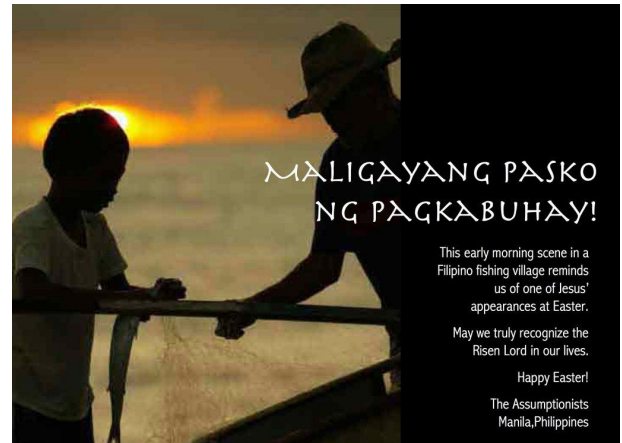


HAPPY EASTER!

Come and visit our new website:

www.assumptionists.ph

You will be able to follow the life of our community and its many activities in pictures and detailed information.



Summary

This issue will tell you about our “ordinary life” in a semester and will include a short year-end report, an article on the beginning of Lent, a situationer on the country, and even on the close of the academic year. The summer holidays coincides with the beginning of the Holy Week. In closing, you will find the usual press review.

1. An ordinary semester with extraordinary events!
2. End of the school year: peaceful yet rushing
3. Happy Easter
4. Our project this year
5. Press review

1. An ordinary semester with extraordinary events

The first quarter of the year is rather “ordinary” since it is spent on usual activities including classes for both the student brothers and the resident candidates. The school year ends on March 15 and the summer holidays start with the opening of the Holy Week and will end by early June.

■ The feast of the Black Nazarene

On January 9, at a time when the Christmas celebrations were not even at a close, two million devotees (mostly men) gathered in Quiapo, a marketplace neighbourhood of pirated items in Manila, in order to touch in some way the famous miraculous statue of the black Christ (Black Nazarene). The statue was sculpted in Mexico and was brought here in the 17th Century. Gilles Blouin, Alex Castro and Ed Molina were right in the middle of this strange crowd of bare foot men (officials claimed that there were 50 wounded and 2 dead) that turned into a popular festival of mixed faith and religiosity.

■ Second anniversary of our presence in the Philippines

On January 25, on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, the community got together to celebrate the second anniversary of our arrival in the Philippines. What a tremendous journey in two years time, thanks to your support, friendship, prayers and financial assistance.

What has changed in this second year of our foundation here?

The community had been strengthened thanks to the help of a Jesuit brother from the Emmaus Center who accompanies our group regularly, thanks to the canonical visitation of Fr. Richard Lamoureux, our General Superior and his Assistant for Asia, Fr. André Brombart, thanks also to the visit of Fr. Miguel Diaz, Regional Superior of Mexico and Formator of our Province. We had a deepening of the understanding of our vision and our mission in

the Philippines through regular community meetings, weekly life reviews and bible sharings. We also came to understand more clearly the role of each member in the community.

A formation plan has been drawn gradually, starting with the candidates and postulants, then professed brothers ... then the formators themselves.

The activities of the community grew at their own pace and have been evaluated accordingly: apostolate to the poor in the squatter area of Daan Tubo, ministry to the youth in the juvenile prison, joint apostolate with the Little Sisters of the Assumption in Malibay, ministry to the street children of Quiapo, collaboration with other catechists of our own parish of Our Lady of Pentecost, ministry to the French-speaking community of Manila, with our participation with the launching of Bayard Philippines, conducting of spiritual direction, confessions or spiritual retreats...

The community has welcomed a lay volunteer, Thomas Lop Vip, who shares our community life. He helps the community with its communication venture and with its fund raising for various projects. He is also involved in its commitment with the poor.

