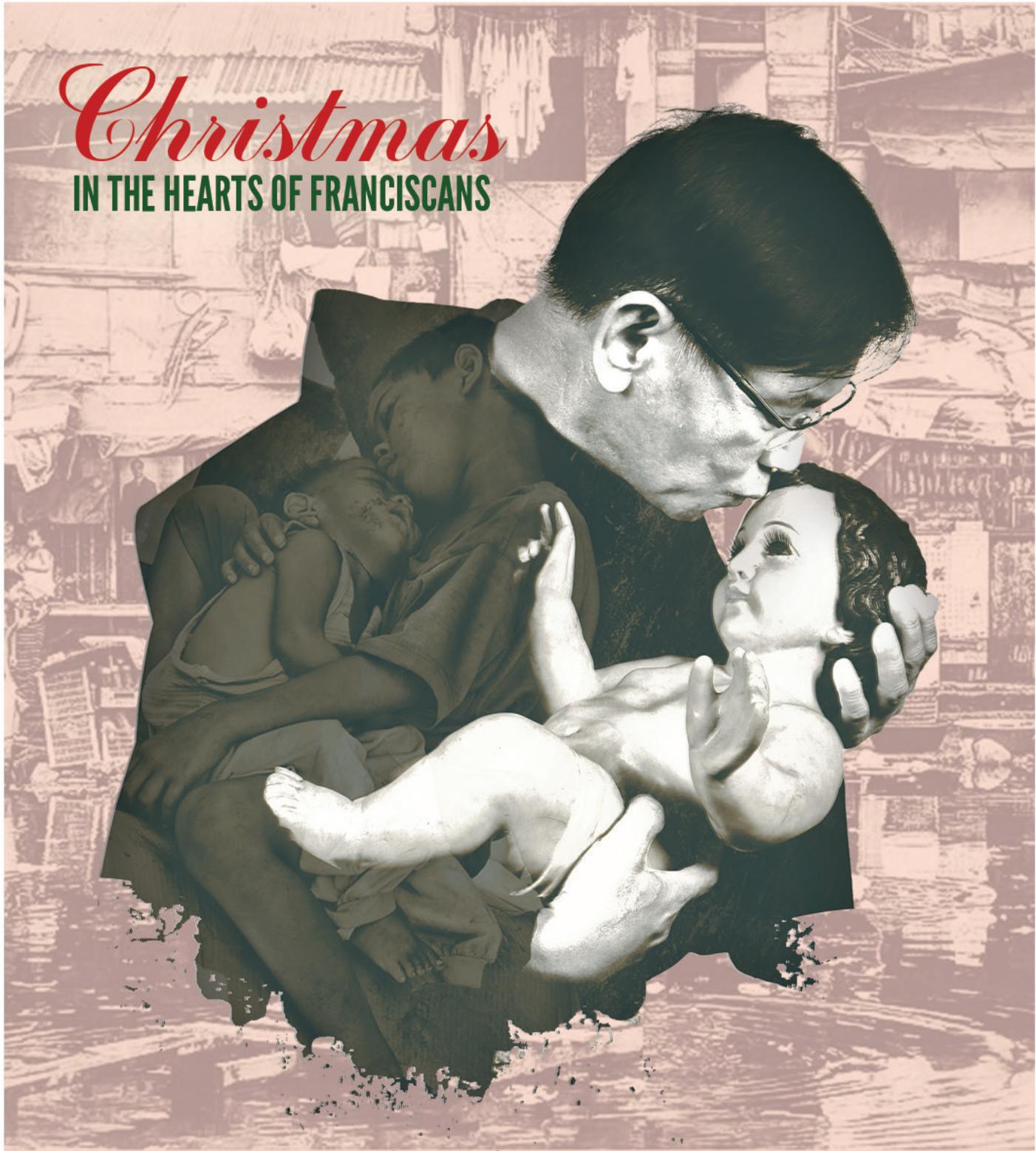


OFM Franciscans Philippines Magazine

Second Issue 2017

# communicator

*Christmas*  
IN THE HEARTS OF FRANCISCANS



NEW FRANCISCAN PARISH & QUASI PARISH | THE PROVINCIAL PLENARY COUNCIL |  
14TH FRANCISCAN PASTORAL ASSEMBLY | 2018 YEAR OF THE CLERGY & CONSECRATED LIFE



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SECOND ISSUE 2017



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## THE COVER

The cover of this issue depicts what Christmas is all about for the Franciscans. The reason for the season is the self-emptying (kenosis) of Christ who humbled himself to embrace what we are in order to save us. God's self-emptying is the basis for the vow of poverty of the Franciscans. To embrace Christ means embracing the poor and the marginalized making them a part of our personhood.



## YEAR OF THE CLERGY AND CONSECRATED PERSONS

Another Jubilee year is bidding goodbye. We now brace ourselves for the incoming Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons. Still a part of the 9-year preparation for the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines. As consecrated persons are we ready to share in the new evangelization thrust of the local Church that will culminate with our *ad gentes* mission outside the Philippines? What can be our Franciscan contribution to the spread of the Gospel as renewed servant-leaders? The recently celebrated Plenary Council may have the answer, we have come out with a renewed and reconstructed Charism-Mission -Vision-Objectives of the Province, our current tool for our life and ministry, and a restored identity as Lesser Brothers (from Friars Minor). Not at all insignificant, our pastors and their lay partners chartered their plan of pastoral action for the parishes.

Meanwhile, we now have another quasi parish (in Navotas) and a new parish (Catanduanes), as well as new solemnly professed and a new Franciscan priest. Two were sent abroad, one to mission and another to further studies. Jubilarians were given tribute. Dominicans and Franciscans celebrated the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. We remembered our deceased confreres in La Loma cemetery.

Outside the country, Pope Francis sent a letter to the Holy Land and the Franciscans. General Definitories were at a common retreat at La Verna. The Year of the Pardon of Assisi came to an end. Latin American Franciscans propagated *Laudato Si* in various countries while in the Philippines the Franciscans and lay partners joined in the opening day of the celebration of the Season of Creation.

Christmas is coming. The issue ends with Franciscans, young and old, sharing their Christmas stories. By the way, the Provincial Communications attempted to update itself. Read how. Merry Christmas!

Fr. Chito Rañoa, OFM  
*Editor-In-Chief*

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# TWO FRANCISCAN MISSION CHURCHES CANONICALLY ELEVATED



Bishop Manolo delos Santos, D.D., during the rite of Dedication of the Altar. (Above); Fr. Emerson F. Bumagat, OFM, on his Installation as Parish Priest of St. Pius X Parish in San Andres, Catanduanes. (Right)



## NEW PARISH IN BICOL, ST. PIUS X PARISH

August 21, 2017 has become a historic and special day for the Franciscan fraternity and the church in San Andres, Catanduanes. There, St. Pius Mission Church, from a barangay chapel and a mission church of the Franciscans since 2011, was canonically erected as a parish by His Excellency, Most Rev. Manolo de los Santos, DD, Bishop of the Diocese of Virac.

In his homily, the bishop stressed on the importance of becoming a parish, and on the duties of the bishops and the laity. During the Mass, the young and dynamic parish priest, Fr. Emerson Bumagat, OFM, was installed as the first parish priest. To symbolize his take over of the parish, the bishop handed over to him the church keys, the baptistery, the tabernacle and the altar.

The speeches that followed after communion expressed joy and the readiness to support the parish ministry. Fr. Reu Jose Galoy, OFM, the vicar provincial of the Province of San Pedro Bautista, encouraged his confreres assigned to the newly created parish to consider the local culture and the Franciscan charism through the witness of their lives. The local government unit, through its local executive who had been generous and supportive over the years in the journey of the parish, assured everyone of their untiring support.

The joy of all those present was reflected in the colorful liturgical celebration with many diocesan clergy, the Franciscans and the lay faithful. The church was too small for all present, that about a quarter of the congregation joined the celebration outside. The wonderful songs by the choir composed of joyful and talented children, portrayed the happiness that filled the area.

With the Mission Church being elevated to a full fledged Parish after almost eight years, the friars are more challenged to do well in their pastoral work for the people. According to Fr. Rodrigo San Jose, OFM, the parochial vicar, the challenge for them is to bring their parishioners closer to God through a more dedicated pastoral care, and attentiveness to the socio-economic concerns. The friars are hoping that the event may inspire the friars to continue working for the souls for the Kingdom of God!

## ST. CLARE OF ASSISI QUASI-PARISH

The Catholics of Brgy. South Navotas, Malabon, gathered and rejoiced for the elevation of the Sta. Clara Mission Church into a quasi parish. The canonical declaration was made on August 27, 2017, in a decree of the Most Rev. Pablo S. David, DD, the local Ordinary of the Diocese of Caloocan. Fr. Cielito Almazan,

OFM, the minister provincial of the OFM in the Philippines and some priests concelebrated.

In his homily, the bishop talked about the historical contribution of the Franciscans in promoting the Catholic faith in the Philippines, and the reforms in the Church. He gratefully acknowledged the presence of the Franciscans in the diocese and hoped for more similar endeavors from them.

The friars assigned in the said community, Friars Cesar Malasa, OFM, and Willie Benito, OFM, were challenged to be more motivated in nurturing the spiritual growth of the people as they bring them closer to God and with light of the Gospel.

## FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS COMMUNALLY CELEBRATED AT SAN JOSE ANG TAGAPAGTANGGOL PARISH

In line with the observance of the Year of the Parish as Communion of Communities, this year's feast day of the Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi was celebrated at San Jose ang Tagapagtanggol Parish in Brgy. Holy Spirit, Quezon City, on October 4, 2017. Maintaining the long tradition of having the Dominican Prior as presider, Fr. Napoleon Sipalay, Jr., OP, came for the festivities.



