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marist district of asia

Life Lessons

“The person who tries to push aside the reality of death is someone who’ll make a poor job of life.”

Brendan Hoban

Last year, I was living life without much concern about how or when it would end. But an unexpected event, changed my perception - this beautiful yet fragile gift called life, will eventually but surely come to an end, taking us on a new adventure elsewhere.

At the hospital where I had my first check-up, they had a list of tests with different prices. I requested for one that was more expensive and comprehensive, one which included an abdominal ultrasound. After my test, I went to the doctor

with the test results, not expecting anything out of the ordinary. Much to my surprise, he asked me to take another test. He had found a tumour in my right kidney. I took the test and was referred to the urologist. “You have cancer and we have to remove your right kidney. Do you have insurance? If you have insurance, I recommend that you do this...” said the doctor. I couldn’t believe it, I was in a state of denial. “He could be wrong,” I said to myself. But subconsciously, I knew what was happening. I was experiencing the first of the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

My friends and fellow Brothers advised me to get a second opinion. At the same time, some of them recommended eating apple seeds, which they said were good for

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fighting cancer. I started to eat them although I knew that a surgery was inevitable. Subsequently, I had to leave Bangkok due to visa problems. As the months passed, my anguish grew and finally, I accepted this reality. So at the beginning of February, I had the surgery and am now recovering.

What has this experience taught me? To accept that

reality can be different from my ideals as well as dreams and, to accept and be at peace with my limitations. My friends say, "Don't worry, many people live with just one kidney" but I tell myself, "Don't worry, you are going to live as much as Lord permits." Since then, I have started to pray with more sincerity and humility the prayer of Charles de Foucauld -

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you. I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Faternally,

Juan.

***By Day and Night, a Struggle* By Pedro Chimeno**

A revolutionary's uprising first starts with himself and in solitude.

**Do not be afraid to be the best soldier,
the worst enemy,
the deserter,
the hero,
the captain,
the revolutionary,
the knowledgeable and the unaware.**

**Put on your boots with no soles or laces,
and wear no shield or life jacket,
Load the barrel of your heart
and open your eyes and hands wide.**

**Uphold your simplicity, smile and tenderness
so to be cruel only to injustice and pain.
Listen to the sounds of the forest.**

**Quench your thirst with water,
and offer your own flesh as nourishment.
Do not be afraid of being afraid,
or to surrender,
for the only loss will be your life for your people.
So let's walk, but let's do so together.**



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Gilbert Dakora

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Rodrigo Sánchez Guzmán

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Estela Rodriguez Ramos

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Evelyn Kow

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Anton Nguyen Tien Công

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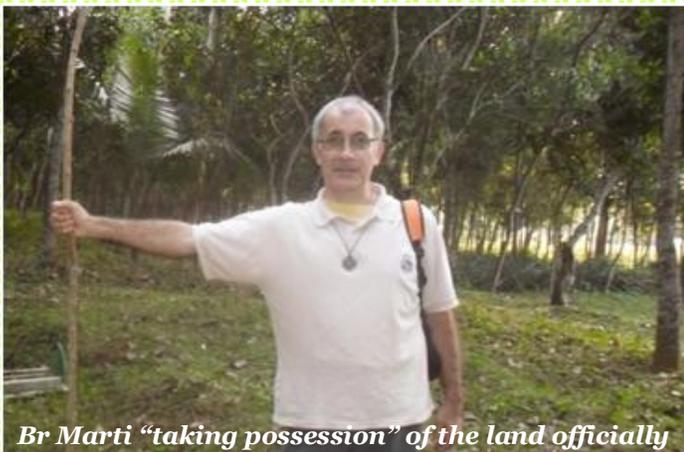
Mark Poro

16/6

Andrew Chan

An Exceptional Day By Eugenio Sanz

27 November 2013 was an outstanding day for us. It was the day when we finally were able to purchase the land on which to build our dream. A beautiful plot in the municipality of Moulovibazar, filled with trees, with a creek crossing it from north to south, adjacent to a tea plantation, and meets all the conditions to make our project for providing secondary education to the tea workers' children.



