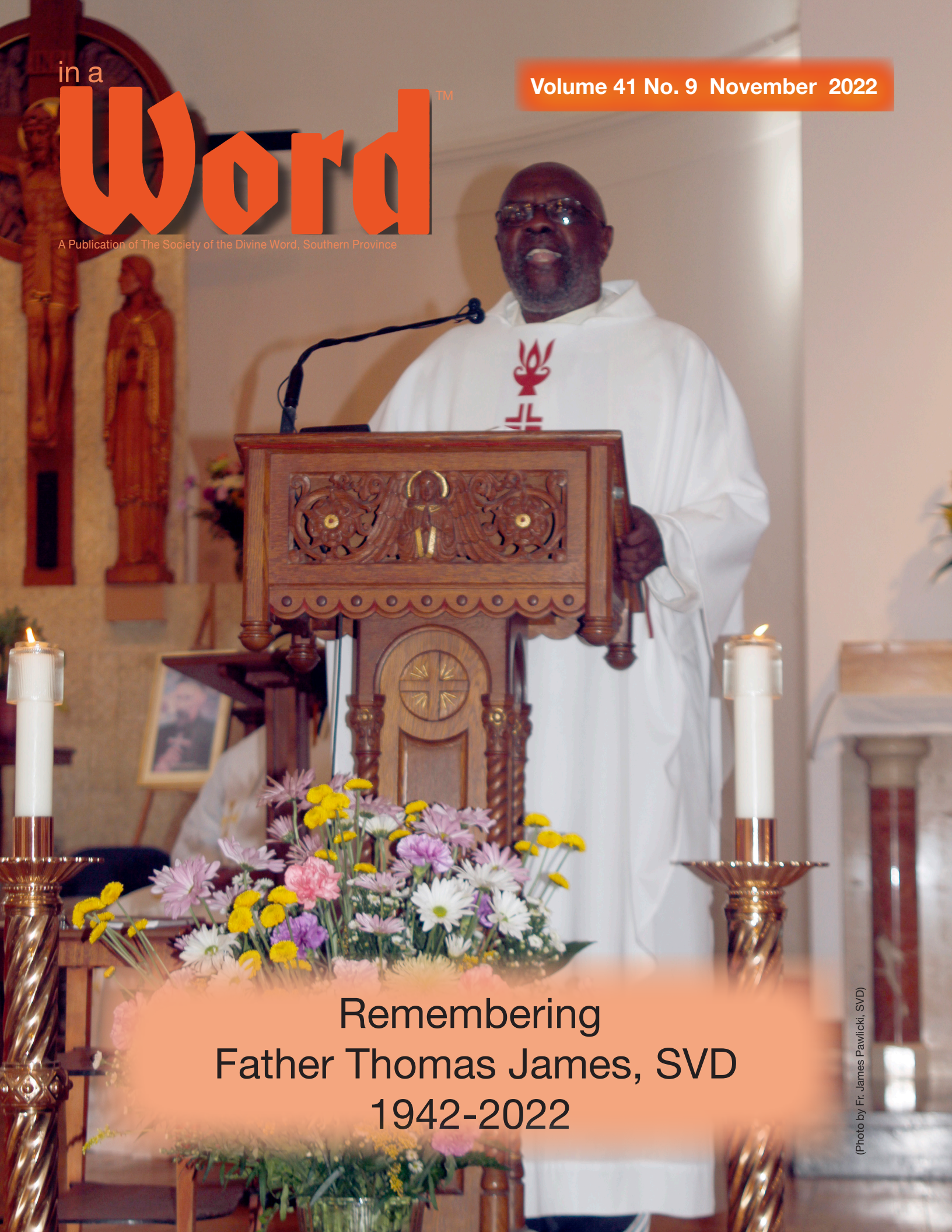


in a

WordTM

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Remembering
Father Thomas James, SVD
1942-2022

(Photo by Fr. James Pawlicki, SVD)

In 1926 Father Matthew Christman wrote a history of how St. Augustine Seminary began with the Divine Word Missionaries.

