

Mid-chapter assembly: Looking back, learning, planning

What has been and what will be? These are the questions that sought answers during the Mid-chapter Assembly of the Region of Luzon, which is preparatory to the 19th Ordinary General Chapter. It assesses and evaluates the decrees of the preceding Ordinary General Chapter according to their practicality, relevance to time and place and meaningfulness. After looking back the assembly then looks forward by drawing up proposals to be presented in the next Ordinary General Chapter.

The assembly, held on April 17-19, 2009 at the Betania Retreat House, Tagaytay City, had 23 delegates: the regional superior (ex-officio), 20 elected and two observers (Junior Sisters). Its theme, “Embracing Diversity in Community and Ministry” indicated the growth of the congregation not only in number of members but also in their personalities and nationalities. S. Ma. Nora Josen, RVM, Regional Superior pointed this out in her report, “We increase in number—Filipinos, Americans, Africans, Indonesians, a Samoan, perhaps Taiwanese, Italians in the near future... It is necessary therefore that we are able to live harmoniously in community and in ministry, not only with the different personalities but that we are able to learn and take the culture of our sisters in places where they came from and accept them as they are.”

The objectives for the assembly outlined by S. Marissa Viri, RVM in her orientation were:

1. To evaluate the implementation of the 18th General Chapter Documents in the past three years using the Appreciative Inquiry Approach.
2. To discuss and come up with a consensus on the different areas’ key directions, strategies, performance indicators, implementation and action plan designs.
3. Make proposals to the 19th Ordinary General Chapter that will help the Sisters “embrace diversity in community and ministry” on the regional and congregational levels.
4. To assess and evaluate the implementation of the Landas, Custom Book and Decrees of the 18th Ordinary General Chapter.

To accomplish these goals the delegates sought graces for the following:

1. Union of mind and heart to seek and do God’s will.
2. More intense desire to appreciate the legacy of Venerable Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo and deepen their living out of the Ignacian spirituality.
3. A deeper awareness of God’s presence within, and communion with the Eucharistic Jesus.
4. Ability to reclaim their vocation to holiness and renew the future with fidelity to their original charism.

S. Marissa stressed the importance of the mid-chapter assembly as a vehicle for sharing ideas and experiences that can help in the realization of the vision and key directions of the Congregation as well as its various areas and ministries.

EMBRACING DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITY AND MINISTRY

(An Inspirational Message by M. Maria Evelyn C. Aguilar, RVM at the Opening Session of the Luzon Mid-Chapter Assembly, scheduled on April 17, 2009 at Betania Retreat House, Tagaytay City)

A Pleasant Morning and a Happy Easter to All! A warm welcome to our 2009 Jurisdictional Mid-Chapter Assembly!

INTRODUCTION

Allow me to begin my message with an end in mind. We are here as ex-officio members, elected delegates and observers to this important and significant assembly. This gathering will take place in these days with the following objectives, namely: to evaluate the implementation of the Landas, Custom Book and decrees of the 18th Ordinary General Chapter and to come-up with proposals to be presented to the forthcoming 19th General Chapter in 2011.

MID – CHAPTER INVITATION

A call to this assembly is an invitation for all of us to engage in discernment that goes beyond the usual daily praxis. In personal reflection and communal prayer, in speaking and listening, our focus in this assembly will be our unity in mind and heart in Christ. This Mid-Chapter is a defining moment in the ongoing story of our jurisdiction. This assembly is not a mere meeting. It is essentially a paschal celebration, an ecclesial event and a jurisdictional affair.

Our faith is supported by Jesus' promise that, wherever two or three are gathered in his name, he will be around for whatever will be happening to us during this assembly. And, if this Mid-Chapter is celebrated well, in faith, hope and sisterly charity, it will be a re-creation of the jurisdiction. Its paschal newness and spiritual freshness will flow upon the Congregation, country, and the world.

MID – CHAPTER REALITIES

As we gather on this first day of this assembly, it is important for us to remember the seven basic realities of this Mid-Chapter.

