First scattering

After Easter, the community split, to go in all directions.



Fathers Jean-Marie Chuvi, Gilles Blouin and Bernard Holzer

Fr. Bernard went off to the Netherlands for the Council of the Congregation

Fr. Bernard Holzer was the first to take off: he is participating in the Council of the Congregation as a guest in order to update the Council on the new foundation in Manila and to help the work of constituting the Asian Commission asked for by the last General Chapter. The Superior General is asking him to become the first “chargé de mission” for Asia.

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Here is a short description of his mission: he will be responsible for directing the study of this priority of the last General Chapter and to insure that the decisions taken in coordination with the various Provincials involved will be followed up. As a member and general secretary of the Commission on Asia, he will stimulate collaboration between the Provinces involved in our mission in Asia and the religious working on the Asian continent; he will ensure that the Congregation has a better knowledge and understanding of the issues at stake for the Church and the Assumption; he will put forward concrete proposals to all the Provinces in order that they feel part of this particular mission The “chargé de mission” works in close collaboration with the Commission on Asia, with the General Assistant who oversees the mission in Asia, and with the Provincials involved with the various missions on the continent. He will prepare the meetings of the Commission and disseminate information at the various levels concerning ongoing projects, initiatives and decisions.After the meeting of the Council, Bernard visited the Assumptionist communities of the Netherlands and Belgium. Everywhere he went, he was welcomed with a lot of interest, enthusiasm and generosity towards our foundation. A short stay in Paris allowed him to visit a few other Assumptionist communities as well as the General Houses of the Religious of the Assumption, the Oblates and the Little Sisters…and a few friends too.

Fr. Gilles to Surigao (Mindanao) to the National Convention of the Directors of Vocations

From April 24 to 29, Fr. Gilles took part in the bi-annual meeting of the Directors of Vocations in the Philippines (DVP), which was held this year in Surigao, a Province at the Eastern fringe of Mindanao. The proposed theme of the Convention was inviting: The role of mass media and the vocation ministry. The participants numbered 234 religious men and women, lay people and diocesan priests working in Minor and Major Seminaries. A variety of veils and rainbow shades of religious habits…yet a joyous crowd, rather young.

The speakers were unevenly prepared but a number of presentations and workshops did help the participants to gain a better knowledge of the media and their possible use in vocation promotion. Assuredly, the main interest of such a meeting was to get to know the people in charge of vocations in a variety of congregations and, for us, to be recognized by all as “the little newly arrived member” of the Assumption family.

Bro. Clem Boleche and Fr. Jean-Marie Chuvi to Kauswagan (Mindanao) to a Justice and Peace seminar

From May 4 to 7, Bro. Clem and Fr. Chuvi went to Kauswagan in the Southern island of Mindanao for a national gathering promoting education to Justice and Peace. The Religious of the Assumption are behind this yearly initiative for the Congregation and their lay partners. This year’s conference was entitled: Peace, a way of Life. The town of Kauswagan was chosen because the Religious of the Assumption were present there during war time and are still in the midst of continued conflict between Christians and Muslims. The Muslim majority in the area (although a minority in the country) accuses the Christians of oppression and exploitation. The objective of this seminar was to help the participants become more conscious of the situation in the region and aware of the peace initiatives put forward by some local and international NGOs as well as the religious leaders in the inter-faith dialogue.

A visit to the University of Marawi helped them grasp how precious is education to peace in an institution which welcomes students of all faith. The University Board has this deep conviction that social development is at the basis of any education to peace. The teaching is directly connected to the needs of the population. Thus, the School of Agriculture has gradually introduced new technology to the farmers.

One of the high points of the seminar was an overnight stay in families, an opportunity to hear from within the daily hassle caused by this conflict. Impressive stories of wounds, frustrations… and also healing. Difficulties in believing in the good will of the other for an in-depth reconciliation.

The session ended with a resolution by the participants to spread the peace education skills in their apostolate throughout the country. They also resolved to share the outcome of this seminar with colleagues, students and their parents at their schools.

In the meantime, Bro. Alex Castro was continuing his summer session at the Jesuit Ateneo of Manila, thus completing his MA degree in Religious Education. The closing Mass was presided by Bishop Socrates Villegas and Frs. Bernard, Chuvi and Gilles concelebrated together with some Jesuits connected to the Institute.

Three Vocation retreats

When the community is back again as a whole, there will be so many things to share! But we have to rush and wrap up the preparation of the upcoming retreats designed for a number of young men aged 21 to 32, most of them close to the Religious of the Assumption. They are part of a list of people whom Frs. Peter Precourt, Dennis Gallagher, John Franck or Roger Corriveau met when they visited the Philippines. The program of these retreats is simple: sharing on our vocation stories, introduction to prayer life, presentation of Assumption today, particularly our new foundation in Manila, time for prayer, silent reflection and one on one dialogue with the members of the community. No one shall forget recreation : UNO, our awful card game of luck and frustration, a must for the Adveniat community.

