

CONGRESS OF THE AUGUSTINIAN LAITY

July 12 - 18, 2006

Report: PROVINCE OF STO. NIÑO DE CEBU

Introduction

St. Paul, in his writings, exhorts all Christians to be true witnesses of Christ and of his Gospel (cfr. 1Ts 2:10; Is 43:10). All baptized Christians have the fundamental responsibility to share their gift of faith to others. We must listen to Christ himself when he said, "Go and proclaim the Gospel to the world." (Mt. 28:19) — these words apply not only to clerics but to all.

St. Augustine faithfully lived-out this invitation of the Lord. He gathered his friends to listen, reflect and study the Gospel at Cassisiacum. He formed the community of lay people in order to share his golden treasures, his experience of conversion and his knowledge of God with them.

The laity comprises the vast majority of the Church today. They are not only the recipients of the gift of faith; they too are movers and implementers of effective evangelization. In short, they are called to be evangelizers.

I. What is burning in the hearts of the laity in Asia?

In the Philippines and in other parts of Asia, the Augustinian lay people are visible in the evangelization. They are co-workers of the Order in various fields of apostolate, namely, parish ministry, educational apostolate, propagation of Augustinians' devotion and vocation promotion. They are involved because of their familiarity with the Augustinian works, their way of life, their attraction to the specific work of the lay, and love for the Augustinian spirituality and community life.

II. What is the Organizational structure?

The existence of the Augustinian lay groups can be traced back from the time the Province or the Vicariate or the Region has succeeded in finally defining its significant contribution to the locality where it is functionally present.

The organizational structure of the Augustinian laity is fairly limited to and defined by the community concerned. It may be an organization accredited in the Provincial level, but the definition of its goals or objectives, activities and structures

need more consolidation on a wider level according to the minds of the Order.

In the Province of Sto. Niño de Cebu, the recognized organizations on the Provincial level are:

(1) *Confraternity of Sto. Niño*. It is an organization which has a the specific and prime objective of propagating the devotion to the image of the Holy child called "Sto. Niño," brought by Ferdinand Magellan as a token of gratitude for the acceptance of faith by the Queen of the island of Cebu in 1521. Sto. Niño is the first religious image to be venerated by the natives of the Philippines.

This confraternity has its national office in the Basilica of Sto. Niño in Cebu. It is a nationwide lay organization.

Activities:

- Monthly meeting and prayer
- Feeding the pilgrims and the hungry
- Annual National Convention
- Retreats and recollection

(2) *The Augustinian lay affiliates*. There is no formal set-up for them as an organization. But they are visible in every special Augustinian gathering. This group consists of lay people who have received special honor and recognition for their unwavering support and the outstanding Christian and Augustinian values they have shown to others and to the OSA community they are serving. There have been many attempts to offer them Augustinian spiritual formation, but since the friars are continually reassigned, there is discontinuity in the said attempts

The Vicariate of the Orient and the Delegation of Korea have their respective lay affiliates as well.

There are also some recently organized Augustinian lay groups which include:

(3) *The Confraternity of St. Monica*. Its members are organized as lay supporters of the major seminary in Quezon city. They pray with the community. They help financially in the formation of OSA seminarians and the various projects in the seminary, like the maintenance and decoration of its public chapel.

Activities:

Regular monthly meeting with an Augustinian Spirituality inputs.

- Annual Retreat or recollection
- Pilgrimage
- Social Apostolate

(4) *The Confraternity of St. Rita* in Gubat, Sorsogon. Its members commit themselves to charity works, (like feeding the

poor), and to regular Augustinian spirituality formation and group discussion and reading on the Life of St. Rita. They testify to the values of St. Rita and are responsible for the propagation of devotion to the saint. They also organize pilgrimages and spiritual retreats.

(5) *The Augustinian vocation promoters.* This an organization in Cebu, consisting of lay volunteers who help raise funds for and promote vocation in the entire region of central Visayas. It was formed in 1995 with more than 50 members.

(6) The Confraternity of our Lady of Consolation and Cincture: this lay group started by the Vicariate of the Orient in order to propagate the devotion to the Our Lady of Consolation. They conduct meetings in San Agustin Church in Intramuros, Manila but they have not succeeded in gaining new members after the death of its charismatic leader Sr. Candelaria, OSA.

A brief report on the KOREAN Experience:

Since 1991, we have tried to promote interest in the writings and spirituality of St. Augustine among Korean lay people through the formation of small lay groups. Fr. Paul Graham, OSA started the group and made a big contribution to the Delegation because of his translation of the Rule of St. Augustine which is greatly demanded by the protestant and catholic readers.

At present there are two groups meeting in Seoul, one in Incheon and another one in Kangwha. These groups meet once a month for prayer and discussion of St. Augustine's writings in the light of contemporary faith and social issues. About 35 men and women currently attend these meetings. I had been part of their formation and activities for more than 11 years being a missionary in that part of the world.

III. What is the contribution of Lay Augustinians to the Province?

There is no doubt to the significant contribution of lay Augustinians to the Province and to the Order as well, considering the present number of active members and their commitment to their work.

Every member of the Augustinian lay groups has been initiated in order to become an active collaborator. Some of them have become close partners of our school administrators; others have become faithful active members of the Parish Pastoral Council or catechists, and still others became faithful promoters of vocation for the Order.

IV. What is the impact of lay people in the in the Church?

Our Augustinian lay counterparts have become in many instances ambassadors of the Augustinians both in local and in the

universal Church, because, in every encounter with other lay groups, they are proud to say that they are "Augustinians." There is a common saying that goes, "If you become an Augustinian, you will be an Augustinian forever."

The Augustinian experience of community life and of faith has left a tremendous impact on their personal life, satisfying them and making them proud of it. Fraternity, hospitality and friendship are the ingredients of the whole profound experience of unity and love. With Augustinian co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord, we would certainly consolidate our own respective vocation.

Laity and clergy must unite or complement each other in the pursuit of effective evangelization. As we priests are responsible of their education and formation, we too are evangelized by their great energy, enthusiasm to work with us and their active presence.

V. Suggestions and recommendations.

Being one of the participants in this second Congress of the Augustinian Laity, it is but fitting to voice out some suggestions or recommendations that would help us build stronger and more effective Augustinian lay groups.

1. Develop a uniformed Augustinian lay manual of formation including materials for lay Augustinian spirituality.

2. Encourage better contacts among the different Augustinian lay groups and invite them to missionary exposure according to the arrangements of the circumscription.

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