

## **SUPERIORS AND FORMATORS MEET**

By Sr. Daniela Romero, OSB



The Superiors and Formators of the Manila Priory and the members of the Priory Government gathered for a six-day meeting from September 28-October 3, 2023, at St. Scholastica's Center of Spirituality, Tagaytay City. M. Mary Thomas Prado, OSB, in her Welcome Address, mentioned that *"it is not just another meeting, but a gathering of sisters tasked with the service of authority- of animating and renewing our sisters and most of all, tasked to be co-discerners in shaping the life and mission of our Priory"*.

It was a privileged time for all to listen to the reports of the communities and the implementing arms, the Procurator, and the Prioress. Sharing in groups took place after the presentation of all the reports. Each group was tasked to identify the trends we see in our Priory today and our response to these trends. There are blessings to celebrate and challenges to face in our life as a priory especially in our different apostolates. The need to constantly listen to the signs of the times is truly vital.

Sr. Sonia Punzalan, RC, an octogenarian with more than five decades as a religious and is actively engaged in Mindfulness for lay, religious and clergy, was invited to give an enriching talk on Mindfulness and Prayer. It was interesting to know that the amygdala, known as our brain's "fight or flight" center and the seat of our fearful and anxious emotions, decreases brain cell volume after mindfulness practice. Mindfulness over time can make the brain, and thus, us, more efficient regulators of our reactions which allows less reactivity and with a better disposition to take a step back, become more aware, more accepting, less judgmental, and less reactive. We need to recover this fundamental element of our monastic tradition, thus, starting next year as announced by M. Mary Thomas, our thrust in Ongoing Formation will be on mindfulness.

Ma. Concepcion "Chichi" T. Sangil, who co-founded Cyber Guardians Philippines (CGPH) and is currently acting as the Executive Director of CGPH Incorporated works closely with Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB, CGPH chairperson. She oriented us on the work of cyber guardians. CGPH is a Non-Government Organization that advocates Anti-Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). The Philippines has become a hotspot for online sexual abuse and exploitation. The challenge remains: to combat OSAEC and work together to co-create cybersafe homes and cybersafe schools.

The meeting concluded with a Wheel Prayer Ritual where each one was given a key to symbolize the unlocking of the synodal space and engaging in dialogue and discernment with our community members, much like the spokes of a bicycle wheel, to work together to create forward movement and balance. Our mission continues and we journey as one in serving our people and giving authentic witness to our monastic and missionary calling. That in all things God may be glorified!



## Wonders at Work in Mother Prioress' Feastday Celebration

By Sr. Mary Emmanuel Espera, OSB

Coming together at a hybrid, Priory-wide, joyful celebration of Mother Mary Thomas' Feastday on July 3, 2023 provided a break from the routine and allowed us to relax, recharge, express gratitude and deepen relationships with one another. What could be a better way to thank the Lord for the gift of Mother Prioress and of one another than the Eucharist! Sisters from the provinces joined us online.

After the mid-morning prayer was the display of showmanship of each community expressed in colors and costumes highlighting the message of interculturality, a call for positive change, hope for a genuine transformation of political, social and religious structures in today's society. The theme of the program, "Wonderland Symphony: Magic Alphabets in Two's", flexed our mental muscle and imagination in coining two significant words that start with the chosen letters found in the name "Mary Thomas Prado". "Road to Peace, Radical Transformation, Passion for the Mission, Prime Mover, Dream to Reality, etc. were some of the "wonderland" messages given to us and to the world, creatively delivered in songs, dances, poems, drama and skit. What an amazing display of Sisters' giftedness! God has indeed done many good things for us!





## SISTERS' ANNUAL RETREAT

By Sr. Mary Grace Macatuno, OSB

“What is the password to your heart?” Such a question was asked, to everyone’s surprise during the Annual Retreat 2003. Fr. Juan Percy Bacani, MJ, former Provincial of the Congregation of Missionaries of Jesus and President of Maryhill School of Theology, facilitated the 8-day retreat in two clusters. The first cluster was coordinated by Sr. Isabel Orito, OSB and was attended by 72 Sisters on September 20-27, 2023 held at St. Scholastica’s Center of Spirituality in Tagaytay City. The second cluster was coordinated by Sr. Antonia Santiago, OSB, and was attended by 30 Sisters on October 1-8, 2023. They traveled all the way to the Jesuit Retreat House in Cebu City. The running theme immersed all the participants into a process on Synodality and Mission with focus on Ecological Context and Perspective.



