

The Philippine Mission District

Since 1948 significant advances have been made by the Marist Brothers in staffing mission schools in the Philippine Islands at the request of His Excellency, Bishop Gerard Mongeau, O.M.I. These Advances enabled the General Council of the Institute to organize this mission territory into an autonomous district in 1960. This decision was the result of twelve years of dedication by missionary brothers from the Province of the United States (1948-1959), and from the Province of Esopus (1959-1960), and of the financial assistance offered by both.

On the occasion of the visitation of Marist schools in the Philippines by Reverend Brother Paul Ambrose, Assistant General, in May 1960, plans were drawn for this creation of a Marist District for the Philippines. Shortly after his return to the Mother House, approval of this new district from Marist superiors was obtained. On September 12, 1960 it became a reality when the Very Reverend Brother Charles Raphael, Superior General, promulgated the official Vatican approbation indult 10975/60.(121.) This announcement also contained the appointment of Brother Humbert Damian as Visitor and of five brothers to assist him in the government of the District.(122.)

In recognition of the leadership shown by Brother Maurus James in the development of this Mission, Reverend Brother Assistant General wrote:

In a very special manner (we would like to pay tribute to) Brother Maurus James, who has built up the Mission in recent years to the point where autonomy is possible. (Founder of the first mission high school in Cotabato, provincial visitor from 1956-1960) . The six fine schools and conventos, the new novitiate, the number of Filipino brothers and trainees, the enviable educational reputation which we enjoy in all the Islands, the prospect of a school in Manila shortly, ALL 12 these speak of his indefatigable zeal and keen foresight.(123.)

At this writing the mission district numbers forty professed brothers. Sixteen American brothers and thirteen Filipino brothers staff the schools; four American brothers are on leave in the United States and France; and thirteen are in the houses of studies.(124.) The continued interest of the Province of Esopus in the prosperity of the Philippine District will continue by providing personnel and financial assistance for expansion purposes.

What follows is a brief summary of the respective histories of the Philippine Marist communities.

Notre Dame of Cotabato High School

Notre Dame of Cotabato High School is situated on the outskirts of Cotabato City, a city in the northwestern section of the Island of Mindanao. In 1948 Brother M. James, Director, and three other brothers (Humbert Damian, Herbert Daniel and Peter Leonard) arrived to replace the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Fathers, who were conducting the school. Here the brothers faced the hazardous and painful conditions of threats to their lives, poor living quarters, daily poverty and teaching in a thatched hut.

Their ability as builders and their will to succeed soon drew many students to a concrete and frame structure, built by the brothers and native helpers. The local government offered the services of Japanese war prisoners to excavate for the building, and to do the work or landscaping what is now the beautiful drill and basket-ball courts.

The brothers adopted a curriculum similar to that in use in American Marist schools. In addition, lay teachers were employed to teach the national language, Tagalogs and for military and vocational training. Like other Notre Dame High Schools in this Cotabato Vicariate# this school was the first to adopt the twenty-six unit system and khaki uniforms, and initiate the annual Notre Dame Schools meets.(125.)

In the years that followed other brothers arrived to help expand Marist services in the city. The enrollment at Cotabato was increased, so that in 1960 the enrollment reached 704 students. The graduates from this school

have been encouraged since the early years to continue their education at the diocesan college in this city. The success achieved by the brothers here encouraged the Marist superiors to add more schools to this mission territory.

Notre Dame of Marbel high School

In 1950 the second Marist missionary group of four brothers arrived in the Philippines to provide for a faculty at Notre Dame of Marbel High School in the central part of the Island of Mindanao known as Koronodal. One of the new arrivals, Brother Edmund Conrad, was appointed to direct the school, which had also been conducted by the Oblate Fathers. Here again the thatched but school and convento which the brothers inherited caused hardships similar to those which the brothers at Cotabato had experienced in 1948.

And here again through the ingenuity of the brothers, cement bricks were manufactured for the erection of two schools buildings and a brothers' residence. Four years later the completed Notre Dame of Marbel plant was referred to as the "pride of the Marist schools in the Philippines." That year (1954) a college department was introduced in the new buildings serving for both high school and college courses.

As the first Marist venture in college work developed in the Philippines, an increased number of lay teachers were employed to help staff the college. In the American Marist publication "Newsletter" a report on this college gave an insight into the program it offered:

The college offers a widely varied curriculum with courses leading to a complete B.S.E., B.S. in Education, A.B., A.A. degrees. Moreover, it offers a two year preparatory law course, the first three years of A.C.S., three years of a five year engineering course, three years of a five year pharmacy course, and a two year secretarial course.(126.)

The influence of the brothers in this school is evidenced by the 485 students in the High School Department, by the 545 in the College Department, and in the number of pagans who are taking instructions in the Faith from brothers who go into the nearby mountains for that purpose on Saturdays and holidays.

