

2017 Interprovincial Experience of Charism and Mission

Report No. 3 from Sister Edie Strong



Our week at INESEM ended on July 27. Our four days at the school flew by. The closing event was marked with “thank you” expressed many times over and in many different ways including special decorations, games for the children, cultural dances, gifts, and lots of hugs. The children have stolen our hearts; we will remember them warmly.

July 27 was also Sister Carole Blazina’s birthday—and everyone seemed to know it! There was homemade bread decorated as a birthday cake (Korean style) at breakfast, cake with the faculty after the closing event, and cake with the staff at the medical clinic (meant to show appreciation for our presence but turned into a birthday cake as the secret was revealed). Each cake was accompanied with “Happy Birthday” sung in Spanish, English and Korean.



The parish priest was seated in the courtyard of the church before Mass. I thought it a good time to go talk with him, until one of the sisters here on mission told me that was the location



View of Saint Peter Church and Rectory

used for the sacrament of reconciliation. After Mass, the priest talked about the retreat that two of our interpreters planned for Saturday, noting that 80 people showed up for the retreat last year. At least as many were expected this year. The interest of the pastor in speaking about spiritual events in the parish makes a lot of difference in sparking people’s interest. Being from a very poor area, where there are no entertaining activities to lure people away and faith is everything, also helps. This year the retreat will focus on Saint Vincent de Paul in celebration of the Vincentian 400th anniversary.

On Friday, July 28, we went with the staffs of INESEM and the clinic to Recinto el Jebe, the Village of Jebe. I think we were about 50 people in all. Most rode in or on an el chiva, an open bus-like vehicle with rows of benches on the driver level and riding capacity on the top—with little to hang on to. The ride was one-half hours long on a rutted, hilly road, of which only a short distance was paved. We passed through two streams on the way. The driver stopped to wash his face in the stream, explaining that having cool refreshing stream



Papaya Tree

water was a rare opportunity that shouldn't be passed up. I imagine the road becomes impassable in the rainy season. Passing a vehicle coming in the opposite direction required moving to a level field next to the road and creatively pulling in the sides of el chiva.

Houses in the country were far apart and made mostly of bamboo. Some had windows and some didn't. Some were built on stilts to lessen the heat by passing cooler night air under the house. There were fields of corn

and wheat, all planted on hillsides and harvested by hand. Some farmers were out harvesting corn; but harvest time has passed for the most part. We passed banana trees, papaya trees, teak trees, and orchards of trees we did not recognize.



Recinto el Jebe is a village with a one-room school and several homes. There were about 50 children present for the field day we planned for them. The day included dancing, races, art and face painting. The game the children like the most and is most familiar to them is football, soccer as we know it. Drop a soccer ball in the middle of the dirt field and every child there knows what to do. The favorite race was when teams of five students inside a loop of wheat bags sewn end-to-end made the “wheel” advance from one point to another.

Lunch was served out in the field – rice and chicken. Almost every meal is rice with something else. Older children were quite happy as some of us gave our chicken to them as an extra helping. The dogs eagerly obliged to eat any leftover rice from children’s plates.

A man showed up selling ice cream treats which he had brought in an insulated box on the back of his motorcycle. This must be a routine event, since some children saw other children with ice cream and were content that buying was not an option for them.

The day ended in true Korean style with a gift bag for each child. Some parents came toting little ones on a motorcycle to transport their school-aged children home. As soon as a



The school building

child is old enough to hold onto the handlebars, he or she is transported

in front of Mom or Dad with a school-aged child riding behind. Other children ride a school bus (of sorts), a pickup truck with higher sides than usual and the children seated on benches built along the sides of the truck bed. I guess this is good preparation for riding in or on top of an el chiva in older years.

The day did not include translation between Spanish, English and Korean. This was, in a way, a welcome relief. On the other hand, watching and being directed “where to be” and “when to be there” were the only ways we could participate, other than informal interaction with the children.



School bus leaving after a day at Recinto el Jebe

The children are happy. They don’t miss what they don’t know. What they don’t know has not limited their capacity for happiness in any way. My guess is that church is not a part of life for these children; planting the seed of faith and nourishing it depends on families who were raised in similarly deprived circumstances. The harvest is plenty but the laborers are few.



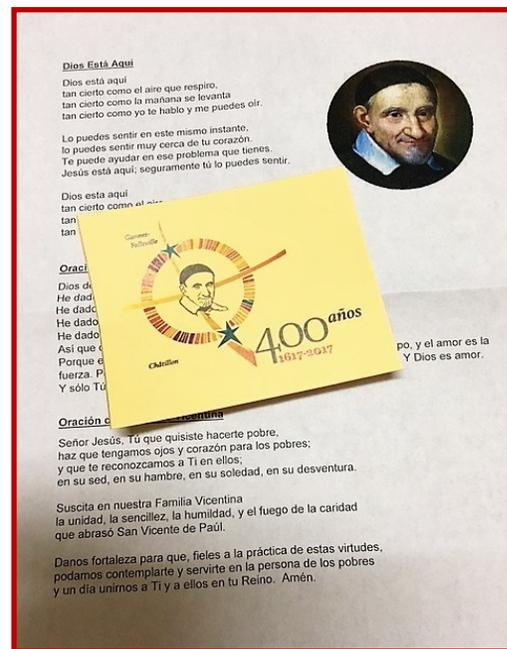


Sanctuary of Saint Peter Church

Sr. Tracey Kemme, a temporary professed of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, and Marylu Vasquez, a lay woman from Texas, have been our interpreters for Spanish and English while here in Pedro Carbo. On July 29, they offered a retreat day for us

“Missioners,” the sisters who minister here, the faculty and staff of INESEM, the parishioners of Saint Peter Parish, and the families of the children at INESEM. About 60 people attended. The day of retreat was centered on the theme of the Vincentian

400th anniversary. We English speakers and the Korean-only speakers were in the minority. Tracey and Marylu did double duty, translating between their responsibilities for facilitating the retreat. Our own Min Ah has been working overtime all week to make sure we English speakers and the Korean sisters both benefitted from and communication given in the other language.



Prayers for the retreat

The retreat included a welcoming activity, song, prayer, reflections on the Vincentian charism by both Tracey and Marylu, and an activity in which small groups decided the order of key events in the life of Vincent de Paul. Meanwhile, the sisters were each given an event to depict



in a drawing, as a hint for the groups as to what event came next in Vincent’s life. There was high competition, and lots of laughs (at our artwork!) and cheers when groups had the right order. The people learned a lot and so did we! Everyone had a good time doing it. The day ended with much gratitude flowing in all directions, hugs, and realization that we had touched each other’s lives in significant ways—and of course, endless photos.

In the afternoon, some of the local Korean sisters took us on a tour of INESEM II, the building used for vocational education. The older students have classes there for making candles and soap, baking bread, sewing, computer technology, and packaging products for sale. The school is well-equipped with computers, sewing machines, ovens and supplies. These are gifts of generous donors. Our mission appeal supports INESEM I and II and the medical clinic with supplies, electricity, and salaries for faculty and staff. All of this depends on the generosity of donors. Our mission in Pedro Carbo has been greatly blessed, to the honor and glory of God and the benefit of the children.

We now set our sights on Quito, the capitol city, as we travel there next to experience the culture of the city and the mountain people, which we hear is quite different from the culture in the coastal lands where Pedro Carbo is located. This is will be the last story until we arrive home on August 1, since I will not have access to a computer until then. Blessings!



Birthday celebration for Sister Carole with mission group and sister hosts

