We moved to the skills training part of the program as we co-learned accompaniment and discernment. These are essential skills for the formators to have in the implementation of the holistic model of formation. Clare Nolan, our resource person drew out our own ideas on the meaning and goals of accompaniment. We saw accompaniment as a journeying with, supporting a person in her growth process towards integration and wholeness. We identified the following qualities required of the formator: non-judgmental, mission-minded, passionate and willing to co-learn. She must be an attentive listener, discerning and reflective since she has the responsibility to nurture growth.

In prayer, we got in touch with Jesus’ way of accompanying people through the way he accompanied Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, Peter, the group of disciples and people he healed. We paid attention to his behavior, looked deeper at what went on between him and the person and what was going on inside of him that made him behave and respond the way he did. We were inspired to model our task of accompaniment on Jesus’ way.

Clare helped us hone our accompaniment skills. She shared with us questions to ask to make the person reflect on her human experiences and discover the divine. She creatively prepared a “personal tool kit” which included tasks and skills like making contracts and goals, listening, curiosity, mirroring, observing, interviewing skills, step by step planning, making use of resources, self-development plan, cultural awareness, pliers and hammers. We identified areas among these tools where we felt competent and where we needed to develop through practice and study.

She encouraged us to explore their use in our accompaniment and to add on to them. We saw the importance of having a personal growth plan for ourselves regarding our task of accompaniment.

In view of present realities of violence, war and different kinds of abuse which people we accompany might have experienced, we discussed trauma. We too can experience trauma in different ways. Trauma causes stress to a person, but it is also an opportunity and a call for growth and transformation. We learned about the cycles the person has to break out from to achieve reconciliation. Sacred space conversations are important to facilitate healing of wounded individuals. We also discussed emerging issues on sexuality like sexual abuse, LGBTQ, and same sex marriage. While we don’t usually discuss these openly in our communities, today’s realities pose a great challenge for us.
We entered into another sacred space, the sacred space of “discernment” as we journeyed with Sr. Linda, Cenacle sister. She referred to discernment as a daily habit of life and introduced Fr. George Aschenbrenner’s framework of three levels: the external activity, skin of our souls and our core. In external activity, we make our choices which people see. The skin of our souls is where our feelings are, which come and go. The core is who we are, the meaning of our life, the values we live by, what we believe in and our relationship with God. Our core is God’s indwelling presence. We spent some time reflecting and getting in touch with our core and to be sensitive to our inner voice.

Another area discussed was the issue of confidentiality. Clare emphasized the importance of confidentiality in accompaniment as the sister in initial formation may reveal delicate matters in the process. The formator must be aware of her own legal responsibilities depending on her local context. There is a need to draw out a policy on this matter in our Units.

Discernment

We entered into another sacred space, the sacred space of “discernment” as we journeyed with Sr. Linda, Cenacle sister. She referred to discernment as a daily habit of life and introduced Fr. George Aschenbrenner’s framework of three levels: the external activity, skin of our souls and our core. In external activity, we make our choices which people see. The skin of our souls is where our feelings are, which come and go. The core is who we are, the meaning of our life, the values we live by, what we believe in and our relationship with God. Our core is God’s indwelling presence. We spent some time reflecting and getting in touch with our core and to be sensitive to our inner voice.

Reflection and wisdom sharing
Salient points of Linda’s input:

Discernment is not possible without spiritual life since discernment is all about being able to see clearly what God is doing in my life and all that life includes, to hear clearly what God is saying, and to understand more fully what God might be inviting me to in order that I may be able to respond to this God in the choices that I make every day of my life. To live in a discerning way one must have capacity for awareness, reflection, ability to come to insight, have desire for God and for a relationship with God, a life of prayer which enables one to deepen this relationship with God, capacity and willingness for self-disclosure, and willingness to engage in some form of spiritual accompaniment.

Experiences of God either as peak experiences, touch tone experiences and events of life are materials for discernment. These religious experiences reveal to us where and how God was present in those moments. Over a period of time we are able to discern or begin to see more clearly the pattern of how God relates to us uniquely and personally. As we go through the process of discernment we are invited to form some conclusions about God, faith statements which reflect a personal knowledge of God and a growing familiarity with God’s ways. Discernment is not possible without a lived history with God who will continually invite us to choose His way, His desires and His will. Discernment, then, is being able to see who God is and who I am to God so that I can always respond to what is of God, and reject that which is not of God. Growth in discernment results to growth in faith, hope and love, in being able to risk, in becoming more loving, more generous and more available to responsibilities.

Formation is a growth in freedom through conversion which allows a person to leave behind certain ways and choose a different way of living, in line with baptismal commitment. As a result of this conversion, one declares an identity in God with a special experience of God’s love as beyond any experience of other loves.

In prayer, we reflected on our own experience of making discernment in our life. We recognized that being in touch with our core is essential in our life and in our work of discernment since it helps us to examine ourselves whether we have the mind and heart of Jesus. We concluded that discernment and accompaniment are essential in all levels of formation.