1. This assembly will be fun. It will be fun because we are here --- and just look at us! What a unique group we are! It will be fun because we know who is ultimately in-charge of this mid-Chapter. Not me, not the President of this assembly, but God! Jesus is at this gathering. It is in Jesus' name that we are gathered. He is with us. This reality will surely bring us lightness of heart in our work during this assembly and smiles on our face!
2. This assembly will not be easy. I say this because this Mid-Chapter is part of our life and religious life is not easy. It is a journey. It will take courage on our part even to embark on a journey, because we must leave where we are and let go of the known. We cannot move towards the journey of implementing our chapter decrees and stay put at the same time. Journeying is hard work --- days of undeniable self-discipline: of sitting, listening, speaking, praying, discerning!
3. This assembly needs all of us. This Mid-Chapter needs every Sister in this hall. And, therefore, in the name of all of us, I welcome each one to listen, to speak, to pay attention, and to discern. Throughout these days, we will have times of formal discussions and informal sharings. The Spirit can use even these times to move our hearts.
4. This assembly must be rooted in the real world. God is found only in the real world --- a world of incomparable beauty and innumerable people of goodwill. He is also found in a world steeped in war and violence, of hunger and poverty, of greed and corruption. This assembly will allow us to see the realities of our life and ministries as consecrated women: both its joys and struggles. The fact remains that this is the world into which Jesus was born over 2000

years ago, the world in which he still lives. This is the Congregation which M. Ignacia founded over 300 years ago, the Congregation in which all of us belongs.

5. This assembly cannot do everything, but we must do something. When we contemplate all the needs of the jurisdiction, we can become overwhelmed. I believe that this Mid-Chapter will do something. Maybe this assembly will result to designing our plans to achieve our dreams and destinies. Or maybe this Mid-Chapter will lay out some proposals to be elevated to our forthcoming 2011 General Chapter. Whatever this assembly does, I hope and pray it will result in some definite jurisdictional movement forward. I also hope that this Mid-Chapter will challenge us on a deeper personal level --- make upon us, stretch our thinking, question our daily choices and cause us to alter them in some real ways.
6. This assembly will be not be perfect. It is because we are not perfect. Sometimes we hear our Sisters say, "I don't expect much from this Mid-Chapter, because we all do is talk about the same concerns over and over again. Well, we should not get tired of talking about the same topic --- like Ignacian Charism and Spirituality, Apostolic Community, Formation for Mission, Governance, Temporalities, Ministries and Mother Foundress. These "stuff" lie at the core of our identity as RVMs. The way I see it, we will always be talking about these things --- we should be! Who else? And, because we are on a journey and as we go forward, our life will continuously challenge our understanding of who we are and what we should be about. We can never exhaust the topic on Ignacian Charism and Spirituality or mission. No! Never! There is nothing perfect. There is only life! There is only this Mid-Chapter! Let us not let our hopes for the perfect Mid-Chapter prevent us from doing something good for God's greater honor and glory!
7. This assembly must be about loving more and serving more. We are gathered here these days for us to become better lovers and better servants. This is the bottom line. As consecrated RVMs, we have the duty to keep ourselves in this ardent state of loving more and serving more God in ways he pleases! May this assembly rekindle our wholehearted and selfless love for God. May it remind us that we are partners with Jesus in his mission because we have said our loving YES to him.

MID – CHAPTER PARTICIPATION

Having heard all these basic Mid-Chapter realities, some of us might find ourselves asking these questions: Why me? What will I do here? What am I here for?

As, Mid-Chapter participants, elected as delegates/observers, by our Sisters in the jurisdiction, we are called to:

1. articulate and speak out loud and clear, be willing to say inside the assembly what we say outside this Mid-Chapter.
2. listen with compassionate desire into the other, not necessarily agreeing but at least understanding.
3. trust ourselves and others, desire for truth.
4. be prophetic persons, come up with new and exciting ideas for the jurisdiction.
5. be sensitive to our roots and traditions, stand firmly on the shoulders of those who were here before them.
6. be persons of vision and deep prayer.
7. be wounded healers and persons of compassion.

Let us not be dismayed if we are chosen as participants to this Mid-Chapter Assembly and we do not have all these qualities. It would be a miracle if anyone among us have all these qualities. After all, Yahweh in Micah 6:8, asks of us only three things: to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God.

CONCLUSION

Lastly, may this Mid-Chapter Assembly rekindle our love for our Congregation, and for one another as Sisters in Christ. May this assembly also rekindle in us the hope-filled courage of Venerable Ignacia del Espiritu Santo and those countless Sisters who have gone before us. With Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation on Vita Consecrate (#10), I wish to end my message with his words to us: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and recount, but also a great history to be accomplished." May this jurisdictional assembly be one small step toward the accomplishment of that great history in the RVM Congregation.

Thank you very much and God's blessings be with all of us!

State of the Region Report

Many have been done, but still a long way to go

For the RVM Region of Luzon, the past three years have been a time addressing the three main areas of concern brought out by the 18th Ordinary General Chapter. S. Ma. Nora Joson, RVM, in her State of the Region Report, outlined the accomplishments on the areas of Ignacian Charism and Spirituality, Community and Apostolic Life, and Governance.

