



# Day One: Building Bridges

Young Asian Assumptionists have gathered here in Manila to start a 10-day workshop meant to prepare and equip them in the future after professing final vows. Brothers from France, Philippines, Korea, Vietnam and the United States will take this opportunity to meet three goals suggested by the Superior General, Fr. Benoit Griere, namely: (1) to deepen our Assumptionist spirituality and charism (2) to know one another as brothers (2) to prepare for and suggest ideas to the upcoming General Chapter.

The day started with a reading of the letter given by the Superior General, making clear the objectives set for this workshop. However among these objectives, the need to know each other is the logical way to proceed. Thus, presentations about the realities of each country were given by the participants through powerpoint slides and photos. Participants agree that after the presentations some bridges have been effectively made and established. They also agree that more work needs to be done to solidify and strengthen these bridges across different cultures, geographical regions and language constraints.

An interesting feature in these presentations was the inclusion of their personal “dreams” or hopes within the Congregation. Most of them wanted to learn the official languages of the Congregation, to visit different communities and share their gifts at the service of our different apostolic endeavors.

In general, it was a busy day for a first day and a great first step has been taken. The day concluded with a Eucharist at Adveniat House in Manila and dinner with other members and friends of the community. The Oblate Sisters also came to this dinner to welcome and greet the participants.



**ASIAN ASSUMPTIONISTS JOINT FORMATION**

**Philippines:**  
Jay LITUANAS  
Cris QUINAL  
Rodel CERVANTES  
Rex NAVARRO  
Eddy GONZALEZ  
Blair NUYDA (Brighton – USA)

**Korea:**  
Christophore JEONG Seong Jo (Gwangju)  
Simon KIM Tae-Hô (Valpré)

**Vietnam:**  
Antoine NGUYỄN HỮU Tháí  
Dominique NGUYỄN VĂN Thọ  
François-Xavier NGUYỄN XUÂN Phúc (Tran Van Ky)  
Joseph HOÀNG VĂN Đương  
Joseph LÊ TUẤN PHUỐC Thiện  
François-Xavier PHAN VĂN Dương (Ba Ria)  
François NGUYỄN ĐÍNH Hành (Valpré)  
Joseph NGUYỄN HỮU Du (Strasbourg)  
Charles VŨ VĂN Huê (Lille)  
Antoine NGUYỄN VĂN Đức (Morère)

**Organizers and Facilitators:**  
Osvaldo GARCIA SANCHEZ  
Ngoa YA TSHIHEMBA  
Duy Nguyen KHUONG  
Bernard HOLZER



## Day Two: Deepening our roots



Now that the engine has started and the ice has been broken, the participants of the Asian Assumptionists' Joint Formation started their second day with a reflection on the essentials of Assumptionist life.

Fr. Duy emphasized in his homily at the morning Mass the value of true brotherhood amidst conflicts and differences. This is one among the many essential features of the Assumption.

Fr. Ngoa led the sessions of the day, focusing on Assumptionist spirituality and charism. The sessions were not meant to be a "second novitiate" but were meant to be a reminder of the Assumptionist essentials and how we will be able to communicate them with ease and confidence.

In one activity, participants made an in-depth rediscovery of the legacy of Father d'Alzon. They listed down certain aspects of the context of the church and society during the Founder's time and co-related these with his convictions, goals and means.

For instance, the participants were asked to list "top ten" important features of Assumptionist spirituality. When speaking about our Assumptionist heritage, these features are considered to be indispensable and non-negotiable (*please see list*).

Fr. Duy has been patiently translating exchanges from Vietnamese to English and vice-versa. Likewise, small group conversations had to be made according to languages: one in French, one in Vietnamese and two in English. More and more, the need to learn a common language become a tangible reality here in Asia.

After another busy day, the participants had vespers and dinner with teachers and students of Assumption Language College. A short sharing about the school's mission took place. This was followed by an interesting video documentary of the teachers' experience of their very recent English Camp for the Missionary Sisters of Charity and the Lovers of the Most Holy Cross Sisters in Vinh, Vietnam.

*Happy birthday, Joseph Thien!  
Glad to celebrate your birthday with all of us.*



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TOP TEN  
(*in no particular hierarchy of importance*)

Augustinian heritage

Apostolic community

Centrality of Christ

Triple Love: Jesus, Mary, Church

Our motto: Adveniat Regnum Tuum

Education and communication

Triple virtues:  
frankness, audacity, and disinterestedness

Triple spirit: doctrinal,  
social and ecumenical

Rights of God

Being simply Catholic



# Day Three: Sharing our stories



The “third day” has always been associated with Easter. Often we look at the third day as a day of victory, of the proclamation of the Good News and of our new life in Christ. In a way, the participants of the Asian Assumptionists’ Joint Formation have felt some kind of Easter as they took time to re-read and share their vocation stories with one another.

