



AFRICA CALLING

Newsletter of the Missionaries
of Africa in the Philippines



1/2010

EDITORIAL

Brother John Abobo from Ghana has been with us in the Philippines since January 2010 following a renewal program for mid-lifers as well as a course in pastoral ministry and spiritual direction in Manila. In this issue John will share his previous experience as director of "Child in the Sun" working with street children in Tanzania. Our 3rd year student Clayb Caputolan will share his reflection on an experience with urban poor threatened with the demolition of their homes.

Fr Bernard Monteron has for the first time in his life touched holy ground in Europe. What is his mission in Rome, the Eternal City? You will discover the answer on page 5. You will find also some news from the Vocation Jamboree and from Filipino Missionaries in Africa: Lito Doguiles and Ryan Contamina. Enjoy reading these articles and please try to share our newsletter by forwarding it to your own e-mail contacts. Fr. E. Lengaigne (Editor)



Mending their nets

I am a Ghanaian missionary of Africa who is following the Sabbatical Pilgrimage Program, in Manila, at the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI). I took my missionary Oath in 1993, in Ghana. I was sent to Tanzania. I then did 7 and half years of work with Street Children. Recently in EAPI I was asked as to what would be my most fulfilling missionary experience so far. My answer was my work in Dar-es-Salaam-Tanzania with the street children. When I remarked that it was very challenging but very

Inside this issue:

Mending their nets 1

An Affair to remember
(Vocation Jamboree) 3

What is a home? 5

The General Chapter 6

News from Africa 7

fulfilling, their immediate reaction was, 'isn't that a paradox: That you find the most difficult experiences of your life most fulfilling'? That remark got me thinking and I arrived at the conclusion that it is not how easy one's life is that will make one happy. It is how meaningful/'life-giving' it is that will bring the happiness.



In Dar-es-Salaam, we were taking care of children (mainly boys) who had either run away or had been pushed out of home and found themselves on the streets of the capital city. They lived by any means possible and were at the mercy of all kinds of adults and fate itself. The underlining principle of our intervention was the belief that 'the best place to raise a child was in his biological family'. We, therefore, welcomed them to our residential centre, away from the street and try to reunite them with their families. This was like mending nets, as most of them would have left the family because they had fallen through the Safety-net of the nuclear/extended family. Due to poverty, poor parenting, broken marriages, parental neglect and abuse they would find that 'home' was no longer home. They would then prefer the dangerous and risky life on the streets to life in their families.

While staying with them we try to find out the reasons why each individual child left home and with the help of social workers, at various levels, we try to help solve the family problems to enable them return home. This meant tracing families and visiting families all over the country. One such experience, for me, was like the woman in the Bible who found her 'lost coin'. I had gone to trace a boy's family, to inform them that their child was living with us in our centre and to find out the real reasons why he left home. This boy had escaped to the city by hiding himself under a big lorry for a journey of 800 kilometers and the parents had not heard of him for two years. His mother was so happy with the news that she prayed for half an hour for me and for the Missionaries of Africa and their work. On our way to the bus station, she would call out to her neighbors with a loud voice, "my sister come and see the man of God who saved my son's life". All her neighbors had to share in her good news.

[He was about 15 years old and they were two hiding in the chassis of an

articulator truck carrying potatoes from Mbeya to Dar]

On another occasion, the mother of one of the children had been misinformed that her child died. So when the social worker turned up with the child, she got so excited and shocked that she fainted in front of the social worker. The only other person present was a little girl, so the social worker had to become an emergency nurse. Such occasions frequently presented the scenarios of the return of 'the prodigal son'.

The family re-unification program often highlighted the fact that although there may be problems in the family 'safety-net', there might still be parts of the net that are strong. In practice, it means that it was frequently possible to identify members of the extended family such as an aunt or uncle who could receive the child and cater for his needs...

Yes, it was very challenging, yet I would exchange any apostolate any day to be back there. It was very fulfilling. One had to learn to rely on the providence of God. There were always surprising developments that made me remember that I was not really the one in-charge. The Lord was in-charge and we were his instruments...

