



2-2014

## THE CHANGING FACE OF OUR COMMUNITY

The first of June saw the dawning of a new academic year at our formation centre in Cebu. While we had hoped to have a few new candidates to join our two candidates who were returning for their second year of formation, this was not to be and we remain with only two candidates - Xandry and Larry - for the current academic year.

The majority of our community remained intact with Frs. Coro, Luisito, Charlie and John. However, changes have come to our formation centre personnel.



Fr. Emmanuel Lengaigne, who has been rector of our formation centre for almost 6 years, completed his appointment and has now left our centre and the Philippines. He will spend some well-deserved time with his family in France before moving to his new appointment at our Spiritual Year Center in Burkina Faso, West Africa in September of this year.

In addition to his responsibility as the one in charge of our candidates in formation, Emmanuel also helped in different ways in the local parishes, as our contact with Cebu Institute of Technology and as editor of the very newsletter you are reading.

We take this opportunity to thank Emmanuel for his dedication not only to the formation of our candidates here in the Philippines, but also for the different ways he helped our



Our Community (with Emmanuel)

Standing (Left to Right):  
Luisito, Xandry, John, Charlie, Emmanuel

Kneeling (Left to Right):  
Larry, Coro, Paul

community and the people we are called to serve here in Cebu and beyond. We particularly thank him for his efforts and dedication as editor of this newsletter, which brings information concerning the life of the Missionaries of Africa to our faithful readers.



Fr. Paul Johnston, from Canada, has joined our community and has been appointed to replace Emmanuel as the rector of our formation centre. Paul is no stranger to formation, as he has spent the past 11 years - 4 years in Ghana (West Africa) and 7 years in Zambia (East Africa) – as a formator of our candidates. While raised mostly in Canada, Paul was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. After his secondary studies and following 10 years working in the corporate accounts department of an insurance company in Canada he started his formation journey with the Missionaries of Africa in Canada in 1986, a journey that eventually took him from Canada to Zambia, South Africa and to England where he completed his studies in 1995. He was ordained to the priesthood in his home parish in Canada on the 27 August 1995. He spent 6 years in parish ministry in South Africa before following a one-year programme to prepare to be a formator. Since then, he has been helping our candidates in their vocational discernment.

He arrived in the Philippines at the end of December 2013 and spent 4 months trying to learn the intricacies of Cebuano in Davao before joining our community in Cebu at the beginning of May 2014. He is currently the one in charge of the formation of our candidates. He will also replace Emmanuel as the editor of this newsletter. We welcome Paul to our community and wish him well in his new apostolate.

## A SPIRITUAL YEAR EXPERIENCE



*Alvin Escabusa, a candidate with the Missionaries of Africa from the Philippines writes of his experience of the Spiritual Year in Kasama, Zambia)*

The Spiritual year is the period of formation where a candidate intensifies his interiority, deepens the knowledge of himself and works for the integration of his mind and heart. In the beginning, it was not easy for me to grasp the essence of integration of mind and heart, but as I have grown in the knowledge of myself, I have gradually grasped the essence of it. I suppose this journey from the head to the heart is the longest journey I've ever had to make.

The Spiritual Year is also a period to savor the life of the Missionaries of Africa, which I aspire to live for the rest of my life. I know it's not easy, but neither is it impossible. To be away from my family, leave my country, people and culture behind are not that easy. I recall the first two weeks of my novitiate; I felt strongly the feeling of loneliness



that almost discouraged me to carry on my Spiritual Year experience. Fortunately, through the aid of my competent and experienced spiritual director and the constant companionship of my fellow novices, I managed to come out from that discouraging feeling. With that experience, I realized how vital the prayer and community life in this missionary vocation.

We are an international community of both students and formators spread through fifteen nationalities within the domain of three continents, viz.: Asia, Africa and Europe. Thus, skirmishes and arguments are inevitable.

However, the spirit of internationality and the fact that we are different has brought more joy and creativity in our undertakings. Indeed, our formation teaches us to get accustomed to live in an international community.



I am hundreds of miles away from my family; yet, wherever I go here is like an extension of my family. Conversation with the people turns out to be an informative dialogue as we share about our cultural differences and commonalities. One of the evident traits which are identical in both the Filipinos and the Africans is our attitude to hospitality.



Missionary life might be difficult for us Filipinos due to our strong family ties; however, if we have a certain amount of willingness to be opened to God's will, I think missionary life is not impossible for us.

One thing that keeps me going is the fact that whatever I've gone through in this missionary journey, there is always the consolation and guarantee of inner joy to which nothing in this world can ever be equated.