Br Marti "taking possession" of the land officially

In the morning, the deed of sale between the owner and the Diocese of Sylhet was signed; in the afternoon, in keeping with Bengali tradition, Br Marti Enrich and I went to the plot to "take possession" officially. Then, we made a "duty visit" to the owner, Mr Mahfuj Chowdury, descendant of the last Zamindar of the area (the Zamindars were traditionally aristocrat landowners). We thank God for the purchase of the land and all those who have made it possible with their donations (It was a difficult



The signing of the deed of sale



Duty visit to Mr Chowdury's residence

task because the NGOs did not provide assistance in the purchase).

But this is only the beginning, now we have to continue raising funds for the construction of the school. Some NGOs, such as SED, Aid to the Church in Need, Manos Unidas and FMSI,



Brs Eugenio and Cesar monitoring the construction progress

have expressed interest in contributing. Let us hope that private institutions and donors will also step forward. Tea plantation children deserve an education that they have been deprived of, an education that would open for them the doors of a brighter future. I encourage everyone to help us, to help these boys and girls by contributing financially and spiritually to this cause – an act that cannot be more human or Christian.

If you want to collaborate with us, visit maristmoulovibazar.blogspot.com

and at the menu bar, click DONATE or DONACIONES. Your contributions are very much appreciated.

PS: At the time of publication, the builders had started building concrete fences to mark the school boundary. They will be laying the foundations soon.

A recent study (Assessment of the Situation of Children and Women in the Tea Gardens of Bangladesh, UNICEF, September 2010) found that about 74% of households in the tea gardens fall below the absolute poverty line, compared to the national Bangladeshi average of 38.4%, and about 50% fall below the hardcore poverty line, compared to the national average of 19.5%. The daily food intake of an average household member is 761.5 gm, which is lower than the minimum 934 gm required for a balanced nutrition, and the average daily calorie intake per household member is 1,956.5 Kcal, which is close to the average level found among the hardcore poor (1,805 Kcal) and lower than the average level among the absolute poor (2,122 Kcal). The average calorie intake in the USA is 3,770 Kcal and 3,270 Kcal in Spain.



The Vocation Adventure By Pietro Codato

At the beginning of September, a group of eight candidates started their Marist vocational experience (live-in, candidacy year) with the Brothers of the Hanoi community. All of them have already finished high school and one is going to graduate from college this year. They got to know about the Brothers through meetings and activities we periodically had in their parishes and in Hanoi.

They currently live in two rented rooms close to the Brothers' house and in the day, they follow the formation programme in the Brothers' house. Their daily life is quite similar to our former juniorates but with slight differences in time and context. As the formation year is focused on experiencing the Brothers' lifestyle and improving their English language proficiency, their weekly timetable includes English classes, prayers, daily mass, housework (cooking, cleaning and etc.), personal interviews, Marist and bible learning, parish activities,



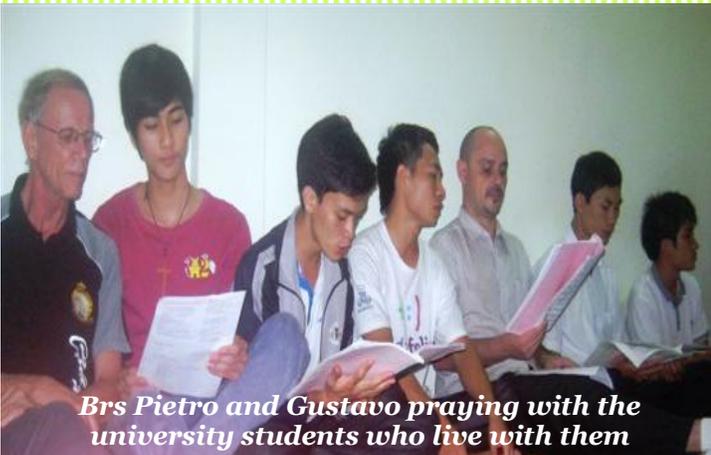
Br Pietro with the eight Marist candidates



Starting the formation programme in Thai Ha

formations and retreats. Every morning, a Vietnamese English teacher teaches them for two hours and in the afternoons, the Brothers help them with their studies and other aspects of their lives. In our English class, there are also three young men who are considering consecrated life.

