

NEWSLETTER GENERAL EXECUTIVE

CONGREGATION OF THE BROTHERS OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

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REPORT OF A VISITATION

In the previous newsletter was announced that the general superior would visit the Indonesian brothers from October 7 until November 5, and that this visit would be his first encounter with the brothers and their good works since his election into office in 2016. Surely, the highlight of this trip was the vows for life ceremony of three Indonesian fellow brothers. What follows, is the story of that long voyage.

THE MALANG NOVITIATE

The first visit from our guest address in Jakarta was to the Malang Novitiate, situated in eastern Java. Br. Nico and I stayed there for about three days. The community is made up of 10 novices and four professed brothers. Brother Alexius is the novice master. The two second year novices were involved in a work-placement practice near Desa Putera. They work in a factory for a month, living nearby the factory like many of the other workers. It is a simple and hard life, but a good experience for brothers who want to be close to ordinary people. This work-placement stage has been part of the novitiate years for several years.

Br. Nico and I had talks with every brother and novice individually, and also with the group as a whole. They were fascinating and candid talks, during which the topic of their vocation was also talked about, as well as the place where they came from, the attitude of the family towards the vocation of their son, and also their dreams when they entered the novitiate. Many lessons are followed, much practical work is done, time for sports, prayers, singing, learning to meditate, and helping out in the base communities of the parish. A pleasant and open group with musical talents.



Side by side, visitors and community.

KEFAMENANU-WESTERN TIMOR

Traveling from Lawang to Kefamenanu takes a whole day. First, you go to the Surabaya airport, waiting for some hours until the plane shows up. Looked at from the air, Timor looks dry and bare. This appears to be true in reality. It is very dry. Water is costly, and the farmers live a hard life. After the flight, it takes another five hours by car to the house of the brothers. One follows a road through a mountainous area, complete with the necessary sharp road curves.

Br. Guido is the superior of the small community, and responsible for the orphanage and the small boarding school for boys who are high school students. Nearby is the orphanage for girls, led by the sisters. There are regular contacts between the two groups. When we arrived, we were welcomed by the boys and



the girls in a traditional manner. Of course, we also visited the orphanage, explained the reason for our visit, entertained questions, and had many pictures taken. During the evening of our farewell, the boys and the sisters were guests in the house of the brothers. They took part in a prayer service in the chapel, sitting on the floor or on a fancy chair while listening to various speeches, and enjoying a delicious meal. The ambience was very relaxed.

Br. Guido (photo) is looking for new activities for the older boys, and is preparing new projects for that purpose. Br. Valentinus is studying catechetics, also helps out in the orphanage, and, together with br. Guido, engages in the promotion

of vocations. He also assists in various base communities in the area. The “nestor” of the group is br. Yoris. For many years, he worked in the orphanage, but is now retired. He helps out in the house and the garden, and visits many elderly and the sick. Formerly, he did that in the hospital, but currently he visits people at home.

This is a small but pleasant community, that is doing a lot of work, also drawing the attention of young people. An important number of our postulants and novices comes from West Timor. Often, these young men have had contacts with the brothers there.

DESA PUTERA

The Desa Putera community gets its name from “Boys’ Village”, an orphanage founded by the St. Vincent Foundation in a suburb of Jakarta shortly after the end of the war. This happened 70 years ago. The community counts 12 brothers, including 5 who are retired. Each one of them requires special care. For instance, the brothers Hubert and Robert are wheelchair-bound, while brother Paulus is almost totally blind.

The orphanage is located on a very large property. There are also an elementary and a high school, a school for graphic arts, a clinic, and a large chapel available for liturgical celebrations for the Catholics in the area, as well as for the brothers. The brothers are working in various projects; two of them are students. One is studying to become a medical doctor and the other for an advanced nursing degree. The latter works in the clinic during morning hours. We noticed that several brothers combined work and study.

BOGOR

The congregation started here in 1926; Bogor was then called “Buitenzorg”. During the past years, the buildings housing the brothers and the clinic, have been taken down, and replaced by new ones. This also involved a new lay-out of the grounds. Right behind the buildings are three schools belonging to the school board of the brothers.