Yes, fulfillment is found when we give meaning, joy, self respect and dignity to the life of others. And was exactly what we were doing there in Child in the Sun – Dar-es-Salaam. **Br. John Abobo**

An Affair to Remember (Vocation Jamboree 2010: Cebu)



My first experience of a vocation jamboree was in my hometown (in Diocese of Digos) in 2008. It was the first time that my home diocese had organised a vocation jamboree. There were plenty of people, among them various religious men and women wearing different habits who participated in the voc-jam at that time. I was fascinated by the variety of participants representing different ways of living religious life aiming to promote awareness of different religious vocations in life and more particularly different ways of living the priestly and religious vocation.

At that time I was already thinking about to join the MOLA (Missionaries of Africa) and through Fr. Bernard's invitation to come to Cebu I was given a chance to witness the 2009 vocation jamboree in USJR Basak Campus.

It was my first time in Cebu and I was excited. I stayed in the Missionaries of Africa formation house seminary and was able to experience the life of a seminarian.

This year I joined the jamboree again, this time as a student living in the formation community of the Missionaries of Africa.

Early in the morning of February 27 we went to the campus of the University of San Jose Recoletos in Basak, the Jamboree venue, to prepare our tent. With Frs. Bernard and Thomas and joined by a contingent of young people from Sudtongan on the island of Mactan the setting up of the pavilion was not difficult. This year the theme of our tent was Cardinal Lavignerie as "Man of Fire" with his Missionaries of Africa as "Men of Fire". Geovannie Robilla, our artistic 3rd year student had made the design (see picture). After our tent was set up I took the opportunity to visit the pavilions of other religious institutes. Some looked really sophisticated in their design with built-up landscapes while some were beautiful to look at even in their simplicity.



By the time I returned our tent was already full of people. The participants were attracted by our Africa quiz. A successful answer to questions on Africa drawn from a hat merited a token gift in the form of a bookmark and a coffee toffee to help the participants stay awake through the night. Each visitor's name was also recorded with cell-phone contact and e-mail address and a good number have found a place on my facebook account. The total number of participants this year again exceeded 10,000.

During occasional moments of tiredness in the month of February and considering the resources, time and money spent in preparation for the Jamboree I at times asked myself whether all these efforts were worthwhile? Now, looking back, I can say that the 2010 Voc Jam was very successful as it reached thousands of young people willing to sacrifice their sleep. Vocation Jamborees will continue to be a unique chance to plant seeds of vocation awareness in the hearts of young people today. When the mass was about to end Fr. Mark invited those who had experienced God's call to come forward for a blessing by Cardinal Vidal. It was overwhelming to see the large number of those who stepped forward from the crowd to affirm that someone had touched their heart at some point during this night. *Fhear Brian (1st Year)*

What is a home ?

Last November, the students of the 1st cycle, M.Afr. Cebu stayed an overnight in Subangdaku, a so called squatter area. Clayb Caputolan (3^d year) share his experience.



What is a home? What is the meaning behind the famous phrase 'there's no place like home.'? What makes every home special? Commonly, when we speak of a home we usually refer to a house furnished with amenities necessary for the well-being of its occupants. However, there are people living in the dumpsites and call it a home. Many are living along the street ways of our cities and also call it a home. The cemetery which is normally a place for the dead is also considered by some of our brothers and sisters home sweet home.

A home is where the heart is. It is a place of refuge, rest and comfort. It is in our homes where we feel most secure, accepted, and loved. A home is, therefore, a vital element for each person. Each human being has the need to be in a place called home. This need cannot be just a privilege, but rather a right which needs to be respected and given recognition by all members of the human race.

In Cebu, it cannot be denied that there are plenty of individuals, together with their respective families, living under the threat of losing their homes. I wonder how it feels like to live everyday with the fear that one day the very place I call home will be taken away from me. The very place where I was born, the place where I grew-up, the place which my parents built with their own sweat and blood will one day be torn down like pieces of broken hopes and dreams lying on the very ground where I used to sow seeds of optimism and devotion. The experience must be horrible; it must be very painful considering that the very part that sustains part of my identity is being grabbed away or simply stolen.

Last November I had the chance to be in Subangdaku where a number of households are facing demolition. The place is literally flooded, almost always for the whole year because flood water has no exit point so it stays stagnant in the area. I noticed many mosquito larvas congregating in one place and in another. I was told that dengue has already claimed a number of lives among the people living there. I have seen garbage floating like lilies in a pond. Honestly, after seeing all of these I found myself helpless. I do not know what to say or do to help improve the condition of



the area. I do not know whose fault it is or who should be responsible for the totally grim condition of the place. I am aware that the government has responsibilities and at the same time I am equally aware that the residents themselves also have some responsibilities.