Each one had an opportunity to share his story in small groups and some “courageous” brothers were able to share their stories in the large group. It was not easy to do this at first. The challenge of language became very evident and some degree of ease in sharing personal details had to be mastered. In the end, brotherly trust and respect helped us achieve what we have set out to do for this day.

Fr. Oswaldo facilitated the sessions in the afternoon. After sharing our stories to one another, we reflected on what is common to all who are in the room—our religious profession and commitment. How to be faithful to this commitment was the topic of his second session in the afternoon (*please see the list*).

At the close of the day, we have come once again to celebrate again our vocation that is both unique and shared with brothers. A restful evening came (festive for some), the end of the third day. And God said, “it is good.”

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## Seven Secrets to a Solid Commitment

1. Assiduous prayer
2. Meditation on the Word of God
3. Authentic faith
4. The community
5. Vigilance and prudence
6. An on-going formation
7. Being free and happy





# Day Four: Living our VOWS



We have dedicated our fourth day completely to the reflection on our religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Our approach to the evangelical counsels was made in a different way. Fr. Ngoa invited us to review our recent self-evaluations, especially what we wrote there

about each of the vows. We also presented two obstacles in our cultures as we live out the vows... the sharing that came after enriched us a lot...

At the morning mass, Fr. Bernard invited us to make our stand in the midst of the conflict or violence present in our reality. In the first session, we also asked ourselves which one of the vows do we need to live first or to what of the vows we need to be formed first. This was done simply to know where our fragilities lie and what are needs are.

In the morning, we recalled what the Founder has to say about the vows in his Meditations (nos. 21-24). Reading some of our self-evaluation reports and what we said about our practice of the vow of poverty, we also named two cultural obstacles in living poverty. Some of these are secularism, consumerism, false sense of security and even family relations.

In the afternoon, we continued with the presentation of the vows of chastity and obedience. Our sharing was fully enriching and included tips and advices based on personal experience from one another in living the counsels. For example, one of our brother proposed that we pinch our skin, as he does, each time that we have a temptation against the chastity. If this doesn't work he reads the Bible, and if it still doesn't work he reads the Bible and pinches himself at the same time... We are not sure if this tip will really help us to be chaste, but we are sure that the advice our Founder gave us in his Meditations will be useful.

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*Fr. d'Alzon's advice on how to live in fidelity to our vows*

## 1. Poverty

- To seek the Kingdom of God and its righteousness.
- To consider this vow as a liberation and not as an obligation: It frees us of worldly commitments, it gives us complete freedom of spirit, it fills us with joy and it helps us to imitate Jesus.
- To learn to possess not to be possessed.
- To be conscious that the desire of money could lead us to unjust practices.

## 2. Chastity

- Blessed are the pure of heart because they will see God.
- To consider this vow as a privilege more than a loss.
- To remember that we are not only bodies but also spirits.
- To have an aptitude of vigilance (prudence).
- To keep a certain distance between ourselves and the danger.
- To pray: Devotion to Mary and devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ.
- To fast: Three elements: To fast of (abstinence), to fast for (motivation) and to fast with (community support)

## 3. Obedience

- To be like Jesus Christ obedient unto death and death on a cross.
- Without communication, it is impossible to have obedience.
- This is an exercise of perfection.
- Four steps: Instruction, orientation, commandment and correction.



# Day Five: Discovering the Philippines



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**S**unday is the day of the Lord, a day of rest for God and for the brothers. We took advantage of this day to discover the Philippines.

We began the day by participating in the Eucharist in the depressed area of Marytown where our brothers are committed to work with the youth. It was an opportunity for everyone to discover the massive poverty that entrenches the population of the capital and also to see the scandalous division of social classes.

From there, we went to the Assumptionist novitiate which moved quite recently to Antipolo, in a house belonging to the Camilians. We met the four novices who are going to pronounce their first vows on Friday and the seven postulants admitted to the novitiate and their respective formators.

Then, we went to the Pinto Art Museum where there are houses and showrooms with antiques and modern paintings which express well the challenges of the Filipino society and its search for wisdom. We ate pizza in the museum garden with soft music, and the ambience was quite impressive. It was an opportunity to contemplate nature, the works of artists, and the rich diversity of Filipino culture and to take time together.