**AN INTERVIEW WITH  
FR. JEAN-MICHEL LAURENT**



*(Fr. Jean-Michel Laurent is a member of the Missionaries of Africa from France and is currently the Secretary for Initial Formation based in Rome. He was interviewed by Fr. Emmanuel Lengaigne concerning his work with our formation program)*

**Emmanuel:** Jean Michel, you are now in your third year as Secretary for Formation for the Missionaries of Africa. Can you describe for our readers your responsibility within our missionary society?

*Jean-Michel:* My role is to serve as a link between the General Council and the formation houses. I am often on the move visiting our seminarians and formators mainly in Africa.



Chapel - Spiritual Year  
Burkina Faso, West Africa

*Emmanuel:* How many seminarians are presently in formation with the Missionaries of Africa?

*Jean-Michel:* The number of seminarians has increased. We now have over 420 seminarians. Sustaining such a program requires a huge effort from the M. Afr. for a congregation of 1,300 priests and brothers.

*Emmanuel:* What is it that motivates the candidates wanting to join the Missionaries of Africa?

*Jean-Michel:* There are valid reasons like desiring to be at the service of the marginalized, answering a felt call, witnessing God's love ... There are also mixed motives like looking for a social status, the opportunity to study or travelling. Part of the formation is to sort out what is valid and what is not. To purify the motivation.

*Emmanuel:* How many formation houses do we have and what are the stages of formation?

*Jean-Michel:* The first phase of studies consists of three years of philosophy and human formation. We have 11 such "first cycles" (7 in Africa, 4 in South-America, Asia and Europe). The next phase is the spiritual year in three novitiates in Zambia, Tanzania and Burkina Faso. The third phase consists of 2 years of training (stage) in apostolic community life, usually in our M.Afr. parishes. Finally, in our Fourth Phase, our candidates study theology in one of five theologates.

*Emmanuel:* After the pastoral experiment you receive reports from the seminarians. Can you recall a situation which impressed you?

*Jean-Michel:* I remember one candidate who with a brother took care of a parish in a remote place of Congo during a time the parish priest was absent because of sickness.

*Emmanuel:* What are the qualities you expect from our candidates?

*Jean-Michel:* I believe that only a strong spiritual life, a desire to imitate Christ will sustain them in being witness of the Father's love to all. Such qualities become manifest in a readiness to enter the local culture and



Spiritual Year  
Kasama, Zambia, East Africa



learn local languages, being close to people.

*Emmanuel:* What impresses you most when you meet our seminarians?

*Jean-Michel:* They are willing to live in intercultural communities. For example in our theologates, out of 30 students, we have 10 to 15 different nationalities. They are committed to their spiritual life, studies and the pastoral work like visiting sick, prisoners, small Christians communities (JKK) and teaching catechism.



Spiritual Year  
Arusha, Tanzania, East Africa

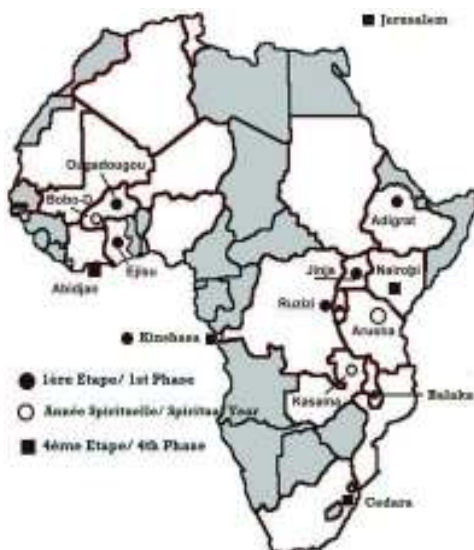
*Emmanuel:* Suppose a Filipino would wish to join the M. Afr. what would be your advice?

*Jean-Michel:* The main question is: "Is God calling you?" Make a good discernment! Does God call you to this vocation? If the answer is a clear "Yes!" the candidate will find happiness. If a candidate mistakes his own desire for God's will he will be miserable. The candidate is responsible for his discernment. The Missionaries of Africa will provide support and a sound formation

*Emmanuel:* What was the greatest experience in your own missionary life?

*Jean-Michel:* I met someone in his twenties who had been sick and bed-ridden for 8 years. After I helped him with the equivalent of Php 150 his life started to change. He was able to go to a hospital, be attended to and later underwent several operations. After a year he was able to start walking with crutches and eventually he was restored to health.

## OUR FORMATION CENTRES IN AFRICA



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