The Jubilarians during their renewal of vows.

Fr. Percival Tayem, OFM, the parish priest of San Jose ang Tagapagtanggol Parish, with the help of his Pastoral Council and parishioners, worked hard to make the fiesta a success.

## NINE FRIARS HONORED BY THE PROVINCIAL FRATERNITY

Nine friars celebrated their milestones in the religious and priestly life this year and were given tributes during the Jubilarians' Night on September 18, 2017, at Santuario de San Antonio de Padua, Forbes Park, Makati City. The thanksgiving Mass was presided over by Fr. Andres Ranoa, Jr., OFM, a provincial definitor.

During the thanksgiving dinner, guests, benefactors, family and friends of the friar-honorees were entertained through various presentations. Plaques of appreciation were awarded to them. Each was surprised with a video presentation about themselves with messages from their

special friends and loved ones. They deserve such appreciation because of their enduring journey in the Franciscan life and in the witnessing of the gospel as followers of St. Francis of Assisi.

This year's Jubilarians are: Fr. Bernardo Lanuza, OFM, Fr. Roberto Manansala, OFM, Fr. Angelito Salazar, OFM, 25 years as Priests, Fr. Reu Jose Galoy, OFM and Fr. Celso Laracas, OFM, 25 years as Religious, Fr. Eduardo Armenta, OFM, 40 years as Religious, Fr. Oscar Ante, OFM, Fr. Ponciano Macabalo, OFM and Fr. Arcadio Guiriba, OFM, 40 years as priests.

## NEW FRANCISCAN PRIEST ORDAINED

Fr. Angel A. Cortez, OFM, was ordained priest on August 21, 2017, at the Santuario de San Antonio Parish in Forbes Park, Makati City.

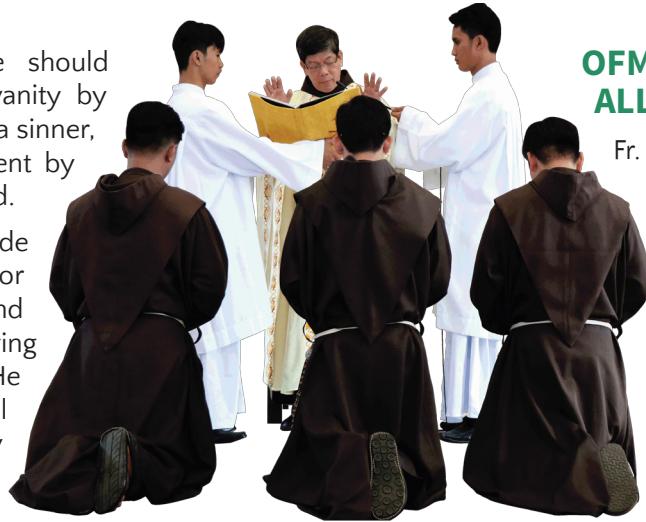
In the homily, the Most Rev. Socrates Villegas D.D., reminded the new priest that the perfect joy of a Franciscan should always be in the cross of our



A painting of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic with the Madonna was given as a gift by the Franciscan Province of San Pedro Bautista to Fr. Napoleon "Jun" Sipalay, OP, Prior Provincial of the Dominican Province of the Philippines.

Lord Jesus Christ. He should protect himself from vanity by remembering that he is a sinner, and from discouragement by remembering he is loved.

In his words of gratitude Fr. Angel asked for continuous prayers and support for a fruitful, loving and holy ministry. He continues his pastoral ministry at St. Mary of the Angels in Sta. Teresita, Cagayan.



## MORE YOUNG FRIARS PROFESS

The Franciscan fraternity joyfully welcomed with thanksgiving three more brothers. Br. Mark Angelo S. Vito, OFM, Br. Wilmar L. Rosales, OFM, and Br. Crisaldo C. Baltazar, OFM who made their profession for life last July 17, 2017. The ceremony, presided over by Fr. Cielito R. Almazan, OFM, Minister Provincial, was held at the Chapel of the Portiuncula, within the compound of Our Lady of the Angels Seminary in Novaliches, QC.

Fr. Joel E. Sulse, OFM gave an inspiring homily encouraging the new solemnly professed friars to be faithful in their chosen life as religious.

On the other hand, after completing their one year formation in the novitiate, seven new friars made their temporary profession of vows: Br. Rhodel Abad, OFM, Br. Kelvin Rosas, OFM, Br. Joey Donato, OFM, Br. Harriet Zifret Fontiveros, OFM, Br. Christian Ezquiel Bueno, OFM, and Br. Robert, Dawal, OFM together with 3 foreigners: Br. Christopher Saw Nyein Chan CoCo, OFM, of the St. Francis Foundation

The friars kneel before the Minister Provincial as he gives the blessing of St. Francis after the solemn profession rites.

in Myanmar, Br. Joseph Maria Duong Thien Chi, OFM, and Br. John Baptist Chatchai Sawanawe, OFM, of the Our Lady of the Angels Foundation in Thailand.

## FRIARS SENT ABROAD FOR FURTHER STUDIES AND MISSION

On August 2017, after completing his short course taken in Brussels Belgium, Fr. Adam Dalac, OFM, was formally sent as friar missionary to St. Francis of Assisi Foundation in Myanmar. The mission sending rite prepared by the Office for Mission and Evangelization was held at St. Anthony Shrine, Sampaloc, Manila, within the Holy Mass.

Fr. Mark Adame Bakari, OFM was replaced as Bursar of Santuario de San Antonio Friary in Forbes Park, Makati City, to pursue further studies in Rome. He is be taking up Moral Theology in the Antonianum.

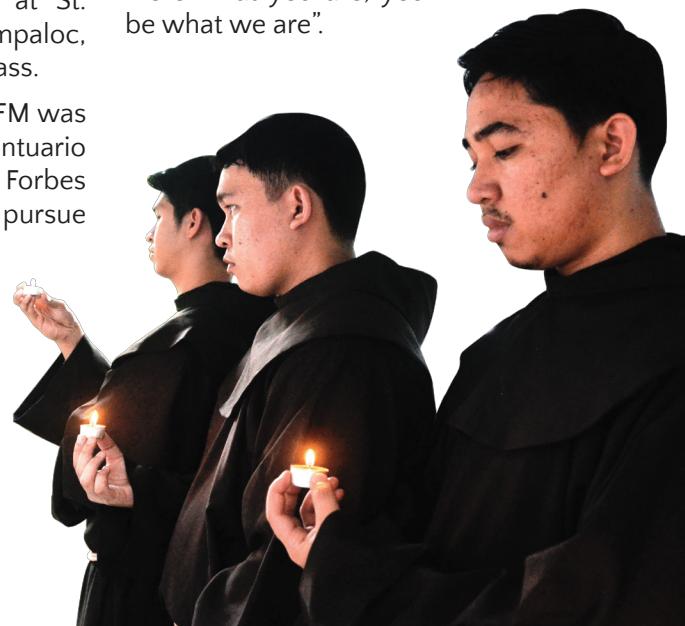
Friars light candles for the departed members of the Seraphic Order.

## OFM'S COMMEMORATE ALL SOULS DAY

Fr. Judee Mar Maquinad, OFM, gave a meditative homily during the commemoration of All Souls. The holy Mass was celebrated in the Franciscan Mausoleum at La Loma Cemetery on November 2, 2017. It was presided over by Fr. Cielito Almazan, OFM.

Fr. Maquinad quoted an excerpt from the book of Psalms "There's everything on this day which invites us to a wise reflection, teaches us to number our days, that we may gain wisdom of heart. Franciscan life professes a pilgrim character and this character tells that if the end comes let it go because there awaits a lot better than what they leave behind."

On his closing message, Fr. Cielo expressed his gratitude to his confreres and to all those who joined in praying for the beloved departed brothers. According to him this yearly commemoration of the departed brothers serves as a reminder to everyone that no one can escape death, quoting "As if the dead were telling us, we were what you are, you will be what we are".



# POPE FRANCIS MARKS 800 YEARS OF FRANCISCANS IN HOLY LAND



Franciscan friars pray during the opening ceremony celebrating the anniversary of 800 Years of Franciscan presence in the Holy Land, Oct. 16, at the Church of St. Saviour in Jerusalem's Old City. (Photo courtesy of CNS photo/Debbie Hill)

(Vatican Radio) Pope Francis has sent a letter to the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land marking the 800th anniversary of its presence as guardians of the holy sites in modern day Israel and Palestine.

In a letter, published on Tuesday, the Pope praises the Franciscans for their vital contribution to life in the Holy Land, in particular their work of accompanying pilgrims coming from all over the world.

The Pope recalls that Saint Francis, in May 1217, during the chapter of his recently founded order, decided to send the friars out on mission. The first missionaries to the Holy Land arrived that summer in the town of Acre, near Haifa, in northern Israel and just over a hundred years later, Pope Clement VI confirmed them as the custodians of the holy places. (radiovaticana.va)

## THE LATIN AMERICAN PILGRIMAGE LAUDATO SI' COMES TO ITS CONCLUSION

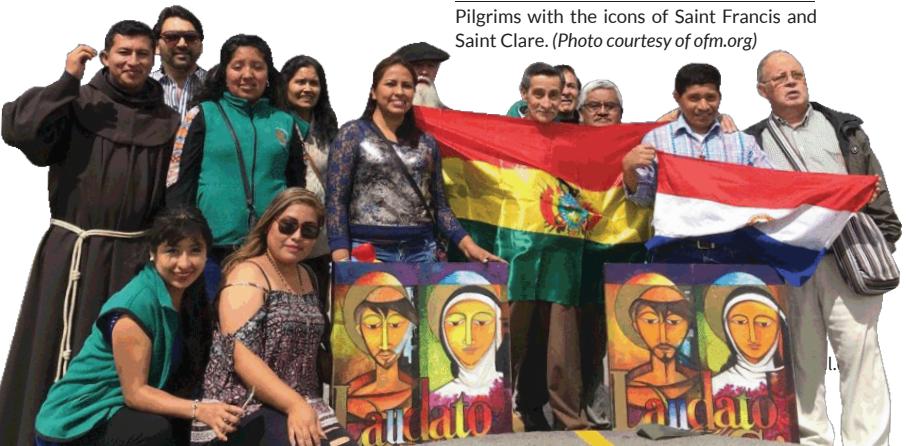
On Saturday, October 28, the Franciscan pilgrimage of the icons of Saint Francis and Saint Clare that accompanied numerous communities of the Franciscan Family in Latin America came to its conclusion. About 18 countries got involved in this international event promoted by the JPIC office.