We had a stop in the cathedral of Antipolo, a famous pilgrimage site to Our Lady of Peace and Bon Voyage, which is never empty. The rector explained to us that fourteen masses are celebrated every Sunday (one every hour starting from four o'clock in the morning) with a burial Mass at one o'clock (there were 14 coffins this day) and that cars, motorcycles and numerous objects are blessed throughout the day (it's one of the apostolates of our postulants).

We took a snack in the novitiate of the Augustinian Recollects, a sign that our links to the Augustinian family is so important in the Philippines.

The end of the afternoon was an opportunity of pure relaxation and brotherly encounter at the summit of one of the hills surrounding Manila. With a fantastic view of the capital city at sunset and with an excellent Philippine dinner, we will be properly disposed to continue the work of the session ...





1. We visit the sick in Es and the Hospital by doing bring to reality de Beati this helps us to show more and compassion toward the dispossessed. This always leads to the solidarity with the

# Days 6 and 7: Community and Apostolate



# ASIAN ASSUMPTIONISTS' JOINT FORMATION

The days that followed our outing were marked by a short mid-evaluation of the first half of the workshop, presentations on Community Life and the Apostolate and preparation for a two-day retreat.

Half-way through the workshop, the participants have been able to settle and have already begun to share about their lives in their respective communities. They have admitted during the evaluation that the workshop had started right away with an intensive schedule, leaving them with just enough time to rest from their travel. While Fr. Duy has translated much of the presentations very well, language remains a barrier to spontaneous conversation

another was evident as the participants make the most of their time together to build some sense of a community.

Fr. Duy's presentation dealt with a reflection on community life in general, its connection to how communities lived during apostolic times and making distinctions in its evolution to religious life and present communities in church and society. An interesting review of community life as stipulated in our Rule of Life also took place. At the conclusion of his presentation, the participants watched excerpts from the movie "Of Gods and Men," the story of the Trappists who stood by their mission and community in the midst of violence and political unrest in Algeria.

The following day, Fr. Bernard facilitated a day of reflection on our Apostolates. A review of excerpts from several important documents from the Assumptionist tradition took place. The participants grouped themselves accordingly and gave in-depth presentations about the challenges of the apostolate in their respective countries. There were also opportunities for participants to ask questions and give comments after each presentation. More and more, bridges between geographical and cultural realities are being crossed to show that our communities indeed exist for the extension of the Kingdom.





# Days 8 and 9: Retreat



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A two-day retreat facilitated by Fr. Oswaldo Garcia Sanchez took place, with the aim of putting together the presentations and experiences of the past few days of the Asian Assumptionists' Joint Formation by way of interiority.

The retreat was spent mostly in silence and prayerful moments. Participants were grouped into pairs to facilitate more intimate reflection and fraternal sharing.

In an attempt to experience our Assumptionist spirituality, we started the first day with a **MEDITATION** of the presence (or absence) of the Kingdom of God in our lives and around us.

Then we did the second step of **PURIFICATION**: going inside to the chamber of the heart to find there what needs to be fixed or healed after our formation experience.

There was a prayerful evening with Taizé chants. After some time in adoration, the brothers recited their personal prayers in their native languages. The prayers they have shared contained gratitude for their vocation, acknowledgement of God's presence in their lives and their growing commitment to following Christ by virtue of their Assumptionist life and mission.

The third step of **RECOLLECTION**: we came out of our hearts scattered, disconnected, dispersed, so we needed to recollect and unify ourselves as we take another plunge into the inner chamber of our hearts.

Finally, we can't do anything to fix or heal ourselves on our own. At the same time we found somebody inside our hearts: the inner teacher (Jesus Christ) who lives there more than ourselves, so we need to do the last step of **UNIFICATION**, which consists in total surrender.

At the closing Mass of the retreat on the second day, the participants were asked to find and offer symbols or emblems which adequately represent their Assumptionist commitment. There were very interesting symbols offered, and because of the sharing that took place in the retreat, the brothers seemed to have understood one another's symbols and what they truly represent beyond words. It is our hope that this understanding will grow into support and concern for one another as the young Asian Assumptionists go back to their respective places within the life of the Congregation.





# Days 10 and 11: New Beginnings



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In putting all the presentations and experiences of the Asian Assumptionists' Joint Formation, two texts were very helpful: (1) the message of the Superior General to the participants and (2) the recently drafted message to the Provincial Chapters from the Superiors and Formators of Asia.