We also looked at what kind of discernment is necessary for the different levels of formation. We took note of the goal of formation which is “to foster the growth of courageous and daring disciples of Jesus the Good Shepherd who are committed to responding whole heartedly to the mission of the Congregation.” Making use of the objectives for each level as spelled out in the formation guidelines, we worked on our local formation program, having in mind the need for consistency in planning the program for the different levels.

Linda emphasized that spiritual direction is a personal relationship between two people focusing on the primacy of the Holy Spirit at work in the heart of the directee and aimed at improving the directee’s relationship with God. In formation, we are called to have trust in the slow work of God and to be patient both with ourselves and the persons we accompany.
We lovingly welcomed into our circle our Unit leaders on the last week of the program: Francine Mutthugala - Sri Lanka/Pakistan, Catharina Supatmiyati - Indonesia, Marie Jean Bae - Northeast Asia, Sabina Pathrose - Central East India/Nepal, Dorothy Ndumba - Kenya, Regina Htoo Htoo - East Asia, Bridget Paily - South West India, Regina Kuizon –Philippines and Joan Lopez - Singapore/Malaysia

Together, we looked into the “struggles we face in living community and our desire for healthy life-giving relationships” (30th Congregational Chapter Direction Statement). Based on our understanding of community for mission in today’s context, we identified what is blocking us and the shifts we need to make to bring about communities for mission. We got in touch with the hierarchical mindset still present in our communities despite our longings to move towards the holistic model of leadership. We saw the need for sacred space conversations, letting go of the ego, developing loving relationships, participative leadership, clarity of vision, inclusion, and reconciliation. We hope to become agents of change and to contribute to make communities for mission a reality.

In this sacred space of co-learning and wisdom sharing, we witnessed the emergence of an effective teamwork among the Asian Formation Core Team, who with Susan and Elaine brought to birth this session. They have shown us the power of working together and inspired us to work as a formation team in our Units. Aware of our oneness in mission, we commit ourselves to extend our hands to our mission partners and make sure that mission partnership is part of the formation program at all levels. We dream of crossing borders, to organize capacity building programs for mission partners, to formulate policies for formation and share resources.
As we end the session, we bless the sisters who will be in the Asian Formation Core Team for the next years: Salomi Cruz (Singapore/Malaysia) as coordinator, Florence Soe (East Asia), Fransiska Wahyuni (Indonesia), Mariam Kulangra (Central East India/Nepal), Imelda Fuentes (CGS), and the new members: Maria Placida (Northeast Asia), Susan Montano (Philippines), a sister will be named soon for (South West India) and Roshanti Ranwatte (Sri Lanka). With them, we will continue the process of co-learning as we implement the holistic model of formation.

We thank God and the Congregation for this opportunity for growth. Our learnings and experience of transformation have given us greater confidence in taking our role in formation. We go back to our Units energized by the Spirit, willing to risk together for mission. Gifted with a zeal that embraces the world, we look forward to more networking within the region and beyond – all for the mission!
Living from the core of my being implies an ongoing process of transformation and elevation of consciousness. I experience this ongoing process as the key to becoming an authentic disciple of Jesus taking on his heart and mind. For me, one aspect of living from the core is to enter into the mystery...that we not be locked into ourselves, that we do not flee from what we fail to understand, that we do not close our eyes to problems or deny them, that we do not dismiss our questions”

Gracia Chiong  
Singapore Malaysia

Personally I feel I have grown in this session through the sacred space of sharing our lived experience. The group’s diversity enriched me. I will continue discerning not what to say but how to say it, having big ears but small mouth and use the accompaniment tools appropriately as I listen to my core.

I will work on my transformational journey by practicing holistic prophetic witness in my community and mission. I will energetically join with my formation team members to give an echo to all our sisters in the unit. I will look at the existing structures of formation and share with my formation team members where we need to improve in each level of formation in applying the wisdom we have gained in the session through co-learning.

Francisca Kameli  
Kenya Province

The experience of being together with the sisters and lay in the formators’ session in Tagaytay led to personal growth and the knowledge of holistic formation through the wisdom sharing of different units. The privilege of participating with the sisters from our own province was a special chance to have a common understanding for the unit’s planning, implementing, reviewing and revising formation programs, and the journey of building covenant community. The richness of accompaniment and discernment which I have learned will assist me in the process of co-learning and sharing responsibility for a circular model of leadership in the East Asia Unit.

I treasure all the precious moments of the Formators’ session which have taught me ways and means of becoming a joyful religious.

Regina Htoo Htoo  
East Asia

Our time together has been one of listening to the ‘unspeakable beat of the Sacred’ within us and in one another. The Spirit was very much alive as we deepened our understanding of the holistic model, and integrating it into our formation plans. I am convinced that as we go forth with renewed energy conscious of our call to ‘become,’ we will foster the growth of courageous and daring disciples of Jesus the Good Shepherd – women committed to the mission of compassion in a universe groaning for wholeness. Together we will make a difference, bringing to life the congregational direction of 2015, as we co-create life for mission through formation. We are the ones – energized by the Spirit we risk together for mission.

Josita Corera  
Sri Lanka/Pakistan