

- What were your expectations prior to attending the Provincial Chapter?

- I didn't really have any expectations prior to the chapter. I imagined it as a kind of retreat with meetings. Other than that, I wasn't sure. I figured I would just be flexible and "go with the flow"---I could do that! I couldn't imagine how we would fill our days, let alone the evenings. I wasn't sure if I could survive without a television.

- What were some of your actual experiences of the chapter as a Lay Assumptionist?

- Where do I begin talking about such an amazing, fulfilling experience? In trying to describe it to non-religious and to my family, I had two analogies: it was like a retreat on steroids. Also, it reminded me (as a former educational administrator) of a week-long professional development experience during which time our focus was to write new curriculum or revise existing curricula.

The days were full and long. There was never a wasted moment. I was looking forward to long walks strolling on the grounds of the Retreat Center. That didn't happen! I did get two short walks in during the week. One was after a beautiful, light snowfall and the other was to do some research on a gravesite I was looking for in the Lithuanian cemetery.

My concerns about not watching t.v. were short-lived. I didn't miss it, nor did I have time to even think about my missed television dramas. Most of our nights were filled with work assignments---either finishing up some small group work or preparing for a liturgy. We did have a few nights of networking and socializing and those were most appreciated and enjoyable.

I mentioned small group earlier. The general protocol of the day consisted of meeting as a large group and being presented with some documents and proposals. We then met in small groups to review, discuss and propose aspects of the documents. Sometimes our groups were territorial, as in the English-language group or the Spanish group, etc. At other times, the groups were divided according to topic. Naturally, my topic sub-group was the Lay Alliance.

Our sub-groups were extremely interesting and open. I loved interacting with the members of each group. On some occasions I was the scribe for the group and later the reporter. Each group's discussions were always shared with the larger group. Going from the small group to the larger group was one of the steps bringing us closer to convictions and proposals for the chapter.

Other beautiful aspects of the week were the liturgies and common prayer times. Each day's liturgy and common prayer were planned by a different group. There was such a gorgeous simplicity to the times we spent in chapel! The nuances of cultural richness and prayerful devotion were everywhere. This was one way that we all experienced the internationality of the congregation. Experiencing the liturgy in different languages was a special treat.

- How did you experience the internationality of the congregation?

- The internationality of the Assumptionists was also experienced on a day-to-day basis throughout our meetings. The meetings were conducted mainly in English, but, at times, presentations were done in Spanish or in French. Translators and headphones were available to listen to the reports in our language of choice. To watch this was amazing! The group sat in a rectangle, of sorts, while translators and secretaries formed an outer group next to us.

It was a fabulous experience interacting with those of a different nationality and a different native tongue. We all did our best to communicate and that could be challenging. I realized my French was so-so and very Québécois. I also realized I need to work on some Spanish

vocabulary, at least.

- What surprised you the most during the chapter?

- A few things surprised me during the week. First of all, as I mentioned, I didn't expect the work to be so intense or the time to be so well-used. I was surprised by the rigidity of the protocol, which was absolutely necessary for us to be productive. Secondly, I always appreciated the Assumptionists for their warmth and welcoming spirit. I experienced this in the superlative throughout the chapter. Everyone, both religious and lay, showed a true sense of camaraderie and openness that was so refreshing. None of us was made to feel any lesser than the other. Lastly, I found that the Lay Assumptionists were treated on an equal par with the religious. We were truly one family and not just in theory! This reflected on what the Andean Province had noted: Alliance members are "equal in dignity, different in our roles and complimentary in mission."

- What are your hopes for the future of the province/congregation moving forward?

- I hope that the General Chapter is fruitful and is able to propel the congregation forward. I now understand the complexities of change and transformation as it impacts the congregation. All things are possible with God and only through God. I know the Assumptionists will keep their mission at the forefront of their decision-making. They are interested in responding to the needs of society and using their gifts and skills to accomplish that. I believe that they will move forward with the help of the Holy Spirit to create a better world for the people of God.

- What do you see as some of the great challenges moving ahead?

- Some of the challenges moving ahead have to do with man-power, vocations and formation. The Assumptionists are a congregation with a great charism. However, they need to attract vocations in this very secularized world that we are living in. They have to cope with a changing world that doesn't always look favorably on religiosity. It's as if the Assumptionists need to develop their "brand" and get it out there, so as to foster new vocations and attract young men to their ministry. They need more young men from around the world to help them fulfill the calling of Emmanuel D'Alzon.

- Do you have any other thoughts you want to share?

- The chapter has given me a renewed appreciation for the Assumptionists and their work. It has invigorated me in my role as a Lay Assumptionist. It has also enlightened me as to the challenges being faced by any religious congregation in the 21 st century.

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