

LETTER FROM TAGUM (14-19 October 2024)
Eric LOZADA, international responsible

“I shall complete the journey... Do not be afraid. On the journey outward all will be well; on the journey back, all will be well; the road is safe.” Tobit 5,16

Dear Brothers:

Warm greetings from Tagum!!!

Travelling from several parts of the country, we are 17 brothers and a little sister gathered for our national assembly at Bishop Joseph Regan Spirituality Center, La Filipina, Tagum City, Philippines. The journey coming in was specifically challenging for our brothers from the prelature of Marawi who have travelled the whole day by land negotiating dangerous cliffs and roads under construction. Their presence, however, was truly inspiring especially because after the 2017 siege, they continue to live as nomads, pitching their tents at the neighboring Iligan diocese and Marawi is still in shambles. Displaced but never disconcerted, they thrive in a climate of uncertainty made worse by political manipulation and religious extremism. The spirituality of Nazareth and fraternal solidarity both amongst themselves and with the people has sustained them. Their situation is ameliorated with the coming of some religious priests determined to do mission there. Together with their bishop, they come in full force. Little Sister Cecilia Grace helps us see the connection between the fraternity's beginnings and Marawi. The late Bishop Benny Tutud, then bishop of Marawi invited Little Sister Madeleine in the early 1970's. Up until now, the prelature has been the nexus of Muslim-Christian dialogue in the Philippines. The presence of Jimmy, a newly ordained deacon is a seed of hope to the fraternity of aging and weakening membership.



The beauty of the place



Bishop Joseph Regan Center is managed by Ancillae Christi Regis (ACR) Sisters. This local congregation of sisters which was founded by the late Bishop Reagan in 1989, the first bishop of the diocese of Tagum owns this 2-hectared center, seated on a hill and a meadow with newly built facilities which could accommodate close to a hundred retreatants. The beauty of the scenic view from its veranda is equaled by the routine exercise of climbing up and down stairs between our sleeping quarters and our

gathering place. We are welcomed in the evening of the first day with a very heavy downpour. Mother Earth is calling us to appreciate the lush greenery of the place and the abundance of fresh water. The warm hospitality of the sisters and the first-class cooking of Sr Mabel (with special treat of freshly picked vegetables and herbs from the garden) make our stay truly refreshing and restful.

The rhythm and substance of the assembly

After the personal introductions, little sister Cecilia shared with us little sister Cathy's presentation on **“For A Synodal Church of Communion, Participation and Mission:**

Looking at episodes in the life of Little Brother Charles of Jesus: Shedding light on our Synodal process.” The presentation empowers us to see the rich mutuality between the soul journey of Brother Charles and the synodal processes of a synodal church. We hold the same spirit in the afternoon as we appropriate and share in small groups our review of life in terms of identifying companions and guides in the understanding of our vocation and mission in the church and recalling moments of listening, speaking out, celebrating, discerning and forming. Bishop Edwin in his homily at Mass exhorts us to a level of affective solidarity in their ministry of encountering and befriending the Muslims in Marawi. At the heart of our assembly is a day in the desert. This day of prolonged solitude and intimacy with God is prepared in the evening with a personal vigil at the feet of the Beloved. During our evening Eucharist, we share our desert experiences in the intimacy of the triad. From the day in the desert, we take on the path of looking intently on the essentials of the Spirituality. Both in seeing together and in listening to one another guided by the directory, some emerging concerns surface: that the Month of Nazareth is not anymore a “conditio sine qua non” for members yet it is strongly encouraged; that regularity in the practice of the spiritual means, correspondence with members and attendance to monthly meetings for a year qualifies one to be a regular member; incorporation of the spirituality into the basic ecclesial communities’ practice and spirituality; introduction of the spirituality to the seminaries. We hear concrete realities and practical concerns during the business meeting: that the local fraternities need rekindling and animation through visitation; that the pioneering experiment of doing the Month of Nazareth in Marawi needs further discernment and planning; that the novena to St Charles de Foucauld prepared by the Kapatiran will soon be available; that the next national assembly will be in Palo, Leyte on July 21-25, 2025. Our fraternity night was graced by the presence of Bishop Medel of Tagum.



“Go on your way; behold I am sending you like lambs among wolves...” was the Gospel exhortation during our final Eucharist. We head home filled with new insights and renewed spirit. “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few...” We commit to continue the journey with revived sense of co-responsibility and collaboration trusting on the Spirit who is always ahead.