This year, we also accepted four university students who requested to join our “Come and See” programme in order to discover or to reinforce their vocation. They take part in our



Brs Pietro and Gustavo praying with the university students who live with them

candidates’ activities when they have the time to do so. Sometimes it is not easy but we try to help them manage their time in the best possible way. Nowadays, our chapel and dining room houses 14 people (plus two Brothers), aged between 18 and 25 years who have committed themselves to this exciting experience.

We pray that our good Mother will bless us and grant us copious fruits.



The candidates and other students attending an English lesson



Breakfast at the Brothers’ house

How Becoming Marist Missionaries Changed Our Lives



By Abel Eom

I thank all of you, my Marist friends.

I am a man of many “titles” - Mr Eom, Lay Marist missionary, volunteer, teacher, ex-Marist Brother, social worker and even a pioneer AMAG. Nevertheless, I call myself Abel, a name that I selected for my baptismal ceremony. Since then, I am still being nurtured by His word and continue to hunger for His love in my life.

In that sense, my experience of serving in AMAG as a Lay Marist for four and a half years was a gift, especially the past two and a half years of my life in CN. It has given me countless enriching experiences with lots of young people and deep inspirations about God. I greatly appreciate the community members in CN as it was truly joyful for me to be with them.

In fact, I have enjoyed my busy work here as a teacher at the orphanage, weekend school, formation house and as a member of youth prayer group. However, the happiest moment for me is to spend time with them such as during annual retreats. I think it is then that we share the same spirit, vision and identity, which we rarely find elsewhere.

When I think about going back home to Korea, I feel a sense of acceptance - I have to accept the reality of my life and move on. At the same time, I am very happy because I am returning with a lot of gifts. These gifts are not only symbols of deep friendships and meaningful experiences but also reminders of my period of spiritual growth.

Ever since my baptism, I've always had a spiritual thirst or hunger and it was probably what made me join AMAG. However, now I come to discover that we receive God's gifts not because of our works or intentional

efforts but through His love and mercy. Now I just feel like giving thanks to God for His generous response to me during my time as a Lay Marist. So I leave for Korea with a precious spiritual seed in my heart. I pray that I will be able to nurture it, allowing it to grow healthily for the rest of my life by the grace of His mercy.

Good on all of you, my dear Marist friends!



By Christina Kim

Previously I was a social worker in Korea, caring for children with disabilities. And then, together with my husband, I joined the Marist programme for missionaries in Asia. Now, four and a half years later, I have come home to Korea and am among the same people, the same familiar places from where I started. But I am no longer the same person that I once was. What are the things that have brought about so much change in my life?

Let me share with you my four-year journey in Marist communities.

The journey began with a year-long course in the Philippines. This was my first experience of community life and through it, I learned to recognize and accept the differences found in each one of us. One sunny day as we sat around the table enjoying lunch, some members got into a fierce discussion. Suddenly a question came to my Korean way of thinking: “How can I go on sharing rice with these people?” The following morning I saw them embracing each other and asking for forgiveness from the bottom of their hearts, tears running down their cheeks. This incident gave me the opportunity to think once more about the true meaning of community.

Our first mission country was India. When I

received this assignment, my heart was ecstatic and I felt the joy of the Holy Spirit, imagining myself accompanying poor children, walking through slums, just like Mother Teresa of Kolkata used to do. When I arrived at our assigned mission I quickly discovered how naïve I was, immediately struggling to cope with the mosquitoes and air pollution.

