

Korea

It certainly will seem strange for me to start with a mission of which I was not in charge. Our mission in Korea was started by one of the Mexican Provinces, which was the only activity of the Mexican Province in the Asian Marist sector. It was the General Administration that first asked me to make a visit to our mission in Korea, which had been started a few years earlier. The Brothers there were teaching mainly college students and were encouraging their first candidates to complete their regular educational training. After a few years there, they were successful in getting a number of candidates to follow all the Marist prayers and customs in a temporary Novitiate, which was also a house for the Provincial community. When the first candidates were ready to make their vows, the General Administration asked me on the occasion of my visit to Japan to please preside at the ceremony and to receive the vows of the Novices in the name of the Mexican Provincial. I was also asked to preside over perpetual profession of the Brother who was to be the Master of Novices, and it was in that capacity that I had been asked to preside at the ceremony.

I was always deeply interested in our mission of Korea. In fact, one of my old friends who had been with me originally when we first started in Rome was now here attached to the Korean mission. It was my pleasure several times to visit in Korea and spend time with Bro. Alphonse Wimer. For years I had been, and am still in correspondence with, the present visitor of that mission. It was a unique occasion to have the Master of Novices take his final vows at the time of the first profession of Korean candidates. After that first visit, each time I had occasion to go to our Marist Asian Center in Manila, I would choose to eat with the young Brothers who were candidates from Korea.

Our Brothers were running college classes for young men of the nearby colleges who came to our communities for help and were also in charge of a boarding school for boys who were under the care of the government. This was our apostolate, and there were also the retreats given by our Brothers for the college students, but the very unique work of our Brothers in Korea was the charge of a special hospital for the Korean lepers. The patients were all gathered from eight areas of the Diocese and lived in separate villages for lepers in each sector. Our hospital used to make weekly trips to the eight villages to take our cured patients back home and gather together those who needed to come back to the hospital for treatment. Three Brothers, three nuns, three nurses, and a doctor who was only there during the week staffed the hospital. The lepers were well cared for and provided with the medication needed. My great admiration was for our Korean Marists who came each summer to take all the young students away from their leper village and bring them to spend their summer vacation at one of our houses where they would have organized sports activities, see movies, and go on tours to further their education. Champagnat must have been very pleased at this Marist project.

I must add here that when I went for a visit to Hong Kong, we used to go to a special place where one could see across the ravine into the hills. On the opposite side, the Chinese military were training and were anxious to keep Mary out of their country. It was there that we would say the rosary for the Marist Chinese whom I could not visit, who could not come out, and who had to live underground or else with relatives. Even an Assistant General could not visit with them. I was then determined that some day I would make it. I did, but I will mention this later.

The best tribute I ever heard about our Chinese Brothers and their training was from Ignatius Cardinal Kung, the Bishop of Shanghai. I had attended a very special Mass for celebrating the 100th anniversary of our Marist work in China in 1991. The dear Cardinal had spent years in prison before being released to come to the U.S.A. He told me that every day when he goes to the altar to celebrate Mass he stops to say a prayer for the Marist Brother Chang who prepared him for his First Holy Communion.