

Philippines: a new frontline mission post

In his well-known Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, road map of his ministry as universal Shepherd, Pope Francis clearly states that *"we need a Church that constantly goes out of herself, keeping in her mission her sight fixed on Jesus Christ and on her commitment to the poor"* (EG 97) This appeal is addressed to all: *"we are all called to participate in this new 'missionary out going'. Every Christian and every community should discern the path that the Lord is indicating; but to each one the responsibility of obeying such call"*. (EG 20) In response to the Spirit impulses and to a repeated invitation, coming from the Shepherd of the Diocese of Dagupan, after necessary discernment and approval of the major superiors, last July a small group of confreres, along with a few young postulants, has moved from our Manila community toward the North of the Philippines. A departure from a large metropolis toward a peripheral rice field region, at about four hour driving distance. A decision inspired by trust and courage, made with the sole intent of spreading, in joyful humility, the seed of the gospel of charity planted by Divine Providence almost thirty years ago, under the shade of a large mango tree that never stops producing not only its natural fruits but also those, not less delicious, of a daily service and discreet closeness to many needy brothers and sisters who carry heavy burdens in their life.



Many have noticed with a sense of wonder how, within a very short span of time, our confreres and young seminarians have easily familiarized with the new local community, through a network of friendship and a caring attitude toward the poor, beginning with the children, the farming families, the elders, especially those bedridden and most needy. Precisely toward the elders who require more urgent attention our brothers are focusing their heart and special care, answering in that way not only to one of the primary needs of that area but also responding to a specific request of a local lay association that has put at our disposal a piece of land and a simple building. So, what was planned to be a 'home for the aged' has become temporarily the simple residence of the religious and the young people in formation. Under such lively "fraternal roof", you may already see the sprouting of a variety of activities and initiatives: catechetical formation, liturgical and community celebrations, training of volunteers, gathering of youth and cooperators... However, the jewel of this new and youthful guanellian mission post appears to be the special attention given since the beginning to our brethren with disabilities; a ministry not yet fully explored in that diocese. The creativity of charity has urged our confreres to visit local public schools searching for 'differently abled students' in need of a special catechesis and accompaniment that would make them too feel integral and precious part of the Church, not only as recipients of assistance but also as special witnesses of the love of Jesus who showed preferential affection to the little ones and the poor in spirit.

Following a program of appropriate catechetical instruction adjusted to their capabilities and language, more than two hundred young boys and girls with special needs have had access for the first time to Holy Communion as well as to the sacrament of Confirmation that Archbishop Socrates Villegas administered to them with touching gentleness. The good Bishop took that opportunity to express, along with his gratitude, a heartfelt appeal to the local Church to give continuity to that grace-filled event by spreading and promoting a constant attention and pastoral sensitivity toward this special portion of God's family and of the human society. We Guanellian have perceived in Pangasinan the invitation to bear witness in a new a creative way to that contagious passion for the favorite ones of Divine Providence whom Fr. Guanella has taught us to call "good children" of our common Father. A call not to get trapped in the tendency of "just doing things the old usual way"; a call instead to open wide the door of the heart to new and fresh initiatives which not only enable us to reach a larger number of people in need, but also help the civic and ecclesial community grow in the spirit of responsibility in spreading respect for everybody's dignity, starting from the most vulnerable and unprotected ones. November 30 has already become in the Archdiocese of Dagupan the official "Day of Persons with disability". More than five hundred people have walked through the main roads of the town of Sta. Barbara, at the joyful rhythm of a local band, awakening public awareness and solidarity around the families with children with special needs who deserve therefore special affection and care. A special love that they themselves are capable to spread contagiously all around. Of such love, we Guanellian are direct witnesses, wherever we are.

padre Luigi De Giambattista

PRESENZA MISSIONARIA GUANELLIANA

Dear Mission Friends,

allow me, through this simple leaflet *"Presenza Missionaria Guanelliana"* n. 2, to address all of you, who in different ways and in different places share the beauty and the challenge of the Guanellian Mission in the five continents. I think of you, dear confreres and sisters, co-operators, employees and voluntary workers, known and unknown benefactors, children and youth, families, the aged and the sick, the members of Christian communities or more simply our friends with a heart open and available to be a neighbour also to those who are not inside our home or "ours". From this geographic periphery of Solomon Island I send my greeting, full of thanks, appreciation and brotherly encouragement to kindle or re-kindle everywhere the missionary effort and enthusiasm, as Pope Francis keeps asking the whole Church to spread it by transmission.

Surrounded by ocean on all sides, and used to go out to sea in our little boat, I want to forward here the inspiring appeal addressed by the Pope a few weeks ago to the pilgrims coming from the diocese of the holy bishop don Tonino Bello: *"It is good, to wait for God's newness in our life ... we don't wait for God staying idle, but active in love. God doesn't want us to be the inspectors of the docks nor the light-house keepers, but trustful and daring sailors who follow God's un-sailed routes, casting life's nets on His word ... We are not made for calm sleep, but for daring dreams!"*. A special wish for their work goes to the PMG Referents who, in each Province and Vice Province just received the task of being animators and promoters of the missionary spirit in the different environments of our pastoral and charitable presence in the world. We have just begun our journey together. Let us go on in communion, with courage and creativity, trusting as missionary disciples of the Risen Lord, blessed and accompanied by the Founder! **Fraternamente**

P. Luigi De Giambattista

Coordinatore Presenza Missionaria Guanelliana

Noro, Solomon Islands, 20 Gennaio, 2019

LENT 2019: SUPPORT THIS PROJECT

Dear Readers,

Don Guanella's words *"We can never stop as long as there are poor to rescue"* are more than ever opportune today in every part of the world, and – as usual – charity gives us the impulse to create new answers for the present problems.