■ **Lent and Asian New Year**

This year, with only one day apart, the beginning of Lent corresponded with the Asian New Year. On Ash Wednesday, the Churches were full all throughout the day. On the streets, passers-by could be seen with black crosses on their foreheads as signs of penance. On the next day, the same streets and the stores were seen with dancing dragons accompanied by the sound of roaring drums hoping to scare evil spirits from disturbing the New Year, the year of the Field Rat.

The community decided to use this Lenten season to deepen the relationship among the brothers and to foster its relationship to the poor and understand better the situation in the country. This is also a time for more prayer, so we accepted the invitations to various celebrations that were extended to us. Fr. Bernard preached a two-day Lenten recollection to the priests of the diocese of Cubao, one of the six dioceses in Metro Manila.

■ **Deepening the relationship among the brothers**

During Lent, we have decided to replace our weekly social hour and movie watching (respectively on Friday and Saturday nights) by an additional time for sharing and an evening of card games: what a better way to know the characters of each other!

■ **Growing in our commitment to the poor**



Adding to our usual commitment to the people of the squatter area in our neighbourhood, the candidates have volunteered twice a week to be among the poorest of the city: families living on the streets. Indeed, the well known “street children of Manila” have become “street families” having their shanties invisible to the public eye, under a bridge or above a sewage or even in a wooden box on wheels right off the polluted streets... where nobody would ever look for them. They barely survive by collecting and sorting out rubbish and plastic bottles, sometime selling drugs or doing prostitution... Candidates Jick and Rodel visit them under the supervision of Virlanie, an NGO working with street children. The shock hit hard on them. Here is their story:



“Our apostolate with the street children at Quiapo (Manila) helps our vocation persistently. The fact that the conditions of the street children in the area are deteriorating, they need special care, love, and attention everyday. Due to poverty, they inclined themselves to work hard in looking for plastics, empty bottles, used boxes, and other materials that can be sold in order to buy food to survive from hunger. Other adults take the solvent (liquid chemical sold in the hardware); they smell it and become high and addicted to it in order to forget that they are hungry, while some young girls tend to sell themselves for prostitution. These social problems make us realize the poignant conditions of the society here in the Philippines which are pervasive. The imbalance on distribution of food, shelter, job, and education is among the main concerning issues of the society being addressed today. Since the community has given us a task to bring the message of the Gospel to the least fortunate, we have not regretted this opportunity to help them. In addition, we offer ourselves to the fascinating marginalized people even though the difficulties and the risks are among the hindrances; it is also a challenge to our mission. We believe that God is always in our midst and guides us in our good intentions. And through the intercession of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon, we can build the kingdom of God in our own way.” (Jick et Rodel)



After a short stay among the victims of the typhoon in the South of Luzon, Thomas Lop Vip was sent by the community to another area in the North towards families who could be the next victims of the heavy rains and typhoons, in the town of Piat. These families have their houses built near a river bank which erodes after each major storm. He is trying to make a relocation program for 23 families in partnership with the town authorities who will provide the land for free

See a complete presentation of the project on the website www.assumptionists.ph

■ **Trying to grasp the political situation in the country**

At the beginning of the year, a new political crisis catches the attention of the media (see our press review below). The presidential couple and some of the members of government are at the heart of a trust crisis, which is seen as profound and divisive in the population. Mr and Mrs Arroyo are accused of corruption in a 329 million US \$ deal between a Chinese company ZTE and the National Broadband Network (NBN). There was an alleged bribe of 130 M dollars! The Senate has opened public hearings on it with live TV coverage. Every day brings forth new rumours or new witnesses, revelations; old affairs surface. The whole thing is quite confusing. The Catholic bishops, pressured from all sides, are divided and play prudence. We have been trying to understand...

We joined a forum organized by the Justice and Peace arm of the Association of Major Superiors of the Philippines and another one with the Jesuits' Simbahang Lingkod Bayan - Ateneo de Manila University. Each venue presented data on the economic, political and social situation in the country by members of the government, the opposition or some NGO. The debates were of high quality: we listened to the information given by one another whose convictions were not hidden.

And for the first time, we spoke about politics at table... with a contained passion.