The retreat opened with an invitation to begin the journey into one’s inner garden, to be aware of the urgent need to do internal and external de-cluttering and to see more clearly our identity, that we are all God’s beloved. Then everyone was led to making individual mandalas and reflecting on the depths of growing relationships and the bond of interconnectedness with all of creation. The Sisters were called upon to speak about their insights while making their respective mandalas, after which the gallery of ingenious mandalas was presented to the big group. Then the big challenge of the shared mission was posted, that of “breaking the barriers” as we journey together making room for intercultural living and to cultivate *sensus fidei*. This simply means recognizing Christ in one another as Pope Francis says, “begin to dream again as a community and look ahead to see what is good for humanity.”

The entire process led the participants to hold on to the household of Earth as the context in which we all live, work and pray together as a community of Missionary Benedictines. We cannot but acknowledge the Word of God and the work of the Spirit in the transitioning of our journey not just as individuals but also as a community of faith. And that includes growing in awareness of our responsibility to foster right relationships within the household, our common home that brings about ecological justice. That in all things God may be glorified!



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## ON-GOING FORMATION NEWS

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### Crocheting Workshop at SBH

By Sr. Roseve Balagot, OSB



It was in the afternoon of August 10 that Sr. Rosalina Fajardo, OSB together with Ms. Ester Bulan came to offer this opportunity of testing the agility of our hands in crocheting. There were just a few who showed interest but on that day, we were blessed with the presence of other sisters such as Sr. Regina Lansang, OSB and Sr. Marissa Piramide, OSB who were there to watch us.

It was a nice afternoon with laughter and appreciation from Sr. Regina and Sr. Marissa. Sr. Marissa would throw jokes every now and then. Sr. Regina was always ready to give her smile and appreciation when we showed her the little that we accomplished. We ended with eager expectation to finish what we had started.

We thank M. Mary Thomas Prado, OSB, Sr. Rosalina and Ester Bulan for making our day challenging and interesting. Maybe some other day, we will have knitting.



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### Crocheting Workshop: The Work of Our Hands

By Postulant Ma. Joanne Zamudio

Crochet is one of the Ongoing Formation (OGF) activities that brought Sisters together both physically in the Priory House led by M. Mary Thomas Prado, OSB, Sr. Rosalina Fajardo, OSB and around 25 sisters and more or less 40 participants virtually (via zoom) from our sisters nationwide and oblates last August 19, 2023. The program started with a prayer and a brief informative crochet history by Sr. Isabel. She mentioned that the word 'CROCHET' comes from the French word 'CROCHE' meaning Hook and started from the humble beginnings of shepherds who would create



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slipstitch-textured fabric for a warm and naturally waterproof garment. It was fascinating to know that while shepherds pastured their sheep, they would be seen with a yarn and hook maybe under a tree or just simply sitting on the fields.



Sr. Mary Emmanuel Espera, OSB introduced our resource speaker, Ms. Jill Ann Dayag, currently a faculty of St. Scholastica's Academy, Marikina who teaches Home Economics to Grade 7 and Grade 9 students. Ms. Dayag discussed the basic information we need to know about crochet like, what the essential supplies are needed for a beginner. These include the hook, yarn, stitch marker, scissors and crochet needle. She also provided a table guide, which mentions the proper hook and yarn to be used. She advised the beginners to get a yarn of medium thickness, preferably light colored that goes with a 4mm - 6mm hook size. She also introduced two ways to hold our hooks either pencil grip or knife grip, whichever is comfortable for the user. Most of our sisters have a background in crocheting during their school days and would like to re-learn the craft. Who knows, by December we might receive something warm and stylish from them. Crocheting is also a good way to relieve one's stress and anxiety in a more productive and creative way.



After the discussion, we were instructed to get our hook and yarn ready for a step-by-step guide starting from slipstitch to lock our yarn followed by a chain stitch to begin our foundation row. It was quite hard to control the hook and it was tricky to manage the tension of the yarn—to make it not too loose or too tight in order to produce balanced and even-sized stitches. Next to the chain stitch is the single crochet, which builds up the stitches from the base. Our goal was to make a headband; for this, ten chain stitches were needed, then continue with a single crochet until we have the desired length corresponding to the circumference of our heads. What is fun to know is how we can make different products from just these three basic stitches like a scarf, blanket, bonnet, tote bag and many more. The spirit of arts and crafts truly dwelt in our activity room as all Sisters, even those online, were seen to be very focused and determined to make our projects beautiful.