The objective of the pilgrimage was to revive the life and commitment of the Franciscan Family in the promotion of the Encyclical Letter, "Laudato Si", by Pope Francis, and the experience of the values of Justice and Peace in the care of the common home. According to the testimony of several brothers and sisters, the visit of the icons to their countries was a moment of grace in which they met, as a family, the different organizations moved by the spirit of Saint Francis and Saint Clare of Assisi.

During the pilgrimage, which began simultaneously in Mexico and Chile on February 10, the icons have summoned nearly sixty thousand people. We thank all the people of good will who have been involved in the organization of hundreds of activities around the icons. These icons and activities were the "pretext" to sing "Laudato si ' my Lord for all your creatures".

The closing of the pilgrimage took place at the same time as the V Ecological Week organized by the Franciscan Family in Ecuador. On the last day, Saturday 28, in the morning, a small delegation of the Franciscan Family, with

Pilgrims with the icons of Saint Francis and Saint Clare. (Photo courtesy of ofm.org)



representatives from different countries, went to the "monument at the Middle of the World". They offered a prayer. The symbolic meeting of the two icons, traveled on a pilgrimage from North and from South America. In the afternoon, Monsignor José Adalberto Jiménez, OFM Cap, presided over the Eucharist. The OFM Provincial Ministers of Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador accompanied him, together with many members of the Franciscan family.

This activity ended the eight months pilgrimage that united many voices of the American continent. Pilgrims "walked with Francisco and Clara for a more fraternal and solidary world in Justice, Peace and Integrity with Creation" as the official motto of the pilgrimage. There will be Latin American initiatives to come in the field of JPIC – Franciscan Family in the near future. This pilgrimage, in the opinion of the participants, allowed them to broaden a little more the physical and ideological borders that sometimes separated us, in order to unite us around the Encyclical Laudato Si' and the care of our Sister Mother Earth. (ofm.org)

## THE GENERAL DEFINITORIES OF THE FOUR FRANCISCAN FAMILIES ON COMMON RETREAT IN LA VERNA

From October 4-8, 2017, at the Franciscan Shrine of La Verna, the General Ministers of the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, Friars Michael Perry OFM, Mauro Jöhri, OFMCap, Marco Tasca, OFMConv, Nicholas Polichnowski, TOR, along with the friars of the General Definitoriums of the four families gathered on Retreat. (ofm.org)



General Definitorium of the four Franciscan families with Muslim theologian, Prof. Shahrzad Houshmand Zadeh during their retreat at La Verna. (Photo courtesy of ofm.org)

A few years ago, the brother Definitors of the four Franciscan Families participated in a similar experience. It was a time of grace, of listening to the Word of God and prayer. This year's Retreat was designed as one of the elements of the process of preparing for the anniversary of the meeting of St. Francis with the Sultan (in 2019 we will celebrate the 800th anniversary of this event). For this reason, the reflections proposed by the presenters dealt with themes of dialogue, diversity, alterity and friendship.

The Franciscan friars were led, during the first days of the Retreat, by Mons. Jean-Paul Vesco, OP, Bishop of Oran (Algeria). Bp. Vesco dealt with the themes of dialogue and friendship. The Conference on the last day of the Retreat was entrusted to the Muslim theologian, Prof. Shahrzad Houshmand Zadeh. She explained some issues relating to the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, pausing at length on dogmatic and spiritual matters. The brother Definitors left La Verna somehow changed and touched, certainly by the ideas shared by the presenters but also by cordial and generous hospitality offered by the friars who work and live at the Shrine of La Verna. (ofm.org)

## THE PARDON OF ASSISI 2017

This year's anniversary was particularly solemn; given it was the closure of the 800th Anniversary of the Pardon of Assisi. This jubilee was inaugurated on August 2, 2016, by Gualtiero Cardinal BASSETTI, and was enhanced by Pope Francis' private pilgrimage to the Porziuncola two days later, on August 4, 2016. The solemn closing celebration for the Jubilee of Pardon took place at 11:00 a.m. on August 2, 2017, and was presided over by His Eminence Pietro Cardinal PAROLIN, His Holiness' Secretary of State.

Another peculiarity of this year, highlighting the bonds between the Franciscan Family, was a feast created by the ingenious intuition of our common founder, Francis of Assisi. This was the Triduum of Preparation (July 29-31) which was preached by the Ministers General of the three Franciscan Orders. (The Friars Minor Capuchin were represented by their Vicar General.) This shared event was placed in perfect continuity along the path that had been undertaken up to that point. The path culminated with the "Generalissimo" Chapter that the Franciscan families celebrated together. (ofm.org)

# HUMAN RIGHTS IN ASIA AND OCEANIA

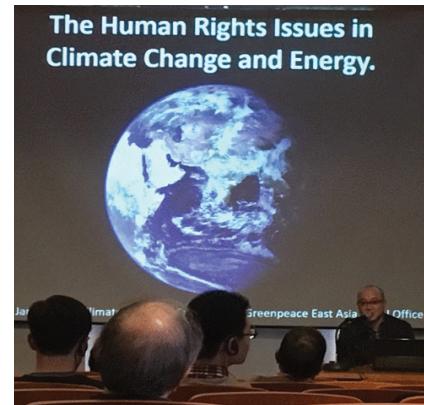


Animators of the different entities of East Asia Conference (EAC), and South Asia Oceania Conference (SAAOC), including Bro. Alejo Villanueva Jr., OFM, Provincial Animator at the JPIC Continental Meeting of Asia and Oceania in Seoul, South Korea. (Photo courtesy of ofm.org)

The Franciscan Animators of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) from Asia and Oceania gathered together to share, listen, discuss and propose about concerns on Human Rights in Asia and Oceania. The conference was held in the City of Seoul, South Korea from October 9 – 14, 2017. The participants came from India, Pakistan, Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Japan and Australia.

The JPIC Continental Meeting aimed to encourage the brothers who are responsible for the work of JPIC in their respective countries to improve the quality of their communication, to intensify formation on JPIC concerns, and to hold reflections and activities on the following themes: migration, mining and new lifestyle taken from the International Council of JPIC in Verona, 2016.

The first day of the conference was filled with sharing of JPIC works from the different entities of the East Asian Conference (EAC) and the South Asia and Oceania Conference (SAAOC). In the following days the animators participated in the different sessions: "The Problem of Migration and Human Trafficking in the Asian Region" presented by Joyce Kim; "The Peace Issue in Asia" expounded by Ms. Curry; and "The Human Rights Issue as Related with Climate Change and Energy" given by Mr. Daul Jang. They took part in the "Wednesday Protest" in front of the Japanese Embassy. A protest in support for the demands of comfort women from the Japanese Government to at least apologize for their abuses during World War II. The animators also visited the "War and Women's Human Rights Museum".



On the last day, the participants discussed possibilities of collaborative work among them and of making concrete action plans to implement in their respective countries for the next three years. (Bro. Alejo Villanueva, Jr., OFM)

## FRANCISCANS IN THE SEASON OF CREATION

On September 1, 2017, the opening of the Season of Creation, friars of the OFM province headed by the JPIC Animator Bro. Al Villanueva participated in the Walk for Creation as it marked the World Day of Prayer for Creation. They joined thousands of people who participated in the cause as they tread the roads going to Luneta Park. According to the friars who participated in the said activity, as Franciscan friars and followers of St. Francis of Assisi, they are tasked to be more profound in supporting different advocacies on creation.

Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, DD presided over the Holy Mass culminating the day's activity.

# THE PROVINCIAL PLENARY COUNCIL

BY FR. GENEROSO B. PASTIDIO, OFM

"Our challenge is to be more reflective not just on the issues we will be tackling, but on the responsibility of our mission for the people of God" Fr. Reu Jose Galoy, OFM, the vicar provincial, said in his homily on the first day of the Plenary Council.

About 40 friars gathered together on October, 17-19 at the newly renovated Poggio Bustone Renewal Center in Brgy. Beneg, Botolan, Zambales. They came a day earlier than the Council for the blessing of the very much enhanced Poverello Hall, the venue of the meetings. Fr. Cielito Almazan, OFM, Minister Provincial, officiated the blessing.

"Listening, Discerning and Action". This was the theme that guided the discussions of the Plenary Council. Fr. Andres Rañoa, OFM was the facilitator of the Plenary Council.

First to be tackled was the revision of the Charism, Vision, Mission and Goal of the Province. After the report on the topic presented by Fr. Reu Jose Galoy, OFM the brothers animatedly participated in the discussion that followed, sharing their ideas and aspirations concerning the CVM of their lives as a Franciscan Fraternity.

Among the other issues discussed in the plenary council were on the Formation Program, on Finances, on Restructuring and on the State of the Franciscan Schools.

