



# Chronicles from Manila n°6 April - May - June 2008

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## Summary

In the Philippines, the beginning of the school year is history. The summer holidays, which started during Holy Week, is also a thing of the past. But during these past months, there have been so many activities and discoveries. Then, there is the reality of a new venture with a new group of people. In closing, the usual press review.

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### 1. Breaking news: first final vows far an Assumptionist in the Philippines!

The community recently received the happy news from Rome: Fr. Richard Lamoureux, our General Superior, has accepted Bro. Ricky Montañez for his final vows. The celebration will take place in Manila on August 23. The next *Chronicles* will comment on the event at large.



### 2. Holidays and Holy Days

In the Philippines, the summer holidays usually start with the Holy Week. The whole country is at rest and becomes pious for the paschal celebrations. People go back to their provinces for family reunions. In Manila, public transportations hibernate from Holy Thursday until Easter Sunday. Shops observe a short truce, restaurants offer a Holy Week light diet menu. McDonald's publicity is just one example :

*"We know that majority, if not all, Catholic Filipinos observe Lent, so McDonald's follows this through its offering a Filet-O-Fish to its customers, now available 24 hours, 7 days a week. So from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, you can feast as McDonald's Filet-O-Fish joint you 24/7! Spread the good news to your family and loved one this Lenten Saison!"*

#### **An impressive parish program of activities**

Our Lady of Pentecost parish offers this kind of Holy Week schedule, in tune with the rest of the Philippines:

#### Holy Monday

Holy Week recollection for children: 9:00 – 11:00 am  
Holy Week recollection for house helpers: 2:00 – 5:00 pm  
Parish Holy Week recollection: 7:30 – 9:30 pm

#### Holy Wednesday

Children's Penitential Service with Individual Confession 9:00 am  
Community Penitential Service with Individual Confession 7:30 pm

#### Holy Tuesday

Singing of the Passion  
Holy Week Recollection for Children 9:00 – 11:00 am  
Holy Week Recollection for Tricycle Drivers 2:00 – 5:00 pm  
Youth Holy Week Recollection 7:30pm - 9:30 pm

#### Holy Thursday

Chrim Mass and Renewal of Vows of priests at the Cathedral of Cubao 7:00 am  
Evening Mass of the Last Supper, Washing of the Feet and Transfer of the Blessed Sacrament 5:30 pm  
Vigil and Visits of Churches 7:30 - 10 pm  
Confession 8:00 - 10 pm



During the Chrism Mass in our diocese, a traditional must for members of our community, Bishop Honesto Ongtioco gave the meaning of the up-coming Easter celebration as a feast of liberation:

*“The Lord has been speaking to us through the events in our country. We experience a social and political mess. We are unhappy, confused, discouraged and we are tempted just to become pessimistic, cynical and indifferent. There is too much lies, corruption, violence, cheating and stealing in our midst. We do not know whom to believe, where would all these uncertainties lead us... The season of lent leading to Easter teaches us how to hope, where to hope, whom to trust and where we are going. The history of salvation teaches us that the road to freedom, real and lasting happiness is long. We have to pass through purification and conversion before we can liberate from everything that oppresses us. Through communal action and circles of discernment - our parishes, BEC communities, organizations and movements, we journey as a people guided by the Spirit of Truth, Love and Unity. Happy Easter to all!” (Mgr Honesto Ongtioco)*

#### Good Friday

Parish Way of the Cross 6:30 am

Veneration of the Cross 3:00 pm

Procession of the Images of Santo Entierro, Madre Dolorosa and others 4:30 pm

#### Holy Saturday

Easter Vigil 8:00 pm

#### Easter Sunday

The early Mass, at 5:30 am, is particularly well attended as it features the encounter of the Risen Lord with his Mother, the *Salubong*. There will be six other Masses later in the day...

Since the parish priest had already led three Ways of the Cross weekly the previous weeks (thus covering the different parts of the parish territory), it is easy to understand that when Easter Monday comes, he is somewhat exhausted. This is the reason why the bishop invites all his priests to a picnic on that day, in order to thank them all and wish them a happy and quiet holiday.

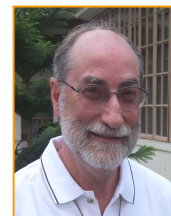
#### Holy Week in family

This year for Holy Week, the community welcomed eight Provincial Superiors and members of the General Curia on their way to South Korea for the Congregation's annual general meeting.



