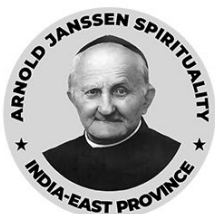


# RELIVING SVD FOUNDATION Day

*All that happened on*

**08 SEPTEMBER 1875**



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Designed by: Fr. Dixon Lawrence D'Souza SVD



**WEDNESDAY, 8 SEPTEMBER, THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LADY, THE DEDICATION OF THE HOUSE TOOK PLACE.** Some families from the village and the school children helped to decorate the little church and the seminary with wreaths. A triumphal arch was placed in front of the house. Both indoors and out, placards with German and Dutch texts, were hung. On Tuesday evening the two bells in the church tower were rung just as on the eve of great feast days, and the same was done on Wednesday morning.

**BY 10AM** all the places in the little church were occupied, mostly by people from Steyl and Tegelen. There were also 20 guests from more distant places. Seldom had the little village church seen such an assemblage. Father Janssen had invited Dr. von Essen to celebrate the High Mass; Father Beckers of Tegelen and Father Wolters of Reuver assisted him. The choir sang a polyphonic Mass.

### **Rector Janssen preached after the Gospel**

**“It** is indeed a unique and rare occasion that has brought such a numerous crowd in celebration around the altar of the Lord. The occasion is the beginning of a sacred undertaking, one consecrated to God, which, even if its goal will be only half-way attained, cannot but become a source of salvation and blessing for many thousands. The foundation has been laid quite close to this church of God, and today, the most holy Feast of the Birthday of Mary, is the festive day when that undertaking too will be born, when the house acquired precisely for that undertaking will be dedicated to its sacred purpose with the blessing of the Church.”

**“What** will come of this mission seminary we do not yet know; goals are not always reached that one aims for. Still, it can lay claim to your participation, for it is founded with the blessing and approval of so many bishops and it is for such a noble, exalted and sublime purpose. Should I today not direct your eyes to that goal and explain to you





what it is we are striving for? Then I must speak to you about the noble, sublime mission activity of the Church, for the purpose of this house is nothing else than to help proclaim the Gospel among the peoples who do not know God at all or not in the right way; to attract young men for this task and to send them out as trained missionaries. But, someone may think, is it really necessary? Isn't there enough work to do in the home country? Why go to distant lands?"

**“For** this reason, I need to show you the necessity of our undertaking and I must guide you therefore to distant places, indeed, guide you over the whole earth and show you what the situation is. The whole world is the vineyard of the Lord and we wish to train and send workers into the vineyard, indeed, to send them to its most distant and most neglected parts where practically only wild vines grow that bear no grapes and where everything is thoroughly overgrown with brambles, thistles and useless climbing plants. Of course, these workers must first volunteer, and so I wish to join my words to the challenge of our Divine Saviour: “The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest” (Mt 9,37). I would like to show you: (1) What the vineyard of the Lord is and how desperate is the situation in it so that every help is very welcome; (2) Why it is so desperate; (3) I would then like to add a few words about our undertaking.”

Father Arnold then went on to explain that the whole human race forms the vineyard of the Lord. There are about 1500 million people on the earth. Of these 210-220 million are Catholics (in Europe 150 million, in America 50 million, in Africa 5 million, in Asia less than 9 million, and in Australia less than half a million). Protestants and Orthodox are about as numerous, and Moslems almost the same. This gives a total of 500-660 million, while the greater part, about 800-900 million, still do not recognize God as creator of the world nor pray to him. This is to judge only from externals since all are counted as Catholics whose names appear in the baptismal register.