Fr. Irineo Tactac, OFM, the Secretary for Formation and Studies presented to the plenum an assessment of the formation program. The discussion that followed surfaced the desire of the friars on these concerns: on strengthening the common Franciscan formation, on vocation promotion, on the formation and specialization of non-ordained brothers and on the preparation of formation personnels.

The topic on the Restructuring of the Province was facilitated by Fr. Napoly Pasion, OFM the Secretary of the Office for Mission and Evangelization. He presented to the brothers the result of his survey of the brothers on this particular issue. The friars exchanged suggestions and ideas that aimed at a renewed animation and the need for the restructuring of communities and regions in view of enhancing fraternal life in mission.

Fr. Marlowe Rosales, OFM, the Superintendent of the Franciscan Schools also brought to the attention of the brothers the difficulties he encountered as Superintendent of Franciscan Schools. In the discussion, the brothers shared their appreciation of the hard-work done by Fr. Marlowe for the Franciscan Schools. They wished that the Association of Franciscan Schools will take up the concerns and suggestions that surfaced in the discussion.

The last morning of the Plenary Council was devoted to the finalization and approval of resolutions. In his homily during the closing liturgy of the Plenary Council 2017, Fr. Cielito Almazan said, "I hope and pray that the Holy Spirit will continue animating us in our actions. All these we do to become authentic witnesses of Christ and evangelizers of our times in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi."



The State of the Finances of the Province was presented by Fr. Reu Jose Galoy, OFM, the Chairman of the Provincial Financial Board and Fr. Robert John Abada, OFM, Provincial Bursar. They were assisted by professional accountants who conducted a study of the financial situation of the Province. During the discussion the brothers desire above all to come up with comprehensive plans, strategies and alternative solutions to address the financial difficulties of the province.



## LISTENING, DISCERNING, ACTING

### Excerpts from the Homily of Cielito Almazan, OFM for the Closing of the Provincial Plenary Council 2017

We thank God for giving us an opportunity to review our life and commitments in the Order and in the Church in this Provincial Plenary Council. I believe that the Holy Spirit was with us, as we were "listening and discerning." Soon there will be "action" as we proposed in our resolutions. I hope and pray that the Spirit will continue animating us in our actions. All these we do to become authentic witnesses of Christ and evangelizers of our times, in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

#### PETER OF ALCANTARA

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Peter of Alcantara, a follower of St. Francis and an outstanding witness and evangelizer of his time. When I was in college, when we took mysticism, our professor, a Claretian, said, St. Peter of Alcantara is one of the mystics of the Church, those who had deep experience of God. He was the spiritual adviser or confessor of St. Therese of Avila, a Carmelite reformer and another mystic.

St. Peter had his own way of reaching mystical experience, getting lost in the mystery of God. He had his own method, different from that St. Therese and that of Ignatius of Loyola. His holiness had a great influence in the Franciscan movement in Spain. He

influenced the spirituality of the first friars who came to the Philippines so much that they were called Alcantarines. He did not come to the Philippines. He died before the friars set their foot in our land, but his spirit was well alive in the friars who came to our country.

The first Franciscan missionaries evangelized the native Filipinos with success because of the strong discipline they learned from St. Peter of Alcantara. They were known to be spending much time praying on their knees. They mortified, they fasted, all those traditional ways, even before coming here. So as soon as they arrived on July 3, 1578, they focused on their mission work. They did not stay long with the Augustinians in Intramuros resting and recreating. I saw in the book of Apolinario Pastrana that within the year of their arrival, the friars already had gone to many places, establishing many towns and building churches in the Tagalog and Bicol regions.

Brothers, St. Peter of Alcantara should serve as our inspiration too. It is important for us also to go back to God, like him and the first Franciscans, that mission is not all actions, actions, outside commitments, activisms, conversions, organizing, teachings, but having deep communion with God, done in prayer and contemplation.

## AUTHENTIC WITNESSES

While St. Peter of Alcantara may inspire us, the gospel reading gives us a little discomfort. Jesus says, "Woe to you who build memorials of the prophets whom your fathers killed." There is so much violence here. The so-called spiritual leaders of his times were murderers. They eliminated those who challenged their teachings and beliefs. They are liable for judgment. We too become liable when we kill our fraternity, by spending more time building structures and posting our little accomplishments in the social media, to immortalize the memory of ourselves.

Jesus says also in the gospel, "Woe to you, scholars of the law!" The equivalent of the scholars before are the clerics and us religious, the present-day theologians. If we are not careful, we may be blocking the entry of people to heaven because of our tendentious teachings and interpretations, and scandalous behavior, due to lack of relationship with God.

Strong prayerlife makes us more authentic witnesses of the kingdom and should motivate us to do more mission and evangelization. Community life, community prayer, community recreation is not a hindrance to building BECs and starting new forms of life, but it is truly living our charism.

Speaking of our charism, we have revised and simplified it in a few but meaningful words. Now we call the whole thing no longer CVM, but C-M-V-O that should make it easier for us to focus on our fraternal lifestyle and mission.

## NEW MISSIONS

Our present minister general Michael Perry has lamented when I was in Rome that the Order has long not been

able to make a new mission project. The last one, if I remember right, was the African Project during the time of John Vaughn in the 1980s. I was there in Rome. Our two brothers Enrique Carpio and Jimmy Giron volunteered to go to Rwanda. They too were trained first in Brussels.

To start a new one, entities, not only provinces should restructure, realign – meaning giving up old commitments like just maintaining an old building, a fixed asset, or an old apostolate, and accepting new commitments relevant to our times. At least, what our general is trying to do to foster our missionary spirit is not concentrated in one continent, but in different places, in Russia, Kazakhtan, etc.

## FORMATION TO MISSION

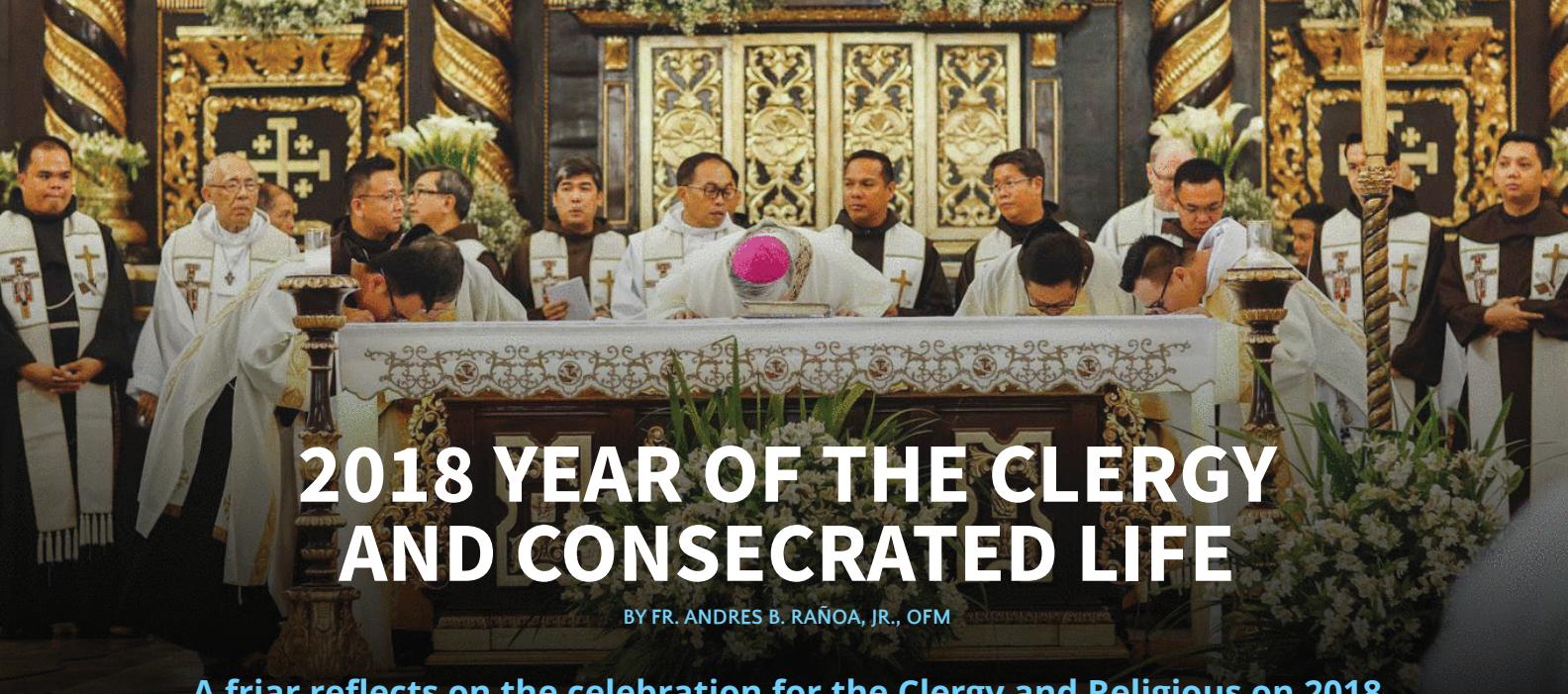
Here the work of formation has a lot to do in the preparations. We are living in a constantly changing world. It is very easy to determine whether a person is in the present or in the past, by the way he uses his cellphone or computer, or by the vocabularies he speaks or the examples that he presents.

We are constantly reminded that if we are not understood by our young of today, in our sharings or homilies, we become irrelevant. We are wasting their time. That's why they do not come to church anymore. That's why, we always need to evaluate ourselves, our programs if they are still relevant. Formation must update us with the new expressions and new vocabularies, new ways as befit the new evangelization.

## FAITH AS BROTHERS

The first reading tells us that the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law of Moses, but through the faith in Jesus Christ. Literally translation of the genitive case would say, "faith of Jesus Christ." Jesus also had faith.