*Legend : Roger Syayipuma (Assistants to the Provincial of Africa), Niceto Calle (Provincial Superior of Spain), Marcel Poirier (Provincial Superior for North America), Ephrem Kapitula (Assistants to the Provincial of Africa), Jean-Daniel Gullung (General Bursar), Emmanuel Kahindo (General Assistant), Edgardo Muñoz (Provincial de Chili - Argentine), and Julio Navarro (General Assistant).*





They had a pretty heavy schedule:

*“In the Philippines, the Holy Triduum is a national holiday and the people are very religious. For the Mass on Holy Thursday evening at the parish, the church was filled to the balcony. On Good Friday, the Way of the Cross in the streets of the parish was starting at 6:00 am, making good use of the early morning fresh air. By 8:00 am, the community and the guests were taking a bus for San Fernando (50 km north of the Capital) in order to witness the well known processions of penitents (we were told that they were over 200 of them), walking the streets in groups while self flagellating. Around noon, we headed to an empty field in the outskirt of town where the crucifixions are held; they started at around 2:00 pm. They are like a re-enacting of the Passion of Jesus with its dialogues and costumes. Most people will leave after the first group of crucifixion (as we did) while some other 24 men will be crucified in the course of the afternoon. I took many pictures of the bystanders with the atmosphere of fête, but none of the penitents with their back stripped of their skin and their blood splashing on the nearby cars (...)*

*I really preferred the liturgy at San Pedro parish in the afternoon, which was followed by a long procession with carts and life-size statues of the various characters of the Passion story: after the Good Friday liturgy, the population accompanies Christ to the cemetery where he lays with the dead people of their families. By 6:00 pm, it is already dark and the lights decorating the carts just make them more beautiful. This procession was more meaningful to me and was telling a lot about the popular devotion and real fervor of these numerous parishioners.*

*For the Easter Vigil, we all went to the Gesu, the church of the Jesuit University where some of our brothers study. It started at 8:00 pm and was over by 9:45 pm, the shortest Easter Vigil I have ever experienced. On Sunday morning, we went to our parish for an early celebration: just before the Mass started, there was a double procession, one with the statue of the Risen Jesus (coming from the nearby cemetery, if there were one) and from the opposite direction, his mother Mary with another group of people. They will meet in front of the church where a little girl dressed as an angel will undo the black veil covering Mary as the crowd applauds and sings: “Rejoice, Queen in heaven, because the One that you bore is truly Risen”. Then, everyone enters the church following the two statues for the Mass proper. The encounter of the Risen Jesus with his mother is not to be found in the Gospels or in the creed, but this enacting of the “Regina Coeli” has something really touching.*

*On Easter Monday, we visited a popular neighbourhood and bought some souvenirs. We passed by Santo Tomas University where Bro. Alex studies Theology (he was our guide) and visited the church of the Black Nazarene: a wooden statue of a black Jesus carrying his cross, like we had seen on one of the carts of the Good Friday procession. It is a huge pilgrimage church, filled with people in prayer, like the chapel of the Miraculous Medal in Paris where one finds people praying all through the day. We ended the excursion by the sea side, eating a delicious fish.*


*On Tuesday, our visiting program brought us to the Jesuit University and its center for Pastoral studies (East Asian Pastoral Institute). Later we met with the bishop of Imus, Bishop Chito Tagle, who introduced us to the challenges of the Church in the Philippines. On Wednesday, we were greeted at the school of the Religious of the Assumption in Antipolo. On that same evening, we commemorated the first anniversary of the community into their new house by the celebration of the Eucharist and a farewell dinner. The next day, we were on our way to Korea”. - (Fr. Jean-Daniel Gullung, French, General Bursar in Rome)*

Many among our guests sent in impressions on their visit with us. You will find them *in extenso* on our website at [www.assumptionists.ph](http://www.assumptionists.ph). Here are some of them:



*“What I knew about Manila before coming is that the city was polluted! But it is also a city where everyday I had the impression of being in front of two worlds apart separated by a profound gap. On one side, the rich people, on the other side a whole world of poor people. On the streets, I could see tainted car windows amidst lots of jeepneys and tricycles... One cannot miss that the trains of the subway are so much cleaner here than the ones passing through popular neighbourhoods. Then I saw many squatter areas next to rich guarded “villages” where there are no power shortage. When I read the newspapers though, it seems that there should be a lot of means available in the country to bridge these two worlds”. (Fr. Emmanuel Kahindo, DR Congo, General Assistant in Rome)*






*“The community in Manila has two houses: Adveniat House for the religious and the postulants, and at a five minute walk distance Pavel House, for the aspirants. A cultural difference is striking: you just do not enter a house with your shoes on. I thought that I was entering a mosque!*

*The community is foremost a house of formation for young Filipino religious and for vocations. This is its main goal. It is inserted in the local Church by participating in the life of the parish, by helping in a nearby squatter area.*

*The community has the project of opening a novitiate in the former novitiate of the Religious of the Assumption, with Fr. Richard Brunelle as the master of novices. Another foundation in the South of the country is also possible in the long run. Another dimension of the projects of the community is to welcome priests, religious and seminarians of other Asian countries (China, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, etc.). The lifestyle of the community is very simple. The members take turns in cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry in order to participate in the financial aspect of their common life; there is no car and fortunately transportation is not too expensive. There is no television either” (Fr. Roger Syayipuma, DR Congo, Nairobi)*



*“I personally suffered much from the heat. The climatic temperatures of this beautiful place were a form of penance for me. However, I was able to enjoy to a great extent the community atmosphere that I experience among you. I did not feel a stranger at all participating in such manner that is truly Assumptionist in living out community life: much welcome, joy, simplicity in the sharing and a very strong community prayer. How beautiful were the community prayers!*

