



French by birth, Fr. Bernard Holzer, member of the Assumptionist congregation, has been stationed in the Philippines for the past ten years. Recently he participated in the International Eucharistic Congress in Cebu.

Fr. Bernard was born in 1948 in a village, Huningue, Alsatia, where three countries' borders meet: France, Germany, and Switzerland. Raised by his German father and French mother, he grew up in a multicultural context where an open spirit and good ecumenical relations were common currency. "That really marked me since the post-war context was quite special." When he was only six years old, his parish priest asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up and he replied, "I want to be like you," without knowing, as he admitted, just what that meant. Later on, his only sister encouraged him to become a religious and not a diocesan priest. "Already at a young age, I became attached to the vow of poverty." When he was 12, he entered an Assumptionist minor seminary.

"The Lord asked me to be at the service of the Church in the strictest sense of the term."

His novitiate took place in a very international context. "I was only 18 and it was exciting to be in the midst of all these cultures! It was a time of true conversion to Jesus Christ, the discovery of the God made man." To his great joy, the Second Vatican Council marked the rediscovery of the original charism of his congregation rooted in the spirit of St. Augustine. After completing his studies of philosophy and theology, he decided that he didn't want to be a 'perpetual student,' so he looked for a 'little' job and was hired as the diocesan secretary of the Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et pour le Développement/CCFD (Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development) in Strasbourg: "It was an incredible opportunity to get to know the Third World." Ten years later, Brother Bernard became the national secretary general of the CCFD until 1992. In two books that he penned he recounts his involvement in international charitable work and

how it profoundly marked his life. In 1993, he was named assistant general of his congregation and was off to Rome for two terms of six years each. It was the first time that someone who was not a priest was elected to this position. It was during this time that he received a second call, one to the priesthood: “The Lord was calling me to be at the service of the Church in the strictest sense of the term.” Ordained in 1997, he undertook the beatification cause of three Bulgarian Assumptionist priests assassinated in 1952 during the Communist regime. He said that while in Rome he had the good fortune of meeting Pope John Paul II several times.

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After this wonderful Italian experience, he left Europe for Asia in 2006 with, as his mission, the foundation of his congregation in the Philippines where he still lives. The cardinal of Manila told him that he had three wishes for the congregation's mission: 1. Embed popular devotion in a personal faith in Jesus Christ that will transform society. 2. Train priests who are close to the poor. “He said to me, ‘I don't find many here.’” 3. Strengthen relations between the Church of the Philippines with that of China. From these three wishes, he derived three missions.

In addition to being the one in charge of the French-speaking parish in Manila, he is responsible for Bayard Press-Philippines (publisher of Living with Christ and other material) and the NGO Kaloob that has as its goal outreach to the poor, and is director of a language school particularly intended for seminarians, priests, and religious from China. “Being a priest doesn't just mean saying Mass and praying all day! When one says that we need a Church that is close to the poor, you have to prove it, you have to act, you have to motivate people. I have the natural talents of a manager, it is true, but I hope that I am not a businessman like everyone else.”