

**SI-P 3<sup>rd</sup> National Meeting**  
**Don Bosco Retreat House, Talisay City, Cebu**  
**November 29 - December 4, 2017**

The third national meeting of Secular Institutes-Philippines, an association of different secular institutes present in the country, was held on November 29- December 4, 2017 at Don Bosco Retreat House, Talisay City, Cebu. The venue is located on top of a hill surrounded with trees, overlooking the sea. It is 1 ½ - 2 hours ride from Mactan airport.



**Day 1 November 29 Wednesday**

**Arrival / Registration**

Some members of Volunteers of Don Bosco working in Cebu welcomed the participants at Mactan Airport and brought them to the Retreat House.

Servitium Christi members- Connie, Virgie and Che-che took care of the registration.

An **Integrated Eucharistic celebration and Evening Prayer** at 6pm was presided over by **Fr. Joel Sulse *ofm* Ecclesiastical Assistant of Missionary of the Kingship of Christ (SIM)**.

The **Welcome Dinner** was a time of happy remembering of the past meetings for those who were in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> meetings and for the new participants, a time for making them see and feel how it would be when secular institute members gather in unity.

The **Council of Leaders met** for an hour to consider some unexpected changes on the Program of Activities.

**Day 2 November 30 Thursday**

At 8:30am, the **Opening Mass with Extra-Liturgical Rite** was celebrated. The **Bishop-president, Msgr. Dennis Villarojo DD, Auxiliary Bishop of Cebu, and his 2 concelebrants, Msgr. Fernando Capalla, Archbishop Emeritus of Davao, and Fr. Joel Sulse *ofm*** were welcomed by the Council of Leaders at the entrance hall of the Retreat House and were led to the Conference Room where participants were gathered. They, too, welcomed the 3 celebrants. **Mary Almonte *ndv* SI-P General Leader** gave an introduction to the celebration. Then a representative of each Secular Institutes present posted their SI logo in the SI-P tarpaulin placed at the center wall. Elvie Tonogbanua *mds*, carrying a statue of Sto. Nino de Cebu, led the ***Sinulog Dance Procession***



from the Conference Room to the Chapel where the mass was celebrated.

Bishop Villarojo, at the start of his homily, admitted that he does not know well secular institutes; he knows a few ladies who belong to some secular institutes but this day was his first time to be in a gathering of members from different secular



institutes. He thanked SI-P for inviting him and expressed his hope that there would be future encounters between him and SIs and its members. His homily that focused on "I have found the Messiah" as proclaimed by St. Andrew whose feast day it was, rang a bell in the hearts of the participants.

Picture taking followed,



and the giving of gifts to the Bishop by Mary Almonte- an envelope and an Eco bag with a Holy Family statue made of native materials. He surprised us when he took only the Eco bag and returned to her the envelope saying, "This is my gift to SI-P, to add to your fund".



***Daghang salamat, Bishop Dennis!***

**Connie Gonzales** sc SI-P treasurer, was the **animator** of Day 1 morning and afternoon sessions.

**Lou Soulijon**, *sidsa* SI-P secretary, called the different SIs present to be recognized.

**Nine (9) secular institutes** were represented: Associates of Notre Dame **AND**, Daughters of St. Anne **SIDSA**, Fils de Notre Dame de Vie **FNDV**, Madonna della Strada **MDS**, Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ **SIM**, Regnum Mariae **RM** Servitium Christi

**SC**, Notre Dame de Vie **NDV** & Volunteers of Don Bosco **VDB**. Present were **thirty- one (31) participants** from the 9 SIs and **two participant-speakers-** Msgr. Fernando Capalla and Fr. Joel Sulse *ofm*.

**Mary Almonte warmly welcomed/thanked the participants and speakers.** In the **introductory talk** that she gave through a power point presentation, she led the assembly looked back briefly to

- the highlights of the  
1<sup>st</sup> meeting- October 25-27, 2013, held at the Retreat House Novaliches, Quezon City when 39 participants from 10 SIs, with the encouragement of the Asian Conference of Secular Institutes Executive Board, decided to form an association and meet every two years;  
2<sup>nd</sup> national meeting- October 21-25, 2015, at the Benedictine Retreat House, Davao City when the 39 participants from 9 SIs decided to give a name to the association, Secular Institutes-Philippines (SI-P) and elected five among the participants to compose its Council of Leaders.
- the 2 Council of Leaders' meetings

\*the first was in Naga City on September 5-7, 2015 in order to assess the Plan of Action done in the 2<sup>nd</sup> national meeting and to begin prepare the 3<sup>rd</sup> national meeting. Four Council of Leaders were present- Mary Almonte, Irene Maramag, Lou Soulijon and Connie Gonzales. Ruby Palma VDB could not come due to professional commitment. Two Important decisions on this first meeting: the approval of the SI-P logo and letter head done by Bishop Emeritus Benjamin Almoneda and writing a letter to Archbishop Socrates Villegas, CBCP President, to request for a time to introduce SI and SI-P to the Bishops during their January 2018 CBCP meeting. It was also decided to request Angie Dy *sim* to attend the second Council of Leaders meeting to prepare for the third national meeting.