*I liked very much that I had visited the Little Sisters of the Assumption and to get to know the sites where they work. I felt very contented to see their apostolate and be a witness of their courage in their work and the affection towards them by the people they work with. In the same manner, it was very good to have known the Religious of the Assumption. The Assumptionists of the Philippines have a strong family spirit, being in close contact with our dear sisters.” (Fr. Edgardo Munoz, Provincial Superior of Chile – Argentina)*

#### ■ **Heavy schedule of activities during the summer holidays**

Weather all through summer has been unusual. It was very hot (35 degrees) yet the sky was often covered with clouds and there were also showers; nights were cool (at least for people used to warm temperatures!). All through this time of holidays, there were many activities.

#### Ongoing formation and spiritual retreats

One major aspect of this year's holidays was the formation that people took: Ricky Montañez, Ed Molina, Rodel Cervantes and Rey Desamparado were completing courses in Philosophy. Alex Castro followed a workshop for spiritual retreat leaders and another one for archivists.

#### Training Program for Retreat Facilitators

*“Last April 1 to 11, I participated in a Training Program for Retreat Facilitators which was facilitated by a team from the Cenacle Sisters. The first part of the program focused on basic theories and principles in facilitating retreats for youth groups. The second part was focused mainly on the presentation of modules applying the basic theories and principles we learned from the first part of the program. Through the workshops presented we were able to adopt the principles to certain target audiences and groups. We were also taught how to integrate media (audio, movies, print) in retreats and recollections for youth groups.*

*I find the program very helpful and enriching as I start a new apostolate in Campus Ministry where the focus of attention like what the program emphasized is the faith formation of one of the Church's important target audience - the young people.” (Alex)*

Ed Molina was enrolled in a seminar for Spiritual Directors. The two postulants, Joseph Macalangan and Blair Nuyda, had a workshop on PSI (Psycho-Spiritual Integration).

#### Quest for Inner Fire

*“Joseph and I spent about two weeks in Baguio to participate in the "Quest for Inner Fire", commonly known as PSI or Psycho-Spiritual Integration Workshop. It was facilitated by the Jesuit-sponsored Emmaus Center of Psycho-Spiritual Integration. The workshop consists of four modules that range from the Embodied Self to Transcendence. There were various activities conducted to lead the participants to prayer, sharing and reflection.*

*There were other participants from other religious congregations. Some were priests and there were also a number of lay participants. The time spent there was really an opportunity to face our personal histories and issues, examine and deepen our motivations and to be truly conscious of God's hand in our lives. Personally, I am also thankful for the opportunity to get to know and deepen bonds with other people whom I can consider fellow-pilgrims on a quest for meaning.” (Blair)*



For the candidates and soon to be postulants, it was time to have the entrance exams at various Catholic universities in Manila. They all succeeded well!

Alex, Ed and Ricky took some time off for their annual spiritual retreat in preparation for the renewal of their vows. The other religious will wait for the beginning of the school year to have their own.

At the end of May, Bernard Holzer and Ricky Montañez participated in an Assumptionist international seminar for Formators in Brazil, in our Assumptionist retreat house in Pinhal, two hour bus ride from São Paulo. They took time to meet with the Assumption family in Rio and Campinas. They are very grateful for the warm welcome everywhere they went. (You may find a summary of the program of the seminar of the Congregation website at [www.assumptio.org](http://www.assumptio.org))

*“Aside from being an opportunity for me to see and be with the many significant persons I came to know from my novitiate days in Chile, the encounter of formators in Brasil last May also gave me the chance to listen to the experiences and expertise of the formators in the congregation. For someone like me who is being introduced to formation work while still under formation, it was a chance to learn from both the young and old in the congregation. I was especially struck by the youthful composition of those who participated. For me, it was a sign that in the congregation young people are being empowered to take on important responsibilities that have a bearing on the future of our religious family. This is very significant since young people are supposedly best represented and understood by fellow young people.*

*This observation, however, does not mean to say that I give little regard to the valuable experiences and contributions of our brothers, who are more advanced in age, present in the encounter. In fact, there were lively exchanges of perspectives especially in the afternoon workshops where the many issues concerning the formation work among young people today were discussed. Their presence was a reminder of the importance of gaining wisdom from experience and of paying attention always to the formative instances in the past. With them we were made to evaluate and identify where we have gone astray in our work so as to guide us on the right track in our present endeavors. As it is often said, it is always necessary to look again at what we missed the first time, to view an old reality in a new way and to learn from it.*

*Very strongly pointed out in the encounter, the most vulnerable stage of initial formation seems to be the post-novitiate stage where most brothers find themselves grappling with reality and the ideals of religious life formed in them most significantly during novitiate. I personally feel that this is an area of concern that needs to be addressed very seriously. Coupled with this is the need for a solid spiritual formation among the young people in formation.*

