

in a

Word

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WORLD MISSION DAY 2021

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“We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard”

-Pope Francis

The theme of this year's World Mission Day – “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20) is a summons to each of us to “own” and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts. Pope Francis says, This mission has always been the hallmark of the Church, for “she exists to evangelize”. Our life of faith grows weak, loses its prophetic power and its ability to awaken amazement and gratitude when we become isolated and withdraw into little groups. By its very nature, the life of faith calls for a growing openness to embracing everyone, everywhere.

We know that the call to mission is not a thing of the past, or a romantic leftover from earlier times. Today too Jesus needs hearts capable of experiencing vocation as a true love story that urges them to go forth to the peripheries of our world as messengers and agents of compassion. He addresses this call to everyone, and in different ways.

CONCERT MUSICIAN RESPONDS TO CALL FOR MISSION

On September 18, Divine Word Missionaries Carl Gales and Derek Nguyen professed perpetual vows at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Chicago. Both men were responding to the call for mission. Theresa Carson, Director of Public and Media Relations for the Society of the Divine Word in Techny, Illinois describes Carl Gales and his responding to mission. Ms. Carson says:

There are many ways to describe Divine Word seminarian Carl Gales: student, musician, runner, perfectionist, son, brother, friend. Perhaps the most complete definition is man of God. In his final year of studies before ordination to the priesthood, Carl, 44, finds that he interacts with people in a new way since first professing first vows in 2016.

“The sense of service is more profound to me,” he said. “In a sense, I’m speaking for the Church—not just my views or my opinions. I’m focused on this larger purpose of mission. How are my words and actions reflecting this mission of the Church? There’s a dynamic sense of purpose.”

“When I look at my life, all of the clues were there,” said Carl of his vocation to the priesthood. “I had to take off the blinders and see them through prayer and meditation.” He continued, **“Life is like music—rising and falling. It has resolution and is not stuck on one particular note. Prayer allows you to see that melody. You can see where it goes.”**

It’s not surprising that Carl used music as a metaphor. He’s one of an elite group of musicians—a fact that may not be apparent when he talks about his life. He might mention having been classically trained as a concert pianist and, when asked directly, will admit to having performed on major stages throughout the United States and abroad, but the inquisitive person must rely on the Internet to fill in the blanks.

Take for instance, his musical debut at age 12, playing Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 23 with the Phoenix Symphony or the invitation to study at Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris. At age 18, he performed in Prague, accompanied by the National Czech Symphony Orchestra, a concert that is captured on the CD “The Virtuoso Piano.” And then there was the time that he played at Carnegie Hall.

However, this interlude in his life is a mere chapter. Born in Baltimore, Carl, his mother and sister moved to Phoenix when he was seven. Carl’s mother placed an emphasis on academics, but church always came first. “Honestly, the main thing is that we went to church a lot,” Carl said with a laugh. “Seemed like every other day we were at church for something, studying and memorizing the Bible, singing and playing organ, working with choirs. All of that was part of my church experience growing up.”

Carl grew up attending the Prayer Assembly Church of God in Christ, a charismatic Protestant church. “It’s a great place for Gospel musicians to grow and develop,” he said, adding that he is forever grateful for their prayers and support.

Ministry to the homebound was part of his spiritual journey from an early age, he said. His mom visited sick and elderly, and he would go with her. “My mom made sure that was part of our lives,” he said. “Mom assumed I was going to college. Grades weren’t a focus, but going to church was a priority.”

Go to college, he did. Carl had a full scholarship to Indiana University, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in music. **As time went on, music consumed his life, but faith remained important. As a college student, Carl discovered Catholicism. A friend invited him to Mass, where he felt an overwhelming sense of peace. He decided to become Catholic while there at Indiana University, receiving Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil in 2000.**

“That was a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful time!” he said. “And the stirrings of the Catholic Priesthood were present even then.”

His connection with the Society of the Divine Word also unfolded with a providential ring. His first position with a Catholic church was Blessed Sacrament-Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd, a parish that is staffed by Divine Word Missionaries in Trenton. He later worked at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Jefferson City, Mo., and Saints Peter and Paul in Decatur, Ga., an annual stop for Divine Word Fathers Charles and Chester Smith’s revival. In Decatur, Director of Religious Education Gloria George Patrick suggested that he give the Divine Word Missionaries a try.

In 2014, he entered the Society of the Divine Word Associates Program. The following year, he began novitiate. “Some have said that the religious life is a running away from life,” he said. “There’s no greater misconception.”

As he reflected upon his time as a concert pianist, he said, “For years, it was my identity. It was my safe zone. It sheltered me from the disappointments of life, from having to deal with people. Socially [as a musician], you live your life through the lens of the next performance, next lesson, next showcase. That lens becomes very narrow as time goes.” Then, **God challenged him to widen that lens.**

“Humility plays a big part in my life in that I’ll be the first to admit that I was not very humble as a musician,” he said with self-awareness. “That handicap really made music the one thing that God wanted me to let go of—not use it for my own ego, for my own self-aggrandizement—because I took it for granted. I didn’t give glory to God for it because I thought it was me. I had the power to do whatever I wanted with the talent.

God said, ‘This gift is mine. Who are you to use it for your own ego?’ ‘God was calling me to something more: to give my true self to Him instead of this imagining that I created,’” he said. “It was as if God said, ‘I don’t want your gift [for music]. That’s mine. I want you.’”