Before she laid out the progress and developments made in these areas, S. Nora explained the theme of the mid-chapter assembly, which is "Embracing Diversity in Community and Ministry." She said it basically points to the growth of the congregation, once called local by its counterparts, but is now international. Diversity also refers to the various personalities and characteristics that sisters individually carry in them and which are made to bear in their life in the community. Diversity should not be equated with division, because diversity can also bring about unity. Embracing diversity, she said, involves "recognizing, accepting, respecting and celebrating our differences."

On the area of Ignacian Charism and Spirituality activities along the following key directions are already being implemented:

1. A life of interiority
2. Practice of discernment
3. Deeper understanding and knowledge of the Spirituality of Mother Ignacia
4. A passion for Christ and His Mission
5. Care for Mother Earth.

In the area of Apostolic Community the key directions being implemented include:

1. Growth in contemplation and discernment
2. Genuine and mature relationship with one another in our community
3. Personal and Communal witness to a simple life
4. Availability and competence for mission.

Among the actions being done in first area are the faithful observance of daily Horarium, attendance at mass and reception of the sacraments of reconciliation and communion; communal observance of fasting; doing charitable acts through reach-out programs; and spiritual reading.

Along the line of the second area, the sisters have been working towards teamwork and active participation in the ministry and parish activities; observance of simple lifestyle; showing support and generosity to other communities in times of calamities and disasters; and group bonding which serve as a venue for sharing ideas, best practices, experiences and personal enrichment.

In the area of governance, the key directions being implemented are the formation of compassionate Ignacian leaders; effective governance; and new ventures.

S. Nora outlined all the activities in each key direction that are making progress but she also pointed out those which need more attention and support. She also noted some "gray areas" that need to be addressed. These include, she said, reviewing and taking up in community meetings and sharing the "Valued Traditions" supplement given in one of our SAEC activities this year (2008-2009), and also the simple regional Manual distributed to the sisters during the 1st Regional Assembly. She also made mention about the five non-negotiable activities done in common in a religious community which are prayer (in front of the Eucharist or Blessed Sacrament as one best recommendation), meals, sharing, meeting and recreation.

The regional superior concluded her report with an exhortation to the assembly to practice community living following the **HEART** (which stands for **H**umility, **E**mpathy, **A**ffection, **R**econciliation and **T**rust), and (just like the Jesuits who were asked to go back to the frontiers) to be with the poor, to live a life of simplicity, to follow in absolute obedience, and most importantly, to build a community of love and friendship.

Region of Luzon Mid-Chapter Assembly

April 17 -19, 2009
Betania Retreat House, Tagaytay City



This assembly will be fun



A gesture of appreciation



Build a community of love...



Delegates on the way to the assembly hall



Delegates take a pose

A time for the Lord



Tellers take an oath of secrecy



Acitivities... acitivities... acitivities... inside the session hall



The Chapter secretaries



S. Nora reviews the committee report



Tokens... take your pick



Pause or pose???

submit report to smapaula@yahoo.com



A lighter moment



and

Committees putting their best output...

A bit serious one



Ignacian Spirituality & Charism



Governance/ M. Foundress



Education Ministry



Retreat/Dormitory/Special Ministry



Community Life
Formation for Mission



Temporalities



AI CHARTS THE ROAD TO POSITIVE CHANGE

The 18th Ordinary General Chapter of the Religious of the Virgin Mary adopted the Appreciative Inquiry as a process for evaluation and assessment of its decrees and programs. At that time, Appreciative Inquiry was a novel way to bring about the renewal and change that the chapter had envisioned for the Congregation, already on the way to its fourth century of existence.

This move could be considered a radical shift because AI was new (to the Congregation) and did not fall into the traditional pattern of identifying a problem and finding a solution for it. Instead AI looks for what works, what is best, and what brings out the best performance in people.

In her welcome remarks for the Mid-Chapter assembly, S. Marissa Viri, RVM, said that the use of AI methodology to fulfill the tasks for the three-day assembly is right on track. AI, she explained quoting Corporation for Positive change, *is based on the assumption that inquiry into and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes and dreams is itself transformational, enabling leaders to create natural human organizations - knowledge-rich, strength-based, adaptable, learning organizations.*

In the three-year run-up to the 19th Ordinary General Chapter the findings gleaned from the AI-based mid-chapter assembly could prove very valuable. The results have been the product of the AI cycle of four processes, namely:

1. Discover: The identification of organizational processes that work well.
2. Dream: The envisioning of process that would work well in the future
3. Design: Planning and prioritizing process that work well.
4. Destiny (or Deliver): The implementation (execution of the proposed design.