*I was also fascinated by the resurgence of the issues concerning the proper and improper use of mass media and the different modern-day means of social communication. There were different positions presented. In the end, what we agreed was that young people should be formed very well on the responsible and proper use of mass media and these means of social communication. I had the impression that people wanted to discuss this further.*

*Lastly, the festive spirit and fraternal atmosphere that pervaded the entire session was an affirmation that our communities could only flourish if and when they become places of joy and fraternal concern. It is said that joy is typical of the young. This means that our communities should attract more young people. We are challenged to form them well even with our limitations. If we do so, the future would prove to be very promising for us all. Thank you dear brothers of the Province of Brasil for the hospitality!” (Ricky)*

#### Vocation Ministry and summer camp

Towards the end of April, Ricky visited some contacts in Cebu and Iloilo while Gilles took part in the National Convention for Vocation Directors in Palo, Leyte.

*“Every other year, those in charge of the ministry of Vocation Promotion, religious and diocesan priests, meet for four days of formation and sharing. This year meeting took place at the diocesan pastoral center of Palo, in the province of Leyte, and gathered 264 vocation promoters from April 20 to 25. Particularly well known speakers were invited: Bishops Ambo David (scriptural approach) and Chito Tagle (contextualization), Fr. Roger Champoux sj (psycho-spiritual challenges). The eight bishops of the Episcopal Commission for Vocations took part in the meeting at some point. People went back home rekindled in their ministry, better equipped for a challenging work of proposing to young people the full time service for the Kingdom of God”. (Gilles)*



A new venture in this vocation apostolate was a week long working camp to help the victims of a typhoon in the province of Albay rebuild their homes in a relocation site.

Nine of our contacts were invited for this project and had a two day orientation at Adveniat House to get to know each other and prepare for such an activity. Some of them were in Manila for the first time and could discover some aspect of the capital and reflect on the issue of solidarity with the poor as watching a movie on Mother Teresa (with actress Geraldine Chaplin). Then they left for a ten hour overnight bus ride to Legaspi, where the Daughters of Charity supervise a relocation project. Ricky, Gilles and Thomas were accompanying them in an experience that surely impressed them deeply. Peter Lumactod, one of the new candidates at Pavel House, shares with us his impressions after the camp:



*“My seven days exposure to the community of Malobago in Anislag, Albay resettlement area had redirected my self-concept on how to become more simple, keen to the need of others, prayerful and be always grateful to God's providence. These are the values that have been re-sharpened during my exposure.*

*Being exposed in the resettlement area was for me an opportunity to apply my knowledge in real life situations. I thought of giving them an appealing advice in relieving their discomfort, of showing them the right means of easing their sad memories on that fateful days of destructions. Quite the contrary, I was the one who received the wisdom on how to become more simple and mindful of other's needs. Their hardship and painful experiences enable me to see and differentiate the natural law of love as greater than the law of destruction. They have taught and inspired me to live more fully the Christian way of life.” (Peter Lumactod)*

### Solidarity with the poor

For our candidates, this time of holidays was the opportunity to help the street children of Quiapo, a poor section of Manila. Joseph Macalangan spent some time with them; here is how he reports his experience with Virlanie, a NGO working with the street children:



*“When I went to Quiapo for my exposure with the Virlanie children, one thing I have observed while working with these children, is their hunger for love, affection, understanding and attention. This was manifested by their constant need to be hugged by us. Also, they hunger to learn. They were very enthusiastic to learn. They like to watch movies like “The Little Mermaid” and “Lion King”; they also love to listen to stories particularly the story of creation.*

*I was able to visit their houses in a very depressed area, some lives under the bridge, and some on the river bank. From this realization, I felt fortunate to have a decent home with my family. But this does not hinder them to hope for a better future. For instance, a boy named Joshua whose house is in the river bank, told me that he wanted to be an engineer so that he help his parents. I believe and I pray that his eagerness and determination will eventually help him reach his dream. The Virlanie experience was a humbling experience because I have no reason to boast for myself, but instead I should be more humble because I find myself to be more privileged than they.» (Joseph)*

Glenn Galvez had a totally different experience working with the scavengers in Las Pinas.



This is his story:

*“My experience of work lasted through the whole month of May in Balikatan –Las Piñas, in what is called a junk shop (waste recovery facility). It was indeed a waste land of more than one hectare and a half surrounded by a metal sheet fence with huge piles of plastic, cardboard, cans and iron, papers, and boxes. Poor people were coming with whatever they had found in the waste bins on the streets and get money for it; we would select and sell to processing shops.*

*This was all day under the sun, with terrible smell and dust, without an ounce of shadow. I was working with ten people among whom there were three teenagers. We had to sort out the in-coming materials, to weigh it and pay the vendors and process the materials and pile them up in the appropriate containers. When the containers were full, we would call the processing shops which would come and buy the products in bulk. I worked from 8:00 am until 5:30 pm, with a half hour lunch break and two shorter breaks mid-morning and mid-afternoon to have some bread and water at our personal expense. Some of my co-workers would quit the job only towards 9:00 or 10:00 pm, depending on the arrival of new material. Those working with me were married men having their family in a squatter area nearby. They could earn between 5,000 or 6,000 pesos a month (\$110.) without any other compensation (insurance, social security...).*

