

Deacons ready for missionary action - and a missionary companion reflects

MANILA: 17th February 2008 -- *Seminaryo ng Don Bosco* reports that in the past week or two four Vietnamese deacons have finished their studies at Don Bosco Center of Studies, defended their theological syntheses and sat for their comprehensive exams. Reverend Joseph Hung, Joseph Thanh, Francis Nhat and Anthony Dung have headed back to Vietnam, and three of them (Francis, Anthony, Joseph Thanh) will go off to the missions, Francis to Sudan, Joseph and Anthony to PNG. The latter two had already spent part of their practical training in PNG. There are still three more Sri Lankan and two Filipino deacons left at Parañaque; they will complete their synthesis before the end of this month.

The Vietnamese just named make up a part of a group of 29 Vietnamese missionaries who have been sent out on mission 'ad gentes' in the past six years. They have gone to Albania, Lithuania, France, Hungary, South Africa, Angola, Ethiopia, Sudan, Chad, PNG-SI, Mongolia, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Peru.

From time to time *austraLasia*, either directly or indirectly, receives something by way of testimonials from the various EAO missionaries in one or other part of the world. Only last week, Fr Albert Van Hecke, outgoing Regional for North Europe, spoke publicly of the change that has been wrought in the Hungarian Province, decimated by 40 years of communist oppression, by four young Vietnamese Salesians who have brought new hope and vigor to the small and relatively elderly remnant of Salesians who courageously took up the work again after the fall of communism. The current Hungarian Provincial, 18 years in the chair, will be the oldest of the GC26 members.

One of the four writes of his experiences in Hungary as a missionary. He, along with his companions, has now gained some proficiency in the language, a task which is no mean feat. He writes that 'the environment offers me many experiences in Salesian apostolic work'. He comments that while he remains eager to live and work in this environment it does not mean that there were no difficulties to overcome. 'Frankly, I cried twice (secretly!)'. He makes the point that 'the source of my strength to overcome [these difficulties] was the conviction that Jesus was the first missionary and that Jesus is present now in the Eucharist'. Faced with difficulties, our confrere reminded himself that these did not compare to the difficulties Jesus faced as the first missionary of the Good News; then he brought his own problems to Jesus in the Eucharist.

Of course, he notes the striking difficulty faced by four young men in an aged and aging community. 'More than half are old, most over 70', and happy just to 'fulfill their tasks in the community'. The comment is made with compassion, recognizing that it could hardly be otherwise given what they have all been through. The forced focus on a single mission, that of parishes, has meant that the people generally could not see much difference between a Salesian and any other priest working in a parish. But these young

men have been working in 'new frontiers', a lively presence amongst the young, especially the most abandoned of them - the Gypsy youth. 'Now it's improving a lot. I hope the variety and Salesian color is becoming step by step brighter and more specific. We trust in God. For Him nothing is impossible'.