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Bi-Annual Newsletter of the Society of Mary - Marist Communities in the District of Asia



Greetings from Asia!

I do hope and pray that you are all in good health and in peace as we continue to face the effects of Covid 19 pandemic.

I would like to introduce to you to this first edition of our District's newsletter, our simple and fraternal way to share our life, ministries and events that shape our District for the first 6 months of the year 2020. We will publish the 2nd newsletter in December.

Our Constitution # 126 tells us that "Marists are not simply workers in a common enterprise, but members of a one Society built on shared faith and a shared vision." We have a common faith founded in the Trinity and expressed the way we live as Disciples of the Lord and children of Mary in the family of the Church. We have one vision that is to bring everyone to the Kingdom of God and making all Marists as Colin envisioned.

As much as we could we have tried to live out this common faith and vision in our lives, in our community, and in our different ministries. As a District, we live in a community nourish by our daily encounter with the Lord in prayers, meditation and celebration of the Holy Eucharist. We show compassion to the vulnerable people we meet and serve in our different ministries at Balay Pasilungan, Catholic Campus Ministry, Parish, Education and Health ministries in Ranong and Inter religious dialogue initiatives.

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As we all do, we also have a share of struggles, trials and difficulties. At the end of last year 2019, Mindanao was struck with 2 massive earthquakes in October and December. Many lives perished and properties destroyed. While in our Mission in Ranong Thailand, the government issued the closure of all Burmese learning centers which paved the way for more than 3000 young children out of school. The problem still persists and negotiation to open these learning centers continues. Of course the covid 19 pandemic that affects many lives and countries all over the world. And on a personal note, some of the members of our families passed away while others are having medical concerns and aging. As we live in the world, our lives and ministries are not exempted from all forms of human sufferings and trials. We face them every day with faith and endurance and discernment. Trials challenge us to keep our faith grounded in God and to the motherly love of Mary. It gives us time to bond together as brothers in the community. It gives us time to reflect, be quiet and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit deep in our hearts. It gives us opportunity to be aware of what is happening around us and the world. It puts us in a situation to think and re-think how to be relevant and to reach out to those who suffer and in need. These testing times must never let us grow weary of doing what is good for each other and those we are called to serve.

What can motivate us to keep going? We learn from the saints and those who have gone ahead of us who travelled in the most difficult circumstances and yet were never shaken or given up for the sake of their convictions. Let the words of St. Paul letter to the Romans inspire and give us courage, "and not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation bring about perseverance, and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope." (Rom 5:3-4).

As we continue to thrive in life with all its joys and sorrow, let our faith to God remain steadfast and strong as ever. Let our commitment to our Marist vocation expressed in our personal and communitarian ways of fraternity and support continue to inspire and encourage us. And most of all, let our love and care to serve our brothers and sisters especially the abandoned, the marginalized and those who suffer injustice be given our outmost attention anytime and anywhere.

Stay safe everyone and may the blessings of God be upon us.

Christopher Thadeos Ganzon S.M.





Additional help to the District

We were blessed with the visit of Fr. Kevin Redmond S.M. from Australia in January this year. He came to experience and gain understanding of Asia. He is presently in Ranong, Thailand.

Br. Denis O'Brien SM managed to cross the border of the Philippines just a day before Davao city was locked down in March 15 because of CoVid19. He is requested to assist in the chapel construction of the district.



Keeping the young ones safe and not bored

Soon as CoVid19 local transmission was on the news, the safety of the most vulnerable both in our community and in our ministries was the prime concern of the Marists in Davao. Fr. John Guo Wang, who is the in-charge of Balay Pasilungan, the centre of street children shelter had to re-configure the operation of the ministry. CoVid19 health and safety protocol was imposed, visitors were limited and engagements of the staff in public places were minimised. The center conducted various programs to keep the boys entertained to keep them in Balay Pasilungan. Until present there is an ongoing training of staff to be more innovative and creative in keeping the program of the center alive.



We have plans, God has his own plan too

At the beginning of the year 2020 the Catholic Campus Ministry of Davao (CCMD) received overwhelming demands from different non-Catholic colleges and universities for retreats and recollections. The needs of almost 9 schools seemed to be extremely disproportionate with 5 persons working in CCMD. Just before CCMD was about to begin scheduling Masses for graduating students, schools were closed and graduation rites were called off.



Young Members of the Community

The Marist Interested College Students (MICS) were excited for the end of school in March. Most were looking forward for the Marist Community immersion in April and May. During the final exam week they were hastily asked to go home to avoid getting locked down in the city. They spent their summer break with their family. They were away for almost three months and luckily, they managed to come back to prepare to resume their studies which will be done online.



*S^t. Peter Chanel
Davao Community*

Gradually there were signs of renewed life.