\*the 2<sup>nd</sup> was held in Manresa Retreat House, Quezon City on February 23-25, 2016. Present were Irene, Lou, Ruby and Angie Dy. Connie Gonzales could not come for she was sick; and Mary, too, for she was on sabbatical year in NDV-France, The meeting focused on the planning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> SI-P national meeting.

- SI-P initial recognition by CBCP

\* SI-P was invited by CBCP-EMCR to 2 meetings to prepare for the Year of Clergy and Consecrated Persons (YCCP). Irene Maramag *sim* **SI-P Assistant General Leader** requested Angie Dy to represent SI-P to the meetings. Angie graciously accepted the request. And so through her, SI-P has now a "face in CBCP". And the latest development- SI-P's

request to have a slot in the CBCP January 2018 meeting is granted. We are still waiting for the exact day /time.

She presented some concerns to decide during the meeting-

- frequency of national meeting/election of Council of Leaders
- SI membership fee
- SI-P Directory
- SI-P involvement to Year of Clerg and Consecrated Persons (YCCP)
- regular communication with CBCP, ACSI and CMIS
- writing of Statutes for Vatican recognition

Listening/viewing the SI-P theme song *Arise and Go For* ended Mary's looking back and forward.

**Grace Alestante sidsa** presented two home videos on **Remembering the 2<sup>nd</sup> SI-P National Meeting in Davao City** making the participants who were in Davao remember the happy days together and the new participants have a glimpse of what is life during the SI-P national meeting.

The announcement of some changes in the schedule for each day was done by Connie before lunch.

The afternoon session started by a wake up dance *The Shark* that energized everyone.

**Lou Soulijon introduced Msgr. Capalla.** The conference was filled with laughter when Lou said to end her introduction, "For us, he is the father of perpetual help".

Msgr. Capalla told his listeners that it would be more of a sharing than conference. His sharing was on **The Spirituality of Dialogue.** He presented his journey, since 1996 to the present, with the Bishop-Ulama Conference, the positive effects of the ecumenical dialogue with Muslim and Protestant theologians/ leaders; and what he personally learned from his involvement and experience. He unfolded before us his own journey and some risks/dangers that accompanied it as a clergy, a bishop of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, a consecrated person in the world. An open forum followed Msgr. Capalla's sharing.



It was **Angie's Time** from 3:30-4:15pm.

Angie Dy *sim* shared the highlights of her two meetings with CBCP-ECMR/AMRSP.

*(CBCP- Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines; ECMR- Episcopal Commission on Mutual Relations; AMRSP- Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines)*

- YCCP theme : Renewed Servant-Leaders for the New Evangelization
- 3 YCCP theme songs
- possible areas of SI-P involvement
- invitation to SI-P as CBCP-EMCR/AMRSP Board member



Angie left us with these 2 challenges to respond before the end of the meeting.

- SI-P, Arise and be involved to the YCCP celebration!
- SI-P, Come up with a Statement as a Sign of your Commitment to the YCCP celebration!

She ended her sharing by telling us: SI-P has now a face. The bishops begin to recognize us; women and men religious, too.

**Small Group workshop on SI-P involvement to the YCCP** was done after merienda. Connie facilitated the creation of 5 groups with instruction to choose the group facilitator and secretary. The different groups responded joyfully to the task given and after an hour, all groups, except one, were done with their suggestions. Group 2, who had an intra-life sharing to start with, finished the task before suppertime.

Everyone took dinner with happy hearts...

**Time with Our Virgin Mother** in the chapel at 8:15pm.

As one community, everybody gathered at the chapel to pray the Rosary. Responding to the invitation of St John Paul II, *“Announcing each mystery, and perhaps even using suitable icon to portray it, is as it were to open up a scenario on which to focus our attention”*, Mary prepared a power point on the Luminous Mysteries. A prayer leader and four decade prayer leaders led the meditation of the mysteries of light. The Rosary Hour ended with the singing of Salve Regina.

**Day 3 December 1 Friday**

The day began with **Integrated Morning Praise and Eucharistic Celebration** presided over by Fr. Joel Sulse with Fr. Godofredo Atienza and Msgr. Capalla as concelebrants.

