

Along with the heat, the number of young people is a strong first impression of Vietnam. In fact, the median age of the country is 34, so appearances do not deceive. The motor scooter is still the favored means of getting around, although there are many more cars on the road since I visited the country with Fr. Dinh seven years ago. The scooters dart in and out in, somehow squeezing through spaces that look impassible. An unaccustomed Westerner has his heart in his throat.

Assumption in Vietnam is also young. Our meetings coincided with an annual workshop for young religious and candidates of the Assumption family. They spent three days together, learning about the city of Jerusalem in sessions led by Jean-Luc Eckert, AA. One of the highlights of our meetings was the chance for each of us provincials to address this large group of young people about the life of Assumption in our countries. A more informal and even more enjoyable moment was joining some of the young brothers later in the evening for grilled fish and shrimp on the beach, with some Tiger beer to wash it down.

Allow me to linger on the seafood. Our meetings were held at a diocesan facility in the coastal

city of Vung Tau, about a hundred miles from Saigon. Right on the coast, the seafood was fresh, varied, and plentiful. One casualty of the trip were singed fingers from peeling the shells off the grilled shrimp that kept on coming. Such a hardship.

The meetings themselves ranged far and wide over a rather staggering number of topics, from new foundations in Togo and Tanzania to a strong statement on requiring those in formation to learn two of the languages of the Congregation. The promise and challenges of the upcoming Asian vicariate received a lot of attention, but If anything set these meeting apart from the three previous ones I attended, it was the amount of time devoted to matters related to the formation of our candidates. Criteria for discernment, the quality of our accompaniment, the properly Assumptionist character of formation all came under consideration, at least in part prompted by Fr. General's observations on these subjects in his opening report.

The hospitality of our Vietnamese brothers - and sisters - was much in evidence, including the full-time presence of two brothers in Vung Tau. We could not have been received with more warmth and attentiveness. It may have set an impossibly high bar for us to reach next June in Worcester. The requests for lobster have already been submitted. We may have to check that out with Didier.