■ **Visitors**

In this beginning of the year, we rejoiced with the presence in the community of many visitors; they widen our horizons, our souls and our hearts. Among them, we remember the visit of Martyn Saddler, a United Church of Canada minister and long time friend of Gilles; he spent a week with us as he was on his way to Cambodia where his sister is volunteering with her husband in a relief Lutheran Center. One weekend a month, we receive Benoît Le Leannec, the nephew of Fr. Bernard Le Leannec (an Assumptionist whose ministry is in Moscow); he is a volunteer for six months with an NGO close to us (Virilanie) which works with street children. Visiting us for two weeks were Robert and Estrella Aquino, Filipinos now living in Toronto; they have known Gilles when he was the director of our shrine in Beauvoir (Québec) and as chaplain of their group on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We sure count them among the friends of the community by now.



Bro. Didier Remiot, one of the directors of the international development office of Bayard, comes to the Philippines twice a year. He was able to assess the progress of the sales of Bayard products here and have encouraged us to get involved in the promotion of the magazines. He brought along news from the Province of France, more specifically from the Vietnamese brothers since he has been named the link person of the French Province for this country. Fr. Leo Brassard, from our community in Gwangju (South Korea), spent a week with us in mid-February; we took the opportunity to have him share some insights on Father d'Alzon in the context of our Lenten recollection. And finally, on March 8, some 50 catechists and parishioners came to hold a day of formation on centering prayer on our grounds; they liked so much the peaceful atmosphere of the place that they would love to come regularly...



■ Vocation ministry

Gilles Blouin and Ricky Montañez have continued their program of visits to the contacts in the South. At the end of February, they both spent weekends either in Cebu, Iloilo, Antique or Cagayan de Oro, keeping contact with possible candidates or interviewing new young professionals interested in the Assumptionist life.

There was also a common workshop with the Little Sisters of the Assumption and their group of young volunteers, on Saturday February 16; four of our Manila contacts were on hand for this first venture.

2. End of the school year: peaceful yet rushing

During the first two weeks of March, there was an unusual silence in the house. It was the time of the preparation for the end of the year exams, or the “hell week” as it is called. People would wake up real early to make use of the fresh mornings and have a final touch to their numerous papers.

The writer of the *Chronicles* can testify that everyone had good marks: Fr. Chuvi, Bro. Ricky, Ed, Alex and Joseph, our Postulant. In the meantime, Glenn was giving his last lessons at the school in Malibay and Blair in San Lorenzo. But Blair had a Shakespeare Festival as a last duty before closing at Assumption College for his formation to Assumptionist life. Here is his account:



"This year, we decided to have for our theme, "Shakespeare with a Twist." It is a showcase of how the centuries-old texts of Shakespeare can be brought to life again in ways modern people can enjoy. I am referring particularly of the following plays: The Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar, Macbeth and Hamlet.

Education indeed does not happen only inside the four corners of the classroom. If one hopes to be successful, one has to learn that education consists of drawing out the students' potential for creativity and goodness. This is a lesson I had to learn and experience firsthand as we encouraged the students to organize Choral Recitation competitions, costume parades, exhibits and major theater productions for this festival. More information can be found in our website: (shakespearefest.wordpress.com)

As a teacher, I had to learn how to go beyond my comfort zones and had to try creative approaches for this endeavor. I have always considered myself utterly shy and reserved but we decided to surprise the students with a performance of our own. If the students can do it, so should we. Thus, we in the Literature Department had to rehearse lines in secret until the big day. Fortunately, it was met with acclaim.

I will definitely miss this school year that is about to end. In fact, I will miss teaching - as I move on with the Assumptionist formation program. But then again I believe that one who was a teacher will always be a teacher. I am glad to have been one and by being one, I discovered this beautiful path to the Assumption. The curtains do not close, but opens wide a greater mystery and challenge. Indeed, I may be leaving the classrooms but will be working on a bigger Kingdom someday." (Blair)



Right in the middle of the review week, the community experienced its first general power outage, and we do not know still the exact cause behind it. It lasted almost a week: a real test of creativity and resource management for all, students and cooks alike... Thank God, Pavel House had electricity and could provide a shelter for those studying late at night or more simply to secure the goods coming from our deep freeze.

