2015 Formators’ Session
Participants and facilitators

The Contemplative Sisters

THE UNITS
South West India, East Asia, Central East India-Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka-Pakistan, North East Asia, Indonesia, Singapore-Malaysia, Congo/Kenya, Isles
First Week: Formators Session in the Philippines

The 2015 Formators’ Session in Maryridge, Tagaytay City, Philippines started on 26 September 2015 with an opening ritual where the participants from ten units of Asia Pacific and RIMOA, namely South West India, East Asia, Central East India-Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka-Pakistan, North East Asia, Indonesia, Singapore-Malaysia, Kenya, and the Isles entered the sacred space with soil and lighted candles from their countries. The soil symbolized the participants’ willingness to continue the process of nurturing towards growth in the work of formation where God beckons us towards newness and life for mission. The handfuls of soil were eventually placed together into a pot with a small plant in the centerpiece.

The participants’ present understanding of formation was drawn out through their reflections on the centerpiece.

Each participant also wrote on a flame the feelings stirring within her and her hopes as we gathered together. These flames were then hanged on the “burning bush.”

Regina Htoo Htoo, Unit Leader of East Asia, welcomed the participants on behalf of Asia Pacific Circle. Making reference to the Congregational Chapter Direction that “challenges us to see and hear the good news of Jesus through the eyes and ears of those who are oppressed calling us to respond in radically new ways,” she pointed out our “responsibility to co-create together with the Spirit this future which opens up new opportunities for mission.”

Regina Kuizon, Unit Leader of Philippines, also welcomed the participants to the Philippines and invited us to “fresh listening” and co-learning.

She reminded us of the questions posed by the 2015 Congregational Leadership Team’s Report on the following issues: how learnings from the formators’ sessions will be sustained; the difficulties created by the frequent change of members of the formation team; how we can grow our capacity for strategic thinking to enable us to address the profound needs of today; and how the younger members and lay mission partners are being prepared for emerging leadership roles.
The participants then presented the lived realities in the implementation of the holistic model of formation and the impact of these experiences. Some growth identified included organization of formation teams in the units and implementation of formation programs that have led to the sisters in initial formation becoming more open to share their views, be co-responsible for their formation and developing a growing sensitivity towards those in the margins. It was amazing to see that there were similar struggles among the units. Common challenges that we prioritized were the need for holistic formation for local communities, strengthening teamwork in the formation team, consideration of culture’s impact on formation, preparation and training of formators, and accompaniment. In a co-learning process in small groups, the participants had an opportunity to relate and work together in thinking of ways to address these issues in a holistic way.

The experiential sharing by some members of the core team in an atmosphere of sacred space of their own struggles in the transformational journey of changing mindset and co-learning in working as a team led to a deepened understanding of the holistic model. It inspired the participants to embrace their struggles and chaos that will lead to growth. The sharing also led to a deeper reflection on the aspect of culture. Culture is the way we live as influenced by our upbringing. Every culture has its own lights and shadows.

From left to right: Salomi Cruz, Josita Corera, Imelda Fuentes (Contemplative) and Florence Soe
Elaine Basinger pointed out that there are shifts we need to make with regards to culture; to recognize that aside from our own cultures, there is a global culture as well as a “convent culture”. The “convent culture” of the past has been one of a hierarchical mindset. It led to stifling of sisters’ thinking, initiative and even way of relating. The call is to look at culture with the eyes of the Gospel. Jesus challenged the culture of domination and exclusion in Jewish society. His “culture of compassion” restored dignity to women and others who were marginalized. Transformation towards this Jesus culture is the work of formation.

As we reflected on the article “Blessed with Hunger” by Philip Pinto, cfc, the participants realized how little we take Jesus seriously in our day to day journey. Most striking for many participants were the stories of the young people who took the risk “to walk out” in order “to walk on.” For us, it may not have been walking out of religious life but to walk out of our mind set for fresh listening, thinking and accepting fresh changes for transformation.

The first week has been an enriching experience as we co-journey in search for new ways. The participants are a mixture of sisters with experience in formation work and those who are in the process of being prepared for it. In gathering the wisdom of the group, we co-learn with one another in the process of co-creating something new for the mission.
The dry leaves and branches—Formation is about nurturing life and should be life giving. We need to let go of what is not relevant. The different shapes, sizes and colors of the lighted candles—In formation it is essential to see each individual person as unique. We are all different. Instead of promoting uniformity in formation, each individual is to be helped to bring out the best that God wants her to be. This means allowing each formee to grow at her own pace and space. *(Rebecca – East Asia)*

The pot with holes for me signify that I need to be empty so that I can be filled by God and by others’ goodness and talents. The holes signify that after I am filled I should share with others. The plant and the soil for me signify growth. There is a lot of growth noticed in our formation houses. *(Francisca – Kenya)*

The plant speaks about the personal care that we need to take at first stage of candidacy. The love and care we show the candidates enable them to be strengthened in their vocation. The dry leaves speak about the formators’ need to be transformed and what to let go of in themselves. The slippers speak about journeying with sisters in initial formation by accompanying, supporting and understanding them. *(Latha – Central East India /Nepal)*

The different colors in the centerpiece remind me of the rainbow. The colors awaken my hopes and dreams. They are different from one another but together they reflect the wonder of the Creator’s mind. It is the same way with those who are in formation. They are so diverse but together they reflect hope and creativity. *(Sadhani – Srilanka/ Pakistan, Contemplative)*

I was struck by the cushion which is used when we make our meditation or when we want to sit in a comfortable way. It provides us comfort. When I connected this to my life, I felt this cushion was giving me a lesson to come out of my comfort zone and to sacrifice myself for the mission, especially in the work of formation. *(Rosina - Sri Lanka/Pakistan)*
Wisdom Sharing

Creativity

Facilitation Team

Co-Learning

Dancing
Since 1st September was devoted to Earth, our common home we prayed together the prayer by our Pope Francis to be in solidarity with Our Mother Earth. All of us looked forward for the Rest Day/Earth Quest where we were given time to care for the soul and to refresh our energies through a city tour, visit to our store, praying with our contemplative sisters, cable ride and a thrilling zip line experience.