*I was sleeping there all week, sheltered by the family who owns the business. After my work hours, around 6:00 pm, I would go to church to hear the Mass with three teenagers and her daughter, and translate for them in Tagalog the Scripture readings of the day. In the evening, I helped them with their math, science and English lessons. I would watch TV for a short while or discuss with the owner on her balcony. She feels lonely since her husband and her sister died on a hold up.*

*When I first got there, I did not say that I was a seminarian. Only Mss. Liezel and her father knew about it. So, I did not have any special treatment and at times my co-workers were a little rough on me and they were wondering why I was working there.*

*This work experience with poor people taught me a lot of things. First, how to communicate, and how to deal with people with little education, and who live in very poor conditions, how to live a simple life. Then, I learned about ecology, how important it is to recover old things and recycle them. I learned patience at work, especially when frustrated people push you around. Most of all, I appreciated that people trusted me and shared with me at times some painful secrets”. (Glenn)*

#### Home visits

This time of holidays allowed some of us to visit with their family. Jean-Marie Chuvi was the first one to leave, at the end of March. He went to Africa for two months visiting his family, his Assumptionist brothers and his friends in Congo, Tanzania and Kenya.

*“During the months of April and May, I was happy to see my family again, my friends, my brothers and sisters of the Assumption family. After a week spent in Nairobi, I went to my family for the rest of the month, especially because my father was suffering of stomach ache and a narrowing of his oesophagus. I went with him in a hospital of Mulago (Uganda) for analyses and he was treated in a private clinic. He is now feeling a little bit better. I am grateful to the community and all those people who helped us financially during this time of trial. In May, I was able to visit and chat at length with Assumptionist brothers and sisters in Kenya, in the Congo and in Tanzania. They all wanted to know more about our mission in the Philippines. Most of them are regular readers of our “Chronicles” and knew about our activities. There were also two Filipina volunteers who worked with our brothers in Nairobi and were thus introduced to the warm personalities of the people from the Philippines. I explained to our African brothers that our young mission here needs support. Some would be ready to join us if invited. I am very thankful for the warm welcome everywhere, the sharing and especially the prayers for all of us here and our mission” (Chuvi)*

Alex, Ed and Ricky spent a few days in their families in Pampanga, Bacolod, in Parañaque, a neighbourhood in Manila and in Negros Occidental.

The candidates and the postulants were also with their families during the month of May. Blair was happy to see his mother visiting from United States where she now lives and to spend the month with her.

Bernard was also the host of members of his family for a couple of weeks. He went around with them discovering the white sand beaches of Panglao, the Chocolate Hills of Bohol and the impressive rice terraces of Banaue. It was also right in the middle of the visit, the anticipated celebration of Bernard's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and the 40<sup>th</sup> of his nephew. As usual, there was a flow of visitors to Adveniat during these months: volunteers from a French NGO, Benoît Le Leannec, nephew of an Assumptionist priest working in Moscow, seminarians from other Religious Orders...



### Asian time

One of our goals in community is to acquire a better knowledge about Asia. Welcoming young Asian students in our community serves that purpose, but also choosing to spend some of our community holidays in other Asian countries as well. This year, we decided to go to Thailand for a week long break, thanks to advantageous flight fares and the warm welcome of the Religious of the Assumption of Bangkok and their friends. We also went to their school in Thabom along the border with Laos just across the MéKong River.

#### Thailand Holidays

*“Our community holiday in Thailand was a first for me to an Asian country. From the start of the trip, I felt at home not only because of the presence and hospitality of the Assumption Sisters and the “five star” accommodation accorded to us by their lay partners at Saint John’s University, but also because we were often mistaken as Thai nationals either in the taxis, in the malls, in the museums, and even in the subway! There were a lot of instances that people would talk to us in Thai not knowing that we are Filipinos.*

*Our short stay in Thailand gave us a glimpse of Thai culture evident in their traditions, in their daily life (although becoming more cosmopolitan), in their food, their museums, and their numerous shrines and temples. But what was so impressive for me was their sense of identity in relation to their centuries-old traditions and culture (a characteristic which I feel is lacking in us Filipinos) even though they are fast becoming a developing country. This is probably because of their minimal, if not less contact with colonial influence as compared to an almost four centuries of colonial influence in our country.*

*Another significant visit for me was our visit to Thabom where the sisters run a mission school inspired by one of the mission schools of the sisters in San Simon in the Philippines. I somewhat felt that pride in me because the school where I finished high school and where I taught for 9 years is now an inspiration to the sisters in Thailand.” (Alex)*

Ed Molina shares with us his impressions on Thailand, ten years after having worked there for six years:

*“Impressive airport, big highways, rocketing high-rise, the names of the places are the same but everything look so different. A tinge of sadness inside as well... whatever had happened to us (the Philippines?).*