He finds himself considering the vision of a parish and what the parishioners need. “I’m responsible for people in the church in a certain sense,” said Carl. “It’s not akin to having children but there’s a weight placed on your shoulders—like a businessperson who has the bulk of responsibility for keeping a business afloat.”

Carl’s two-year Cross-Cultural Training Program (CTP) in the Democratic Republic of Congo heightened that sense of responsibility. CTP is part of the Divine Word formation process and is designed to give participants an opportunity to live and minister in a culture other than their own.

Carl found that life in the Congo deepened his vocation. “The Congo taught me how much determination and perseverance I have that I didn’t think I had,” Carl said. He said that for a time, he did not have contact with family, friends or the social constructs that many people take for granted. During the African nation’s presidential election, officials cut off internet access.

“One and a half months of no communication with many people puts things in perspective,” he said. “When things became difficult, confreres circled around me to make sure I was okay. I never felt abandoned or in danger because they know how difficult it is.” He also found solace in advice he received during novitiate six years ago. Father Felix Eckerman SVD, who served as a missionary in India for more than 50 years, frequently said, “Go with the flow.”

“Those are four words packed with meaning,” said Carl. “No one way is better than other, just different, different ways to process, to be celebrated. That’s the whole essence of being an SVD, that expression of living.”

Carl and Derek will complete their final year of studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago this year. Carl will serve as a transitional deacon at Our Lady of Africa parish in Chicago. He has been assigned to the Chicago Province after priestly ordination in May.

Many thanks to Theresa Carson for her stories on Carl Gales, SVD. To read more about Carl, we invite you to read “Former Cathedral of St. Joseph Music Director Professes Final Vows in the Society of the Divine Word” [Link to: <http://catholicmissourianonline.com/stories/former-cathedral-of-st-joseph-music-director-to-profess-final-vows-in-the-society-of-the-divine.3484>] from The Catholic Missourian and “From Concert Hall to Novitiate, Carl Gales Listens to the Heart.” [Link to: <https://www.divineword.org/from-concert-hall-to-novitiate-carl-gales-listens-to-the-heart/>]



Carl Gales, SVD in the Congo. Life there deepened his vocation and commitment to mission.

in a word or two

EVERY YEAR, SOMETHING SPECIAL HAPPENS on the next-to-last Sunday of October. WORLD MISSION SUNDAY joins all Catholics of the world into one community of faith. At Mass that Sunday, we recommit ourselves to our common vocation, through Baptism to be missionaries, through prayer, participation in the Eucharist, and by giving generously to the collection for the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

Pope Francis' message for World Mission Sunday this year reflects on the theme: "We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). On World Mission Sunday, we join our Holy Father in supporting his missions. As we pray and respond here at home, we share in those celebrations taking place in every parish and school throughout the world. Together, through our prayers and financial support, we bring the Lord's mercy and concrete help to the most vulnerable communities in the Pope's missions.

In a world where so much divides us, World Mission Sunday rejoices in our unity as missionaries by our Baptism, as it offers each one of us an opportunity to support the life-giving presence of the Church among the poor and marginalized in more than 1,111 mission dioceses. **WE CANNOT KEEP FROM SPEAKING ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD. ACTS 4:20**

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (CNS) -- The Black Lives Matter movement not only qualifies as an example of public theology -- it also exemplifies Christian teaching, a speaker at the University of Notre Dame said Oct. 7. "To put this in more explicit theological terms, each one sees the other as an icon of the divine transcendent one, as another human made in the likeness and image of God," said M. Shawn Copeland, professor emerita of theology at Boston College.

Copeland's Oct. 7 lecture kicked off the 31st annual Black Catholic Theological Symposium hosted by the South Bend, Indiana, university and sponsored by its departments of Africana studies and theology. The symposium also included two days of private meetings and an invitation-only listening session for Black Catholic students, community members, faculty and staff. Retired Bishop Edward K. Braxton of Belleville, Illinois, lectured Oct. 8 on the Catholic Church and the racial divide in the United States. The event closed Oct. 9 with a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington.



M. Shawn Copeland,
(CNS photo/Matt Cashore, courtesy University of Notre Dame)

ROME (CNS) --Ten months after Pope Francis inducted him into the College of Cardinals, Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington took possession of his titular church in Rome, the Church of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the Grottarossa neighborhood of northern Rome.

Greeting parishioners Sept. 27, Cardinal Gregory noted how Mary, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, is also the patroness of the Catholic Church in the United States. "Whenever I recall Our Lady's title, I will be united with you and your families and clergy in prayer," he promised them, reading his text in Italian. "I also hope that you will remember me and the Archdiocese of Washington in your prayers, as we are now joined in devotion and affection through the intercession of her whose son established the church as one family of faith, hope and love."

Cardinals are symbolically priests of the Diocese of Rome, so they are given titular churches in the city, following the practice of ancient times when cardinals were pastors of Rome parishes. "It's important for me to have a parish here in the city of Rome that binds me, first of all, to the service of the Holy Father but also ties me to the people of this parish," the cardinal told Catholic News Service. "Now when I pray, I will pray first of all for the people of the Archdiocese of Washington and then for the people of this local community: my parish and the family of my parish here in Rome."



Do we recall the land mark pastoral letter on evangelization published in 1985 by the African American Bishops? The title of the pastoral letter was **WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD.** (photo above is of the Bishops who authored that letter)

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, Florida and Arkansas.

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