This is why, as Sisters Daughters of St. Mary of Providence and Confreres Servants of Charity, looking together at society in Romania where the number of homeless is growing every year, we decided to propose a practical project to realize, for those who – like the Guanellians – can hear the cry of the poor and want to do something to give a stop to the "throw-away culture".

It is a shelter for those who lost everything and have to wander along the streets, this is what we are asking you to accomplish through a solidarity Lenten action.

The small contribution of each one, united with those of all others, may change the situation of some brothers and sisters, giving them hope for a better future and strength to smile towards life, that "they may see your good deeds and give glory to God".

don Umberto Brugnoli *Superiore Generale SdC*

suor Serena Ciserani *Superiora Generale FSMP*



A shelter for the homeless at Iasi – Romania

*“Each person is precious, people are more important than things
And the value of every institution is measured on how it considers the life
and dignity of every human being, especially the vulnerable”*

(Pope Francis, World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2018)



The General Councils of the Servants of Charity and the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence, through the PMG – Guanellian Mission Presence, organise a special solidarity collection in all Guanellian communities for the project **“A shelter for the homeless at Iasi”** – Romania is one of the main cities in Romania, the capital of Moldova, with a population of about 350.000. The Guanellian sisters arrived here in the 1990’s and manage a large home for the aged and a centre for girls in need.

At their side, for a few years now there are two Guanellian priests who work as chaplains helping in the charitable action and as formators of a small group of young men who desire to consecrate themselves as Guanellians.

At Iasi, as in other Rumanian cities, there are quite a lot of people who are homeless, persons who lost their job after the folding of the big public enterprises of the communist regime. Persons who were not able to migrate abroad to look for a job, as millions of others did. Moreover, the adjustment of the State law for the minors to European rules caused the fact that many youngsters, when they reach 18 years of age, are immediately dismissed from orphanage and State-managed centres and find themselves without a support from their relatives who live difficult lives in the rural areas, therefore they easily return to the city, only to find themselves living on the road. The Confreres and Sisters in Iasi have been for long concerned to find ways to support the poor of the city, especially during the harsh winter months. Our Sisters offer daily hot meal for lunch to more than seventy persons. The Confreres, helped by the young seminarians, approach them in the evening to give blankets, clothes, hot soup and beverages.

Within a more complete future project, aiming to help these persons through a centres that could welcome them and work for a professional formation and social rehabilitation, they would like, to begin with, to give them a shelter during the night. Last year the Confreres tried to prepare a place in a cabin close to the house, but the experience failed for the risk of fire, so that they had to close, following the suggestion of the local police. Meanwhile a fire has actually destroyed the public night shelter, so that these people are now condemned (in this winter 2018/2019) to sleep under the bridges or in the empty tombs at the cemetery.

The Sisters are ready to give a piece of land close to their Home for the aged, and the Servants of Charity want to start as soon as possible the first part of the building. This will contain:

- four rooms, to avoid large dormitories that could more easily give way to fights and other behavioural problems;
- toilets, showers, laundry;
- sick bay and nurse’s room
- a small office and a meeting room for the long and cold winter evenings.

The building could contain between 18 and 35 persons, men and women. The cost of the project or about € 200,000. Naturally everybody will be surprised of the high cost: we should keep in mind that Romania is part of the European Union and thus, even if the medium income is much lower than in other states, the building and safety rules must be according to the social service rules of Europe.

Meeting with the confreres in charge of the PMG

Fr. Adriano and Silvio Verga have started a series of meeting to get acquainted with the confreres in charge of Mission Pastoral in the Provinces “Sacred Heart”, “St. Joseph”, “Our Lady of Guadalupe”, and “St. Louis Guanella” of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence. Each of them presented their working environment, explaining how people in the area are attentive to mission, what is going on, the aids they know or use, the presence of voluntary word in or around the Guanellian communities, their relationship with diocesan mission centres; all this in order to make a program that will consider the different situations.

The confreres in charge for the Provinces “Cruz del Sur”, “Santa Cruz”, “Divine Providence” and of the Vice Province “Our Lady of Hope” will be contacted through a written form.

This is a work requiring time, attention, and reflexion. A time is needed to find common guidelines and directions on which the local projects will be prepared, according to the local church movement. We are sustained by the words of Jean Guitton who said, explaining the reason why Paul VI used to take his time in taking important decision, because of his extreme attention to people’s requests and needs: *“It is much better to run the risk to disappoint the impatient, rather than improvise by rushing”*.

In this journey, we wish for everyone to be *“open to look at the entire, real Guanellian world, in a spirit of co-responsibility, of being open to one another in discerning and in deciding”*. This is why heartily invite all those in charge to go over again to what was written in the past Christmas PMG Letter about the characters and role of the PMG in-charge.

don Adriano Folonaro

