

Just two weeks before the end, Vernon's niece Ajani and his nephew Cameron were visiting. The 12-year-olds were having a blast despite the 38-year discrepancy in age. "Uncle Vernon, can we stay with you tomorrow also?" they implored him. "Don't think about tomorrow. Don't ask about tomorrow," he answered. "You are here today! Enjoy today!"

But can that "Enjoy today!" be the rallying cry of the thousands of unfortunates who survived the ravages of the November 8 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, mourning the loss of their dear ones, their habitat and possessions? In what meteorologists call the second tornado season, what will recent U.S. tornado victims be thankful for this Thanksgiving day?

Their very lives, to be sure. However, in addition to bereavement, a lack of quality of life, the bare necessities of food, drink and shelter, and the most rudimentary conveniences will haunt them for quite some time. Forget about the horn of plenty. Their prayer is that they be given the opportunity to access the basics of life and to live without the fear of storms.

Those and countless other victims and deprived in this country and around the world will not have the privilege and leisure to sit peacefully at a bountiful Thanksgiving table, giving thanks and reminiscing fondly about Thanksgivings and Christmases past. Instead, because of the evil tragedies of natural disasters and moral neglect, it is hard to say "Thanks."

Every year, about two weeks before Thanksgiving, the dread holiday watch begins for a huge number of people who start calling friends and counselors about their sad, painful memories, their many anxieties and their great distaste for the glitzy, multi-colored lights and prolonged shopping frenzy of the holidays. "I can't wait until it's all over!" they say.

All those negatives notwithstanding, there are still priceless, irreplaceable highlights of the words, camaraderie, family life and times of our dear ones who have gone to God.



*The devastating typhoon that struck the Philippines has affected at least 10 million people. The Society of the Divine Word has a strong missionary presence in the hard hit area of Tacloban. There are Churches that were destroyed. The Divine Word high school was utterly demolished. The Divine Word Hospital, the only functioning hospital in Tacloban, featured in many news stories is run by the Divine Word Missionaries. Its needs are acute. The following account from the affected area was sent to us days after the storm.*



For thousands of people in southern Philippines, life has become so unbearably painful. There seems to be no let up to calamities that claimed so many lives and destroyed incalculable properties. Just yesterday, we were again visited by a very strong typhoon, named “Yolanda” (Hainya) that many claimed, could be the strongest typhoon that ever formed on this earth. It had a wind speed of 350 kilometers per hour near the center – making “Pablo” (Bhopa) in Mindanao, less than a year ago, looks like a mere wind in comparison.

“Yolanda” is already the sixth calamity that we have experienced in the south in less than two years. In December of 2011, there was typhoon Sendong that claimed thousands of lives in Cagayan de Oro alone. That was immediately followed by an earthquake in Negros Oriental that buried scores of people alive. Next was the cyclone in Camiguin Island which was soon succeeded by super typhoon “Pablo”, the typhoon that brought trauma to farmers no end. We have not yet overcome the effects of Pablo when another furious earthquake struck in Bohol – the phenomenon that had only started to sink in to everyone’s psyche. And now, just three weeks after, “Yolanda” came.

As of this writing, we only get glimpses of the real devastation along the paths razed by “Yolanda”; due to the loss of communication lines. Cell phone transmitters must have been toppled down and telephone cables cut since phone calls could not go through. **News feeds and photos provided to the public via satellite phones and international news services, however gruesome, are nowhere near to capturing the comprehensive situation.** For one, there is no way as yet to verify the destructions that are happening in rural areas and far flung barangays. Death estimates are too small to believe in. What we are sure of are the facts that food and water supplies are running out very fast, no electricity in the whole island, numerous number of individuals have died, destruction is everywhere and the problem of inaccessibility is widespread, slowing down upcoming relief operations.

The SVDs have a number of confreres assigned to our school Liceo Del Verbo Divino in Tacloban City, the city that embraced the most devastation. We don’t have news about them yet as of this writing – a real cause for worry. Likewise, we also have many SVD confreres who come from Leyte and Samar areas and they too have no news about their families back home.

