CHRONICLES OF A FOUNDATION no. 1

The installation of the community

The members of the Manila community (1) have finally landed in the Philippines some three weeks ago. Very quickly we took possession of a rented house in Quezon City, close to the Ateneo, a Jesuit University, where the Assumptionist brothers will continue their studies. As soon as we arrived, with the precious help of the Religious of the Assumption, we wandered around in the malls in order to equip the house: a washing machine for the laundry, a gas stove for the kitchen, an air conditioner for the computer room, a drinking water dispenser, etc. We moved into our house on January 25, 2006. Since then, we have been polishing it up nicely and it was no luxury. But it looks solid, a little oldish, and it would need basic repairs if we were to buy it: electricity, plumbing, toilets, windows and window screens. The garden would need also some investment but it offers some possibilities. Then we e-mailed our possible candidates of our arrival.

On February 2nd, feast of the Presentation and of Consecrated Life, we had a grand opening and our home was officially blessed and inaugurated, with in attendance the family of the Assumption in the Philippines: the Religious of the Assumption and their novices, and the Little Sisters.

The first discoveries

Little by little, we discovered our 'village', our parish, our neighbours, but also the capital, its malls and super markets…the way things are done in the country, the means of transportation: tricycles, jeepnies, bus and metro… and we walked too. Some words in Tagalog have become familiar: *mabuhay* (welcome, long life), *taho* (soya juice) sold in the streets by early morning and *balut* (aborted duck eggs) at night, but also *Am a Namin*
(Our Father). Even the music of the ice cream man rings to our ear by now. We are getting used to texting, a national sport here, which allows us to communicate with each other and with the people we meet, by cell phone at low price.

On our first Sunday outing, we discovered 'intra muros' Manila, the Old City. It was a real class in history when visiting the cathedral (with its succession of weddings in the afternoon), the museum of the Augustinians , the first religious Order to come here with the Spanish Conquerors, a superb museum and an invitation for lunch with the community; we visited the old Citadel with its memorial to Rizal, the Filipino national Hero, a walk around the National Park, where we had our first taste of *Halo Halo* (home made ice dessert), a surprise procession of the Santo Niño (the most popular devotion to the Infant Jesus of Prague), some 200 floats parading in the streets of downtown Manila with loud music, colourful costumes, dances, candies and fireworks: something of the Rio Carnival… then the big malls open on Sunday, and a final hit at some sea food restaurant at the end of the day. Enough for thanking the Lord in our evening Eucharist and dropping dead asleep.

The next Sunday was very different: we went to Antipolo where the Religious of the Assumption have a big and very modern ecological school. We attended Mass at the cathedral which is a very popular pilgrimage shrine to Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, a small wooden statue of the Blessed Mother that accompanied and protected the Spanish galleon ships on their way from Mexico in the old days. We had a taste of popular devotion and also a fraternal lunch with the Sisters.

Our local Chapter and the visit of the General Superior

On February 6 2006, Father Richard Lamoureux, General Superior, visited the community to help us through our first local Chapter. The objective was to define our mission, values and means to implement it. Here is a summary of our reflection:

Our purpose is to build an international, inter-Asian and Christ-centered Assumptionist community, sharing our charism with the Filipino people, attentive to their needs, especially those of the poor.

By build we mean we are a founding community that needs to be constructed day-by-day. We want to insist on vocation ministry for the future and the solid initial and continuing formation of our brothers, as our priorities at this time of founding. We are building this community through a gradual involvement with and insertion into the Filipino context.

We want our community to be international to express the Congregation's commitment to the mission (General Chapter #68). We want it to be inter-Asian to foster unity among all Asian Assumptionists and to open ourselves to the broader mission of the Church in Asia. We believe in the enrichment brought about by the encounter of diverse cultures and spiritual traditions as a sign of the communion that we are called to promote, especially in a globalizing world.

By Christ-centered we want to say clearly that it is Christ who gathers us together (RL 2,4). We want to deepen our friendship with Jesus Christ, source of our communion and our mission. We want to be attentive to his calls today.

We insist on community because Saint Augustine, Emmanuel d'Alzon, our founder, and our Rule of Life all remind us that community is at the heart of our vocation and our first apostolate.

Our charism defines who we are: to be a people of faith and of communion in solidarity with the poor (see General Chapter 2005). It is a gift to us and to the Church. We take seriously our responsibility to root this charism in Filipino and Asian soil.

Our apostolate will be defined gradually, by being attentive to the needs of the Filipino people and becoming more involved in their life. In addition to vocation ministry and formation, we envision involvement in the world of education and communications, with a special attention to the poor.

Common values

There are certain ways of acting (what we called "values") to which we attribute a great deal of importance. Some of these are personal, but we all believe that the following "values" should guide us as we implement our common purpose: family, fraternity, fraternal relations, family style; respect, love for the other as other; co-responsibility, accountability, openness/transparency; communication/transparency; trust; prayer; hospitality, within and without; simplicity of life; hard-working, passionate; helping others; order and joy.

We studied carefully concrete ways to achieve our goals and root our values in our daily life,

deciding on daily and weekly schedules, distributing chores and responsibilities to each one.

Here is a typical day:

Wake up around 5:00 - 5:30 at the sound of an aging rooster in the neighbourhood (but we can sleep through that by now or is it just dead?), then the motorized tricycles, million of them, simply blast the sun out at 6:00 sharp.

Time for meditation and Morning Prayer in the chapel at 7: 30 am, followed by breakfast together. There is a noon meal prepared by one of us. Evening prayer and Eucharist are at 6:15 pm followed by diner and evening recreation.

Father Richard's visit was an opportunity for us to meet the bishop of Cubao, the diocese of this part of the Capital, and with the communities of the family of the Assumption in Manila. Thus, we all met at Assumption College (San Lorenzo) for the celebration commemorating the beatification of Mother Marie-Eugenie. Father General could share with the sisters the fruits of our deliberations in local Chapter and to answer the questions of the sisters about the priorities of our last General Chapter.

Saturday February 11th, feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, we had our open house with Father Richard as guest, some family members of our Filipino brothers, friends, candidates and neighbours, including the chairman of our 'village' who had already come to meet with us. Sunday the 12th, we visited the Little Sisters in Malibay and had Vespers and diner with the two communities of the Religious in San Lorenzo.

In the weeks to come

In the coming weeks, we would like to continue the work of our local Chapter and get more specific in defining the means that we will choose to implement our mission, sharing about our gifts and skills and personal goals, in pursuing the organization of our foundation. We will register at a number of courses and seminars, start our initiation to Tagalog, the official language of the Philippines (with English) spoken in the island of Luzon where the Capital is

located. We plan to meet with the candidates to the Assumptionist community life and formators of various Religious Congregations who have a long experience in the Philippines and in Asia.

The community as a whole will register to a two week seminar on 'how to build an international community in the respect of the diversity', organized by the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA). As summer holidays will begin early in April with the warmer weather; we are planning two short retreats for candidates in the southern islands Visayas and Mindanao, we will visit their families and get to know their environment - in many ways very different from the Capital. We will also visit the northern part of the Philippines, make our annual spiritual retreat and prepare for the coming of the first residents at our Adveniat House and put together a program of formation adapted to their needs.

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