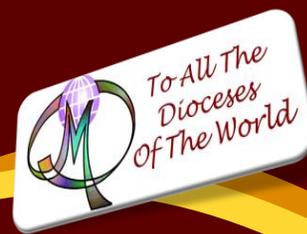


# ASIA MISSION AD GENTES

**News Brief** • ISSUE 27 • May - June 2013 •



## STRONG IN SPIRIT

Luke describes John the Baptist as "a man strong in spirit" (Lk 1:80). Strength of character and powerful witnessing are two traits in John's personality that can be easily identified by any reader of the gospel of Luke. His moral and spiritual integrity frightened the authorities of the day, even after death.

How did John become a man strong in spirit? Some may say that it was the result of his hardships in the deserts of Judea, others may suggest that it was his hermit-like temperament and personality or, some psychological disorder.

### *In this issue*

- Strong in Spirit P.1
- The Wind Blows Wherever It Pleases P.2
- Marist Vocation Camp P.3
- Welcoming and Acceptance Into the Novitiate P.4
- My Experience of Teaching Catechism in Camp Siongco Elementary School/ A Letter to My Brother P.5
- An Interested Bystander in Hanoi P.6



My perception is that John was a man strong in spirit because he was aware of being entrusted with an important mission in life and lived that mission to the fullest: making Jesus known and loved! He grew into this consciousness since he was in his mother's womb and never left it. Just before being beheaded, he encouraged his disciples to go to Jesus, to discover the wonder of his presence, person and mission. We can easily agree that John the Baptist was a pioneer. Pioneers are often people possessed by their mission.

One of the greatest gifts I have had in my life was knowing and living with some of the pioneer Brothers in Zimbabwe: Anthony, Ernest and Ephrem. They all carried this passion for mission in their lives for over 40 years and they did this at a price: moving all the way from Swaziland to Rhodesia, trying

different approaches, experiencing many frustrations and disappointments as well as saying no to distractions until they found a concrete way of translating their mission into ministries. Their legacy was over a thousand primary schools and a Teacher's Training College that provided, for many years, excellent primary school teachers.

We in AMAG have the gift and challenge of being pioneers. The main challenge of being pioneers is finding concrete ways to put our mission into practice. Some of us have more than once showed signs of anxiety at being pioneers: Why doesn't the General Council tell us exactly what needs to be done? Well, in order to be a pioneer, one needs to be possessed by a mission and never lose sight of it. One has to link this mission to the loving, strong presence of the risen Lord - Our Lord Jesus Christ. No matter the difficulties, the hurdles along our way, we know we are given a mission and that mission is to bring the gift of Jesus' presence into the lives of everyone around us.

Good reading,  
Brother Luis.

## The Wind Blows Wherever It Pleases...

By Hoan Castro



*"The most persuasive invitation to follow Christ comes from the witness given by our consecration, and by our life of simplicity and joy lived in a community which is in solidarity with the poor. We call young people to discover our life of brotherhood and apostolic action, and we invite them to commit themselves to this life." Constitution 94.*

I arrived in CN after three months of absence. During the first community meeting, I was very pleased to hear that "the wind is blowing". The Spirit is at work and Her gifts are present in our communities – some young men are curious to learn more, to search beyond the smiles and friendliness of these foreigners who are making the effort to immerse in the culture of this great country.

One of these young men, Peter, has already stayed for more than six months with one of the communities. Slowly, he is discovering something special and his desire to continue is crystallizing. He may soon join another group of young men who also want to share the dream of Champagnat. I know them, these young men over 20 years old – one is already working, the other is going to graduate from college next month and yet another is learning English.

In India, three young men will soon live in community with the desire to discover if this is the life that the Lord of the harvest is calling them lead. They will live in Kolkata, a city of a thousand contrasts, a window to a world full of needs and challenges. They will be accompanied by two brothers as they journey within themselves.

Recently, we heard so much about Bangladesh through the mass media. Poverty, corruption and injustice are everywhere in this densely populated nation. Nevertheless, these did not prevent the wind from blowing this way, as three young men who have completed high school, have decided to spend a year as Marist aspirants and learn English before joining the Postulancy.

The vocational seedbed, VN, blooms with a candidate as well as groups of young aspirants who are preparing for their next step of formation in Davao, the Philippines. Three groups have gone through this process with the current group being the fourth. As I write, five young men are making their final evaluation before sending their letters, expressing their desire to continue their encounter with Jesus Christ.