For its strategic planning, the assembly used the AI-based approach, which included:

- Identification of our best times during the best situations in the past
- Wishing and thinking about what worked best
- Visioning what we want in the future
- Building from what worked best in order to work toward our vision.

With AI, the assembly can come up with a vision culled from the talked about and shared stories and experiences of those involved in the congregation's communities, and also together, own the actions that would lead them to the vision.

Properly applied and understood AI affirms life and the efforts of people in an organization or community to attain its fullness. As it prepares to fully "Embrace Diversity in Community and Ministry," the RVM congregation discovers, dreams, designs and delivers its Vision, faithful to the legacy of its holy founder Venerable Ignacia del Espiritu Santo.



LEARNING, LOVING ... FOREVER

by: S. Ma. Mayflor Saluba

Experience is the greatest teacher but if only we are fully awake and active players!

Kudos to the Luzon delegates who were at the center stage, as actors and learners. They took pains in learning and preparing their power point presentation. They were passionate in their discussion and attracted 100 percent participation. They readily, but humbly, welcomed suggestion for improvement in the well heard “well-taken”.

The Mid-chapter learning experience is more of formation of the heart than of data information. The learning is not so much of the performance assessment – the quantitative information poured into us but more in the process that we the delegates underwent. What emerges from us is learning, and consequently the consensus regarding the implementation and the action designs followed. It was exhilarating to accomplish something out of the qualitative data from the 4 Ds findings; to come up with the Two Year action Plan that will aid the sisters in embracing diversity in community and ministry and the Proposals that will serve as guides in the course of the journey ... as we make history... and bequeath Ignacian Marian legacy.

What am I feeling and thinking? This I have to say:

I am awed
by the delegates young and old
In learning mode
as they collaboratively worked,
putting quality premium in their report.

Lesson 1: We best learn in putting our hearts and minds together

A prayerful atmosphere filtered through the whole 3-day activity
as the beautiful liturgy aptly conveyed
God’s message for each committee,
especially the strength to carry out
the gigantic tasks creatively and diligently.

Lesson 2: Take time to pray. Prayer is power.

Begin with an end in mind -- Objectives to meet.
Followed by Inquiry – What should we accomplish?
And end with truth, with design – I see!

It’s not the end yet, we need to perpetually journey
to reach the last D – the destiny!

Lesson 3: Make sure the key directions are carried out faithfully.

I cap the 3 lessons I gleaned from the assembly with this mathematical formula:

2 learn
2 love
4 forever



WE PLAYED AS A TEAM

by: S. Ma. Lupeciña Amamio, RVM

The Regional Superior of Luzon, S. Ma. Nora Josen, spearheaded the region's mid-chapter assembly held at Betania Retreat House in Tagaytay on April 17-19, 2009. It was a delegation of twenty elected delegates along with two junior observers.

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." The foregoing quote by Andrew Carnegie summarizes it well and it approximates my impression on the recently concluded assembly. It was indeed a joint effort of individual sisters for a common goal. Babe Ruth, the great baseball player, had another way of saying it that befits us: "The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime." Admittedly, we were not the greatest bunch of individual stars but we tried our best to play as a team. True enough, we had a smooth, fruitful and blissful yet head-breaking but fun-filled assembly.



A time for discovery and appreciation

by: S. Ma. Nelda Roa, RVM

Attending the mid-chapter assembly was a joyful journey with the loving and assuring God of Hope.

As one of the first time delegates, I had so many apprehensions at the start because I knew that the activity could demand great responsibility. Deep within I had mixed emotions, which included doubts and anxieties. I asked myself, "What can I contribute to this assembly?"

However, as the three-day gathering daily unfolded, I found myself no longer focused on finding the answers to quell my apprehensions. Instead I became eager to discover and appreciate what were being revealed by the different committees as achievements, dreams, plans and desired destinies. I realized that spending special time talking, discussing about our ministries is not a simple task, but it was very energizing and inspiring because of the common desire held by each one in the assembly to love more and to serve better through the ministries of the RVM congregation, which we have publicly vowed to live out.

Having been given the opportunity to participate in the mid-chapter assembly, I have deepened my faith, strengthened my trust and hope that like Mother Ignacia, we too could contribute our share to the history of our congregation. We can do this by never stopping to appreciate our life-giving forces, while at the same time acknowledging our moments of stagnation. We never want to stop dreaming to achieve our goals. Most importantly, if we are assured of the blessings of God who is always delighted in every good desire that He sees in our hearts, how much more in our efforts to realize all of these?