Less than two years; six big time calamities: is simply too difficult to go through. People, too, have limited resilience. Relief operations, no matter how generous and dedicated, are bound to show signs of fatigue. But “there is no rest to the wicked”, as the saying goes. Wherever and whenever there are suffering people, we refresh and sustain our resolve to serve. We, the Divine Word Missionaries, in times of pain and difficulties, reaffirm our calling to be at the forefront whenever our services are called for. For this is the only way we make gospel values alive, real and dynamic to the people we vowed to serve.

When will all these sufferings end? No answer is ever necessary.

Fr. Eugene Docoy, SVD  
Philippines

You can find updated information concerning on going relief efforts at the Divine Word Missionaries web page... [www.svdmissions.org](http://www.svdmissions.org)

So much needs to done. Food and supplies are desperately needed. The second stage of rebuilding will take years. Donating to the Divine Word Missionaries will go to where the monies will be most useful.

You may donate on-line through the website or send checks to:

Typhoon Relief  
Divine Word Missionaries  
P O Box 6099  
Techy, IL 60082

If you would like to make an online donation to help the victims of Typhoon Haiyan [www.svdmissions.org/contact\\_us/donations.aspx](http://www.svdmissions.org/contact_us/donations.aspx)

Please pray for all the victims of the typhoon. Pray that hope can come to the many poor people.

Pray that the smiles can return soon.

## in a word or two



St. Mary's Academy, a private Catholic coeducational elementary school and all girl middle and high school in New Orleans, Louisiana, participated and marched in the annual New York City Veterans Day Parade on November 11, 2013. Organized in 1929, the New York City Veterans Day Parade is produced by the United War Veterans Council (UWVC) and is the largest Veterans Day event in the United States of America. The St. Mary's Academy Marching Unit was honored to participate and each student remembered family members, friends and Maryites who served in our nation's military.

Although the journey was long, there was a positive energy emanating among the girls as they neared their destination. Many had never seen New York City, so any nervousness they felt about marching in the parade in front of all America, was replaced by excitement and wonder.

The all-girl marching unit, after several fundraisers, traveled by coach from New Orleans to New York City where they first participated in the Band of Pride Tribute, a conglomeration of high school bands from across the United States who together played patriotic songs in honor of veterans past and present. Held at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial site in Manhattan, the students played tribute to the men and women who so bravely protected and continue to protect our nation's honor. The Native American Color Guard opened the ceremony.

The Veterans Day Parade in New York City, also referred to as America's Parade, had over 25,000 people participating, making it the largest in the nation.

On Saturday, Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>, the girls enjoyed a dinner cruise on the Hudson River which highlighted the major landmarks in the New York area. They were amazed by the Statue of Liberty as she stood bright and proud. The city was lit up as the DJ rocked the mike inviting our students and students from Chicago, Illinois to the boat's dance

floor. Friendships were made that night as each student waved goodbye with 'see you tomorrow'.

The students, along with their principal and president, Sr. Jennie Jones SSF and Sr. Clare of Assisi Pierre SSF, respectively, chaperons and parents, celebrated Sunday Mass at the famous St. Patrick's Cathedral where every year more than five million people of every different nationality and faith come to worship. "The Cathedral has been a wellspring of hope and solace in times of peace and plenty and war and sorrow. In a city and nation of immigrants, it has greeted countless waves of peoples seeking freedom," according to St. Patrick's Cathedral website. Visits to Chinatown and Times Square added to the adventure.

On the very last day of our trip to New York City, God blessed us with a sprinkling of snow! Our beautiful Maryites from the South twirled and lifted their heads as snow flurries descended from heaven. What a great way to end an adventure like this.

God has truly blessed our school and we are eternally grateful to Him, to the parents, patrons and friends who helped us make this adventure possible. Venerable Henriette Delille, our foundress, walked with us as we marched proudly for our veterans and for our school.

Donations to assist students for next year's parade can be sent to St. Mary's Academy Marching Unit's NYC Veterans Day Fund, 6905 Chef Menteur Highway, New Orleans, LA 70126.

**Photos and article by:**  
**Cathy Green Miner**



**Divine Word Missionaries** is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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