



- **Would you share a bit about your background: family, childhood, early education etc.?**

- My name is Hugo Fernando Morales Ballesteros. I was born in Manzanares Caldas, Colombia, in 1976. I am the second child among four siblings. I obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from the St. Thomas University and a Bachelor of Theology from the St. Bonaventure University in Bogota, Colombia. I specialized in Pedagogy. I wrote two books on the Teaching of Philosophy. I have worked as campus minister and secondary teacher for subjects related to Philosophy, Religion and Humanities. My parents have been a source of inspiration. Their faith has taught me that the purpose of life is to believe, to hope, and to strive. They have a great devotion to the Blessed Mother. It was in this atmosphere of faith and involvement in the Church that I received God's call to the religious life.

- **Where/how did your Assumptionist roots begin? Did anyone in particular have a significant impact on your life?**

- I first met the Assumptionists online in February 2015 while I accepted a Facebook invitation of an Assumptionist brother from Mexico. Then Father Roberto Reyes, who was the Director for Vocation Promotion, invited me to participate in a summer mission in the state of Veracruz. After this mission, I was accepted to start my vocational journey with the Augustinians of the Assumption in Mexico. I chose to go to Mexico because of my love for the Virgin of Guadalupe, to whom I have consecrated my religious vocation. I am grateful first to God, who has given me so many wonderful vocational experiences and filled my life with remarkable beauty. I am also grateful for those Assumptionist brothers who have witnessed to God's presence for me. Among them, I want to thank Father Gary Perron for teaching me that "true service requires a heart full of love. Love is the ultimate relationship; it allows us to connect with others in a personal way. We only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And we can be the face of the

living Christ. Love is the tool needed for world peace and it can start within our hearts”.

- Would you share some of your later education and formation memories? Do you have any favorite scripture passages?

- Throughout graduate school I learned two things: first, I have to be patient with people to get to know who they really are. One action does not define them. Most people are looking for the opportunity to reveal themselves. My favorite teacher taught me to “try and create an environment that is not judgmental and encourages openness. You must lead by example by revealing yourself”. In addition, my most significant formation experience was when I was in my novitiate in the Philippines. I had the opportunity to attend a 10-day immersion in a hospital called Tala Leprosarium where lepers are taken care of. It taught me to discover God in people who suffer from leprosy.

In sick people, one discovers the face of God. For me, Tala is the light of Christ. The light of Christ is with the lepers because they taught me to value life in small things. I also learned that the virtue of humility is in recognizing that the most important thing in people is their internal and not their physical appearance. I also learned that leprosy is not only a physical illness but also a spiritual illness when we are contaminated by our vices or sins. When our life is governed more by our personal whims and interests and not by the will of God. I learned to be a grateful person with God for my body, for my health, for my abilities. I learned that having an illness is not a punishment or a curse but a gift from God to recognize and feel his presence in order to help other people in their search for God. Finally, it made me reflect on my formation as a novice because I have a great responsibility to prepare myself strongly in the spiritual, human and community dimension to be an authentic Augustinian of the Assumption who with my life and witness can proclaim the Kingdom of God to those in need. For these reasons my favorite scripture Quote is “He must increase; I must decrease”. (John 3,30). The reason I love this quote is that it constantly reminds me that God in the center of my life, not me.

- How have you experienced growth in the living out of your Assumptionist charism?

- My novice master, Father Ngoa Ya Tshihemba, taught me that the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and passion for the Kingdom are the fundamental center of our charism. In this way, I live the charism of the Assumption being a religious brother of faith, prayer and study. For me, it is a call from God to holiness because we are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.

- Would you share any happy memories/stories?

- I thank God and my congregation for allowing me to make my novitiate in another country and thus value and be open to internationality. In this sense, for me to live in another country (the Philippines) with a different language and culture has been a beautiful opportunity to open my mind to new perspectives, to value the intercultural richness of new insights. This has helped me understand that in serving the Lord, there are no limits because the love of Christ is the universal language that calls us brothers from different cultures to be apostles of his Kingdom where God calls us to serve him.

- What hobbies or other interests do you have?

- I like to play sports, read a good book and write faith stories. I also like to contemplate nature, the creation of our Lord.

- What is your vision and or hope for the future of the congregation and/or the Church?

- Maybe this “state of emergency” (Coronavirus) is an indicator of the new face of our Church, for which there is a historical precedent. I am convinced that our religious congregation should seek to draw closer to the ideal that gave rise to the European universities: a community of pupils and teachers, a school of wisdom and also profound contemplation. Such islands of spirituality and dialogue could be source of a healing force for a sick world. The day before his papal election, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio quoted a passage from the Book of Revelation in which Jesus stands before the door and knocks. He added: “today Christ is knocking from inside the church and wants to get out”.

- Is there anything about you that you would like to share or that would surprise others?

- My faith in God has allowed me to be still long enough to get a sense of what he would have me do and to affirm that whatever the future holds, I am in good hands.