The retreat in Iloilo

The first of these retreats was held in Iloilo, at the Cenacle, a retreat center on the campus of Assumption College run by the Religious of the Assumption. The sisters were wonderful in their warm welcome. Three young men joined the community for the retreat: Joseph, a music teacher at the college, Greg, a teacher of philosophy in Cebu (another island), and Rodel, who works in a dental clinic. Joseph and Greg will join the Adveniat community in the coming weeks for a period of community life and discernment.

After the retreat, we took some time to visit with the Archbishop of Jaro in Iloilo, His Eminence Angel Lagdameo, presently the head of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. We presented to him the community and our future projects. The last General Chapter's orientations seemed to him well suited to the Philippines, especially education and the media, as well as ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue, the preferential option for justice and for the poor. The same day at noon, we shared lunch with the people responsible for AMA (the volunteer program of the Religious) in Barrio Obrero. They coordinate the life in a poor neighbourhood and form leaders. Living in community, in the line of Jean Vanier's L'Arche communities, these volunteers run the local grade school.

We went on to visit Joseph's family. His father is a respected leader of the Muslim community of Iloilo. He blessed his son, giving him permission to become a Catholic priest and entrusting him to our care… It was a visit of great emotional intensity.

The next day, we were on our way to Antique in order to visit the father of Bro. Carlos Melocoton (presently studying theology in Boston, Mass.). Carlos's father just left the hospital where he was treated for a severe liver cancer. We went on to visit the Religious of the Assumption in their school at Sibalom, a rural area famous for its rice fields and delicious sea food (indeed!).

On our way back, we stopped over in San Joaquin to meet Rodel's family. Our meeting place was in front of the ancient parish church; its portico is a stone carved representation of the Spanish conquest over the Moors… Inside the church, a procession of some hundred children offered flowers to the Blessed Mother, as is the tradition during the month of May…

Then we spent some time with the Sisters, praying and sharing with them; they invited us to an evening barbecue on their balcony which overlooks the beautiful Iloilo River (Wow!). Early the next morning, we spent a couple hours at the beach as Chuvi took his third swimming lesson (He floated by himself for the first time… since he left his mother's womb!). That same afternoon, Bernard and Clem went to the local hospital for a visit to Carlos's mother who is recovering from a stroke which left her paralyzed on her left side of the body.

Discovery of Cebu

In late afternoon, we took a boat to Cebu. It has three classes : economy, tourist or four- bed cabins. The economy class is a large dormitory with bunk beds very close to each other. The tourist class has compartments designed for six bunk beds (already so much more private!) and

your sleeping body can be hidden by a curtain (you just hope that the air con will not fail). Reserve early: only a hundred space are available. As for the top class, well, we just did not visit…

We left the bay of Iloilo at sunset and arrived in Cebu by early morning. We passed under both huge bridges of the estuary, in front of old rusty boats, a number of fishermen's wooden houses, oil tankers, national navy flotillas, shaky fishing boats, ferries, shipbuilding yards.

Greg and his father were waiting for us at the jetty. They drove us to their home for a copious breakfast. You might have guessed that in the Philippines there is always food on the table… Any guest will be served marienda (a snack) or a full course meal. The rest of the morning was devoted to chatting with Greg`s parents, his brother and his two sisters. Then, we celebrated Mass in this modest wooden house.

After lunch, Greg's father and eldest brother toured us around Cebu, the second largest city of the Philippines and the oldest of them all. This is where Magellan landed in 1521 and planted a cross in the name of the King of Spain. We visited the historical site of Fort San Pedro where the Spanish conquerors defended the city merchants against the Muslim pirates from Malaysia and Indonesia. Our visit included a short presentation of the conquistadores enterprise (1565-1833). From there, driving along the international sea port, we crossed over the bridge to Lapu-Lapu, a city with great hotels and lavish beaches. The place is also famous for its guitar industry. We pass by the international airport and the industrial zone, all the way to the Hilton International at the very end of the Punta Ingano peninsula. Here the great battle in which Chief Lapu-Lapu defeated the Spaniards and killed Magellan (April 27, 1521) is comemorated, as depicted in a huge fresco, the battle of Mactan. We came back to town, using the new bridge built eight years ago.

We drove by Saint Joseph parish in the middle of their fiesta (balloons, colorful flags, venders of all sorts and loud music) and stopped at Our Lady of Guadalupe. We went through the old China Town towards the monument celebrating the arrival of Magellan in Cebu: he is depicted bringing with him the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe and of the Santo Nino; in the background, around the cross that he has planted, are shown a number of colonial churches built by the first missionaries and a representation of San Lorenzo Ruis, the first Filipino martyr. Next on our visit were the cathedral and the Provincial House of the Augustinians, our venerable cousins, who had the idea of renting part of their immense complex to local banks… A small, but well visited, shrine commemorates the actual place where Magellan had planted the cross on April 21, 1521; a few yards away from the National shrine of the Santo Nino; a Mass was being celebrated, with quite a crowd outdoors, as the church itself was absolutely full. In the

cloister, dozens of statues and thousands of lighted candles. On the porch of the church, vendors offered us candles or balloons or food of all sorts, while some kids begged desperately for money.

4:30 pm came. We made a short visit to the shrine of Blessed Pedro Calungsol, the second Filipino Blessed, run by the Jesuits, on the grounds of the residence of the Cardinal. Nearby, the modern church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hosts the wealthy Chinese community.