Fr. Bernard made clear the objectives of the workshop set by the Superior General in his message to the participants. The presentations clearly helped achieve the first goal, which is to deepen our Assumptionist roots. The sharing, meals, outings and daily community activities during the workshop facilitated another goal, which is to get to know and build relationships with one another. There were some difficulties in terms of language barriers, but we were able to manage.

There was still another goal to fulfill: to contribute ideas to the upcoming provincial and general chapters of the Congregation. In this regard, the message from the superiors and formators of Asia helped to initiate the process of sharing among small groups. At the plenum, the ideas and suggestions for the chapter were really very interesting and encouraging. There some elected provincial chapter delegates among us and they took notes of what have shared. Everyone agrees that what took place was honest and sincere and that the sharing were really close to the heart of the Asian Assumptionists.

Brothers Rod (Philippines), Jose Manuel (Mexico), Daniele (US) and Brian (US) made their first profession of religious vows. The participants of the workshop joined the celebration along with representatives of the Assumption Family present in the Philippines. It was a good opportunity to see together the novices as they start their religious life, and the workshop participants prepare for their final vows in the Congregation.

We wish to thank those who have supported the Asian Assumptionists' Joint Formation in one way or another. Our special thanks go to the Province of Europe, Province of North America and the Philippines and the Generalate.



# Our Contribution to the Chapters: Some Notes

## *Suggestions for Formation*

- If there is common formation in Asia, which stage of formation? Where? The Philippines is the place for this. We will learn English, neither in Vietnam nor in Korea.
- Language is the first obstacle. Each country has its own language. Among the Asian Assumptionists, we have 2 official languages – English and French. A Brother has to take time and to invest himself in the learning of either language.
- What do we do with Brothers who are not gifted in languages? Perhaps, **we must invest in a structure/formation that will enable people to learn new languages in the context of formation.**
- Integration of Vietnamese classes at Assumption Language College (ALC) especially for those who express the willingness to go to work in Vietnam and vice versa.
- **In terms of the quality of formation, how are we forming leaders? According to their own culture.**
- exchange of people (who can learn/speak English) who can take part in Sojourn, an inter-prenovitiate program in Manila.
- to stress on the importance of co-discernment; it is not only formators/superior who make the decision but the formand must be able to participate and contribute to the decision-making process.
- **Thinking of possible international house of formation in Asia for theology.**
- **Another meeting of formation for the same generation of brothers who attended this meeting for follow-up.**
- Novices will spend at least 1 week or 1 month in another country (Phils., Korea, Vietnam)
- CAFI in France to know the spiritual legacy of our founder.
- Another session of formation in preparation for final vows in another country like Vietnam or Korea.
- International exposure will be in countries of Asia.

## *Thoughts and suggestions for the organization of the Assumption in Asia*

- The real work of organization will be after the General Chapter and we must take into consideration the realities in Asia; **after the Chapter, there is a time for adjustment**
- Do we need to consult Brothers in Asia about this organization? The delegates to the Chapter must be able to express this position on our behalf. We would like to tell them what we think.
- We should not only think of structures. We should also think of other people (not the same ones again) to put there and new types of leadership.
- Create committees (from different countries) to focus on particular works.
- Council of superiors (regular meetings among them)
- a commission to oversee the expansion of Assumption in Asia.
- Right now, we cannot think of a different organization as Asian Assumptionist because we depend from US or Europe financially for Philippines and Vietnam respectively. To think of a possibility of an independent Asian structure, we need to be self-sufficient first.
- We may not think of one province but we can work together and strengthen the Asian commission.
- Possibility that North American Province will give the Philippines to Europe.
- **As for the organization in Asia, we are not ready to have a Province yet. We will have a kind of organization among the 3 countries but someone has to be coordinating this. (But now it seems for some of us to difficult to think of a different organization as Asian Assumptionist because we depend from US or Europe financially for Philippines and Vietnam)**

## *Other suggestions and remarks*

- All these are new for us who are based in France. We do not know about what the formators/superiors in Asia are discussing or have decided on. Asians in Europe must have time to get together and be updated about the region. We have websites but there is not much to know and to interact with. The contact is maintained more on a personal level.
- We must come up with a communication network to update the Brothers in the 3 countries as well as those in the diaspora. Now, we have these problems of communication, but later on these will become a problem of identity.
- **This meeting (Asian Assumptionist Joint Formation) is very important.**