Notre Dame of Lagao High School

In 1952 four brothers under the direction of Brother Humbert Damian arrived in the small town of Lagao in southwestern part of the Island of Mindanao in the section of General Santos to undertake the management of a high school. Here on a sixteen acre property, they found native buildings which served a parish church, rectory, a girls school, a sisters' convento, a boys' school and a brothers' residence. Soon afterwards the brothers initiated another program of replacing these quarters by brick buildings similar to the ones at Marbel. The results of their labors were two five-classroom buildings for 180 boys and a brothers' residence.

Many students attending Notre Dame of Lagao in the early days traveled to the school from neighboring Dadiangas. To relieve these students of the arduous daily trek, the brothers first purchased a truck to transport them back and forth. Then in 1952 an annex to Notre Dame of Lagao High School was opened in Dadiangas to accommodate these students.(127.) This annex obtained a regular faculty a year later.

For fifteen months, from January 1959 until March 1960, candidates studying for the Marist brotherhood studied at a temporary novitiate at Notre Dame of Lagao. Once the novitiate building was ready at Tamontaka, a few miles from Cotabato City, Brother Louis Omer, master of novices, and his aspirants left Lagao. The four aspirants will soon return to do their college work. A scholasticate building will be erected for that purpose.

Notre Dame of Dadiangas High School

Notre Dame of Dadiangas High School had its beginnings in 1953 as an annex of Notre Dame of Lagao High School. Classes were held in the partitioned parish church for the first group of sixtyfive students. Two years later a Marist faculty was assigned to Dadiangas, where they once again began a building program for a school and a brothers' residence.

To better provide for these students, a brick structure was proposed on an eight acre property in the city of Dadiangas. To the surprise of the brothers, vociferous protests were made by bigots headed by a city councilor. The hotly contested right of the brothers to build even reached the national government at Manila. The brothers finally won their case and obtained the desired site, and the proposed buildings were erected between December 1958 and June 1959.(128.)

As the new Notre Dame of Dadiangas High School opened its doors, college students were admitted after the regular school hours. Thus was born Notre Dame of Dadiangas College. On November 27, 1959, Bishop Mongeau of Cotabato traveled to Dadiangas to bless this new structure. Reverend Reginald Arliss, C.P. spoke to the gathered. missionaries, students, and friends of the school:

Another milestone achieved, another accomplishment won in the almost phenomenal progress of the Marist Brothers during their relatively short history in the Philippines. This must be attributed to the one outstanding feature of their lives and their labors, namely, their persevering and unstinting self-dedication to the cause of the youth of the Philippines.(129.)

At this writing the enrollment of the high school department and college department is 261 and 301 respectively. It is hoped that this institution will develop with the same prosperity which this commercial hub on the Celebes Sea is presently enjoying.

Notre Dame of Kidapawan High School

In 1954 Brother Maurus James, Director, and two other brothers arrived in the city of Kidapawan along the National Highway in the central part of the Island of Mindanao in the Province of Cotabato. Here these brothers undertook the direction of a school as they had done at Cotabato and Marbel.

The following year Brother Denis Herman was entrusted with a building program which included a ten-room school building and a brothers t residence to replace the original buildings of bamboo and nipa. As the work progressed, money received principally from the Marist Mission League in New York City enabled the project to proceed smoothly. In addition three thousand books from Marist schools in the United States were received for the library.(130.)

Imma Culate Conception Novitiate, Tamontaka

The inauguration of the Immaculate Conception Novitiate had its inception in the mind of Brother Louis Omer, the present master of novices there. It was to establish a novitiate in the Philippines that he left his position as master of novices at St. Joseph Novitiate, Tyngsboro, Massachusetts in 1952. Because of the numerous problems involved, the plan was delayed until 1959.

The Novitiate property, a gift of Mr. Jovencio Broce, worth 415,000 is located seven kilometers from Notre Dame of Cotabato High School. Construction of the building was begun in 1959. Before it was completed the official Roman indult to establish this novitiate was received.(131.) Brother Louis Omer, who had been training five candidates at Notre Dame of Lagao, moved into the new quarters at Tamontaka in the spring of 1960. On May 1, 1960 Bishop Morgeau presided at the first Filipino Marist investiture ceremony at Cotabato Cathedral.

At this writing there are five novices and eight postulants studying at Tamontaka. Further training of these will begin at Notre Dame of Lagao, where they will study for the bachelors degree.

Notre Dame of Jolo, High School

In 1959 three Marist Brothers arrived on the Island of Jolo in the Sulu Archipelago of the Philippines to conduct Bishop Francis McSorley's school. Here the brothers found a new school building and a brothers residence. This situation allowed the small faculty to concentrate on apostolic work without having the arduous task of implementing a building program.(132.)

Brother Herman Edwin, the first Director, began organizing the program of studies for the high school in which he emphasized the field of religious instruction. Because half of the students are Moslem, the task he set for the brothers was challenging. He encouraged the students to attend frequent masses and to participate in Catholic Action programs. The immediate results were quite noticeable. Ten have been converted and several Chinese students are taking instruction to become Catholics.