Meanwhile, Fr. Bernard was in the USA at a Council of the Province meeting and at a formators' meeting. He used his time there to meet with many of the brothers and get acquainted with the Development Office resources in Boston. He also hoped to get some rest on the campus of Assumption College since the students were out for the Spring break... (although it looked more like Winter this year, with the amount of snow still covering the ground in all of New England!).

3. Happy Easter



As we finish writing these *Chronicles*, we are entering the Holy Week. This year it will be very special since we are welcoming eight Provincials and General Assistants on their way to the Council of the Congregation in Gwangju (South Korea).

You can follow their discoveries on our new website: www.assumptionists.ph. To all of you we wish a joyful feast of Easter!

4. Our project this year

We would like to present to you a project that is dear to our heart this New Year. It would be our own way of supporting the Church in Asia, particularly in China, Myanmar, Indonesia and East Timor, for the formation of their leaders and future priests. Their formation is very difficult in their respective countries.



Our community would like to offer to some of them a home for their studies, close to the main centers of spiritual and theological formation in Manila, and where they would find many other young people in formation from all over Asia. We would offer them the possibility to develop their proficiency in English, a community set-up conducive for study, prayer, sharing and common activities. It will also be for us and our Congregation a means to open up ourselves to

the reality of these countries and these Churches.

This «Asian Home», to be built on our property here would offer 22 bedrooms (with toilet and shower), a community lounge, a study room (fully equipped with computers), an oratory, kitchen and dining room, laundry room. The total cost is 13 million pesos (210,000. euros or 300,000. US\$).

The construction would take about eight months. We expect to have our first guests for the school year starting in June 2009. We already have a long waiting list...

If you are interested about this project, please ask us for more information.

You may send your contribution to. You can indicate the project that you want to support. You can see our website www.assumptionists.ph (section “Help us to help others”):

For Europe

In euros: Assumption, 79 Avenue Denfert-Rochereau 75014 PARIS France

For North America

In American dollars: Montmartre Canadien - 1679, Chemin Saint-Louis - QUEBEC G1S 1G5 - Canada.


In Canadian dollars : Assumption Guild - 330 Market Street - BRIGHTON, MA 02135 - USA

If you wish to receive a tax exemption/deductible receipt for your gift, please send your gift to Procure Missionnaire de l'Assomption (Paris), Montmartre Canadien (Quebec) or Assumption Guild (Brighton, USA), and indicate clearly on your check “For the foundation in the Philippines”.


For the Philippines

In Pesos, Augustinians of the Assumption 686-100-197-9 Bank of the Philippine Islands - Katipunan Branch - Loyola Heights - QUEZON CITY - Philippines

5. Revue de Presse

 The Filipino of the Year 2007

According to the *Philippine Sunday Inquirer*, the 2007 Filipino of the Year 2007 is Ed Panlilio, a priest elected as Governor of Pampanga, often called a *prophet of hope* (see *Chronicles from Manila* no. 2).

 A scandal at the highest level

Since the beginning of the year, the Filipino newspapers run one major story – even among the paid publicity pages – and that is the scandal involving a deal with China where the husband of the President and other high-ranking people like the former chairman of the Electoral Commission presumably received bribes, in an ambiance of settling of scores and rumours not easy to verify.



Many witnesses were called to the Senate hearings, which were largely broadcasted on TV. Fantastic series of events have been put into light, like this one: the original contract lost in transit on the plane...How to check that one out?

Rodolfo Lozada, one of the engineers who brokered the deal, had run away from the country so as not to be present for the hearing as requested by the government, so he says. But he flew back to the country and was allegedly kidnapped by the presidential guards upon landing and was found secured by a group of nuns... who in turn organized a press conference before he is taken to the Senate. Immediately, he becomes a national hero...