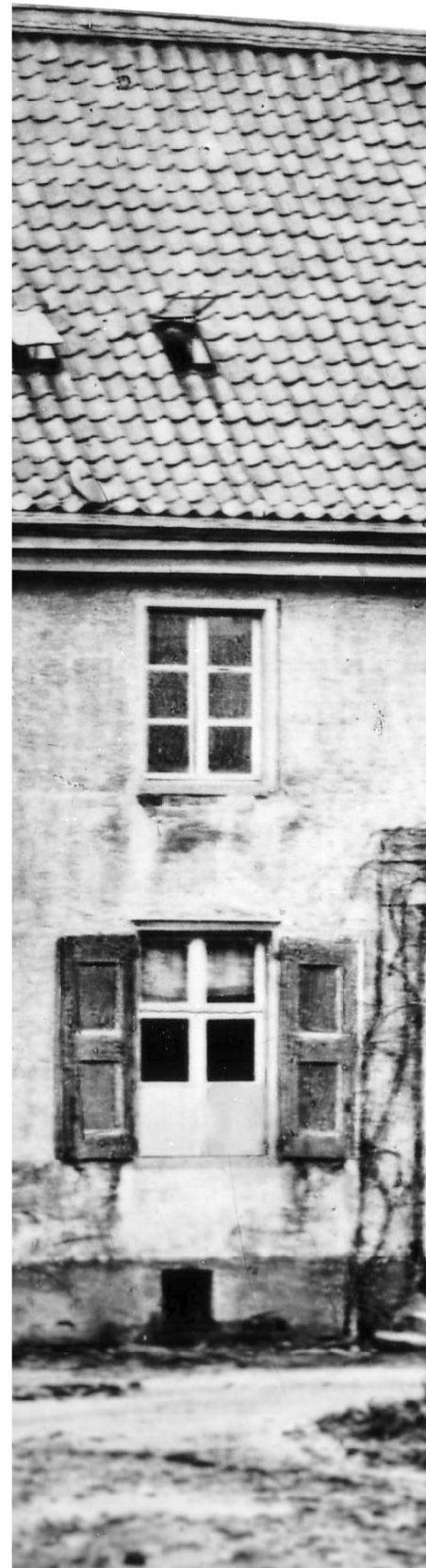


**“The** Lord God had arranged that Christianity could easily spread over the whole world. Christ was born at the centre point of the then known world. From there he wished to spread his divine message in all directions through his apostles. But human perversity had tried to bring God's work to nought. Therefore, the Chosen People were rejected since they had proven themselves so unworthy of di vine grace and of their high calling. Europe thus inherited this task which the Near East once had.”

**“The** foundation is already laid; Europe has made a start. From it the Christian faith has spread over the world so that we now find Christians in all countries, even though in many places they are relatively few. The missions have experienced a great push forward. The Paris Seminary in 1872 offers a good comparison. Fifty years earlier they had only 25-27 missionaries; but now they have that many dioceses and almost twenty times as many missionaries.”

**“But** what is that among so many? The situation is a very sad one, indeed, it is a shame for us. The words of the Saviour, 'Go and teach all nations!' are not addressed only to the apostles but to the whole Church, and also to us to work, as much as we are able, for the execution of this divine command.”

**“A** German priest has taken these thoughts to heart and has begun to work for the realization of this task. The dear Lord has helped him and in spite of many difficulties has arranged for him to receive the support necessary to make a modest start. Whether anything will come of it, is known only to God. But we express our thanks to the Giver of all good things for having helped with this beginning. We hope that the house will attain its purpose. The simplicity of this beginning should not discourage us. The mightiest tree starts as a single seed and the strongest of giants was once a weak, whimpering baby. We know that with our present resources we cannot accomplish our task, but we hope the good God will





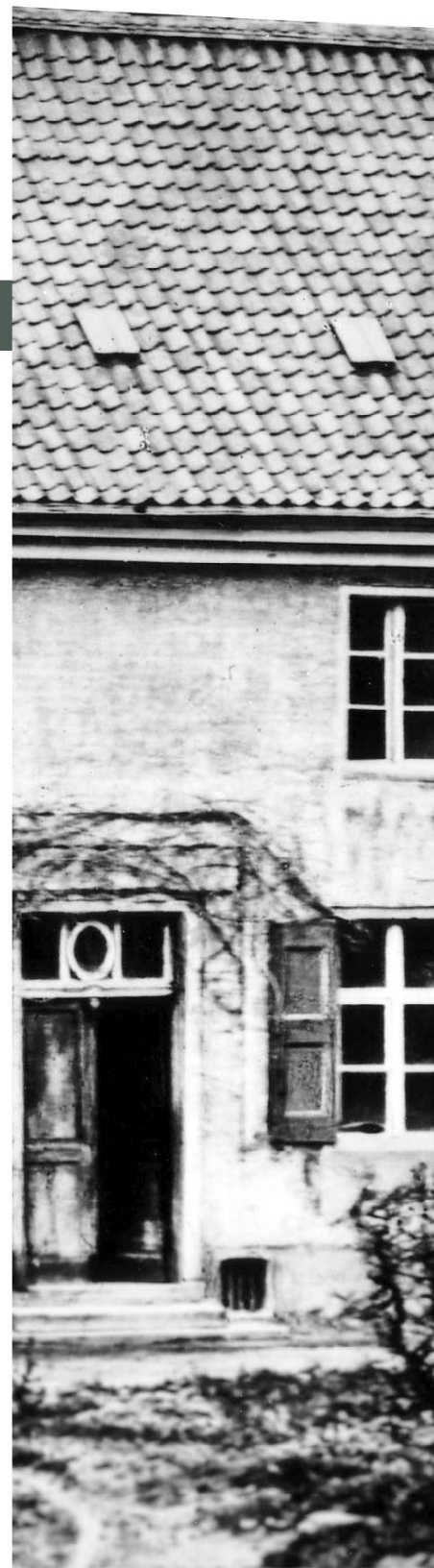
accomplish our task, but we hope the good God will provide everything we need. And he may do with us what he wills. **IF THE SEMINARY SUCCEEDS, WE WILL THANK THE GRACE OF GOD. IF NOTHING COMES OF IT, WE WILL HUMBLY STRIKE OUR BREAST AND CONFESS THAT WE WERE NOT WORTHY OF THE GRACE."**

Then the preacher Father Arnold addressed an appeal to the congregation for help with the newly started venture through prayers and sacrifices. Like the preacher and his magazine, the sermon was factual and pious; it was also too long; it lasted more than an hour. By the time the congregation left the church after the High Mass, two and a half hours had gone by.

