



One La Salle

LIKE LEAVEN IN THE WORLD

Reflection on the Visits to the Initial Houses of Formation in Asia



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When I visited the formation houses located in our schools in Thailand and Pakistan on 3-7 January 2023 and 15-21 January 2023, I did not witness only inspiring candidates to religious life but also accounts of peaceful co-existence collaboration between Catholic, Buddhist, and Muslim Lasallians. The climate of working together and by association between Catholics, Buddhists, and Muslims is a precious gift to our Institute. The visits were part of the Secretariat for Formation's objectives to accompany initial houses of formation, interact with formands and formators, engage in conversations on the formative journeys to inspire one another, and witness the community and apostolic life in the initial houses of formation.



With the Pre-Postulancy Community in Sampran, Thailand.





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Every time I do this part of my work as Coordinating Secretary for Formation, it brings with me two realizations: First, it becomes a powerful witness of how diverse our Institute is. Second, a blessed encounter with young men whose faith journey and trust in God are edifying. On a visit to the Pre-Postulancy community in Sampran, Thailand, I met ten promising postulancy candidates. I witnessed young men who understood that they needed an introspective, conscious, and intentional plan to grow and mature spiritually. They look at their life in formation just like a fruit-bearing plant, young souls who need a degree of nurturing to grow and flourish. The Juniorate House in Nakhonsawan, Thailand, is like a place where I ask each of the 50-plus candidates, “What do you seek?” In their own words, they want to know more about the love of Jesus through Saint John Baptist de la Salle. So, I spent most of my time sharing our Founder’s life and work story. The Aspirancy is more apprenticeship than a formal religious formation program, more journey with friends in the house and the Brother mentor.

☆ With the Juniorate Community in Nakhonsawan, Thailand.





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My arrival in Faisalabad, Pakistan, was an unforgettable experience. I entered the country on a business visa document. In three different moments, I was interrogated by military personnel: when I deplaned, as I walked to the Immigration desk, and when I waited for my luggage. I was asked varied questions like: “What type of business do you have here in Pakistan?”, “Who is your business partner?”, “Can you state your full address while in Pakistan and provide us a number of your contact here?” and “What is your religion?” The last question surprised me, “Where is your escort?” The immigration officer also took the time to question me about the stamps found in my passport. I had to explain too my U.S. student visa.



With the St. Miguel
Aspirancy Community
in Faisalabad, Pakistan.

All in all, it took 45 minutes of the questioning process before I was allowed to leave the airport arrival area premises. I was prepared for that because I had been warned that I needed to go through that process, so I was calm and composed every time personnel approached me. In hindsight, the beginning of my journey in Pakistan encompasses the distinct phases of the formative journey: inquiry, exploration, reflection, and preparation to go out to the field.



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The visit to St. Miguel Aspirancy House in Faisalabad was an enriching experience. The young formators, Brothers Saddique Gill and Sajawal Javid (my scholasticate formandee in Manila in 2015), assisted me in ensuring a fruitful visit. The highlight of my Pakistan visit was a three-day formation workshop on accompaniment with the young Brothers. I firmly believe that nearly all of them had a sense of renewal and reconnection after the sessions. Most of the concerns of the young Brothers I encountered were weariness in the mission and the need for an “accompanier” in the journey. I contemplated the stories they shared and shared with them that the remedy for weariness is not to give up and disconnect. Instead, they need to reconnect with the source that gives them life.



With the young Brothers of the Sector of Pakistan.





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I had the opportunity to visit our schools in Pakistan and met with many dedicated Lasallian partners. I listened to their stories- most are very inspiring. But what impressed me is that they have been transformed by a Christian environment while living the realities of a predominantly Muslim culture. Christians account for less than 2% of the total population of Pakistan. No wonder I had to go through that interrogation process when I arrived at Faisalabad airport.

Overall, the visit to Thailand and Pakistan's initial formation houses was productive. Yes, it was overwhelming, but whenever I find myself dazed by the work in the secretariat office, I am especially drawn to the assurance of Jesus, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Meeting our young men in formation and colleagues in a highly diverse culture will always be a learning encounter. And they give me hope and courage.