The President of the Bishops' Conference praised the courage of Lozada, wished that the whole affair be cleared out and that the honour of the country be restored. Church groups asked prayers for truth and justice, usually at three in the afternoon, the hour when Jesus died on the Cross. Rallies and Masses were organized in most major Catholic universities, often with the presence of Lozada and former President Cory Aquino. By the hour, new revelations came out.

The Bishops' Conference held two extraordinary meetings on the present political crisis. On January 27, in their common statement entitled "*Let us convert and let us believe in the Gospel*" they urged the faithful "*to place the common interest above personnel interests*". According to the bishops, it is not by changing government that the country will get out of the political and economic stagnation of the last decades but in working together for the common good of all people.

The events have found the Bishops' Conference divided; the bishops only agreed on not putting out a political statement, refusing to sign in the traditional role of the Church as a healer of political crisis, like the position of the late Jaime Cardinal Sin at the time of two People Powers in 1986 or more recently in 2001 overthrowing the political leaders of the time (Marcos and Estrada).

In their statement, the bishops recall what they see as the structural problems which undermine the Filipino society for a long time: deeply rooted corruption, political killings, aborted agrarian reform, electoral reform, political and economic oligarchy, environment related problems. "*We are desperately short of public conscience in our society. We must realize that we all contribute to worsen the situation in favouring our personnel interests, in letting in other hands the future of our country by our apathy and our opposition to change, which allow us to vote for people we should not trust in. We want to see stronger commitments and wiser responses from the part of the faithful in matters of corporate responsibilities and good government, enlightened by the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church*".

The editorials note the striking mixture of corruption and poverty, but also the denial of basic human rights and a culture of impunity. They also stress the loss of basic trust of the people in their government or possible political change; they argue that the political opposition is even less credible if not even more corrupted than the present government.

The same newspapers denounce the threat to the life of civilians witnessing in the trials against the State.

On February 23, the President admitted that she knew about misdoings just before signing the deal with China. She could not renounce signing the contract at that point, given the ties between the Philippines and China. But recognizing the "abnormalities", she later broke the contract... What are they? The day after this interview on the radio, a speaker for the Palace denied the President saying that, yet an authenticated recording is leaked to the media...

The Chinese government is silent; bribes can bring death penalty there... The Chinese ambassador to the Philippines says that the Senate hearings have gone too far in this case.



The *telenovela* continues with its low strokes, its threats, its many versions, its states and denials... with public appeals to support the President and her government or calls to step down... Some people play the card of the fear of another coup. The army shows support to the President, organizing an all-out rally on the very day of the anniversary of EDSA-1 which overthrew dictator Marcos. One of the many issues is to favour the change through the institutions rather than through the street. But when the institutions disqualify themselves...?

The society is divided on the issue... even the alumnae of Assumption College and the former classmates of the President take sides against each other in paid ads in the major newspapers of the country.

■ **Yet, life goes on...**

- Speaking and writing the Chinese Mandarin language may soon be taught in public schools with the help of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Inc (FFCCCII) and the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.

- A 2004 Kirin Research Institute study ranks the Philippines as the 5th highest beer consumer in Asia (next to China, Japan, South Korea and Thailand), with 1.4 billion liters consumed annually and projected growth of 15.6 percent per annum. A Filipino drinks an average of nearly 20 liters of beer a year.

- On Palm Sunday, in Las Vegas, the light weight boxing champion Manny Pacquiao did it again: World Champion!

■ **... and important problems are not soon being solved...**

■ War in Mindanao

The President of the Republic is asking the Congress and the Senate to change the Constitution in order to put an end to the rebellion of the Moro people and to allow the creation of an autonomous Muslim territory in Mindanao, after decades of confrontation between the Muslim separatists and the army. The opposition denounces the initiative as a diversion in the public opinion from the many cases of corruption.

■ The fate of the Filipino Overseas Workers

- Officially, the number of FOW is 1,073,402. But the government authorities are frightened by the number of illegal workers abroad, mainly in the Middle East and more specifically in Jordan.

- The amount of money sent back to the Philippines by these workers is phenomenal and continues to increase even against a weaker American dollar.