We are grateful to the OGF team and our speaker Ms. Dayag, who made this activity possible for a new learning and for us to be able to make useful items for our community. We also thank M. Mary Thomas for her generosity in providing our crochet materials, which we were also able to bring home after our activity. May our good Lord continue to bless the work of our hands and make crochet a way to bring God's grace to others making it a crochet with a purpose. That in all things, God may be glorified!



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## NEWS FROM STATIONS

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### PRIORY HOUSE

#### Sisters Celebrate Season of Creation

By Sr. Rosalind Tanhueco, OSB

September 1<sup>st</sup> to October 4, 2023 marked the Season of Creation. The Priory House community started this Season of Creation by integrating an intercessory prayer at Vespers and Holy Mass.

Our regular pulong-pulong in the community is a discussion of relevant issues in our country. Some Sisters of the Manila Community, our office staff and house staff – drivers, kasambahays, gardeners, cooks, and skilled workers, joined us on the afternoon of September 12.

On this Season of Creation, we say: No to reclamation! Save Manila Bay!

Thank you to our speakers Cleng, Leah and Becca of AGHAM (Advocates of Science and Technology for the People) and People's NICHE (People's Network for the Integrity of Coastal Habitats & Ecosystems) for an enlightening afternoon on the cost of reclamation projects to our environment and people.



Laudato Si' Movement Pilipinas organized Ecumenical Walk for Creation on September 15, 2023, from 5AM -8:30AM at the Shrine of Jesus the Divine Word, E. Rodriquez, Quezon City. The event started with the symbolic walk and fellowship followed by an ecumenical celebration together with the representatives of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). The Priory House Community was represented by Sr. Aurora Bravo, OSB and Sr. Theodora Bilocura, OSB, Ms. Bernaliza Lablabong (SPA staff), kasambahay and gardener. And St Scholastica's College (SSC), Manila was represented by Sr. Angeline Arceo, OSB with some teachers and students. It was well attended by lay, religious organizations and religious congregations.



## ST. BENEDICT'S HOME

### INVESTITURE OF FINAL OBLATION IN ST. BENEDICT'S HOME, MARIKINA

By Sister M. Hilda Buhay, OSB



From left to right: Eddielyn Astronomo, May Agsie and Sr. Maria Luisa Villanueva, OSB

For the first time, St. Benedict's Home in Marikina saw the **Investiture of Final Oblation** of two of its resident personnel: Eddielyn Astronomo and May Agsie last July 23, 2023. Eddielyn has served the community for 20 years now, while May Agsie has worked in the community for 5 years. At the moment, Eddielyn acts as secretary of Sr. Maria Luisa, OSB, the Superior, while May takes charge of the laundry. As Benedictine Oblates, both of them desire to live up to the Benedictine values they have witnessed from the Sisters in the community.

## ST. SCHOLASTICA'S COLLEGE-MANILA

### CONGRATULATIONS TO SISTER AGNELLA GUECO CAPILI, OSB

By Sister Therese C. Bulatao, OSB

On September 29, 2023, the sisters of the Manila Community attended the Awards Ceremony of Profiles Asia Magazine. It was held at Manila Hotel from 5- 11:00 p.m. Sister Agnella Capili, OSB was given an award for Excellence in Music Education and Cultural Preservation. Sr. Christine Pinto, OSB, SSC-Manila President read the citation, the essence of which is best summed up as:

*“Through her work, she has not only empowered the lives of young individuals but has also left an indelible mark on the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. “*





## Manila Community Joins Parish Marian Pilgrimage

By Sr. Therese Bulatao, OSB

On September 2, 2023, the Manila Community joined the Santissima Trinidad Parish in a Marian Pilgrimage to the Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan. We left the convent at 3:30 a.m. We were welcomed at the Shrine of our Lady of Manaoag by Archbishop Socrates Villegas. In that shrine he told the pilgrims to pray to our Blessed Mother in this way: “Disturb me, dear Mother, that I may see ....and that in this renewal and conversion, I may once again return to your Son.” The second pilgrimage place was the Seminary