*The Thai people were as I knew them before - friendly, always ready with a smile, and courteous. The street vendors were also just as they were, maybe only more numerous and just as packed. The life of the average person, it seems have improved: more stylishly clothed, a spending power, many more branded establishments and boutiques - a country that is becoming very industrialized and modern or postmodern. I wonder what it would become in another ten years. Would the Assumptionists be in Thailand by then? What could we offer the Thai Church and the Thai people as a whole?” (Ed)*



### South Korea

Bernard had the opportunity to go back to South Korea for the second meeting of the Commission on Asia and the part of the General annual meeting of the Congregation reflecting on our mission in Asia. With the Superiors of Korea and Vietnam, he is launching an on-line “Letter from Asia” that you may receive upon request.



### Hong-Kong and Japan

Thomas Lop Vip, our French volunteer, was also off for some holidays, his first ones since he arrived. He spent three days in Hong Kong and two weeks and a half in Japan with a three day tour of Tokyo. We interviewed him:

*“Visiting these two mega cities is impressive: a mass of humanity, contrast in the architecture, the ever neon lights that color the night, so many things that make them different from any European city or even from Manila. Then, I spent two weeks working on an ecological project that consisted in replanting trees and safeguarding an endangered species of butterfly. All this took place up in a mountain area where there was this unique village with traditional wooden houses classified as a world patrimony by the Unesco. What struck me was the refinement of the Japanese culture suggesting a strong national identity. As I was totally immersed in the nature, I came out of that experience refreshed and re-energized. I was happy to be back with the community and find there two newly arrived Chinese priests: everyday is an opportunity to discover a little more about Asia”.* (Thomas)

### Assessment and evaluation

Holidays are also a time to assess the past year. While in Bangkok, the community took time off from holidays in order to evaluate the various levels of formation under our responsibility: vocation ministry and the follow-up of some thirty young men at different stages of their discernment, residency program for our candidates at Pavel House, postulancy and the preparation for the opening of a novitiate, formation for the student brothers, on-going formation. A few days before the beginning of the new school year, the community met again for an overall evaluation of its life and activities and to plan this new year. We also met with our parish priest in order to evaluate our collaboration with Our Lady of Pentecost parish.

## **3. New ventures for our mission**

### **■ Arrival of Father Roddy Ratsimiolaka**

At the end of April, we had the joy to welcome Fr. Roddy Ratsimiolaka as a new member of our community. He is 41 years old and comes from Madagascar where he has been a teacher and parish priest. The program of his first year in Manila is to immerse himself in a new culture and to level up his English proficiency and start learning Tagalog. His responsibilities will be determined gradually. Trained in Kung Fu, he is well prepared to be in charge of sports activities in the community and at the novitiate. Here are his first impressions since he arrived:

*“When I first arrived in Manila, I was deeply impressed by the heat! Another kind of heat from what I knew in my own country: so oppressing! I realized later why: the city of Manila is very polluted and people here prefer to use air conditioners rather than to fight the source of that pollution. Indeed, many cars and taxis have tinted glasses. Heavy traffic all the time except on Sundays. Thus, you drive your car all windows closed. Everybody is looking for the “fresh” and “purified” air of a taxi, a bus or “malls” (commercial centers) and supermarkets, even the churches and chapels!*

*There is a great variety of trees, plants and flowers: some I mistook for other varieties in Madagascar. Here, everything seems well organized in gardens. The “radriakas” have yellow flowers rather than the purple ones I am used to back home. The “yland-ylang” from Madagascar, the pride of the people from the mountain area, produces here red flowers instead of yellow...*

*Filipinos are very good cooks and I discover all kinds of new and strange dish here (sorry!). In the city, they don't hesitate to use chemicals to add flavour to the food: maybe the natural food has become tasteless for them. So, in the stores one can find shelves filled with “artificial flavours) products. In the countryside though, it is pure Filipino cuisine. If only the people from Madagascar knew that the flower of the banana tree (kaboka akondro) are very tasty vegetables as well as the young jackfruits (ampalibe), nobody would go and spend money buying vegetables. In the same way, here people can mix in the same soup “veromanitra” (citronella) and “tsakole” (fresh corn) and it is delicious! In the next “Chronicles”, I will share my impressions about the Church and the faith of the people here”.* (Roddy)



#### ■ **Opening of a new community**

At the beginning of June, Bro. Ricky and the two future novices, Joseph and Blair, left Adveniat House with their belongings for Antipolo. Fr. Gilles Blouin is accompanying them for two months until the arrival of the master of novices, Fr. Richard Brunelle. The novitiate will be our second community in the Philippines, under the name of Emmanuel d'Alzon novitiate, after our Founder.

The house itself is the former novitiate of the Religious of the Assumption and is located on the grounds of Assumption School, on the hills East of Manila.

