

Visit to the Servite Foundation in Indonesia – November 2009

(You're invited to read this somewhat lengthy account of my trip. It's just my way of sharing an experience of a new place, and a new enthusiasm for Servite life).

On November 22 I arrived in the city of Denpasar, on the island of Bali in the country of Indonesia, after more than 22 hours in the air. The next morning I met the arriving Prior General, Angel Ruiz Garnica, the General Treasurer, Piergiorgio M. Mazzoleni, the Priors Provincial of NAC, Gerardo Torres of Mexico and Yvon Chalifoux of Canada, a Councilor of the Province named Tobias Macias, and the former Prior Provincial of the Province of the Santissima Annunziata, Giuseppe Galassi, with whom I would spend the next week. Some Servite Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows of Naples have a house there, just a few minutes from the airport, and we made that our temporary home, between the visits to the friars' houses. We were warmly welcomed and treated with great hospitality by these sisters whose primary ministry is to house travelling missionaries and others in transit. The small air-conditioning units provided some respite from the high humidity and temperatures in the upper 80's and low 90's. (Don't say it, I know it's November!)

On the 24th, we flew to Surabaya, on the island of Java, and drove through a couple of hours of indescribable traffic to the city of Malang, where one of the formation houses is located.

Actually, there are a couple of rather simple, temporary buildings at the moment, which house two Mexican friars, David Mejia and Gerardo Hernandez, and fifteen young people (11 in 1st year of philosophy and 4 in 2nd year). Like most of the country of Indonesia, Java has a largely Muslim population, though Catholics have established some study centers in Malang. They do their philosophy before novitiate. We were festively welcomed with the presentation of traditional stoles placed over one shoulder, followed by a considerable amount



of singing (supported by organ, electric guitars and drum). After the evening meal, we retired to a Carmelite retreat center for the night, and returned the next morning to explore the construction of the new building, built on land which we had helped the Mexican Province to purchase (along with Canada and Veneto).

The project is enormous, the fruit of real optimism about Indonesian vocations, but is progressing step by step, under the leadership of a calm David Mejia (prior), and according to a careful prioritizing of what is needed first. The next need is housing for the pre-novices, and it is

that building to which our reduced contributions to them are going this year, along with a contribution of Canada and the proceeds of land sold in Mexico.



But there's another formation center yet to be seen, after flying back to Bali, and taking a day to do a little sightseeing of temples, gardens, some Balinese cultural dance and a busy beach on the Indian Ocean. It was Thanksgiving Day in the US, and Yvon's actual 25th anniversary of priesthood.

The next day, we took off for the island of Flores, inhabited mainly by Catholics (due to Portuguese influence), landing at Labuanbajo (a beautiful place on the coast), and then driving for about 3 hours, over winding, climbing mountain roads, past gorgeous terraced rice fields to the beautiful town of Ruteng. We eventually learned that a rather significant percentage of that population presently can be found in seminaries and convents!



This is the view from the formation house!

We were greeted by an 'army' of young men in formation, some dressed in traditional clothing, who presented us with another kind of stole/scarf and a ceremonial hat, and presented Angel with a bottle of beer and a live chicken as a sign of welcome. The ritual was enhanced by music and lots of spontaneous smiles, which we saw a lot of on this island.



*Tobias Macias, Giuseppe Galassi, me, Piergiorgio Mazzoleni,
Angel Ruiz, Gerardo Torres, Yvon Chalifoux*



In this house, we met our Mexican brothers Rogelio Rayas (who was at our Chapter last February, formerly the assistant provincial), Miguel Angel Delgado (also a fairly new arrival) and Ramon Bustillo (who has been there for a couple of years already) . . . along with [get ready for this] fifty-six men in formation. 31 in their first year and 17 in the second year of the initial stage of welcome. Eight others are in the novitiate.

It is worth mentioning that there are also 5 Servite Sisters' Congregations (Galeazza, Pisa, Napoli, Compassioniste, and Riparatrici) present in Ruteng, with a total of 180 young women in formation! While the Mexican friars stayed at the formation house, the rest of us were welcomed at the beautiful house of the Sisters of Napoli, which is actually a complex of buildings, including a residence for younger women, from the rural areas, who are going to school in Ruteng.



This photo on the left is the view through the huge glass window behind the altar; and that natural sculpture made of roots is the central part of the tabernacle.



They were all there the next day, November 28, with other friends, 400 strong, for the big celebration of Eucharist, during which the truly magnificent new chapel would be dedicated and the new formation house blessed by the Prior General. The liturgy was wonderful, with music resembling our country western music to some extent . . . certainly a surprise to me. The diocesan administrator presided, and I heard later (in translation) that his homily was very good.

The music continued during the dinner, and afterwards, first in the form of performances by the various groups, and then by general dancing of whomever wished to participate. Young Indonesians know how to celebrate!



On November 29, we slowed down the adrenaline a bit, and had a meeting of the three provincials of the North American Conference, together with the Prior General. Arnaldo Sanchez had earlier expressed his desire to not continue as the regional coordinator of NAC, so, after some discussion, we decided that it would be best to bring the leadership back into the group of those already involved by virtue of our ministries in the provinces. Yvon Chalifoux agreed to (once again) be

the coordinator, Gerardo Torres will be the vice-coordinator, and I will continue as secretary. We further discussed the foundation of Indonesia; our relationship with Cono Sur, the conference of the two South American provinces (who took the initiative to suggest some collaboration); contracts for friars who work in other jurisdictions than their own province/vicariate; responses to the directory/calendar of NAC; and some conversation with Angel Ruiz on a variety of



In sacred Hindu temple areas, bare legs need to be covered with sarongs

topics. The next meeting (at which others will be present) should take place in Canada during February or March of 2010, before the provincials' meeting in May. The following day, we visited a few places around Ruteng, had Mass with some of the sisters, and then I left my traveling companions, and made my way back to Bali, and on to Perth, Australia . . . just a short flight from there. I am very grateful to our brothers in Indonesia for their wonderful hospitality and I wish them God's blessings on their growing new foundation. They are, in turn, very grateful for

our assistance to them, in the form of financial aid. **And they would be very happy if a Servite friar from North America would like to spend a little time in Indonesia, teaching English, even for a month or two or three . . . or longer.** (I mentioned to the students that it would serve the Order in the future for them to learn English well and prepare for missionary activity in the northern hemisphere!). It's a beautiful country, welcoming, happy, safe and I found it truly culturally and spiritually enriching to me, not to mention more hopeful about a Servite future.

Submitted with gratitude for the experience,

John Fontana, OSM