Archbishop Socrates Villegas and Manila Community @ Dagupan Arzobispado

of our Lady Help of Christians. There Bishop Soc, as he is fondly called, told us that we all need help. Our Blessed Mother is always ready to help us. In turn we must also help one another. We journey together in faith. The third stop was at the Cathedral where the Patron Saint is St. John the Evangelist. There Bishop Soc invited us for lunch in the Arzobispado. At Mass he explained what



Manila Community with SSC Employees @ the St. John the Evangelist Cathedral in Dagupan

Lingayen means. It means to remember and not to forget. We must not forget the roots of our faith life. He also explained the meaning of the word Dagupan. It means an assembly point where we are one. We are gathered as one in the Church. One Faith, One Baptism, One Father, One Lord. The last stop was at the Minor Basilica of St. Dominic in San Carlos City. There we did some marketing for our overnight stay in San Fabian for our much needed rest and relaxation. The rest of the pilgrims went back to Manila; there were 24 employees of SSC-Manila

who joined this pilgrimage, and two of our Oblates were there too.

The following day we returned to Manila but we had Sunday Mass at our Lady of Victory Parish in Dau, Pampanga. It became an opportunity for vocation promotion.



Manila Community @ San Fabian, Pangasinan- a Beach Resort

## ST. SCHOLASTICA'S ACADEMY—SAN FERNANDO

### SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT AC-CREDITED

#### “THE FIRST IN THE PHILIPPINES”

By Sr. Mary Ignatius Aquino, OSB

The Senior High School Program of St. Scholastica's Academy, City of San Fernando, Pampanga was granted a three- year initial accreditation by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU) on May 26, 2023 which is valid until May 2026. In granting accreditation, PAASCU recognizes and appreciates the **fine caliber of instruction** in the institution.

The Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities (**PAASCU**), is a **reputable** association performing external **quality assurance (QA)** of member schools.

There are Eight (8) Key AREAS: Leadership & Governance, Quality Assurance, Resource Management, Teaching & Learning, Student Services, External Relations, Research, Results

#### Highlights:

##### Area: **Leadership and Governance**

- The team commends the school for its **consistent** practices that make the motto **Ora et Labora** and its **core values alive** among employees, students, and stakeholders.
- The **support** extended by the **administration** to the personnel for their **holistic development** is commendable.
- The team acknowledges the **initiative** of the **alumnae** to **support** the school through financial donations, especially during the pandemic.

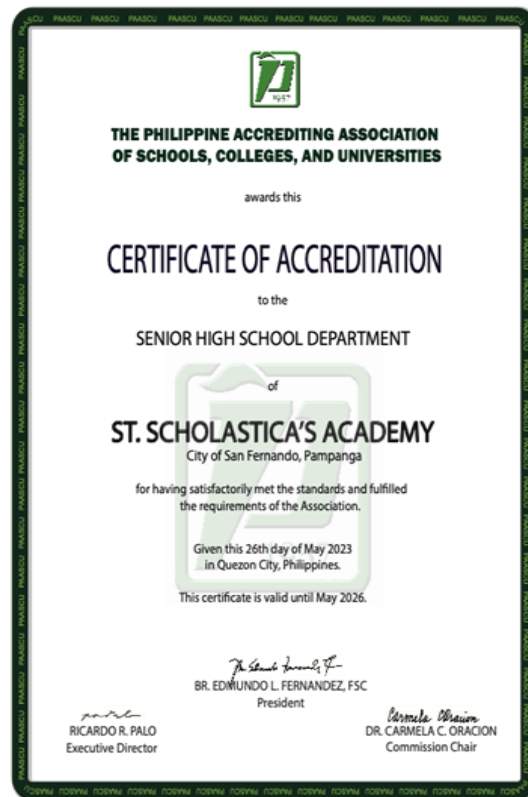
##### Area: **Teaching and Learning**

- The team commends the school for the **strong manifestation** and **affirmation** of **Benedictine hallmarks in scholastic work** and their **enactment** in **real-life** situations.
- Also commendable is the consistent promotion of **global** and **environmental issues** to foster **social responsibility** among the students and personnel
- Also laudable is the **interdisciplinary integration** among various subject areas directed towards **transformative, holistic, and relevant** learning.
- The **exemplary behavior** and **demeanor** of students resulting from the **integration of character formation** in the teaching-learning process are also worth mentioning.

