



Be shepherds with the smell of your sheep, in the midst of your people like Jesus the Good Shepherd.



On November 4-8, 2014, the MBS-SPA (Socio-Pastoral Apostolate) Sisters gathered together once again for its 24th National Assembly at the St. Scholastica's House of Spirituality, Tagaytay. Twenty one sisters who represented the social centers/SIP from Luzon, Visayas and the mission houses from Mindanao, participated in the gathering. The Sisters brought with them quotations by Pope Francis and were displayed on the bulletin board. The theme of the assembly: "A Unified Socio-Pastoral Apostolate as we Journey among the Poor towards the Total Liberation" guided the Sisters in their 4 day activity. The inspirational talk delivered by the Prioress, who herself was a former SPA sister in her younger years, was refreshing to listen to.

Old Timers... Young Blood

At the start of the assembly was the usual Opening Prayer (indeed an apt feature of any Benedictine gathering) followed by sharing of symbol of oneself using colored clay. It was interesting to note how they could articulately share about themselves when they made use of objects.

The participants were a blend of old faces in the missionary undertakings and young blood in the SPA mission. The old timers in the field shared their experiences with gusto while the young ones were all ears trying to muster what could be learned and what could be applied to their apostolate.



As for the speakers: Thelma Lauron Gonzales, Fr. Francisco Albano, Ms. Sylvia Mallari, they were friends and previous colleagues of the sisters hence facilitating camaraderie. They were conversant of their subjects, and they walked their talk.

Try to remember

The participants tried to remember the history of SPA, as Sr. Celine, OSB guided them to significant appointments and events that contributed to the maturation of the SPA, from dole out to organize and progressive advance. At one time, the routine of the sisters could be marshaled to serve out in any manner remarkably when there were rallies and mass actions. Foremost reasons of these were a grave economic crisis, social unrest, nuclear plant and so forth; and the declaration of Martial Law, which a number of the sisters went through "baptism of fire." It was for them a memorable event and they mused over their experiences with amusement.

Sr. Celine also traced the dates of the assemblies in which she recalled that the year 2015 will be the SPA's 40th year.

Sr. Rosalind, as the chairperson presented the organizational structure of SPA which triggered questions for discussions.

Looking through the eyes of the poor

As the speaker, Ms. Mallari talked about the Philippines situation she helped the participants look at it through the eyes of the oppressed sectors of society: indigenous people, urban poor, calamity victims, exploited women and children, et cetera. She focused on the peasants who are the most vulnerable to oppression by landowners, destruction by calamities, and easy target by the military. The government is supposed to protect the peasants for they are the rice/food provider of the country. The clarion call to be in solidarity with them in their struggle was thought-provoking and need to be addressed by the SPA Benedictine missionaries.

Relief and Rehabilitation

Sr. Edita and Sr. Claudia presented the relief and rehab project for the survivors of typhoon Yolanda particularly in Samar and Leyte. This is the pilot project that the Priory had embarked on in response to the growing appeal by the People's Organization.

Solidarity night, hilarious night

The Sisters went gaga over the solidarity night. It was a hilarious night with all the sisters participating and displaying their antics. The emcees' well - crafted spontaneous program was based on the reports in the centers and mission houses. It was a regional fun-filled performance with prizes according to the recommendation of the judges. The most who garnered the best enactment was the Mindanao cluster and the couple who was crowned the queen and king.

Quo Vadis, SPA Sisters

Sr. Noemi, OSB synthesized the Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao reports and put forth the trends in the SPA that could guide the Sisters in the development and implementation of a 5- year plan: in the region as well as in their respective center. These will serve as the guideposts to where they are going and to what they are

doing, according to the signs of the times and in keeping with the exhortation of Pope Francis: "***Among our task as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor.***"

Closing Liturgy

What could be more fitting and timing to end an assembly than to celebrate an appropriate closing liturgy that would recap the 4 day activity, and at the same time commemorate through a video the 1 year anniversary (Nov. 8, 2013) of the super typhoon Yolanda that wrought massive destruction and wiped out thousands of lives in Eastern Visayas.

Thus far, as esprit de corps suffused among the sisters, there was a fervent wish and a prayer for the tribe of the SPA to increase in ***mercy and compassion*** as they go forth on their missionary journey with grit ...!

By: Sr. Edita Eslopor, OSB