We bring in this issue next two two pages of his history. More will follow in future issues of IN A WORD

These considerations moved Father Heick in 1913, who was then superior of the S.V.D. Missions in the South, to give permission to Father Stein when this priest was sent to Greenville, Miss., to open a Mission School to establish a boarding school for boys. This was to develop later into a seminary. However, only the attic of the school and the cellar of the rectory could be spared to accommodate these boys. There were no funds to consider improvements; to feed the boys became a heavy financial burden for the already poor and very needy Mission. Thus, when Father Stein was removed to Techny, the department was practically discontinued. Yet eight years later, that same poor and ill-equipped attic was beautifully remodelled and used as a dormitory for the first seminary. Consequently, Greenville was, after all, chosen for the first home of the new community of Colored seminarians.

In 1914 the Colored seminary became already the principal topic of discussion at the Christmas conference of the priests in our Southern missions. The writer of this article read a paper on the subject and all the Fathers present voted in favor of the seminary. The Reverend Superior, Fr. Heick, was requested to write immediately to the Rt. Rev. Bishop of Natchez and to Father Provincial of the Society for permission to open the seminary. (SEE A-1). Father Hoenderop was charged to make the plans for temporary quarters. It was decided to build in Jackson for two reasons: Jackson, as the seat of the headquarters of the Southern Missions, was better able from the financial point of view to support the institution; it has two priests and one of these Father Christman, rather wished to devote himself to teaching.

In his answer, Father Provincial stated that he was not himself adverse to the idea of a Colored priesthood but wished to have more time to study thoroughly this mooted question.

The Right Reverend Bishop Gunn answered that he did not believe the time was yet ripe for such a tremendous undertaking and would, therefore, withhold his permission to open a Colored seminary. (SEE A-2). However, he placed before us, for our consideration, a very novel proposition, which Mission scientists will not consider as altogether too strange and novel a plan. He proposed that we open an apostolic school for Colored candidates to educate them as catechists. But they should be invested with regular offices and even raised to ecclesiastical dignities by letting them

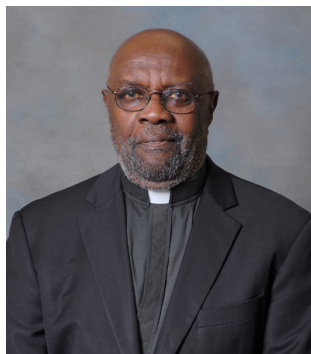
pass through the minor ordinations to the two major orders of subdeacon and deacon. However, these candidates should, with the permission of the Holy See, be granted the extraordinary privilege to marry.

This proposition was received with all the reverence due to an ecclesiastical authority whom we not only respected but sincerely loved; but it was not accepted as very practical, because it was not thought very likely that Rome would grant such an extraordinary privilege. Furthermore, deprived of that privilege, the deaconship at the end of an ecclesiastical career would have no more much meaning. There was no longer a good reason why these Colored candidates should not be permitted to pass on to the last step of ecclesiastical ordinations, the crown of all others, that of holy priesthood. Yet the kindly letter of our Bishop showed us beyond all doubt that some day he would grant permission to open a regular seminary, even, though his personal opinion was opposed to the idea.

The following Easter, Father Provincial paid us his usual annual visit. At our urgent request he decided to go with Father Heick to a meeting of other prominent missionaries in the Colored Field which was being held at Richmond, Virginia. Our Fathers wished to hear the opinions of these men concerning a Colored priesthood. To our great surprise, it was quite unfavorable. They seemed to be able to produce an almost irresistible and a most formidable array of arguments against the Colored priesthood, the strongest one being that of past experience. This strong opposition produced two effects: it was considered inadvisable to make further efforts, at least for the present, to "force through" the opening of a seminary; it was decided to study the problem more thoroughly, especially the real reason why previous efforts failed.