##### Area: **External Relations**

- The **student-initiated community engagement** and **service** activities in the Senior High School that demonstrate their development as **social transformation agents** deserve recognition.
- The team commends the Senior High School **faculty** and **staff's significant contribution** to the **mission** in Bagong Sibol, Quebiawan, City of San Fernando, and Sitio Target, Sapang Bato, Angeles City, Pampanga.

The positive results and high ratings of this accreditation is a **solid evidence** of the holistic and relevant impact of **Benedictine Education**. Being granted accreditation is an **affirmation** of the school's remarkable **history of excellence** and **relevance**.





## Health Care Campaign for Babies

By Novice ( Belle) Ngoc Tan Lam

A project of Pru Life UK in celebration of their 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary became a joint endeavor with the Formation House which covered a diagnosis benefit and death benefit for infants, ages 7 days to 11 months old who are infected with malaria, dengue, typhoid and measles. The free insurance lasts for 6 months from the date of registration. It was our task to look for the babies and their mothers, a minimum of 20 participants and Pru Life would send its speakers for the seminar which was held in the Formation House. The mission was assigned to Postulant Ma. Joanne Zamudio, who communicated with the contact person, Ms Maricel Estavillo. Starting on the last week of July, every Saturday, Joanne walked from house to house among the surrounding barangays of our community to look for poor families with babies who fit the criteria and whose mothers were interested.

As a result, on the morning of September 19, 2023, 25 mothers, some with their babies, including a grandmother baby-sitter, came to the Formation House. After the opening prayer led by Postulant Ma. Joanne, Sr. Mary Vincent Feliciano, OSB welcomed the group and explained how the invitation to organize the event came via email, which showed a flyer about a similar event held in Cebu City. If interested, contact details were given to be able to pursue the project in Tagaytay.

From Pru Life came Ms. Maricel, assisted by Ms. Hannah, who introduced Pru Life UK. Their partner insurance agent, Ms. Jonah, gave a talk on Financial Literacy, educating families on financial management. She encouraged the women to create a budget, have savings, invest early and avoid debts. Therefore, an insurance can be helpful in times of sickness, accident, disability and death, or can provide their children proper education. She moved on to introduce other insurance plans offered by Pru Life UK.



Fifteen of the mothers present, whose babies qualified, enrolled themselves that day. Congratulations to Postulant Ma. Joanne for a job well done, a creative way to reach out to the poor, empowering them of their responsibility and capacity for the health care of their babies.



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## JUNIORATE UPDATES

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### Immersion with Women Workers in Parañaque

By Sr. Amanda Marie Fondevilla, OSB

On August 1 – 4, 2023, the two junior sisters, Sr. Amanda Marie Fondevilla, and Sr. Sophia Marie De Guzman, underwent their immersion experience with poor women workers, as part of their curriculum requirements at the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies (IFRS). Aside from the women workers' sector, the other sectors for exposure (where the other students went) were Farmers and Indigenous Peoples, Fisherfolk, and Street Families.



The Urban Missionaries of the Philippines (UMP) and Kababaihang Yumayanong Tungo SA Kagalingan (KAYUMANGGI) coordinated the immersion experience with women workers through the Community Involvement Program (CIP) of the IFRS. UMP is one of the affiliates of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP). KAYUMANGGI is a community-based organization of women in Sunnyvale, Parañaque City, where the juniors spent a few days living and interacting with the resident families. Each of us had a different host family. Aside from Sr. Amanda and Sr. Sophia, there were 5 exposurists in the women workers' sector, including two Holy Spirit Sisters (SSpS), and an Augustinian Sister (OSA). One SSpS Sister was a perpetually professed sister from Papua New Guinea.

Many of the women are factory workers on short-term contracts that last only 5-months, renewable at the discretion of the employer. This allows the employer to keep hiring workers without incurring additional costs required by law for regular workers, such as social security and health benefits. Salary levels are also at “piece-rate”, instead of the standardized daily wage. A contractual worker is also not allowed to join or form unions with other workers, and is often left without an avenue to voice concerns or fight for her rights. The other women we met are also members of the “informal sector”, those who have very small businesses formally registered with the government, like a little store at home, or who make a living by sewing and selling rags, or repairing umbrellas. The income from these endeavors is meant to augment the already meager income of their husbands, who, like most residents of the immersion area, are workers in the nearby factories.



The exposure-immersion experience was processed and wrapped up by Ms. Sheba Martinez, CIP officer of IFRS. The hope and objective of this program were to provide a concrete context for our studies, and a deeper awareness of what was being asked of us as religious, missionaries, and student-theologians.