The Divine Potter was Around

"As clay in the hand of the potter so are you in my hands." - Jeremiah 18.6

Covid 19 hit Digos City area hard. Last October until November 2019 Digos City experienced several earthquakes and no one wants to go back to that. Covid 19 came quickly at the beginning of the year 2020. The whole Philippines was on lock down since March 20, something prisoners experience all the time in Digos. Police checkpoints were all over the city and nobody was allowed to travel to adjoining provinces without a special pass. Fr. Arnold Garferio S.M. went home for his uncle's funeral and he had to spend time in isolation both there and when he came back to Digos.

Certainly life was lonely without the parishioners and yet we were conscious that they were not far away. In the community we adjusted to each other at a different level and we felt the Divine Potter was around. Gradually there were signs of renewed life. On May 13 we celebrated our first parochial fiesta of Our Lady of Fatima. We had virtual novena Masses and the Bishop came to celebrate the feast day with about 50 people. We had a few meetings with the Bishop and priests of the city as we began to discuss and plan what the new order might be like once some of the restrictions were lifted. On June 7 we began saying public Masses with social distancing, washing of hands, wearing masks and shortened liturgies. Seniors (over 60 years old) and youth (19 and under) were not allowed to attend the mass. People were very happy to be back. We celebrated single baptisms in the local chapels.

Matti, Digos City is noted for pottery making. We have about 50 families making their living from pottery making. Each household has its own master potter. The special clay is got locally and many pots and bricks are made for cooking, feeding bowls and flower display. After a week, stocks were sold out. Such was the rush to get back to normal for many.

Many customers came from nearby towns to refurbish their own stocks for selling pots. Schools are not expected to come back until a vaccine is found. Children have been taught online and modular learning method. Hopefully the image of the potter will stay with us in the months ahead as we adjust to the new challenges and circumstances. (Fr. Patrick Muckian SM)

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Digos Community

A Safe Place and a Supportive Home

Supporting our Migrant Families in the midst of Coronavirus

When the Coronavirus situation hit Thailand we were just starting the summer holiday period in Mid March. As the Migrant Community faced border closures between Ranong and Myanmar, fish factories and other jobs experienced closures, our Migrant Families suffered the loss of work, fear of 'out of date' documents, and travel restrictions. Our Health and Education Programmes continued to respond to some of the most in need families who contacted us for help. As the Coronavirus situation continues, the fishing boats and fish factories are facing more closures. This is making the situation worse by the week for Migrant Families as they do not have work and often do not qualify for social welfare services from the Thai Government.

Back to Education

As we recognised that the Government would not allow schools to open until July, we gathered our staff to create a plan to keep students and parents connected with education. We created weekly workbooks. We were interviewed and videoed by Teacher Focus Myanmar to highlight our creative response to meeting the COVID education challenge.

We have been allowed to sit entrance exams and we have had Non Formal Thai exams, Burmese Migrant Secondary Programme entrance exam, and an Intermediate Entrance Exam. We have also supported Government and NGO meetings to strategise and engage with the Burmese Migrant Community at the Marist Centre. Before welcoming students back to school on July 1 a teacher led workshop on Behaviour Management was conducted. Five young ACU Certificate in Teaching and Learning Teachers create and run this workshop.

Community Health Education

A new and creative initiative for our HIV Health Team was to engage in community education in small groups and also undertake a new Quality of Life (QoL) survey for our patients. Four community education experiences have revealed Burmese families are open, interested and active in learning about health information. Surveying 30 of our HIV patients has also been a great occasion for listening and understanding our patients.

Creating a safe place

The Marist Centre is experienced as a safe place and supportive home. Community Meetings, Parents, Students, Young Migrant Workers, Government Agencies, NGO's. The Marist Centre has been available, open, welcoming, a venue for networking and support. We have just been given a special status as a Non Formal Thai Community Education Learning Centre which gives us added authority to provide education for our Migrant Community. It also shows trust and recognition by the Thai Education Authorities. We have a great team and there is a real energy to make a difference for our Migrant Students and families. Thank God for all those who support us so we can bring Marist Compassion to this fishing village of Migrants on the Thai Burma Border. (Fr. Francis Bird SM)

*Marist Mission
Ranong*



Fr. Kevin Redmond, Fr. Hermes Sabud and Fr. Frank Bird.



Fr. John Pereira, S.M. is the oldest Marist Priest living in the district of Asia. He is currently residing in the District House at Davao City under the care of St. Peter Chanel Community.

In January 04, 2020 we celebrated his 93rd birthday. He still hears the confession of some diocesan priests and bishops, and Marists in formation.



(Photo left) Fr. Gil Casio and Fr. Lionel Mechavez (standing on both side of Rev. Fr. John Larsen S.M.) attended the Colinian Renewal program.

(Photo right) Fr. Kevin Medilo has recently finished his licentiate in Theology specialising on Inter-religious Dialogue.



Some members of the District and other Marist confreres gather every after the council meeting in Davao City, Philippines.

(From left to right. Frs. Joaquin Fernandez, Jacob Aba, Arnold Garferio, Chris Ganson, Lauro Arcede, Patrick Muckian, Roque Rebito, Lionel Mechavez, John Guo Wang)