The study was specially taken up by Father Wendel, who rose into great prominence as an ardent and even passionate advocate of a Colored priesthood. He developed his views and arguments in a quarterly magazine, which he founded, the "Colored Messenger", later it was published only as a "Year Book". First there appeared in his magazine only a few short articles on this subject, while the last number, which was published in 1918, was replete with long discussions and short, pointed notes on the great topic. It aroused much enthusiasm and even more bitter opposition, as he seemed to side too much with the so called "Colored Catholic insurgents".

in a word or two



Father Thomas Anthony James, SVD, died peacefully on Friday, October 28, 2022, after a lifetime of priestly service. Father Tom was a dynamic preacher, teacher, pastor and friend to many. Father James was a spirited person, and he brought out the best in others.

He was born on June 11, 1942, in St. Martinville, Louisiana. He entered St. Augustine Seminary in Bay Saint

Louis, Mississippi and became a Divine Word Missionary. He was ordained on December 18, 1969.

His first assignment was at Verbum Dei Catholic High School in Los Angeles, California, where he served as an educational minister, teacher, deputy, and Principal. He faced numerous challenges in his early ministry, but he persevered and maintained lifelong friendships with the people of Los Angeles, including many former students and co-workers.

In 1987, Father James was named Associate Pastor at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Lafayette, Louisiana. A year later, he was named Pastor at St. Edward Catholic Church in New Iberia, where he was instrumental in developing a robust music program that helped people grow in their faith through the gifts of music and song. An educator himself, he was deeply committed to the success of St. Edward Catholic School and oversaw major improvements to the school's campus.

In 2002, Father James returned to Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Lafayette to serve as Pastor. This church had been built to accommodate the "First Four" African American priests ordained in the United States, and several of them had been stationed there. A deep historian, Father James connected the parish and its people to the "First Four," understanding their struggles and persevering in service with gratitude. One of his proudest accomplishments was erecting a Memorial to these "First Four" African American Priests on the grounds of Immaculate Heart. In addition, he worked tirelessly in support of Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School and proudly supported Catholic education, particularly in the African American community.

In 2015, Father James was named Pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Broussard, Louisiana, and St. Anthony Mission Chapel in Cade. His leadership and presence in these two communities was marked by great love. A country boy at heart, he enjoyed watching students return home from school each afternoon and they loved seeing him in his rocking chair. Father James delighted in being amongst the people that God had chosen him to shepherd wherever he served. He later retired to Holy Ghost Church in Opelousas, Louisiana.

Father James also served as Episcopal Vicar for both the South Region and the Central Regions of the Diocese of Lafayette under Bishop Edward O'Donnell, Bishop Michael Jarrell, and Bishop Douglas Deshotel. In addition, he served three terms as Vice-Provincial for the Southern Province of the Divine Word Missionaries and served several terms on the Provincial Council. He was dedicated to service in his support of the Miles Perret Cancer Center, Veterans programs, and Hospice of Acadiana, where he served on the Board of Directors.

Father James also devoted himself to mentoring young priests throughout the course of his ministry, and he loved teaching, reading, enjoying time with his friends, fishing, and listening to music. He was a great storyteller, and most of all, he loved to serve God's people and he loved being with his family, whom he cherished so deeply.

In each of his roles, Father James was beloved by the priests and the lay people alike. His paradigm in ministry was centered in faith, truth, and service, and he worked tirelessly to support his parishes and his people. He treated others with dignity and respect, and he loved engaging individuals in growing in their faith and focusing on their gifts in order to share their light with the world. He was greatly admired and respected for his leadership, his courage, and his passion to serve God's people.



Father Tom James is shown here with his siblings Sister Geneva James, SSF, and Collins James, Jr

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. IN A WORD is a publication of The Society of the Divine Word's Media Production Center. Rev. James Pawlicki, S.V.D., Director and Editor; Cathy Green-Miner, office manager; consultant.

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