One day, I saw a Brother from another part of our world struggling to eat his portion of rice, so I asked him why he was feeling so uneasy. He said that he was not accustomed to eating rice and that it made him nauseous sometimes, yet since this was the staple food of the children living in the hostel, he wanted to be like them. When I heard him say that, I was deeply astounded and felt a deep sense of respect for this Brother, for even in a very isolated village in the Indian countryside, he wanted to live our Marist spirituality, putting into practice Jesus' commandment of love.



The second mission assignment for me and my husband was in CN. At the beginning of our time there, I felt uneasy, knowing that we were in a communist country. But our community life with the Brothers and the people we met in our ministry made this experience a wonderful opportunity to grow in maturity. A Brother my age, passionate about our mission, committed 24/7 to a group of young aspirants, sharing space and time with them and dedicating himself totally to their care and concerns, made me once again grow

in Marist spirituality.

Well, now we have returned to our home in Korea. Living with the Marist Brothers for four years has taught me a new way to relate to others, joyfully sharing my life with them, in Mary's way of being attentive to their needs.

Now the people around me often say, "After those years overseas you seem different. What changed you?" I always find this question difficult to answer. It was not one person or a single event that brought about this transformation. Rather, it was a plain and steady process that has led to my becoming imbued with the spirituality of the Marist congregation. Thus, I find it difficult to adequately express how I've changed. As time goes by, memories of the activities in which I participated and the people I met may fade, but now I recognize them as an immense gift, a tremendous grace. My Marist ministry for the past four years has taught me a truly wonderful lesson that I will always cherish in my heart. Here on my desk is a quote from St Augustine - "Fill yourself first and only then will you be able to give to others."

From the bottom of my heart I thank God for offering me this opportunity and experience, and I want to express my sincerest gratitude to all the people who have helped me fill my life with meaning during those precious years my husband and I lived in Marist communities.

Marist Communities, a Little Yeast in the Dough By Horacio Bustos

(Br Horacio Bustos is the Provincial of Cruz del Sur province. He came to visit the Brothers of his province in February. This article was extracted from the letter he sent to them before returning home.)

Thankfully, everything went according to plan and I was able to visit three countries of Mission Ad Gentes where three Brothers from the Southern Cross province have been working for the past few years. They are Brs Doroteo (Thailand), Hilario (Philippines) and Max (Cambodia).

I really like the work that the Brothers are doing, especially in Saen Monorom (Cambodia). They not only do it with so much love and generosity but also with humility, the ability to listen and dialogue with locals and to work with them without being imposing. Their approach have won the locals' hearts and "opened doors". Some of the young people here treat our Brothers like parents, others, as friends.

The reality of living amidst many races, cultures, languages and religions have enriched me and left me with a sense of wonder for God's creation, as well as an admiration for the people, their history and their country – where God is fully present! This trip was a real godsend. It has allowed me to witness and experience very different realities and above all, led me to support and appreciate the Marist life that is unfolding there through the generosity of the Brothers and Lay people who contribute to this project in Asia.

These Marist communities, by their witness of life, are small seeds of Christian presence, a little yeast in the dough that God will raise in due time. I thank God for the Brothers and Lay Marists of the Marist District of Asia for the kindness that I received during my visit. I return with the joy of having accomplished my goal as well as having more deeply experienced the beauty of Marist life and mission.