God's righteousness can also be manifested to the world, to our brothers and sisters, through our faith as brothers, as fraternity. We as a province can manifest, give witness to God's goodness through our fraternal life and mission, as taught by our holy Father St. Francis.



# 2018 YEAR OF THE CLERGY AND CONSECRATED LIFE

BY FR. ANDRES B. RAÑO, JR., OFM

## A friar reflects on the celebration for the Clergy and Religious on 2018

Filipino Catholics are looking forward to the 500th year of Christianity in the Philippines. In a pastoral letter entitled *Live Christ, Share Christ* the bishops recall with thanksgiving the first Mass celebrated in Limasawa Island on Easter Sunday March 31, 1521; the baptism of Rajah Humabon who was given his Christian name Carlos and his wife Hara Amihan who was baptized Juana, and the Santo Niño de Cebu, the oldest religious icon in the Philippines, gift of Ferdinand Magellan to the first Filipino Catholics. Indeed the year 2021 will be a year of great jubilee for the Church in the Philippines."

In 2012 on the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the 20th year of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the declaration of the Year of Faith from October 11, 2012 until November 24, 2013 by the Holy Father summoned XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops with the theme "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith" in Rome from October 7 to 28, 2012. The CBCP adopted a similar theme.

### PHILIPPINE CELEBRATION

According to the pastoral letter, the theme New Evangelization stands on four pillars:

1. fostering and fulfilling the "**missio ad gentes**," as a special vocation of the Church in our country, effectively involving our lay people, priests and seminarians and men and women in consecrated life;

2. "bringing Good News to the poor" toward becoming "**a Church for and with the poor**";
3. **reaching out** to those among us whose faith-life has been largely eroded and even lost and **those who have drifted from the Faith and the Church, and have joined other religious sects**, and
4. awakening or reawakening in faith, forming and animating in Christian life our **young people** and youth sector groups, in both urban and rural settings.

We have been charting a nine-year journey for the New Evangelization which will end with the Jubilee Year 2021. 2013 was a year of faith; 2014 laity; 2015 poor and 2016 Eucharist and the Family. This year was dedicated to the Parish as a Communion of Communities and next year for the Clergy and Religious (2018). The last three years 2019-2021 are dedicated to the Youth, Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue and *Missio ad gentes*.

These 9 pastoral priorities of the Church in the Philippines were/are celebrated in conjunction with the current or previous themes of the Universal



Church: Laity, Poor, Eucharist, Consecrated Life, etc. The climax which is the *ad gentes* mission envision that Filipino missionaries will start to fill the world with the Good News that Jesus is truly the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Catholics would have been evangelized once again and prepared to share their faith.



All efforts at awakening the faith of people is centered on the People of God's vocation to be holy and mission to make others holy. How does the Church envision this universal call to holiness during the Year of the Clergy and the Religious? The specific theme is "Renewed Servant-Leader for the New Evangelization." The logo chosen for this theme is the *Mandatum* or Jesus' washing of the feet of his disciples.

By washing each other's feet. The clergy and the laity as disciples of Christ are called to serve and even forgive one another. The action of Christ in washing the feet indicates to us the way. It is through the humble ministry of the servant leaders done out of love towards one another and towards their flock that they could become holy together with their flock.

In planning for this Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Life, representatives from different dioceses and a representative from the CBCP met in August. The CBCP representative said: "I am very excited coordinating with the different dioceses nationwide, so that, our priests and religious will become better instruments of God for the benefit of the people." He added that working for God is always exciting especially in "working for peace, justice and the good of all, especially the weak and poor." The discussion was centered on the obligations of priests and religious in evangelizing especially to those who have not heard it yet.

Who were missing in the planning? Representatives from the Consecrated Life, like sisters and brothers. Apparently the planners failed to see the specific role those in consecrated life might be able to contribute tremendously. The activities lined up

throughout the year 2018 are for priests and religious priests primarily. The Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons begins on December 3, 2017 (First Sunday of Advent) till November 25, 2018 (Solemnity of Christ the King).

## NEW EVANGELIZATION

After the Second Vatican Council, renewal became the catch word. Priests were challenged to renew. Religious were mandated to align their missionary dimension according the new missionary evangelization called for by Vatican II.

The Franciscan Order, in compliance with the call, revised their General Constitution. The section on evangelization and mission underwent various revisions as the awareness for a renewed understanding of mission intensified. There were efforts initially at *Implantatio Ordinis* or Implantation of the Order, with emphasis on the dialogue of life and presence in new places. We do not go *ad gentes* to preach Roman Catholic faith primarily but the Kingdom of God. Mission is understood not only going out *ad gentes* but a re-evangelization of Catholics in the Christian faith. Then personal mission was out of the question. Our mission is the mission in fraternity and of the fraternity. We must be evangelized first before we evangelize. Other forms of living our charism emerged.

Other Orders and congregations, male and female, engaged in similar endeavor according to their founding charisms. The result was shared in diocesan endeavors by the religious clergy and renewed men and women in consecrated life. They involve themselves within the parishes and the mutual relations among religious and bishops were clarified. Parish renewal experiences, establishment of parish committees participated by lay became in vogue as a result of the renewal in the identity of the laity. Sacraments were reinvigorated. The challenge of nominal Catholics versus "sacramentalized" Catholics versus "evangelized" Catholics was addressed.

The men and women in consecrated life can contribute a lot. The challenge for them is to get together and plan their activities in complement to the lined up activities for the year of the clergy and religious. We can safely say that as far as the new evangelization is concerned, the religious are more than prepared to embark in the *missio ad gentes*, which is the envisioned result of these 9 year preparation.



Fr. Joel Sulse, OFM, at Greccio, Italy, where St. Francis celebrated the birth of Jesus.

# CHRISTMAS IN THE HEART OF A PRIEST AND CONSECRATED PERSON

BY FR. JOEL E. SULSE, OFM

The Year 2018 was declared by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) as the Year for the Clergy and Consecrated Persons. This is still part of the nine-year novena in preparation for the Fifth Centennial of the Evangelization of the Philippines. This grace filled year opens on the First Sunday of Advent which prepares us for the Christmas season.

This leads us to ask ourselves: how is Christmas celebrated by a consecrated person and a priest like me? How can I describe the “spirit of the season”, considering the pastoral demands that go with it? As Franciscans, how does the experience of the Poverello serve as a model for an encounter with “the other” in this season?

## WHAT IS CHRISTMAS?

Honestly, the first thoughts that flooded my mind when asked what Christmas is, were the following: an occasion to encounter people with varying needs [material and spiritual], food, visit to my family, rest and silence after the highly demanding schedules of Simbang Gabi, and a visit to poor communities who became close to me and to whom I could “waste time”.

For most of us, the days prior to Christmas are filled with invitations to a lot of parties. I would remember that, once, as a pastor of a big urban parish, there was a time when I would need to attend about four Christmas parties in a day! As a result, I got high remarks in my blood and sugar tests not to mention the increased measurement of my waistline. Anyway, this left me with a decision to share my pants and shirts to others of my “former” size.

## CHRISTMAS IN CHILDHOOD

For many children, Christmas is all about gifts or “aguinaldo.” But not everyone would be as fortunate to have them always. I could recall that during one Christmas, I was told by my parents that my one and only “ninong” in Pandacan, is away. My ninong was a close friend of my father when he was still working in Sta. Mesa. Due to work constraints, we would need to move with my father to his new assignment in Samar.

One time, I have decided to buy a gift for myself from my savings. I told my Mom that it was sent by my Ninong for me. I felt really sad but this led me to the realization that I should be generous to others

most especially to those who have never received gifts even once in their lives. This experience taught me compassion and mercy.

Later on in life, I realized that Christmas is the time when we should be reminded of a God who emptied himself in order to show his love, taking the form of a slave, and being born in the likeness of men. This is the real “aguinaldo” This humility of God should teach us that ‘humbling down’ makes a lot of sense, and an enormous grace beyond compare.

## GROWING UP IN A BIG FAMILY

I remember that when we were still not that many [I have eleven siblings in our family], our parents used to buy us new clothes for Christmas. But when we started to increase in number, our parents were constrained to just save the money for our education. Instead, they instructed us to practice the “hand-me-down” tradition where one must share the good clothes to whoever has the exact fit. For my sisters, this has been the practice. Since I have only one brother who is older, I have no choice but to inherit his old clothes.

Oftentimes, my parents would receive old clothes in good condition from our Chinese cousins. And since my Mom was a good sewer, she would find a way to make our clothes fit well after skillfull adjustments; and we admire her most for that. She was not like our Dad who spoiled us [me, most especially, much to my brother’s jealousy] yet was a strong disciplinarian.

## LEARNINGS FROM CHILDHOOD

Looking back, I should say that I have a very simple childhood and that I seldom get what I wanted. This experience taught me to be generous with others. During Christmas, I have developed the attitude of giving many things that I have; most especially to the poor to whom I can relate with as the little Joel who has no godparents to give him gifts. I thanked God for my childhood experiences since it has helped me to recognize the essence of my being, and the responsibility attached to this lifetime commitment, now as a consecrated follower of Francis of Assisi.

This experience reminds me of the Love of the Father for all of us. It is the reason behind the humility of the Incarnation – the Spirit of self-giving without expecting anything in return. This is the distinct manner of understanding that Francis wants us to consider in each person especially the lowly ones. This is the desire in Francis, when he re-created the scene of the first Christmas in Greccio. In the creche, Francis makes the generous love of God concrete in his Incarnation by affirming the human person as His image and likeness with this special dignity placed at the core of his being.