*Danggit*, the dried fish which Cebu is noted for, was served at breakfast to the delight of everybody.

**Arlyn Natocyd *sim* was the morning session animator.**



She taught the participants the way of greeting of the Palawan ethnic group when someone comes to their house or when they meet each other anywhere. It was a new learning for each one- a beautiful meaningful way of greeting each other.

**Dory Palma *vdb* the SI-P organist and FaceBook moderator, introduced the speaker, Fr. Godofredo Atienza *sdb*.**

Fr. Godo, as he prefers to be called, surprised us before his talk-

- with 2 questions: who is the oldest and youngest among the participants and as gifts- gave them a small beautiful rosary purse
- with a gift for each one- a rosary ring with a request – pray one Hail Mary for him
- playing the guitar, taught a Marian song Heaven’s Brightest Star



In his conference, **Living our Consecration with Our Blessed**

**Mother Mary**, invited us to follow her in our faith-life journey as consecrated persons in the secular institutes. He did this by presenting six reflections on Mary:

- the Virgin Motherhood
- Full of Grace
- Be Not Afraid
- The Lord is with You
- You have Found Favor with God
- Let Your Will Be Done according to Your Word.

The Annunciation event (Lk 1:2-38) was his last consideration. He led us to a look back on our own annunciation event and shared with us a meditative poem on the Annunciation by Denise Levertov, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic writer. He ended his talk by singing with us the song Heaven’s Brightest Star.

Exchange/sharing on what Fr. Godo talked about filled up the conversations during morning snacks.

The **small groups’ suggestions on SI-P involvement to the YCCP** were presented to the assembly. Angie encoded them all in her laptop as each reporter shared her group’s output. When reporting was over, the suggestions were projected and read by the participants. Clarifications were done on some suggestions. Then the Council of Leaders met to consolidate them- to be presented during the afternoon session for approval.

**Viel Macabidang *sim* was animator of the afternoon sessions.**

**Angie Dy** introduced the afternoon speaker, **Fr. Joel Sulse** *ofm*

Fr. Joel's talk on **Secular Institutes: Redeeming its Spirituality and Formative Challenges** underlined the need to develop a formation program that will help enhance the spirituality of the particular institute where we belong and the importance of an ongoing formation at all levels of consecrated life. He cited six developments in the Church to help SIs members appreciate their life of consecration:

- the contributions made by women for the growth and renewal of the Church
- the growing tension between piety and spirituality
- deeper understanding of commitment
- Inter-religious dialogue
- partnership with the laity
- technology and media.



Open forum followed the talk.

### Reading/Voting on Consolidated Small Group Suggestions



The suggestions consolidated by the Council of Leaders were presented to the assembly under five headings: Vocation Promotion, Formation, Administration, YCCP active participation and Social Involvement.

Each suggestion under each heading was voted upon: first by consultative vote where all voted, and the second, the definitive, where only the

Council of Leaders voted. The participants and Council of Leaders agreed to

- include all the approved suggestions in the SI-P Statement to be drafted
- have a launching of YCCP during the 6:30 pm December 3 Eucharistic celebration
- read the Statement before the end of the mass
- celebrate and express one's commitment to the Statement

### The ACSI Hour

Connie Gonzales shared the highlights of the September 6-8, 2017 meeting of the Asian Conference of Asian Secular Institutes-Executive Board (ACSI-EB) and the Secular Institutes in Vietnam. ACSI board members present were Adelaide Vaz *president*, Satira Soares *secretary*, Connie Gonzales *treasurer* and Lily Fernandes *councillor*. Cecilia another ACSI-EB member could not come because she has to stay with her sick old mother. The meeting was held at the Ho Chi Minh Archdiocesan Pastoral Center with 125 members from 16 Sis-Vietnam (13 women SIs & 3 Sis men) participants, thanks



to Fr. Thomas Vu Quang Trung *sj*, Secretary & Episcopal Vicar for Consecrated Persons of Saigon Archdiocese. Result of the encounter: the formation of Conference of Secular Institutes present in Vietnam with its officers headed by Therese Dinh Thi Back Hue, National Leader of Servants of God. Connie mentioned that the 2018 ACSI general meeting would be held, most likely, in Vietnam on a date still to be arranged with Fr. Thomas. She encouraged all Sis in the Philippines to participate in it.

### Council of Leaders 2017-19 Election



The election of Council of Leaders was held. Connie read the Election Guidelines formulated during the 2<sup>nd</sup> SI-P national meeting in Davao City. Arlyn Natocyad was elected as Election Chairperson. Ali Limjoanco *fnv* volunteered as secretary. The suggestion from the members with voting rights that the present Council of Leaders continue the term for another two years was accepted. VDB delegate Ruby Palma begged off because her role as regional delegate is ending on December 2017. Esmie Roxas

*mds* replaced her since Esmie received the 6<sup>th</sup> highest votes during the 2<sup>nd</sup> SI-P national meeting.