#### ■ **First employee for Bayard-Philippines**

Early June, Bayard Assumption Media Foundation hired a development manager, Renee Bernardo, 30. She has a nine year work experience in administration and marketing. She is completing her studies in Theology at the nearby University, run by the Jesuits. Her work consists in developing subscriptions for our Bayard products with the adult, youth and kids publications. The office of Bayard is located in the annexe behind our residence.

### **4. Enrolment: all done!**

#### ■ **Beginning of the school year, programs of formation**

Classes started on June 10. Our student brothers will be quite busy! Postulants, future novices and their formators follow the *Sojourn* program (inter-postulancy) and *Exodus* (inter-novitiate). The religious had a week-end seminar on the vows of poverty and obedience with Bro. Karel sj and Bro. Raymond Callo sdb. Scheduled for the month of August is another seminar on chastity and sexuality. The next issue of the *Chronicles* will present the new communities and their various activities

#### ■ **Singing the “Our Father” in Chinese**

Our project to have a residence for Chinese priests and seminarians, as presented in an earlier issue of the *Chronicles*, will be discussed at the next meeting of the Provincial Council in July. We hope that our project will be convincing. In the meantime, our Provincial Superior, Fr. Marcel Poirier, has encouraged the community to welcome two Chinese priests, Paul and Paul (their family name is kept secret for security reasons). They came to our community on June 16 and will stay with us as long as they will master English enough to continue their studies in Theology. They will in turn form seminarians and lay leaders when they return to their country. They have four hours of tutorial teaching every morning, at the same school where Bernard, Gilles and Chuvi studied Tagalog. In the afternoon, they have their homework and practice with computer and tapes. They are fully integrated in the activities and chores of the community: prayer, meals, chores and soon kitchen service... Chinese food, I bet! In only 15 days yet, they have made a lot of progress. Since they arrived at Adveniat, the community sings the “our Father” in Mandarin at Evening Prayer.



## 5. Rainy season and first typhoons

The rainy season came early this year; so, the first typhoons. The sixth typhoon, “Franck” hit really hard the Iloilo province where our Sisters, the Religious of the Assumption, helped the victims of the flood of their city. Gilles Blouin just happened to be there visiting some contacts when the typhoon struck.

*“I guess that the airport closed soon after we arrived in Iloilo: the typhoon was upgraded “signal number 2”! Indeed, some of the streets were already flooded and electric wires were hanging low across the road. That was early morning. It got worse all through the day so much so that many people had to vacate their home because the level of water had risen at an unacceptable height. They either took refuge on the roof or got a shelter at one of the three evacuation centers.*

*The one I visited with our Sisters is the Cathedral compound where over 600 people spent the night. We were bringing first necessities: drinking water, canned food and noodles. The sisters welcomed to their retreat house the retired priests of the diocese whose residence had been flooded too and where there was no electricity. People were anxious when they could not be in contact with members of their family. On the next day, the sun showed up and everybody was out starting to clean the mud before it would dry out. Unfortunately, many people had no home to go back to; it had been washed away with what they had...” (Gilles)*



**You want to help us in any of our activities or with the formation of our young religious? Consult the website [www.assumptionists.ph](http://www.assumptionists.ph) (section “Help us to help others”) and you will find out how you can send your contributions. You can indicate the project that you want to support.**

### For Europe

In euros: Assomption, 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

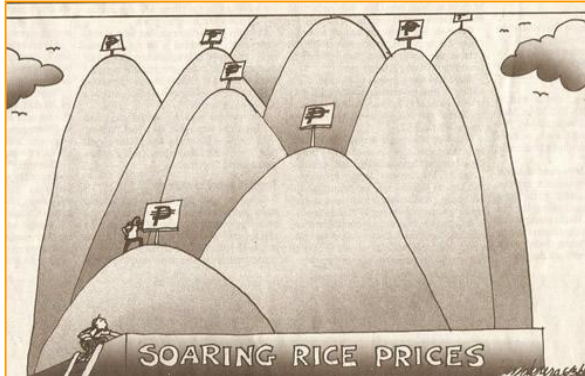


## 6. Press Review

### Food crisis

#### High rise for the price of rice (How's that for a title!)

The Philippines has become the number one importer of rice! Since January 2008, the price of rice has grown by 47%. In the nearby squatter area, the price of the subsidized kilo of rice has gone from 21 to 38 pesos. Shops sell rice at 50 pesos a kilo.



Legend: *Philippines Daily Inquirer*.  
June 3rd 2008.

#### Poor people get poorer

It is estimated that one third of the families in Manila live on 100 pesos a day (an average of 20 pesos per person). How can they just survive with the rice at 50 pesos per kilo?