Brother Kanisius is retired, but he does all kinds of odd jobs in the garden and in the house. The other brothers work in the clinic, the school, or work elsewhere. One of the brothers works in the clinic and

during the weekends does management studies. In addition to their primary tasks, the brothers are involved in the base communities and in Caritas.

VOWS FOR LIFE

Brothers Polikarpus Arifin, Albertus Komang, and Robertus Siahaan made their vows for life on October 27. Parents, and/or siblings sometimes travelled great distances, while about 40 brothers were also in attendance. The vicar-general of the arch-diocese led the Eucharistic celebration, assisted by two priest-friends. The chapel was nicely decorated with many flowers. The brothers (in white habits), together with close family members, went to the church in procession, where they were greeted by altar boys and priests.

After the sermon, the ceremony of profession was begun, led by the general superior. After a dialogue of the general superior with the three brothers, the brothers asked their parents, or their oldest brother or sister, for permission to dedicate their lives in the service of the congregation. Later, the parents offered their sons to the congregation. This was a beautiful and moving part of the ceremony. The priest gave a special blessing to the three brothers and their families.



During the singing of an appropriate psalm, the three brothers were lying in a stretched-out position in front of the altar in a half-circle, surrounded by fellow-brothers. This, too, was a moving and significant moment. Next, each individual brother made his vows, accompanied by the signing of the official documents, and the blessing of the rings that were presented to them by the general superior.

The celebration ended in the large party room of the orphanage, with good wishes, performances, music and dance, and a festive meal.

MEETINGS

The final week of the visitation was almost completely used for all kinds of meetings: the general executive by itself, the general executive together with the Indonesian provincial executive, with each of the two Yayasan, and with the brothers responsible for formation. The meetings took place in an open and good ambiance, so that the general executive got a better idea of the condition of the communities, the formation, and the many projects involving the brothers. In a realistic way, problems, challenges and outcomes were highlighted. The general executive made recommendations regarding the policies to be implemented.

Br. Ton Houde

NICE TO MEET YOU

A general executive made up solely of Dutch and Belgian members, is now history. Since brothers outside of Europe now carry the most important responsibilities, the editors have asked the members of the executive to introduce themselves to readers via the newsletter. In previous newsletters you were able to meet br. Ton Houde and br. Franklin Clemencia. This time it is br. Nico Simanjuntak's turn.



Brother Nico Simanjuntak, divides his time between Indonesia and Belgium.

I was born on January 20, 1955, in Pematangsiantar (northern Sumatra, Indonesia), in a family with many children: 6 brothers and four sisters. My father made a living by being a teacher, and my mother ran a small store. Our family was deeply religious, and while being rather young, I assisted in the parish community. I attended the high school of the brothers, and shortly thereafter, I joined the congregation. Their involvement with people really appealed to me. There somewhere lies the birth of my vocation, which was allowed to mature in the years that followed. Now, I regard myself as someone walking in the footsteps of Glorieux, and, of course, of his great example: Jesus.

After having taught in Pangururan (Sumatra), I was asked to study nursing in Jakarta. Once I had that diploma, I started working in our outpatient clinic in Desa Putera for the duration of 16 years (1982-1998). In many ways quite

a valuable experience! Soon, other responsibilities were added. For instance, I was elected as a member of the provincial executive, and as a member of the administration of Yayasan Budi Mulia that manages most of the schools of the brothers. All those experiences were formative for me in a positive sense.

In 2001, I was elected as provincial superior, a function which lasted until 2010. This is not an easy assignment. There is much involved in this function, and the various problems that you are expected to resolve, are not small. The experiences gained and the many contacts I had with people in a religious sphere, served me well, and several times resulted in some form of cooperation with other religious institutes and organizations.

In 2010 and once again in 2016, I was elected as a member of the general executive. Since that time, I spend my life between Belgium and Indonesia. In addition to my tasks as a member of the general executive, I am spending a lot of my time and energy on projects in Indonesia. For a few years, I helped with the founding of an orphanage for boys in Solo (Gentan, Java). Since this year, I am helping with congregational activities in Panguruan. Indeed: this is where I started out with my life as a brother.

A FINAL WORD

The year 2017 is almost finished. We hope you've enjoyed reading the newsletters and we would be honoured to count you amongst our readers in 2018.

The editors wish you a beautiful Christmas time, and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year!

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