## **Juniors attend Leadership Training at IFRS**

By Sr. Amanda Marie Fondevilla, OSB

Sr. Amanda Marie and Sr. Sophia Marie attended a two-day Leadership Training Program, conducted by the IFRS (Institute of Formation and Religious Studies) for new students on August 26 – 27, 2023. Some thirty (30) students from different congregations attended the program. It comprised of various team-building activities, such as tower-building, collage-making, an activity called “Crossing the Bridge Together”, as well as lectures on leadership based on the four pillars of IFRS education. These four are: contextual, inclusive, integrated, and transformational.

The training was concluded with the nomination of candidates for the Student Coordinating Team (SCT), the IFRS equivalent of a student council. This was followed by the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. As of this writing, Sr. Amanda Marie has been voted as Secretary, and Sr. Sophia Marie has been voted as the new Coordinator of the Socials Committee.



## **Juniorate Returns to the Priory House**

By Sr. Amanda Marie Fondevilla, OSB

On July 22, 2023, at around 9:00 in the morning, Sr. Rosalina Fajardo, OSB, Sub-prioress and Junior Directress, arrived at St. Scholastica's Formation House in Tagaytay to fetch the two newly professed sisters, Sr. Amanda Marie and Sr. Sophia Marie, and bring them to the Priory House in Manila. Sr. Remedios de los Reyes, OSB, who had just finished her home leave and was set to fly back to Namibia, accompanied Sr. Rosalina, and was able to meet the Formation House Community, as well as the two juniors.

The Juniorate was formerly housed in Tagaytay, together with the Novitiate and Pre-Novitiate Communities, but will now be re-integrated with the Priory House community, a few years after the Priory Government returned to Manila from Tagaytay. Full transfer of the Juniorate, including the furniture, library, etc. is expected in a few months' time, upon completion of repairs and renovation work in the Juniorate area.



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## SOCIO PASTORAL NEWS

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### Tuluyan ni San Benito Reopens

By Gino Lisondra

On the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15, 2023, Tuluyan ni San Benito (TSB) welcomed once again the homeless during its blessing and reopening rite.

Sixteen (16) homeless individuals came during the blessing and reopening activities, where Fr. JD Zaldivar, priest from Santissima Trinidad Parish, officiated the service and led the blessing rites for the entire TSB building. Rooms, facilities, and the different areas of the drop-in shelter were blessed with holy water along with prayers of protection and guidance.



Twenty-three (23) Missionary Benedictine Sisters from the Manila Priory House also attended the event and representative Missionary Benedictine Sisters from St. Scholastica's Academy San Fernando, Marikina, and St. Scholastica's College, Westgrove such as Sr. Victoria Bulacan, OSB, Sr. Evangeline Madayag, OSB, and Sr. Fides Ablen, OSB accompanied by Mr. Richard Garcia respectively.

Tuluyan ni San Benito Coordinator, Sr. Theodora Bilocura, OSB gave the opening remarks and welcomed all guests and friends of the drop-in shelter, which included ten (10) alumnae from Batch '82 of St. Scholastica's College, Manila who are generous supporters of TSB and its programs, ten (10) Oblates, and twenty (20) other guests and friends.

Games with and for the homeless guests followed right after the opening program, blessing rites, and the meals shared by all guests. Sr. Victoria facilitated the games. The homeless guests were joined in by Sisters and other attendees who all competed in different Filipino party games and participants received winning and consolation prizes.



Since its reopening day on August 15, Tuluyan ni San Benito has continuously opened its doors to the homeless, where they can bathe, wash their clothes, prepare and cook their food, and rest for the day. That in all things God may be glorified!





## Youth Camp Held in Tanay

By Gino Lisondra (Tuluyan Volunteer)

On July 27 and 28, 2023, Tuluyan scholars with Sr. Theodora, and some SPA and Tuluyan staff travelled to St. Scholastica's Farm in Tanay, Rizal for an overnight bonding, reflection, nature appreciation, sharing, and enrichment.