### **After the Two and Half Hour Long High Mass...**

**The** visitors then inspected the few, and all but empty, rooms of the modest mission seminary. Four of the first occupants were on hand to welcome them: Rector Janssen, Francis Reichart, Henry Erlemann, and Brother Juniper. A photographer had come from Kempen for the occasion and took pictures of the seminary, the members of the community and the guests. He had offered his services free of charge, but when the plates were processed, almost none of the exposures turned out well. It was well past one o'clock when the 26 guests sat down to the festive board. Toasts were proposed to the Holy Father, the bishops, and also to the benefactors of the seminary. Dr. von Essen, who had a special devotion to St. Michael, suggested that **the seminary be named in honour of the great Archangel.** Though Father Janssen raised a few objections, it was agreed to do so.

**AT FOUR O'CLOCK** a short service was held in the village church during which **the Litany of All Saints was sung.** Then Dean Raetsen of Venlo, who had arrived in the course of the afternoon to represent the bishop went





through the rooms of the building, accompanied by Father Janssen, and blessed them. Soon afterwards the visitors departed.

**SHORTLY AFTER SIX O'CLOCK** a telegram arrived, conveying the blessing of the Holy Father. It was a special joy for the community. On 5 September, Father Janssen had wired the Propaganda requesting the blessing and had included payment for the reply. The telegram was the first communication from the mission seminary in Steyl to be placed in the Roman archives. The telegram read: **"JANSSEN, RECTOR OF THE MISSION SEMINARY, KALDENKIRCHEN — WITH HEARTFELT LOVE THE HOLY FATHER IMPARTS HIS APOSTOLIC BLESSING TO THE NEW SEMINARY, THE RECTOR AND STUDENTS. CARDINAL FRANCHI."**

**The** four members of the seminary community, now alone, recited evening prayers and then the Rector announced the order that was to be followed. It included the weekly days of fast and abstinence. Thus began the life of **"prayer, work, and self-denial which was to be observed in the seminary."** Accounts of the event were carried in Dutch and German newspapers. One daily in Cologne made special mention of the **"beautiful and healthful location of the house, on the banks of the Meuse,"** and referred to Rector Arnold Janssen as **"the Founder of the seminary who has been promoting the project, especially through his monthly magazine."** The Superior General of the Scheut Fathers sent belated good wishes from their seminary in Belgium.

**"YOU'VE PUT YOUR HAND TO THE PLOUGH. MOVE BRAVELY FORWARD. BRACE YOURSELF TO STRUGGLE COURAGEOUSLY AGAINST ALL DIFFICULTIES... THEY ARE BOUND TO COME, BUT WILL BE THE BEST PROOF THAT THIS IS A GOOD THING AND COMES FROM GOD."**





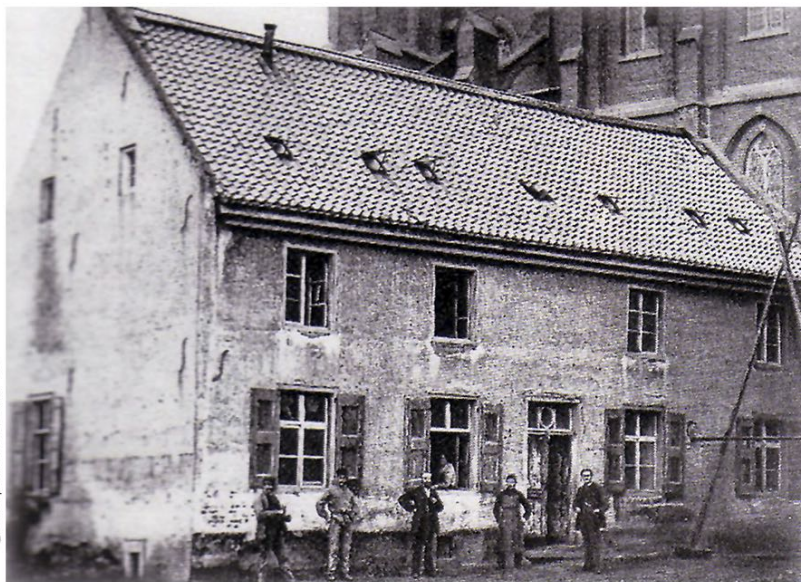
## SEPTEMBER 1875 GALLERY



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JANSSEN. Sermon on 8 September 1875 (excerpt, ed. P. McHugh) in Peter McHugh. Edited "Arnold Janssen - Yesterday and Today". *Analecta SVD-63/III*. Romae, 1998.  
 BORNEMANN Fritz. "Arnold Janssen: The Founder of Three Missionary Congregations 1837-1909". *Analecta SVD-35*. Ad Usum Privatum Nostrorum Tantum. Romae: Apud Collegium Verbi Divine, 1975.