It is really encouraging to see how the wind blows wherever it pleases, revealing the power of the Spirit and God's blessings in the Ad Gentes sector.



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

**13/8**

**Bernhard Tremmel**

**23/8**

**Hoan Castro &  
Mike De Waas**

**25/8**

**Luis Sobrado**

**1/9**

**Eugenio Sanz**

**2/9**

**Pedro Chimeno**

**5/9**

**Pepito Mahong**

**7/9**

**Jose M. Sierra**

**12/9**

**Hilario Schwab &  
Gilber Barrillas**

**23/9**

**Cesar Henriquez**



## Marist Vocation Camp

*By Jose Maria Sierra*

During the last week of May, we had the first Marist Vocation Camp at our hostel in Talit. There were 13 of us – 10 young Santali boys and Brs Paco, Malangmei and I. The boys were from different parishes and youth groups.

We did three main things: to show the main characteristics of our Marist Life, to pray and to share about our personal life. Every morning, we talked about one different topic, like Saint Marcellin Champagnat, Mary, our good Mother or about our charism. In the evening, we shared about what we discovered in the morning. At the end of every day, we celebrated the mass as the Emmaus Community. A priest also shared about his vocation during the camp.

In the middle of the week, we visited the tomb of Mother Teresa, asking for enlightenment in our discernment. After the interview, three of them decided to join us this July as candidates and another four will join us after they finish their university studies. We thank the Lord and Mother Mary for the gift of these Marist candidates. We will start a new formation community in Kolkata with them in July.



## Welcoming and Acceptance Into the Novitiate

By Canisio Willrich

On 10 May 2013, the Immaculate Conception Novitiate of Cotabato in the Phillipines had the pleasure of welcoming nine novices who enthusiastically stepped into their next stage of formation. Subsequently, on 15 May 2013, we also conducted the Rite of Acceptance to the Novitiate for Roldan, Jake, Ralph, Jick, Mark, Joseph, Henry, Cyril (all from the Phillipines) and Cong (from Vietnam). Each novice received the habit and the Marist Constitutions from Br Manny (Provincial of EAP) as symbols of their desire to follow Jesus as Mary did, in the footsteps of our founder, Saint Marcellin Champagnat. During the celebration, each consecrated himself to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The following consecration was composed by our new novice, Cong:



*O Mary my good Mother, I offer my life in your hands. I offer all my joys, hopes, fears and difficulties to you. I ask for special care and protection of my body, mind and spirit for this day and every day of my life. Good Mother, as my life turns to a new page; I know that I will encounter difficulties and temptations along the way, I ask for your prayer so that I can be faithful as you are faithful to Jesus. Mary, I entrust myself to your love and care. Direct me according to the will of your Son. Amen.*

We wish the nine novices a blessed journey throughout their formation. Let us be united with them in our daily prayer.



## **My Experience of Teaching Catechism in Camp Siongco Elementary School**

*By Sytha Touch, nFMS  
(Mission Ad Gentes Novice)*

*I want to tell you about my experience teaching catechism in Camp Siongco Elementary School. By the way, my name is Francis Sytha Touch, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year novice from Cambodia. Every Friday, I go for catechesis with Br Allen. In our class, there are about 28 students, most of them are Catholics and some are non-Catholics. I teach in Grade 5. The truth is, I do not know how to speak the Filipino language. Another problem is that the students cannot understand English that much. They can speak English but they only know a few words. Nevertheless, I have Br Allen who helps me to translate whenever I want to communicate with them.*

*Before starting the class, we always begin with a prayer. Sometimes, we ask some of the students to lead in praying. Even though I have some difficulty in speaking with them, I can still communicate with them by action and gesture. I am really very happy to be with them like when I play with them and sometimes tell them stories.*

*One more thing is that during our classes, they really pay attention. I can tell since in our class, they participate actively. Though I only have a short time with them, I can say that I had a good time being in their company. And with this experience, I understood what they need the most. I know that they really need to be loved, have the opportunity to play and get encouragement from teachers and their parents. The more we express our love to the children, the more we express our love to God. God bless you!*



## **A Letter to My Brother**

*By Quy van Nguyen, nFMS  
(Mission Ad Gentes Novice)*

*Dear brother,*

*Today, I'm here in Bahay Maria but my mind is thinking of you. I could feel that you're suffering from your illness every day. I never experienced what you are going through, but with our solidarity experience here in Bahay Maria, I can somehow experience your pains.*