Tuluyan Scholars Hya, Angel, Elvan, Allen, Reynaldo, Efren, and Cyrus met with Sr. Theodora and SPA/Tuluyan staff at St. Scholastica's College Manila at around 6 AM, to travel to Tanay, Rizal. The group arrived safe and early at the farm, and after eating breakfast, began and participated in activities such as nature appreciation and bonding. The scholars went around the farm, observed the flora and fauna, and were asked to appreciate in silence the different sounds, rustles, and movements in the ecosystems present in the farm. Lunch followed. Afterwards, the scholars engaged in a sharing session and fun activity with the SPA and Tuluyan staff, talking about their personal experiences, sharing about Jesus Christ and their thoughts on prayer, the divinity and humanity of Christ, and their relationship with God. The scholars shared and opened up on certain personal things, in relation to the topics being shared, as well as enjoyed some good fun and banter among themselves and with the SPA and Tuluyan staff.

The group also visited the chapel, the spring and little brook, and the marang plantation area, among others, at the farm.

The following morning, the Tuluyan scholars had a group session facilitated by Sr. Theodora where they discussed and shared about their inspirations and aspirations, their dreams, the people they admire. Sr. Theodora also shared with the scholars the ministry of Jesus, and its implications on their own personal lives. Each of the scholars was able to share some thoughts, personal experiences, their young dreams and goals, and their beliefs in Christ and His Love for all peoples and for each person.

The group then travelled to the Bak-Bak waterfalls, where they enjoyed the fresh waters of the falls, had lunch, took pictures, and had some more fun. After this, the group travelled back to Manila, concluding the two-day activity.

It had been a couple of years since the group had a similar bonding and enrichment activity like this, so everyone shared how they missed each other and also how they look forward to more activities and gatherings in the future. That in all things God may be glorified!



## Mindanao SPA Cluster Meet in Davao

By Sr. Cecille Ido, OSB

Traveling six hours from Marihatag and three hours from Mati, Sisters of the two insertion communities in Mindanao met at the Davao International Airport on the morning of August 22, 2023 to happily welcome to Davao City Mother Mary Thomas Prado, OSB and her two traveling companions, Sr. Theodora Bilocura, OSB and Sr. Mary Emmanuel Espera, OSB, also participants of the Mindanao Cluster Meeting.



From the airport, the Mati sisters brought M. Mary Thomas and Sr. Mary Emmanuel to the venue, the Benedictine Sisters of the Eucharistic King Retreat House, Ulas, Davao City, where we enjoyed a good lunch. Meanwhile Sr. Theodora joined the other group. They took a late lunch after a detour to the San Pedro Hospital to visit the former Bishop Odchimar of Tandag, Surigao del Sur, who was confined in the ICU of the said hospital.

At this first meeting after COVID-19 pandemic, on August 23-24, 2023, the Sisters hoped to arrive at a common understanding of their role, specific focus and direction as immersion communities in Mindanao. It was also a time to revisit the mission-vision and objectives of the Socio-Pastoral Apostolate within the context of the Mindanao immersion communities, a time of tracing back the development and impact of the Mindanao communities since their foundation to the present, their plans and their dream for the future.

Resource speakers helped in the process. Mr. Leo XL Fuentes (MASIPAG Director) discussed *“Mindanao the Country’s Food basket and the Challenges towards Food Security”* and Mr. Lito Abadilla (CBCP Mindanao’s head of Migrant Concerns) spoke on the current situation of the Mindanao church. Sr. Theodora, Socio-Pastoral Apostolate (SPA) Coordinator traced back the historical development of the SPA in our Priory from 1906 onward.

We joined the BSEK Sisters for lunch on the second day. In the afternoon, two of their sisters guided our farm tour of their property in Wanang Calinan about an hour trip from the Davao City.

Our evening recreation in costumes, songs, games, and generous prizes was a night to remember. We praised the Lord for the many blessings received and thanked M. Mary Thomas Prado, OSB for her presence, gentle support and guidance throughout our assembly days.



August 25 was travel day for all. The Marihatag group left at early dawn. The Manila group was brought by Mother Prioress Marianne of the Benedictine Sisters of the Eucharistic King (BSEK), to the airport. After some business in Davao City, the Mati community went also on its way home.



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## INTER PRIORY SHARING

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Sr. Anitta Lawrence OSB, who for 4 years lovingly cared for our Sisters in St. Benedict's Home and nursed them to health returned to her regional house in India on September 4, 2023



Sr. Leticia Saraza OSB, who rendered 15 years of missionary service in Bulgaria, Easter Europe, has generously responded to another call to international mission, this time in Peramiho Priory, Tanzania, East Africa. She left on September 11, 2023.