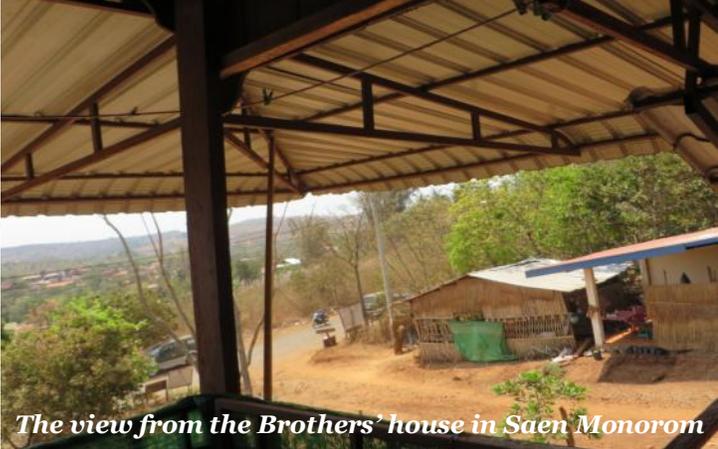
Brs Max, Bernhard and I



Students from Saen Monorom



Brs Eugenio and Bernhard with some students



The view from the Brothers' house in Saen Monorom

Stories of Sharing and Spreading Joy By Marguerite Theophil (Submitted by Paco Garcia)

Once, a teacher and his young assistant arrived at a village where the people were angry and quarrelsome. At their



request, he gave them his blessings, and asked them to remain together in the village forever. In the next village they met joyful people who were cooperating with one another and caring for each other. The teacher blessed them too, but asked them to leave the village, and spread out across the country.

The puzzled assistant asked the teacher why he had given such different advice. The teacher smiled. "Those angry, argumentative people will only spread their unhappiness wherever they go. So I asked them to stay where they were. But it is better for the caring people to spread out, taking their happiness with them. Then others will also learn to be joyful."

One day a man from a nearby village called out at the monastery gates, and handed the old monk who opened it a magnificent bunch of grapes, saying, "Dear Father, I have brought as a gift the finest grapes my vineyard has produced." The monk smiled. "Thank you, I will take them to the Abbot immediately; he'll be delighted with this offering." But the villager said, "No, no I brought them for you." The old monk didn't think he deserved such a fine gift. "Oh yes!" insisted the man. "For whenever I come by, you open the gates and welcome me. When I needed help because the crop was destroyed, you shared your meal with me every day. I hope this bunch of grapes will remind you of the sun's love, the rain's beauty and the miracle of God, for it is He who made them grow so fine."

The monk held the bunch grapes. It looked full and luscious. He decided to present it to the Abbot, who had always encouraged him with words of wisdom. The Abbot was very pleased with the grapes, but as he accepted them, he thought of one of the

brothers who had been very unwell. "I'll give him these grapes; they may bring some joy to his life."

But the grapes didn't stay in the sick monk's room for long. He reflected, "Brother Cook has been feeding me such nourishing meals to help me recover. I'm sure he will enjoy these." As the cook brought him his meal, he presented him with the grapes. "They're for you," said the sick monk. "You work so hard; take a moment to sit and enjoy these."



Brother Cook was amazed at the beauty of the grapes, then he thought of the newest member of the monastery. He decided to give them to the youngster as he felt he might be a bit lonely without his family, and also so that he might understand that the work of God is in the smallest details of creation.

When the novice received them, his heart was filled with the glory of the Lord, for he had never seen such beautiful grapes. Just then, he recalled the first time he came to the monastery, and of the simple old monk who had opened the gates and warmly welcomed him; it was that gesture which allowed him to feel at home in this community of people who knew how to value the wonders of life. And so, he walked to the monk at the gates. "Eat and enjoy them," he said. "For you spend most of your time alone here, and these grapes will make you very happy."



Colours

*By Eduardo Galeano
(Submitted by Pedro
Chimeno)*

*Some place in time, beyond
time, the world was grey.
Thanks to the Ishir Indians,
who stole colour from the
gods, today the world is
resplendent; and the colours
of the world burn in the eyes
of all who look at them.*

Ticio Escobar accompanied a film crew from Spanish TV that came to the Chaco to

shoot scenes of daily life among the Ishir. An Indian girl pursued the director, a silent shadow that stuck to his body and stared into his face from up close, as if she wanted to get inside his strange blue eyes.

The director turned to Ticio, who knew the girl, and that very curious one confessed: "I want to know what colour you see things."

"The same as you," smiled the director.

"And how do you know what colour I see things?"



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