



BUGEY MISSION EXPERIENCE: MATTI, DIGOS CITY



Bugey is a region in the department of Ain in Eastern France, located between Lyons and Geneva. When Marists talk about the Bugey missions, they are referring to the early history of the Society of Mary, between 1825 and 1829. The early Marists began

their work here in 1825, and they were: Pierre Colin, Jean Claude Colin, and Etienne Déclas. During these years, Jean Claude Colin and his companions would go out for a mission – preaching, giving retreats, listening to confessions, and administering the sacraments – for thirty days without a break. Their task was to preach to the people who had no parish priests, and they were to do this travelling on foot through the snow and mud of the mountains. They lived and shared their daily living with poor people under very primitive conditions. Despite the hardships and challenges they experienced, Colin remarked, “Never were we so joyous. Never did we laugh with such good heart. I have always been nostalgic for that period. They were good times...” (OM 639).

For my own taste of the Bugey Mission Experience, I was sent to the Marist Fathers' community in Digos City from October 8 through October 22, 2019. Digos is a city in Davao del Sur in the Mindanao region of the southern Philippines. The Marist Fathers have been ministering in this place since 2004. At that time, they lived a couple of kilometres away from the present site, while working as chaplains to the National High School and in prison ministry. In 2012, at the request of the bishop, they moved five kilometres outside of Digos City to the barangay of Matti, where they ministered to 24 mission stations or Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC). These communities now comprise Our Lady of Fatima parish, erected on 13 May 2019 by Bishop Guillermo Dela Vega Afable, the Bishop of Digos, as a new parish of the Diocese of Digos. There are three confreres working in the parish: Fr. Christopher Thadeos Ganzon, sm (District Superior and Parish Priest) from the Philippines; Fr. Patrick Muckian, sm (Community Superior, Parochial vicar and Chaplain in the Prison ministry) originally from Ireland, but present in the Philippines for over 25 years; and Fr. Arnold Garferio, sm (District Vocation Director and Marist

Laity Animator) from the Philippines.

It was a privilege for me to be part of this community for two weeks to live and share their life and mission while living my unique Bugey Mission Experience. It was indeed a joyous time, as not only did I share life with the Marist community, but also with the parishioners and other people who were very welcoming. Immediately, one can notice the strong Marist influence through the spirituality and simplicity in the parish. As mentioned above, there are 24 BECs that make up this parish, and I was pleased to have visited a couple of them and participate in their beautiful and simple liturgy. There is a large presence of young people who are dynamic and enthusiastic about the mission and work of the parish. I was fortunate, on one occasion, to give a reflection during the Youth General Assembly of roughly 230 young people from all over the parish. However, the old are not left out as everyone has a place in the life of the parish.

Also, during my stay in Digos, I witnessed almost all the work the Marist confreres are doing in Digos. They are chaplains to the two jails (PRC and BJMP) in the city. In PRC, I visited the inmates and joined them for Bible sharing; in the BJMP, I was filled with compassion as I witnessed the weddings of two inmates. They were two convicted men whose wives live outside, but joined them to regularise their matrimony in the jail. It was just so beautiful to experience such an act of love. There is also an active campus ministry where recollections, confessions, and catechism lessons are brought to students and pupils in their schools with the assistance of devoted catechists. In all, I can say, I witnessed the celebration of six of the seven sacraments of the Church, with the exception of Holy Orders.

In the end, my feelings are those of gratitude to the Marist community in Digos for accepting me and continuing to nurture in me the zeal and love for the mission and work of the Society of Mary, which they live faithfully in this part of the world through their simple lifestyles, compassion towards the poor, and sensitivity to the spiritual needs of the people.

Clinton ASUNKWAIN KUBE

BUGEY MISSION EXPERIENCE: DAVAO CITY



The first phase of the Bugey Mission Experience saw novices assigned to campus ministry, assisting in the running and administration of student recollection and retreats; or to the Southern Philippines Medical Centre (SPMC), assisting in the hospital chaplain-

cy office. Both assignments were located in Davao City.

Hospital chaplaincy work entailed meeting with patients and providing support for office staff: novices visited patients in the orthopedic and emergency/observation wards in the mornings, and they assisted in the Mass and other office duties in the afternoon. Entering the wards on the first day was particularly challenging – the first patient we came across was, in fact, the remains of a patient who had died in the observation ward and was moved to the corridor for collection. As we came past, our guide Fr. Boy, made as if to say something, but then thought otherwise and made the sign of the cross as he continued walking. It was the clearest and most explicit introduction to this form of ministry that we could have received, for we were to be greeted by a sensory overload of death, misery, and sorrow. Patients in the emergency/observation ward are in acute medical crises – usually the effects of stroke and renal or gastrointestinal distress – and we were invited to enter into that distress alongside them; we were invited to share not only in their suffering, loneliness, and anguish, but also in their hopes and courage. Due to the overcrowding of the hospital, patients are often in observation for extended periods of time until a bed can be found in other wards. This allowed us to meet and build connections with the patients (and in the case of children, their parents as well) over a period of days.

Meanwhile the majority of orthopedic patients were the victims of motor vehicle accidents and were left in traction following major surgeries to mend broken bones. We were once again called

to be alongside these patients in their pain and suffering; though less critical than emergency patients, their pain was much more acute and their injuries more graphic – we saw severe scarring, extreme traction devices, and caved-in skulls. We experienced the frustration of being confined to a bed, the infuriation of postponed surgeries, and the trauma of destruction. But, within that frustration, infuriation, and trauma, we also saw optimism, hospitality, and a community spirit – patients support one another through their injuries and we were accepted into that community. For many patients, we were seen as an extension of the love and support that they received from one another.

In all, hospital ministry at SPMC might be the most difficult and challenging thing I have ever done. The days were long and arduous, the emotional toil exacting, and the days made longer by negotiating public transit. Often, we found ourselves with people who spoke little English, and the language barrier was difficult to cross. Many of us were forced to confront death – and in doing so, our own mortality – and for some, it threatened even the very existence of God. Nevertheless, all of the difficulties and challenges, all of the toil and labour, were made trivial by a patient looking at you through their pain and saying, “thank you for visiting me.”

Our most sincere and expressive thanks to Fr. Boy Guinit, MI, and all of the staff and volunteers at the SPMC Chaplaincy Office for their welcoming support and love.



Hemi ROPATA

Marista Fathers' International Novitiate House



The novitiate community gets a visit from Fr Ben McKenna sm.



During the Bugey Mission Experience at Our Lady of Fatima parish in Digos City, Fr Pat Muckian sm (center-left) and Clinton Kube (center-right) are visited by Fr Leronio sm and Fr Fred Kado sm.



The novitiate community visiting the cemetery on All Souls Day



Leonard (left) and Lesley (right) pretend to be hard at work



Nothing like a soutane to make novices suddenly seem serious.



Fr Ben McKenna sm shares his stories from the missions.