*Here I met a young man named Jomar who is just 20 years old. Because of a motorbike accident in 2000, both his hands and feet are paralyzed. Every time he has to urinate, he has to do it through a rubber hose near his belly. He has a cell phone but he cannot use his fingers so he uses instead his wrist to send a message or make a call. He cannot even hold a cup of water. How hard is it for him to live? Aside from physical pain, he is also emotionally in pain. His family left him here. Although there are people here to help him, I think that it cannot ease the pain in his heart in his longing for a true family. Every time I come here, I usually come to his bed and say hello to him.*

*Looking at his eyes, I feel in the depths of my heart the pain of longing for intimacy. Somehow, I know and I believe that you or even others may encounter this kind of longing. Isn't it? My brother, we are far from each other in distance, but in the spirit of personal prayer, of community prayer, we*

are very close, very near as there is no boundary. Our family too, they are always with you, near you and me.

*I believe that in the quiet green grass moments of pain, you are offering these as your sacrifice to our Heavenly Father. In the Gospel, it tells us to "take up our own cross and follow him". In our Constitutions and Statutes, it says that "the old and the sick take a great opportunity to be closer to God." Keep trusting in God and ask for the intercession of our good Mother who tenderly cares for us. And so do I, I put you in the hands of Mother Mary and all the saints especially St Marcellin Champagnat.*

*Ah! Just a brief review of our activities here: outside our Novitiate House, we are involved in some apostolic activities like solidarity experiences here in Bahay Maria, catechism classes and recollection giving. Maybe next time I will tell you more about all these experiences.*

## **An Interested Bystander in Hanoi**

*By Barry Lamb, Melbourne, Australia*

Well not in Hanoi actually, but about 17 km west of Hanoi. In the small "village" of Quoc Oai, lives and works Br Geoffrey Kelly, an Australian who has volunteered to learn the Vietnamese language and to be a gentle presence to the people there.

The Provincial of Australia is determined that Br Geoffrey enjoys some supportive company while he is so far from home and in such a relatively isolated environment. And that is how I, another Australian Marist, have joined Geoff from May until July in his rented premises in an alleyway just off the main street.



In virtual retirement after an apostolate of teaching, I have the time and inclination to try to be of some encouraging company for Geoff as he tries to introduce

the people to the important values in life ever so indirectly through initially offering free English classes to primary, middle school and high school students as well as some Vietnamese teachers. Called the "New Horizons Project", its next phase involves the vocational training and support for young unemployed, and is currently being negotiated.



In other leased rooms with a "shop front" opening to the main street, Geoff has set up classrooms. With the help of his Vietnamese assistant, he has spread the word through the schools of the area that free English lessons are available. As Vietnamese children attend school either in the morning or afternoon, there are always children free to attend lessons throughout the day. Bright-faced children arrive with their clear plastic satchels eager to throw themselves into any language activities Geoff and his volunteers have prepared (the programme is supported by part-time volunteer teachers).



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While it is clear that the children's command of English is improving in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary, it is not clear, whether they connect the generosity of the teachers with the values that move us to be here. But as a "bystander", I can say that Geoff (and I, for that matter) are universally greeted with smiles by the locals. Geoff has been studying the Vietnamese language for some years and the traders in the market enjoy their attempts to persuade him to buy their goods and relish teasing or joking in a most natural and happy way. Occasionally, Geoff finds himself in conversation with the traders who are eager to chat with him.



Thanks to the number of children participating in the different programmes, it is common to see the children's faces light up in recognition of Geoff, happily greeting him as he goes on his way by bicycle. Neighbours are care for each other and some are kind enough to share their food. Another regular occurrence is having a tradesman refuse payment and to wave away any offer of payment for a service provided or even for a can of beer. I have experienced also, the obvious delight of the locals when hearing that one is volunteering in the district. There seems to be a great appreciation of people from developed countries who are helping them in such a selfless way.

Is this fulfilling the original idea of the Ad Gentes project?

One of my musings is that what Geoff and his volunteers are doing in Quoc Oai is living out the encouragement attributed to Francis of Assisi: "You should always preach the Gospel, and if necessary use words." And the excellent news is that Br Geoff will be joined by another Ad Gentes Brother on a permanent basis by September 2013, ensuring the continuity of the project and the friendly presence and witness in this corner of Vietnam.