**SI-P Council of Leaders 2017-2019:** Mary Almonte *ndv* General Leader, Irene Maramag *sim* Assistant General Leader, Lou Solijon *sidsa* Secretary, Connie Gonzales *sc* Treasurer, and Esmie Roxas *mds* Media Coordinator.

Free time for all to prepare a presentation for the evening fun...

**Prayer with Trusted Strangers: A Scriptural Litany from the Old Testament, New Testament and the Now Testament.** The power point interactive prayer prepared by Mary led us to meet persons who, in our day to day life, have mirrored us to ourselves.

Another surprise at the dining room: lechon on the service food table, a gift of Msgr. Capalla.



### It's more fun in Cebu: an evening of songs & dances

Ali hosted the SI-P 3 evening fun. Starting with a comestante, it was followed by a song/or dance of each SI present- except NDV who came out with a logo contest. SIDA, after rendering a song, surprised everybody - they went around offering each one *balot at penoy*. For the logo contest, Mary asked each SI to create a human sculpture of its logo. Each entry was photographed. Msgr. Capalla, the contest judge, announced, " And the winner is... VDB". Ali was the prize donor. Irene was the most applauded vocalist. Fr. Godo who was present among us accompanied the AND and RM with his guitar. And when asked to



sing, he rendered *On Top of the World*. Ali, the host, upon hearing the song spontaneously went center stage to join him in singing it. The duet became a choral group after a few minutes when everybody joined in the singing. The evening turned to be an anticipated Christmas carolling with some SIs ending their presentation with Christmas songs.



#### Day 4 December 3 Saturday

##### Pilgrimage/Tour

Two choices were offered to the participants:

- pilgrimage to Our Lady of Lindogon, Simala; Bishop Camomot's Tomb, Carcar and San Pedro Calungsod new shrine, Cebu City (Group 1)
- visit to Little Amsterdam, a farm of flowers in Sirao, a Greek style temple, Sto. Nino Basilica and Cathedral Museum, Cebu City (Group 2)

Group 1 left early morning. The Mass was celebrated at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lindogon with Msgr Capalla. Group 2 had mass at Don Bosco Retreat House chapel and left after breakfast.

***Daghang salamat*** thank you to VDB-Cebu  
for the transportation of the day (and on the arrival day, too).

Back to Don Bosco Retreat House... at 5pm-

Business meeting, before and after supper, was held at the dining room. Agreed upon are:

- National meeting every 2 years
- Election of Council of Leaders every 2 years- during the national meeting
- Membership fee of each SI: 1K to be given every 2 years during national meeting
- Culminating activity of SI-P YCCP & Christmas celebration in Manila, Nov 29-Dec 4,2018. Venue: Pius XII Center, UN Avene, Manila or Manresa Retreat House, Quezon
- Continue searching for SIs in the Philippines and groups that want to become SI (eg SIMI in Roxas City, c/o Elvie Tonogbanua) invite/encourage them to join SI-P national meeting
- send SI-P 3<sup>rd</sup> national meeting news to ACSI & CMIS and to CBCP Monitor.

The writing of SI-P Status for Vatican recognition would be a later concern.

### **SI-P launching of YCCP**

The launching was done during the 6:30pm Eucharistic celebration presided over by Msgr. Capalla. He read the CBCP Pastoral Letter on the YCCP celebration signed by Archbishop Romualdo Valles, CBCP President. After communion, he read the SI-P Statement and gave each one a copy. Each participant, after receiving it, offered a flower as a sign of commitment to do what is in the Statement.



Before the mass ended, Mary thanked Msgr. Capalla for his presence and constant support to SI-P. She also announced the Council of Leaders' decision that Angie Dy would be the SI-P liaison officer/representative to CBCP-ECMR and SI-P legal consultant. The announcement was warmly acknowledged by the participants.

Fr. Joel could not celebrate the mass with SI-P YCCP launching. He was not feeling well the whole day.

### **Day 5 December 3 Sunday**

#### **Morning has broken ... First Sunday of Advent**

Fr. Joel "is risen". He presided over the concluding mass of SI-P 3<sup>rd</sup> national meeting.



Before breakfast, Dory announced that it was the birthday of Esmie. Fr. Joel blessed her with a birthday prayer as we sang Happy Birthday.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> SI-P national meeting has been celebrated.... We all look forward to the SI-P YCCP culminating/ Chris Christmas event in Manila on November 29- December 4, 2018- in a place still to be arranged.

*prepared by Mary Almonte*