In his Admonitions, Francis emphasizes this by saying: “Consider, O human being, in what excellence the Lord God has placed you, for He created and formed you to the image of His Beloved Son according to the body and to His own likeness according to the Spirit. (Adm 5, 1).

“  
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Emphasizing the spirit of the humility of God in the context of the family, Pope Francis, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* [The Joy of Love], says that: *the incarnation of the Word in a human family, in Nazareth, by its very newness changed the history of the world.* (no. 65) Pope Francis refers to this as the mystery of Christmas that exudes the beauty of family life and the same experience that fascinated Francis of Assisi.

## CHRISTMAS AS A FRANCISCAN

The day of my profession is in a way, Christmas for me. At the very moment that I have given my life in consecration to God, the “Word became flesh” in me. Reflecting on the experience, it has become like the point of my spiritual conversion. Thus, Christmas day for me is not just December 25. It is the daily living and enfleshing of the values of the God-made-man whose only preoccupation is to love.

Nothwehr, in his book *The Franciscan View of the Person*, captures this realization in Francis, who “showed us that humanity, at its best, continues to bear Christ to the world in the usual events of life. Today, in our vast depersonalized cyber societies, it is often through small ‘random act of kindness’ or simply speaking on behalf of someone less assertive that lives can be changed, because human dignity is made concrete.”

Following his thoughts, everyday is a memorable Christmas experience if one is serious in following Christ (*sequela Christi*). Then, a converted soul will come to realize that each second and minute in our lives are offering us vast opportunities to live the Christ-like experience. Openness to the other would lead us to encounter Christ with those who are lost in the streets; those who are deprived of the basic necessities in life, those who have mechanized their bodies to be able to bring meals to their table, those who are still crying in need for peace and justice, those who have never experienced the love of God in concrete, and to those who would still have to experience ecological conversion.

## LONELY CHRISTMAS?

Some people ask me if we priests and consecrated persons have a lonely Christmas. I honestly don't think so. I believe that in the very depths of the heart of a priest and or a consecrated person, is the memory of a God who was made man. The mere fact that they have offered their lives for the continuance of the mission of Christ is a very strong indicator of a soul possessing the spirit who is capable to "bend down." For how can a man or a woman fully accomplish the work of establishing God's kingdom here on earth without a joyful heart?

Pope Francis, in his letter to the consecrated persons has this to say: "We are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness; that we need not seek our happiness elsewhere; that the authentic fraternity found

in our communities increases our joy; and that our total self-giving in service to the Church, to families and young people, to the elderly and the poor, brings us life-long personal fulfilment."

As a consecrated person, I have to admit that there are times when I am confronted with realities of crisis in my life. No one is ever exempted in experiencing this 'dark night' of the soul. Yet still for me, Christmas should never be celebrated with a lonely heart because the "bundle of limitless joy" – Christ himself, has been given to us. The *Emmanuel* has come to visit us, giving us the opportunity to experience authentic love and joy. So with God, there must be no place for loneliness.

But we cannot deny that many people experience loneliness during the time of Christmas, especially those who are detached from their loved ones even in a temporary or in a permanent basis? There is some sort of a mystery here! And this is where we can pin point to man's neglect of his or her true being.

In the words of Bonaventure, it is the neglect and or denial of the "All Good!" who is God present in the human person. Hence, one commits sin against the other. One abuses the other. One deprives the other of the love, respect, care, compassion among others. One becomes unfaithful to the other. One reduces the other to mere-something. So, the complications of the world and in our lives are all brought about by man's attitude of greed, of unmindfulness, of sloth! But, the premise that Christmas is Joy is irreversible!

## CHRISTMAS WITH CONFRERES

Every year, I look forward to the Christmas party of the Province and of our community. Here the spirit of simplicity, of fraternal joy and solidarity are always celebrated at a minimum yet in a very meaningful way. When I was out of the country, I missed this a lot. As a matter of fact, I cry in my room as I listen alone to Christmas songs in my room. But this was easily changed into joy after a Christmas dinner and *tombola* (Ed: the european equivalent of our bingo) with my community when I was still in Rome.

With the brothers, there is always so much fun, and every time we have our parlor games, it brings us to our child-like innocence. For me, that is priceless! Thanks be to God! We have this Franciscan joy in us!

Finally, what makes a merry Christmas for a priest or a consecrated person like me? God! No more, no less!





Fr. Melito Pinili, OFM, with the Filipino community of Khartoum, Sudan.

# CHRISTMAS AWAY FROM HOME

BY FR. MELITO M. PINILI, OFM

For us, Filipinos, Christmas is one of the feasts we want to celebrate meaningfully and joyfully with our families and friends. But what about when one is away in a foreign country? How does one celebrate Christmas without the people he loves?

I am blessed by the Lord to have experienced Christmas abroad in my seventeen years as a missionary. I have gone to several African countries such as Libya, Egypt, Republic of Sudan and Morocco. One may ask, "How do I celebrate Christmas in these Muslim countries?" Believe me or not, Christmas for me in these countries has always been a time of amazement and holy wonder.

Of course I miss the times when I celebrated Christmas with my family and friends. I think of the children going from house to house to carol. I imagine the beautiful lanterns hanging in houses, in churches, in malls, in the streets. And for the Christmas melodies I have to connect to the internet or play in my laptop some of my few collections of old Christmas music. Quite a sad and lonely Christmas you might say.

Indeed it would be a lonely Christmas if we only look at the things we miss. But the missionary does not dwell on the past. The missionary dwells on the

present and the future and in the firm faith that even before we have set foot on the land where we are now, Christ has already been there. And, indeed, he has!

At present, I am stationed in Morocco with missionaries from other countries. Together our goal is to establish a dialogue of life with all the Moroccans and other foreigners. Our desire is to engage in a friendly encounter with them, in a relationship that is built on trust and love. In short, we desire nothing else but to make visible the "Word made flesh and dwelt among us." Quite a difficult task, you might say, because in the place where we are there are only very few Christians. The rest are Muslims.

But Christ, indeed, has been here ahead of us. He has made it easy for us to establish our dialogue of life with the Moroccans. Christ has already opened the hearts of the Moroccans to welcome us!

Morocco is an open country which allows the practice of different religions, and the government recognizes Christmas as a very especial feast among Christians. They know that it is the day of the birth of Jesus Christ as a prophet. Moreover, they not only respect the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ (Id Yasua Al Massi) but also put up Christmas trees and

lights to welcome the tourists, so that they will feel at home and feel the spirit of Christmas in Morocco. What an amazing gesture of fraternal concern from our Muslim brothers and sisters!

Some Moroccans are fascinated by our Christmas decorations. They are very much curious about how we celebrate Christmas. . My Moroccan friends ask me how I celebrate and what I do and where I go during Christmas. I gladly tell them. Our dialogue of life goes on.

The Moroccans make it easy for us to celebrate Christmas with joy. So we also desired to make other Christians happy during Christmas. In our community, we invite Spanish lay Catholics, nuns, and African students to celebrate Christmas with us. So much so that during Christmas our church goers increase from fifteen to thirty Catholics participating in our liturgies. What? Only fifteen to thirty people? Yes! And we thank God for them. In our missions we are not after numbers. We are after the glow of joy that radiates in the faces of the other Christians on Christmas.

There are more Catholics in the Diocese of Tangier (Spanish speaking, north of Morocco) and the Diocese of Rabat (French speaking south of Morocco). Here, the churches are well decorated with Christmas signs and symbols. The liturgies and activities in these communities are greatly influenced by French and Spanish traditions. Moreover, the presence of many African Catholic migrants, such as the workers, the immigrants, refugees, students and the Sub-Saharan people contributed to the beauty of our liturgical celebrations. Here are different cultures and languages blending in beautiful harmony through songs, dances and symbols to celebrate the birth of their only Lord and Savior.

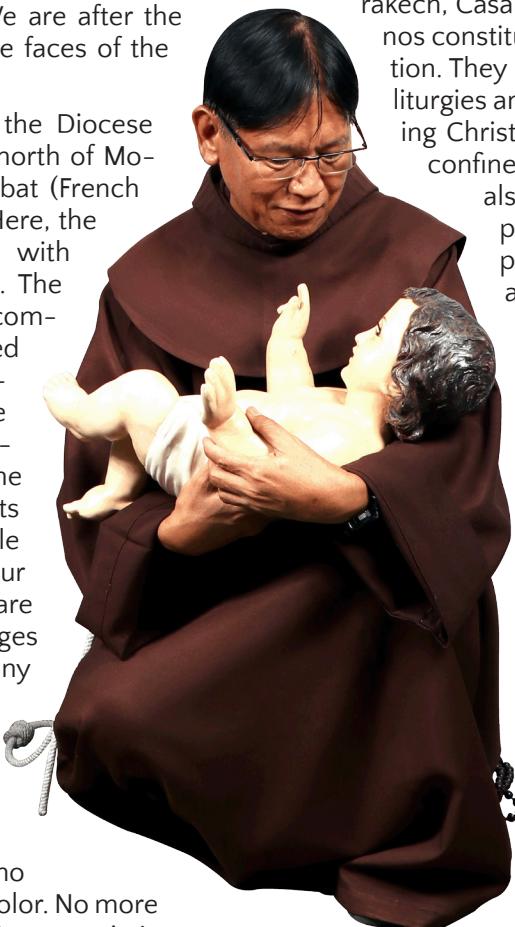
These occasions usually move me emotionally. There are no more races nor differences in color. No more wealthy or ordinary laborer. Everyone is just a brother or a sister to the other, members of one big family. And joyfully I sing the hymns with them, and I sway and move my body with them. Truly I feel I belong. I sincerely feel very much at home.

