

Philippines

It was on June 6, 1948, that the first four American Marists left the United States to start their mission work in the Philippine Islands. We were welcomed by the Oblate Fathers who were already there and they assured us of a warm welcome. They had also sought out many good vocations in the country ready to do the apostolic work for the Church; the Filipinos were especially devoted to Mary, the Mother of the Lord. There were, of course, some troubles with those of a different faith, especially the Muslims, but there was already a good breakthrough and in many areas the Christians and Muslims were working together very well. The evidence of the devotion to Mary is shown in the fact that Our Lady's Name was the main feature of every school the Oblates had and we would gladly follow that tradition. The Marist schools in the Philippines are Notre Dame of Cotobato, ND of Kidapawan, ND of Dadiangas, ND of General Santos, ND of Marbel University, ND of Marikina, and ND of Solo.

The people were poor and had very strong faith. Another quality, which is precious in the mission, was their great love of work. Most of our schools had a kindergarten, an elementary school, and a high school, four of our schools also had a full college course, and one of them is on a university level. It is really incredible how fast they grew and how anxious some native Filipinos were to join and become Marist Brothers. In fact, a good number of the early Filipino Brothers were sent to Marist College to complete their education, at least until they began to have their own colleges.

I remember that it was on one of my visits there that I was offered an honorary doctorate. I believe they offered it to me out of gratitude for taking their young candidates at Marist College at the time when they had no colleges of their own. One of the outstanding Filipino Marists who came to Marist College later became the Provincial of the Marist Philippine Province, and in fact was also named Assistant General at one of our General Chapters where Brothers unite in selecting the new Superior General and his Assistants to supervise the work of our congregation. This was our Bro. Renato Crux, who has already left for his reward in Heaven.

Our Filipinos did so very well that they have been in charge of their own Province for years now, and in fact there are only two Yanks still working there: one as principal of our first founding high school at Cotobato, and the other working for the development of the existing colleges and in the founding of new areas for our apostolate among the poor. Jim Adam and Bob McGovern are the last Americans still working in the Philippines full-time. Our Filipino Brothers are not only running the great Notre Dame of Marikina near the capital city of Manila but also started and have been leading the work of training for all the various countries of Asia who wish to send their candidates to be trained at the Marist Asian Center, which serves all Marist activities in all the countries of Asia. This activity is under the direction of the Major Superiors in Rome.

The country is rich in religious communities, colleges, and retreat centers for special training. And in the spirit of our Founder, our Filipino brethren have been keen especially in their service for the poor. So many of our Filipinos have trained in the U.S.A. that there is a close relationship between the two countries. There is only one of the original Marist Brothers, Bro. Joseph Teston, who is still alive, and in 1998 the Philippines celebrated the 50th anniversary of its Marist work there.