- In the USA, Filipino workers are getting organized in order to have their voices heard during the up-coming electoral campaign. They encourage those Filipinos who are now American citizens to vote and put up questions on immigration policies.

- In Doha, the capital city of Qatar, there was the consecration of the first Catholic parish in the country. The new parish priest is a Filipino Capuchin. According to the statistics of the Filipino embassy, nearly 120,000 Filipinos live in Qatar and 85% of them are Roman Catholics. Most of them are employed by oil or gas companies, some others work in hospitals or are care givers. With some Indians, Sri Lankans and a few Lebanese, they constitute the majority of the faithful of this single Catholic parish in the country.

- In Hong Kong, in 1995, 130,000 out of 150,000 care givers were Filipinos. They were very badly treated. The second edition of a book has just been released: "Maid to Order in Hong Kong. *Story of Migrant Workers*", by Nicole Constable, Cornell University Press, 2007, 242 pages.



Murders, illegal arrests and blackmails

- On Tuesday, January 15 2008, Fr. Reynaldo Roda, Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMI), 54, was killed in Tabawan, in the island of Jolo, in the Southern part of the Philippines; he had been a missionary there for the last ten years. He was simply praying inside the church and opposed his kidnapping. He is the third Oblate to be killed in the last few years.

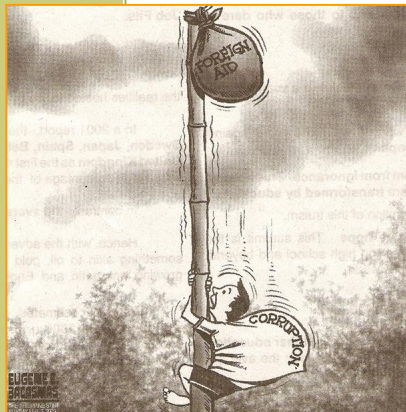
- On Friday, January 24, Felicissimo Catambis, a sixty-year old minister of the United Church of Christ was murdered in Leyte while driving his motorcycle. He is the third clergyman of his Church to be killed in the last three years.

- The mayor of Cotabato City said he paid *protection money* to a gang to spare his city from terror attacks, but it didn't work.

- The Filipino citizens chose prayer over reporting crime. 85% of people prefer to seek divine intervention rather than file a complaint at the nearest police station, a study undertaken by the Philippine National Police (PNP) revealed.

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Poverty



- According to the National Statistics Office, the number of poor families (with a salary of less than 6,274 pesos per month (US \$155 or 105 euros) has gone up from 4 million in 2003 to 4.7 million in 2006. The number of poor people has increased by 23.8 million in 2003 to 27.6 million in 2006. That means that one Filipino out of three (32%) is considered poor according to the government criteria. The same study reveals that the number of families with not enough resources for their food has gone from 1.7 million to 1.9 million; 12.2 million Filipinos do not eat to their full!

- The same Office released that the number of pregnant teenagers has increased dramatically. On 1.7 million children born in 2004 (818,000 in 2000), 8% were born to mothers aged 15-19, mostly among poor people. 10% of these children are underfed.

- A study conducted last year by the National Economic and Development Authority showed that 60% of Philippine National Police personnel live below the poverty line.

Health problems

Three cities of Metro Manila have seen cases of dengue increase considerably. The Ministry of Public Health is worried. The deadly disease is observed mainly in over crowded areas like Quezon City, Manila and Caloocan City.

And yet the economic situation of the country is good

- In 2007, the national net growth ranged between 6.9 and 7.3%, the highest in 31 years. This rise is partially due to heavy governmental investments, the increase of services like the call centers and the high consumers spendings.



- Early February, economic experts from the Citigroup, a major player in the banking system here, are foreseeing a peso at 35 to a US dollar by the end of the year. For the moment it is at 40. Yet the Central Bank of the Philippines is seeing an inflation rate of 4.4% in 2008 which should decrease to 3.3% in 2009. But that does not change much in the life of the poor people...

March 15, 2008
Manila - Philippines

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