On the Second Sunday of Advent (December 5, 2010), the residents and guests at the Assumptionist Center in Brighton shared their diverse backgrounds, experiences and rich insights into the Advent-Christmas mystery.

In the predominantly Buddhist country of China, where Catholics represent 5% of the population and non-Catholic Christians are10%, the government keeps a tight control on matters of race and religion. It is difficult to live the faith openly, so religious practices are more often personal and insular. Following the reception of Confirmation, many people become lapsed in the living out of their faith. In addition, there is still much ancestral worship taking place.

Reflecting on the Advent/Christmas experience of the people in the Philippines, which is a predominantly Catholic country, it is common to celebrate this season from October through February. This time focuses on the family, with parents emphasizing the importance of sharing, though this is not easy among the poor. A particularly strong cultural and religious tradition is to prepare for Christmas beginning on Dec. 16th where by an early morning Mass each day gains momentum as the 24th approaches. This tradition which gathers families and extended families evokes life-long happy memories.

Variations of this tradition takes place in many Spanish speaking countries such as Puerto Rico and Guatemala, where being together with family and neighbors is of the greatest importance in celebrating the feast of Christ Child's birth. In Mexico, we see the very beautiful and very profound love for Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Mexicans' devotion to Mary, as a mother-in-waiting, makes up the very fiber of their religious being and gives a powerful witness to the world of what Advent and Christmas is all about.

In the Congo, the observance of Advent in preparation for Christmas, is to a great degree due to the presence and ministry of the Assumptionists in their parishes. This has also brought about a strong sense of solidarity among parishes where frequent violent attacks are taking place. For children, Christmas often means getting new clothes.

Several folks shared their memories of the Creche scene as it varied according to cultures and traditions. Here in the U.S. we are challenged by a society which highly values commercialism, particularly at this time of year. For students who are stressed with the deadlines of papers and upcoming exams, Advent could be pushed aside very easily. It was also noted that today, more

than ever, we need to hear the message of Advent which calls us to stillness, waiting, simplicity and hope!

For the Assumptionists, Christmas Eve is of utmost significance, for it was on that most sacred of nights that Fr. d'Alzon founded the congregation by his profession of first vows in Nimes, France.

As always, the 'conversations,' which nourished our hearts and souls, moved us into the dining room where the bodies was nourished by a delicious meal. Clearly the whole morning was a gifted experience of Christ's presence!