*“And yet, writes with anger Ana Maria Pamintuan in an editorial of *The Philippines Star* (April 21, 2008), *Agriculture officials insist that the country has enough rice and there is no reason to panic. And it seems true. Go to any supermarket and you will see abundant stocks of rice, with a wide range o varieties to choose from based on flavor, aroma, fluffiness, stickiness, grain size and shape - any rice quality you are looking for will be there. You can choose your important source - Thailand, Vietnam, India, China, the United States.**

*We have a lot of special rice imports available, for paella, basmati, sushi and risotto, sold alongside our gourmet organic and highland varieties.*

*The Philippines truly has enough rice - for those who can afford it. The majority of the Filipinos can't afford anything beyond the cheapest government-subsidized rice. The must wait in line to buy a maximum of three kilos of rice per person. The last time the nation saw such long snaking lines for rice was about four decades ago.”*

Almost 40% of the Filipinos subsist on less than 2\$ a day and about 13.5% of the population (11 million Filipinos) are living on less than \$1 a day, the threshold defined as extreme poverty by the United nations. About 7.4 million or 9.1% are subjacent poor (those living on 75 US cents to \$1 a day) and 3.6 million or 4.4% are medial poor (those living on 50 to 75 US cents). There is no figure available for the ultra poor, or those living on less than 50 US cents a day.

For the distribution of subsidized portions of rice, the government has asked the help of the Churches in order to counter the possible sale of the rice at the market price or speculation.

#### Failed policies

About the crisis, news reports denounce the agriculture policies of the government and its priorities. There is an open debate about the price control, the bio-energy system and dependency creating aid while the government has allocated P5 billion in subsidies to 300,000 poor Filipinos families in the 20 poorest provinces.



The news agencies ask the Church to reconsider its position on demographic policies for the country where the birth rate is the highest in all of Asia: 5,800 children are born every single day of the year. According to the figures of the Asian Development Bank, in 2050, the Philippines will be the tenth most populated country in the world.

1948: 19,2 million people
1995: 68,6
2000: 76,5
2007: 88,5 (August)

#### Inflation, price hike, poverty line

In June the inflation rate has been 9,6%, mainly due to the rise of the food products, oil and electricity. Each time that there is an increase of 10% of the food products, the country numbers 2,3 millions more poor people. Construction costs have grown by 20% in one single year, mainly due to the rise of the cost of cement and iron.

#### **Other problems in the country still hit the headlines**

##### Corruption scandals

- Recently, the US military's health insurance program has been swindled out of more than \$100 million over the past decade in the Philippines, where doctors, hospitals and clinics have conspired with American veterans to submit bogus claims, according to prosecutors and court records.

- A book has been written about this national calamity: *Corruptionnary*, with a list of 400 words or quotes associated with recent corruption scandals, namely the contract between NBN and ZTE of China, where the presidential family and members of the government are allegedly involved (see *Chronicles* n°5).


Example: “*Apostol* means someone who has a *padrino* or backer or strong connexion; while *bacteria* means an employee or official of an agency who is always involved in corruption activities”.


##### Difficult school entry

The Philippines is the only country in Asia where the elementary school cycle is 10 years compared to 12 years elsewhere.

Education does not seem to be a priority in the country. The student population is about 20 million, yet the government spends 6,354 pesos per student against 47,700 in Thailand, 56,846 in Malaysia, 123,200 in the USA and 293,440 in Japan.


The news reports show how dysfunctional is the national educational system: textbooks filled with errors, missing chairs and tables, overcrowded classrooms in the public system, the ever under budgeted Ministry in the government...


 War on terror and gang system has been clearly in the news in July with the kidnapping of a TV crew and star reporter, Ces Drilon. The family admits having paid 5 million pesos ransom while the police reports a global ransom of 15 million, most of which ended up in the pockets of local politicians...


 Never ending unresolved murders of journalists. According to the UN, the Philippines is the second country in the world, after Iraq, where the number of unresolved murders of journalist is the highest for the last ten years: 79 cases in Iraq, 24 in the Philippines, 20 in Colombia, 14 in Russia, 9 in Sierra Leone, 8 in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan, 7 in Afghanistan and Mexico, 5 in Somalia, Nepal and India.





## Briefs news

 In 2007, 1,75 million of Filipinos were working abroad; 78% of them were working in Asia. Saudi Arabia gets the most of them: 19,8% (which is 346,000 people); next comes UAE (United Arab Emirates) with 12% (211,000 people), then Hong Kong with 6,7%, Singapore (6%), Japan (5,6%), Taiwan (5,5%), Qatar (4,5%) and Kuwait (4,4%).

 The money sent home by these OFW's through the banks has increased by 16 % in February (compared to February 2007), which means 1,3 billions US\$. This rise reflects the fact that the migrant workers are becoming more and more qualified.

 The Philippines continue to be a source of illegal drugs and their transshipment in Asia despite government efforts to curb the menace, according to the latest report on the global drug situation released by the US Department of State.

 In the Manila area, the daily minimal wage has been increased by 5,5 % (or 20 pesos); it is now 382 pesos (or 5,6 euros)

 A friend of the community under the “revolutionary taxes”. Hubert d’Aboville is trying to supply with solar power 18,000 families of Masbate. The New People’s Army (NPA), a communist unit, is asking him to pay “revolutionary taxes” or threatens the personnel of his company. They already bombed many buildings and set fire some materials. Hubert has decided to cut short the program and is waiting for the area to be secured.

June 24 2008  
Manila - Philippines

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