

Being Leaven in the Dough ...

Notre Dame de Vie Secular Institute

Reflections of a Member

In December 1954 Blessed Father Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, a Carmelite priest and Vicar General of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, came to the Philippines for the first time in order to visit the different missions of the Carmelite Fathers and monasteries of the Carmelite nuns. It was also the occasion when he founded the Notre Dame de Vie—*Ina ng Buhay*—Secular Institute in the Philippines. ↓

Eugène of the Child Jesus envisioned forming witnesses who seek an intimate friendship with God and at the same time are engaged in diverse professions and ministries. He told the members: In a world that has lost the sense of God and is perhaps losing it more and more, the Institute has its place; it has its mission which is all the more urgent; ... it is calling for a testimony which asserts the existence of God and of his rights.

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This was the first departure of members from France for the mission. In fact, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus gave the providential sign for in 1952 for her twenty-fifth anniversary as Patroness of Mission, an invitation came from the Carmelite Bishop of Infanta, Monsignor Patrick Shanley, for the Institute to come to his Prelature. On Christmas night of 1954, the Philippine foundation was born. Soon after, vocations started to come. At present, there are about one hundred members in the Philippines.

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Total Consecration to God and to the World. Members in formation live in the House of Solitude. Here in the Philippines, the House of Solitude is located in Angat, Bulacan. A two-year formation grounded in contemplative prayer is lived where a balanced life of silent prayer, daily participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, intellectual and manual work, and recreational activities is maintained. Members study the teachings of the saints of Carmel: Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Therese of the Child Jesus, and Blessed Father Marie Eugene of the Child Jesus.

Their apostolate is founded on a deep and constant prayer life. Thus, contemplating our Lord, they may lead souls to Him towards the

perfect fulfillment of their baptismal grace. They are immersed in the ordinary life of people. As one member puts it: as a member of a secular institute I can go to any place without calling any attention. I dress like the ordinary people. At the end of the day I feel the need to pray again to tell God: “Lord, pass after me, whatever is lacking, please fill it up with your grace.” My contact with the poor and suffering patients fuels my prayer life.

For a member of a secular institute the field of apostolate is the whole human being ... both within the Christian community and in the civil community (cf. Pope Benedict XVI). The members of the Institute are in education, health care, catechesis and pastoral ministry, architecture, social work and business; they are like the yeast that leavens all the dough (cf. Mt 13:33).

Mother of Life Catechetical Center. In one of the visits of Father Marie-Eugene to the Philippines he recognized that there is faith and a deep religious sense in the Filipino and that religious instruction must be the priority of apostolic concerns. He gave this directive to one of the members: form catechists providing them not only with necessary theological

and pedagogical knowledge but also the opportunity *to experience a deep contact with God* which will allow them to convey their knowledge of God, forming those who have been entrusted to them in the spiritual life. Mother of Life Catechetical Center is the fruit of this thought.

To date, about 1,600 catechists have been formed coming from 76 ecclesiastical territories working as religious educators, parish pastoral workers, or values education teachers all over the Philippines. This year, 2017, marks the fiftieth year foundation anniversary of the Center. Mother of Life looks back with gratitude at the past as it sets its gaze towards the future with hope. Its theme for the jubilee year is: *MOL@50: Magnificat! ... Continuously Journeying together with Mary, Mother of Life ... Bringing the Gospel Anew*. This theme signifies commitment to the Church’s efforts for the new evangelization—here and beyond the Philippine shores.

Father Marie Eugene Family Development Foundation (MEFAMDEV). The Institute set up MEFAMDEV in 2017 to help the families of Angat by working in partnership with them towards a





better quality of life. The program consists of family welfare and livelihood programs. Members who are no longer active in their profession work closely with social workers in order to share their expertise in values and spiritual formation and parenting education and by providing tutorial classes to students to help them in their school work. MEFAMDEV continues its work through the generous help of people who gladly share what they have. Through them educational assistance is extended to those who would otherwise have no access to education.

Notre Dame de Vie Institute has been in the Philippines for more than 60 years. The faith of the Founder and those who started the Institute in the Philippines has sustained its growth and development. As Blessed Father Marie Eugene encouraged the members: I would like you to go where we cannot go, on the boulevards, on the high seas, into all social classes and environments. What will it be in the future? It seeks only to be faithful to its prophetic mission to stand in the presence of the Living God and to burn with zeal for his glory (1 K 19:10).