I was deeply touched when I saw the dedication of many of the residents in working hard to make ends meet. Sometimes I find it difficult to conceive how things were done especially when I knew the limitations. Despite the poverty, there is richness. I believe many are quite content and willing to call it home no matter what others say. A house can be valued in money, but a home is basically priceless. This is the principle that the residents are holding on to. I was surprised to see many little children playing freely and happily embracing the very things that made the area intolerable for others.

To demolish the whole community may not be the best solution, similar to saying that staying there may not be the best option. Whichever, it must be remembered that what are involved here are persons. A house can easily be built after being destroyed, but a home takes many years to shape and sometimes a shattered home can never be put-back together as it was.

[This article was first published by the Task Force on Urban Conscientization (TFUC) for the newsletter Sabwag last January 2010.]

GENERAL CHAPTER of THE MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA in ROME

Since October 2008 the Missionaries of Africa have been preparing the General Chapter of our society. The purpose of a Chapter is mainly to evaluate what has been going on in the last 6 years and to try to foresee and plan for the future of our society. During the Chapter the Superior General and four other missionaries who form his council are elected. For this 27th chapter the principal theme will be "Our Mission in Africa and to the African World".

Last October 2009, our two teams in Cebu and Bangalore (India) met to

prepare for this event from an Asian perspective. The visit afforded the team of Cebu the chance to know India. The visit left us deeply impressed by the cultural diversity of this vast sub-continent. The actual population now stands at 1.15 billion while it was still only 350 millions 60 years ago. Bangalore City, the "Silicon valley" of India's computer industry seems like one big building site under the intense pressure of continuous growth. India's non-Western rich cultural diversity is amazing as it brings a sense of the Divine into the bustle of the city and into the heart of ordinary life ...

Our three confreres in India in two houses of formation cater for the training of more than 30 students. All thirty hope someday to be future Missionaries of Africa. During our meeting Fr Bernard Monteron (our superior in the Philippines) was elected as delegate of Asia. He will be one among the 42 members of the up-coming Chapter in Rome and the 1st Asian to be present at our Chapter.

We invite all our readers to join us in our prayers for the 27th Chapter. We pray that our Society will become even more intercultural and inter-continental in its mission at the service of the Lord.



News from Africa....



Br. Lito Doguiles Tanzania

I am settling in well since I arrived here in Tabora. I have been able to organize a formation program for youth leaders every Saturday and visit the parish every Sunday. Every Tuesday I facilitate cooking lessons for the youth. At this time I have 25 apprentice cooks. The plan is to put up a canteen run by the youth. There are also mothers who would like to join but I have asked them to wait due to limited space. On other days I keep busy with some

administrative work, counseling and soon I'll be teaching in the school for the blind run by the Franciscans Fathers... The archdiocese is composed of only twenty parishes but too large with the furthest parish at almost 300 km distance from Tabora. Regards to all... In prayer
Lito (March 12,2010)

For information on joining the Missionaries of Africa contact:

Fr Bernard Monteron 0908 17 53 155

bamonteron@yahoo.com.ph

Fr Thomas Schwiedessen 0919 23 43 406

molafricavoc@yahoo.com

www.mafrome.org

Ryan Contamina Zambia

EASTER greetings from Kasama Spiritual Formation Centre. Last Sunday on April 18 the Provincial of Southern Africa decided my appointment for the next two years after I finish the novitiate. I am very glad to inform



you that I am appointed to the community of Mua, MALAWI. This community lives in this historical site of the Society of the Missionaries of Africa involved with two major ministries - parish apostolate and "Kungoni Centre" for culture and arts ...

Keep me in your prayers. God bless and happy Easter! **Ryan**

(April 20,2010)

How you can help us ?

-Above all, please help us with your prayers for the vocations and for the Missionary in Africa.

-You can spread this « News Letter » through e-mail.

-You can help us in the formation of our seminarian by sending your contribution by check payable to « Missionaries of Africa ».

4 Kalaw St., Sto. Niño Village, Banilad,
P.O. Box 1088, 6000 Cebu City, Philippines
Tel N° (032) 344-06 06 Fax N° (032) 346-27 71