In the Philippines we eagerly celebrate the traditional Simbang Gabi or Dawn Masses, nine days before December 25. These are occasions when you see the churches overflowing with people. In Morocco there is no Simbang Gabi or dawn masses except in Christ the King Church in Casablanca. Here, the priests are French and Italian and they celebrate the masses in English. There is also a good number of Filipinos here, most of whom are working in the International Duty Shops and they take care of organizing the Simbang Gabi which they usually schedule at 7:00 in the evening. It's one of my greatest joys to celebrate mass with them. It's really a different feeling when you celebrate Simbang Gabi in a Church with decorations similar to what you see in the Philippines, with a congregation that is mostly from your own country speaking your language at home.

Among the English speaking Catholics in Marrakech, Casablanca, Safi and Rabat the Filipinos constitute the majority in the congregation. They play a great role in preparing the liturgies and training the choirs to sing during Christmas. Their animating skill is not confined only in church activities. They also organize Christmas parties participated by Americans, Europeans and African Catholics such as the Nigerians, Camerounians and other English speaking Africans. Here they lead everyone to sing Christmas songs and to exchange gifts with one another.

I bless and thank God that he made the Filipinos his instruments in gathering people together to celebrate the birth of His Son; and for making everyone happy as they share the spirit of brotherhood beyond cultural bounds. I'm always excited to celebrate mass with them and attend their gatherings even if I have to travel for eight hours to reach them. For there's nothing greater than to be filled with holy wonder upon witnessing that Christmas and the love

and joy that it brings is very much real even if you are away from home.





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Group photo of Pastors and Lay Partners during the Pastoral Assembly 2017

## THE FRANCISCAN PASTORAL CHALLENGE: GO FORTH WITH ONE HEART AND ONE SOUL

**Strengthening the Pastoral Workers in the Franciscan Parishes**

### FPA GOAL

The team of the Office for Mission and Evangelization of the Province of San Pedro Bautista is extra dedicated to its mission for the Franciscan Parishes and communities. Hence, the annual Franciscan Pastoral Assembly was created to provide a venue for the pastoral lay agents to deliberate on the significant issues encountered in their Pastoral Ministries.

The 14th Franciscan Pastoral Assembly was held on Oct. 13-16, 2017 at the Our Lady of the Angels Seminary, Novaliches, Quezon City. There were about one hundred twenty-five (125) friars and lay leaders who attended the gathering coming from the sixteen (16) OFM parishes in Luzon to discuss important issues related to the empowerment of the BEC and strengthening the pastoral Workers.

The Franciscan Pastoral Assembly aimed to achieve the following: (1) To lead the participants into a deep encounter with Jesus as the real source of unity and communion while working in our Franciscan parishes/quasi parish/shrines, (2) To reaffirm the OFM Pastoral Thrust in forming Basic Ecclesial Communities as a concrete manifestation of a participatory church, (3) To challenge the role and lifestyle of the participants as they see the importance of becoming communion-in-mission for the renewal of the Church and her transformation.

### INSPIRING THOUGHTS

According to by Fr. Reu Jose Galoy, OFM, the Vicar Provincial and Parish Priest of Santuario de San Antonio Parish, Forbes Park, Makati City, the Pastoral Assembly is the most awaited gathering of all the

pastoral lay agents working in the Franciscan communities. The theme says, Go forth with one heart and one soul. It challenges everyone to have an understanding that a parish is not only concerned of one's own community but it also acts as a messenger of the Good News, bringing Christ to everyone specially those who live in isolated communities.

Fr. Cielito Almazan, OFM in his letter addressed to the participants said, "As pastors and lay leaders, it is time again to renew our friendships with one another, to review our mission in our local churches vis-a-vis the OFM Pastoral Thrust and to examine the quality of our leadership in renewing the Church to make it more dynamic and truly the instrument of advancing God's reign in our hearts."

He also stated in his letter that, "In our parishes, we are not there to do our own will, to spend much time, money and resources for our personal agenda and projects, but to carry out the mandates given by the Franciscan Order, the Philippine Church and the Province's pastoral thrust, spelled out in our documents, statements and resolutions. Those are our true guides in truly administering our parishes."

Fr. Etchie Enalpe, OFM, the Parish Animator of the Office for Mission and Evangelization also delivered inspiring words. He said, "The only time people truly get to know more about themselves, their culture



and tradition, their identity as a people, and more importantly, their shared vision and aspiration is when they gather and exchange profound thoughts and feelings especially when the exchange is on the mental or spiritual level. This is basically the essence of communion – an intense connection that makes us both human and humane.

"The 14th Franciscan Pastoral Assembly wishes to explore the same theme of connection and unity as a parish as communion of communities. This is an occasion for all friars and lay leaders to open more spaces in our parishes for people entrusted to our care. By opening spaces to others, we will be able to touch the wounds of our Risen Lord in the vulnerable, the weak and those in the peripheries by listening to their concerns and aspirations. This is our way of offering a room to everybody, friars and lay participants, as we listen to each other's stories, feelings and thoughts during this two and a half day pastoral assembly.

"Communion is not considered self-referential or captivating. Communion is mission – it is going forth spreading the story of Jesus amidst the indifference of peoples. Day Three of FPA will lead us to the challenge of mission. The disciples of Jesus after listening to him were sent to the entire world to tell his story. In our missionary activity, let us look for what is common, allow space for others in order for them to participate and create a lifestyle of being communion-in-mission."

Fr. Etchie also stressed in an interview by the Franciscan Communications Office that the challenge of the Parish Animator's Office is to strengthen and develop the Spirituality of Stewardship in the BEC

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**Communion is not considered self-referential or captivating. Communion is mission - it is going forth spreading the story of Jesus amidst the indifference of peoples.**

which is, as they realized, to be developed more within the Franciscan communities. Our goal is to have a solidarity and interaction among the parishes in Luzon. And the challenge is to go forth with one heart and one soul. As a Province, our goal is to establish the parishes as a real communion of communities. The office urges everyone to create sustainable programs in strengthening Stewardship within the BEC in the Franciscan communities.

### **BEC AS A WAY OF LIFE**

An alumnus of OLAS and the present Parish Priest of the Holy Trinity Parish, Sampaloc, Manila, Fr. Eric Enrico Adoviso was among the invited resource speakers. He shared his views and thoughts based on his experience in developing BEC in their community.

He stressed in his talk that BEC is not a mandated organization in the church but it is a way of life. He also mentioned some difficulties that are usually encountered by pastoral lay agents and the clergy. Fr. Eric also expounded on the importance of developing the relationship among the members of the BEC as part of their spiritual maturity.

### **THE PASTORAL WORKERS' VIEWS**

Many of the Franciscan communities are in remote areas. Friars were sent to depressed barangays to evangelize people. They journeyed to the hills and mountains, crossed roaring rivers and lived simple lives in an island. These mission areas are the priorities of the Office for Mission and Evangelization to establish Basic Ecclesial Communities.

Mrs. Vilma Buraga, who works in St. Clare of Assisi Parish in Isabela values all the knowledge she had learned from the 3-day assembly and pledged to impart to her community those significant learnings to strengthen their BEC.

"I was glad that I was chosen to represent our community in this gathering specially that I belong to a depressed area. We are asking that well trained pastoral workers, be sent to us to help us create sustainable program for BEC. The friars assigned in our area endured the difficulties in walking kilometers to reach a community." Ms. Erlinda Mehrurada, a pastoral worker in the Diocesan Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi in Donsol, Sorsogon lamented of the hard work of the friars sent to their area. They climb difficult ways on hills just to teach catechism and celebrate mass for people who cannot get out of the mountain.

"The significant lessons that I learned from this gathering is how to value the service we offer to the parish and accomplish the duties and responsibilities asked of us by the church as pastoral lay agents. As a mother, I will be glad to tell my children to also offer the same service to the church," Mrs. Luz Sandoy, a lay worker from the Santuario de San Pedro Bautista Parish in Frisco, Quezon City and a mother, is hoping that her children will be encouraged to do the same apostolate by her examples.

Mrs. Alma Guemo of San Jose Ang Tagapagtanggol Parish in Brgy. Holy Spirit, Quezon City also shared her inspiring experience on BEC. She spiritedly narrates: "Since I joined the BEC community in San Jose ang Tagapagtanggol Parish, I have learned so many



things, such as how to mingle with the people, how to help people and be humble, how to embrace the poor and the children in the streets. I have learned how to go to the depressed areas to spread love by way of helping the needy in the little way I can. I find it fulfilling that we are doing these things with sincerity as members of the BEC."

## THE RESOLUTIONS

On the last day, the 14th FPA came up with the following resolutions; (a) to actively implement the OFM Franciscan Pastoral Thrust towards forming Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC's) within the trienium considering the following concerns; to hire

at least one full time Pastoral Worker/ Community organizer per parish and ensure that he or she be provided with the necessary formation; provide lay leaders with continuous and sufficient formation in sustaining Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) and Spirituality of Stewardship (SOS); and continue the implementation of the Parish BEC and SOS regardless of the change of the Parish Pastoral Team, (b) to enjoin the Franciscan Provincial Leadership to consider assigning pastors, who have the heart and soul for BEC's and stewardship and (c) to foster in the parishes the BEC principles of co-responsibility, collegiality and subsidiarity according to the Franciscan Charism.

## NEWS

### FRANCISCAN PASTORS' CONFERENCE

The Franciscan Characteristic of Pastoral Care in parishes were pointed out in the talk of Fr. Esmeraldo Enalpe, Jr., OFM, the Parish animator during the Franciscan Pastors' conference held on November 8-10 at Calatagan, Batangas. Witness and servants of the word of God, adorers in spirit and truth with all creation, signs and workers for communion, content to be among the poor and promoters of peace and sent to the whole world were the five complimentary dimensions pointed out and further discussed during the talk.