Retreat in Cagayan de Oro

In late afternoon, after a well deserved marienda, we embarked on the China for Cagayan de Oro (Mindanao). Our crazy UNO game in the hall in front of the boat's chapel caught the attention of more than one passenger.

As we arrived the next morning, we met with the community of the Religious of the Assumption on the grounds of Xavier University, where they work in the campus ministry. A few retreatants were welcomed as Gilles, Clem and Glenn were out to see the Da Vinci Code movie: it is very popular here too and generates a lot of debate. The Catholic Church of the Philippines seized the opportunity not to oppose the movie but rather to give an in depth catechesis through leaflets, DVDs, etc., truly well presented.

In late afternoon, a mini van drove us to the venue of our retreat, near the airport. It is called Sanctuario, a former farm on a large piece of land transformed into a retreat center. Just imagine a large wooden house on top of a hill, surrounded by luxuriant vegetation, with a series of mountains in the distance, palm tree plantations at the base and a zigzagging river treasured by rafters…

Six young men had responded to our invitation: Eugene, Romer, Cherkie, Glenn, Aldrin and Hector. Glenn is to graduate in philosophy and join the community this June; Hector and Bazil (who could not be present at the retreat) will join us later, in October.

We flew back to Manila and found the house dusty after these ten days, running around. We did the cleaning, picked up our e-mail and gradually got back to business…

Retreat in Antipolo

On Ascension Day, celebrated here on Sunday, we went to Antipolo at the formation center operated by our sisters, the Religious of the Assumption. We received Blair, an English teacher at San Lorenzo, Windel, a social worker in a Manila hospital, Resty and Ryan, both students in philosophy. Like it had been at the two other retreats, it was a marvellous time of sharing and prayer. We exchanged e-mail addresses and promised that we would keep in touch during the year. It sure is easier with these young men who live in the Manila area.

All through these retreats, we discovered great generosity among these young men, a genuine way of speaking of their vocation stories, and a habit of calling on each other: to participate in a retreat is quite common here and to invite a friend to come along is a natural thing. We sometimes had the feeling that this is so much like the Gospel: Andrew came to his brother Simon: “Come, we have found the Messiah!” Here, one invites a cousin or a friend to come along. We discovered new cultural traits among this very religious people, their wounds also, such as in the families where one or both parents work abroad and return only after a year or even four years…

Back to the routine

Having come home after the last retreat, we rejoiced to see Bro. Carlos Melocoton. Presently studying theology in the USA, he made this home visit to see his suffering parents and renew his visa papers. He will be able to spend quite a few days with our community.

Clem and Alex are busy with their upcoming academic year; they have to take entrance exams in new institutions. Gilles and Bernard will continue visiting formators of other Religious Congregations and deans of studies in various Catholic universities. They will also start a formation program for formators, enabling them to better grasp the religious culture of this country as well as its rich spiritual life and common values. With Chuvi, they will begin taking lessons in Tagalog. At last!

«For the time being, it is our duty to be among them like little children who have to learn the language» - Letter of Francis Xavier to missionaries in Goa (1549)

«Men pay attention only to those speeches which speak to their deep conscience… You must reveal men to themselves if you want to fascinate them… In order to express their thoughts, you must know them, and in order to know them, there is but one way: to live among them, to study them thoroughly, to penetrate them. These are the living books you have to study.» – Letter of Francis Xavier to a companion who stayed behind in India (1549)

Add to this the visits, the feasts (anniversary of ordination, soon the 60th birthday of Gilles), meetings with friends, cooking, laundry, cleaning, daily prayer, classes… and you will get an accurate picture of our routine for the coming weeks

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Miscellaneous

- The first typhoon

At the end of May, we had our first experience of a tropical typhoon. Well, only the tail of typhoon Carlos: strong winds, heavy rain, a drop in the temperature (26 degrees) and power failures. A few days later, a strong storm with bright lightning and the flooding of two bedrooms in the basement. Just getting ready for the coming rainy season.

- The month of May traditionally consecrated to Mary

Our parish church welcomed a couple dozens of statues of the Virgin: Lourdes, Fatima, Good Counsel, of Asia, of the Baranguay…They are all decorated with flowers. At the end of the Mass, people come and pray in front of them. A wooden box will receive their petitions to Mama Maria.

Praying the rosary is a common devotion in the parish and in the families. Children organize processions and bring flowers to the statue of the Blessed Mother. In the vicinity of the churches and chapels, one is offered strings of flowers to decorate the Madona. Survival economy finds all kind of means.

- Costumes

In Cebu, if Saturdays are for weddings, Sundays are for funerals; we have witnessed numerous funeral processions among the Sunday afternoon traffic.

- The rooster of our neighbour

It is alive and must have won the latest fights since there are three of them now, with their early

cock-a-doodle-do in front of our house.

Please check the latest pictures PHOTOALBUM and read previous Chronciles of a Foundation:
- Chronciles of a Foundation No. 1
- Chronciles of a Foundation No. 2
- Chronciles of a Foundation No. 3