Congratulations and Best Wishes!

Sr. Mary Martin Likuwa, OSB, and Sr. Isabella Petrus, OSB, Namibians from Windhoek Priory earned their degree of Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the Holy Angel University last July 2023.





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## VOCATION ANIMATION

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### “CALLED FOR A PURPOSE”

Vocation Retreat

By Pamela Anne A. Tobes

The Vocation Retreat entitled, “Called For A Purpose” was held last July 28-30, 2023 at the BeneFarm, San Fernando, Pampanga. I was invited by Sr. M. Victoria A. Bulacan, OSB in the first week of July together with the other new teachers and staff of St. Scholastica’s Academy, San Fernando Pampanga (both GS and HS Departments). Many of us were hesitant to attend because of the stereotype idea surrounding the purpose of this retreat. But thankfully, Mrs. Laarni Salas, our Guidance Head, enlightened me despite the many pre-occupations I encountered even during the day before the retreat.



From July 24 onwards, the typhoon and heavy monsoon rains hit Pampanga. But behold, on the day itself, July 28, despite the heavy rain in the early morning, the sun shone around 7:00 a.m. Truly, God permitted things to happen HIS way.

We were three attendees: Ms. Emily Santos (GS teacher), Ms. Nina Queddeng (GS Teacher) and myself (GS Psychometrician). We enjoyed each other’s company. We had created this bond that turned us into friends, while also learning God’s ways and teachings - thanks to Sr. Marialuz Dungca, OSB, who was very patient with us and really took care of us. We also extended our gratitude to Sr. M. Victoria, OSB, who joined us in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the retreat. They were so generous with all the learnings, the senses-opening, the kind words, the wisdom, everything. We felt really special during the Vocation Retreat.

I was able to share this fruitful experience with my little sisters at home and my colleagues here in St. Scholastica’s Academy-Pampanga.

We were able to introspect and retrospect with Sr. Marialuz’s help and got connected to our core. We were also taught that we should know how to answer when God calls. That when we surrender everything: our pains, our worries, our treasures, our cries, and heartbreaks, then, we can embrace God, and run the race with Him holding our hand. The road may be winding, and pitch-black, but I am now not afraid because I know God is holding my hand, and He will never let go of it. That even when there are times, I cannot even love myself, God will always love me, no matter what.

As Gen Z’s would say it, “shout out” to the Benedictine Community and our dearest Benedictine Sisters for this effort. I am so lucky to be a part of this gathering. I am forever grateful.



## Bridging the Youth with the Benedictine Spirit

By Khallyl Catalan, Alumna of St. Scholastica's Academy - Marikina, Batch 2022

I was granted the opportunity to attend the Salesian Local World Youth Day at Don Bosco Technical Institute of Makati with the Missionary Benedictine Sisters from St. Scholastica's Academy, Marikina and Priory House, Manila. As an alumna of *St. Scholastica*, it was nostalgic to immerse in an atmosphere resembling the liturgical assemblies I used to attend with my former schoolmates. Yet, attending the event with the company of the Benedictine Missionaries made me enjoy these kinds of gatherings from a new perspective.



With the theme, “Mary arose and went with haste”, this year’s World Youth Day calls on the youth to channel their energy and enthusiasm to be of service to the Lord. The activity did stay true to being a youth-centered festivity, evident from a series of group sharing, fair-like game booths, lineup of youth guest performances, and the overall direct involvement of young individuals in the handling of the event. There were also a number of religious congregations that promoted their respective charisms through vocation materials display. But perhaps the highlight of my experience was helping out our Benedictine Sisters to spread the word about their vocation as we went around the venue and handed out brochures. It was an unanticipated yet delightful experience, as I feel honored to have been directly involved in expanding the awareness of the presence of the Benedictine community, especially to my fellow youth. In the midst of enjoying the many attractions, the Sisters and I could not help but feel inspired to replicate such initiatives back home.

Indeed, this localized World Youth Day celebration is an excellent example of highly engaging the youth for a greater cause through utilizing their talents, interests, and willingness to interact with their fellow peers. The cheerful and light-hearted spirit that radiated from the Benedictine Sisters I was with, as well as being able to get a closer glimpse of their lifestyle, are what made my experience as a fellow youth attendee unique. Overall, collective gatherings like these reaffirm the capability of the youth to promote taking on similar lives of faith and service to others, regardless of one’s chosen vocation.



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