The said gathering aimed to experience deeper bonding among the friars and to come up with concrete action plans vis-à-vis the 14th Franciscan Pastoral Assembly resolutions.

The Provincial JPIC Animator, Bro. Alejo Villanueva, OFM, gave an update on JPIC concerns from the international and local levels. After the presentation, the pastors discussed on the possibilities and on how those realities can be taken into serious consideration in the parish ministry. Fr. Ireneo Tactac III OFM, Secretary for Formation and Studies also reported some details concerning the Initial and Ongoing Formation of the Province.

Cielito R. Almazan, OFM, Minister Provincial, delivered his inspiring message to the pastors by reminding them to take into serious consideration the resolution of the 14th Franciscan Pastoral Conference. He said that as pastors living in fraternity (communion-in-mission) they are called to respond to the mission of the Church and ensure the implementation of the OFM Pastoral Thrust.



The Resolutions made during the Franciscan Pastoral Assembly and an input on the Plan of Action were tackled on the second day. It was facilitated by Fr. Reu Jose Galoy, OFM the vicar provincial. During the deliberation, the pastors reflected on the theme, "Franciscan Pastoral Leadership Concern: Heart and Soul for BEC-SOS".

The pastors also desired to identify what makes a Franciscan parish truly Franciscan? This was the topic in the group sharing and workshops. According to Fr. Enalpe, OFM, it would be a great consolation for us when the faithful entrusted to our care can easily make a pronouncement that theirs is truly a Franciscan Parish. When this happens then we can say that the FPC 2017 Resolutions have come to fruition. It is now our turn to act. We need to give flesh to our respective plans and establish details for its exemplification" he added.

The friars also discussed the CBCP's declaration on 2018 as the Year of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons. To highlight the celebration, a pilgrimage in Assisi or Holy Land is one of the proposals they submit to the provincial definitory for approval.

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# PROVCOM ATTENDS THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL MEDIA SUMMIT v6

BY BR. KELVIN C. ROSAS, OFM



Br. Kelvin Rosas, OFM, Br. Harriet Fontiveros, OFM, and Karl Elloran.

The Catholic Social Media Summit V.6 challenged the gathering of students, seminarians, priests, parish media ministers, and communicators. The message is to be aware of the trolls' treacherous posts of fake news and anti-Catholic propaganda and to counter them by spreading more of the Good News in the world of social media so as to inspire others to do the same and be reconciled with God.

On November 18, 2017, with its theme: Dispelling the Darkness in Social Media, the Catholic Social Media Summit v. 6 conducted a series of talks regarding the platform of Social Media and the spread of the Catholic faith and truth. The resource persons included the Most Rev. Pablo David, Bishop of Caloocan, Msgr. Pedro Quitorio, Director of CBCP Media Office, Fr. Jade Licuanan,

Fr. Amado Picardal, CSsR, and Fr. Jeffrey Segovia. The event was held in Siena College, Quezon City. The bible verse used was taken from Isaiah 43:5: "Fear not for I am with you."

The event started with the Eucharistic Celebration presided over by Msgr. Pedro Quitorio, with seven concelebrating priests. After the Mass, the talks followed. Every after two speakers the participants were encouraged to ask questions. The event offered meaningful new discoveries and ways of how to traverse respectfully and effectively on the fake information in the social media platform. According to Quitorio, "bashing is not something new. This is as old as humanity. Don't be afraid! Don't be discouraged!... The only way to fight this phenomenon of fake news or dispel darkness in the media is to switch

on the light." Speaking the Truth and inspiring others to tell the Truth through social media is the main mission of every Catholic Christian as far as evangelization in the virtual community is concerned.



Rev. Msgr. Pedro C. Quitorio, III



# EXPERIENCING CHRISTMAS IN THE COMMUNITY

**Rhodel and Harriet, both first year professed friars, reflect on how their ideas of Christmas have changed after they have embraced the Franciscan way of life.**

## THE GIFT-GIVER

BY BR. RHODEL G. ABAD, OFM

Whenever Christmas is near we often hear the question: "What gifts would you like to receive?" But is Christmas really about receiving something?

### CHRISTMAS AS A CHILD

When I was a child, I was always excited to receive Christmas gifts from my godparents. I often would spend days trying to imagine what they would give me. Would it be new clothes, or toys, or cash so I could buy something I truly liked? Furthermore, my

friends and I would hop from one house to another singing our hearts out as we serenaded them with our Christmas carols in exchange for some coins to add to our "baon."

Things changed when I got older. Enough to realize that I was too old to be receiving some Aguinaldo. Now it is time for me to give back. But how?

### OUTREACH PROGRAM

One day when I was still working in Makati, my colleagues asked me to join them in their annual outreach program for street children. I got interested with the idea since this would be my first time to

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**While giving brings a lot of prestige and honor in it, begging helps us more to see the reality of who we are as mendicants for meaning and love.**

experience this thing. I was amused on how happy my friends were as they packed some toys for the street children in Paco, Manila. They all bought these out of their own pockets. I learned that they used to visit these kids every now and then just to mingle with them.

All the days of hard work in preparing for the gift-giving day was easily replaced by the joys that we experienced in preparing the gifts. Looking at them, I realized how fortunate I have been. I also noticed how my colleagues were very happy that day.

### **GOD AS THE GIVER**

But why do we have to give gifts on Christmas? It is because, God himself is the gift.

Pope Benedict XVI, reflecting on Christmas during one of his General Audiences, has this to say: “Christmas is a privileged opportunity to meditate on the meaning and value of our existence.” He says that the season of Christmas leads us “to reflect on the drama of history in which people, injured by sin, are perennially in search of happiness and of a fulfilling sense of life and death.” The ultimate reason why we give gifts during Christmas is because our God is a merciful God “who came to man to communicate to him directly the Truth that saves, and to enable him to partake in his friendship and his life.”

Finally, he says that we must approach the mystery of Christmas “with humility and simplicity, making ourselves ready to receive as a gift the light, joy and peace that shine from this mystery.”

### **ON GIFTEDNESS**

Now that I am already a professed Franciscan, I notice that I have become more giving. But more so, I also have learned to beg. While giving brings a lot of prestige and honor, begging helps us more to see the reality of meaning who we are as mendicants in love.



Looking back at my experience in Paco, I realized that I was the one gifted with joy when I first went to these street children. Such was also the experience of St. Francis of Assisi every time he shared gifts with the poor. He was not the benefactor, but the beneficiary of God’s grace.

This Christmas, I hope to further reflect on the value of my existence. I hope that the first encounter with the poor that I had with the street children of Paco will be replicated in many more encounters that I will have here now and always.

# WAKING UP ON CHRISTMAS

BY BR. HARRIET ZIEFERT G. FONTIVEROS, OFM

As a young kid, there was nothing more exciting than waking up on Christmas Day. I remember that we used to prepare socks and hang them beside one of the windows of our house hoping and praying that Santa Claus would fill them with gifts during the night. True indeed, my brothers and I would be filled with glee when we found some sweet candies and some glistening pieces of coins in our socks. Simple things, like those socks and candies, would be enough to complete my Christmas then.

Those socks and candies are gone now. They were gone as soon as we learned that Santa was no other than our parents. Yet, things are not so different now. I am still hoping that my new “socks” will be filled again and again with sweetness every year as I wake up on Christmas Day.



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**Even while there were a lot of activities in the Novitiate before Christmas Day, I would still feel that my “socks” were empty and still waiting for someone to fill them.**

Things were a lot more different when I entered the novitiate, a year of intense Franciscan formation in 2016. That would be my first Christmas to really be separated from my family. Even while there were a lot of activities in the Novitiate before Christmas Day, I would still feel that my “socks” were empty and still waiting for someone to fill them.

Then came Christmas morning.

“Expergiscere, homo: quia pro te Deus factus est homo – Wake up, O man! For your sake God became man,” says St Augustine. Waking up for Christmas that day means a lot more different for me as it means waking up to the mystery of a God, who chose to become one of us.

With the message of God’s incarnation, all are invited to enter Bethlehem again and to see it like Francis in every place even to the most out-of-the-way corners of the earth. For Francis of Assisi, Christmas is a feast of light and peace, it is a day of inner wonder and joy that expands throughout the universe, because “God became man.” From the humble grotto of Bethlehem, the eternal Son of God, who has become a tiny Child, addresses each one of us: he calls us, invites us to be reborn in him so that, with him, we may live eternally in communion with the Most Holy Trinity.

Photo after singing their carols to the parishioner of San Pedro Bautista during their Postulant year.



## CHRISTMAS WITH THE FRATERNITY

When Francis recreated Christmas by making the first manger, he invited everyone to encounter Christ in reality with the greater family of the earth as one united fraternity. A fraternity that is radical and truly a family. It is gentle that does not allow injury.

On that day, I found my “socks” filled up with the joy and glee of my brothers who have truly become my own family now. My novice master used to say that every brother is a gift and true indeed, the joy of being with them is enough to complete my experience of Christmas. Our table was all filled up that morning with gifts coming from different families who sent their greetings to us.

After breakfast, we all participated in our many prepared games like bingo. All friars, both young and old, tried their luck, while waiting for the numbers in their cards to be announced followed by boisterous laughter from everyone.

## SOCKS FILLED UP

At the end of that day, I was surprised to see my “socks” all filled up with the joy of seeing Christ in our Franciscan fraternity. To celebrate Christmas with my fellow brothers in the fraternity, sounds like

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celebrating Christmas ordinarily. But what makes it so meaningful is that in simple gathering, I realize that I have received so much. I may be far from my family, but I never feel alone for I am with a bigger family now.

This year, I will be emptying my “socks” once again so I could receive the most important gift of all—that is Christ, our brother, savior and Lord.



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