



Fr. Heru, secretary general, sees if he can really be supported by the web created with an exercise from the Argentine SCJs.

General Conference Report, Wednesday, July 19, 2012

A trip around the world!

After three days spent primarily in the meeting hall, conference participants went on a “trip around the world.”

Splitting into linguistic groups, participants “visited” the Democratic Republic of Congo, Moldova, the Philippines and Argentina. Representatives presented youth projects from each of these locations.

The first stop on the list for English speakers for Fr. Arthur Guevara, who spoke about the Philippines; in particular, the Kasanag Daughters Foundation and the Higaonon high school program.

Kasanag was begun by the SCJs in 1999 to provide a safe haven for girls and young women (ages 8 to 24) who have been sexually abused. The foundation offers psychological assistance, legal help and educational opportunities, including college. The program can accommodate 32 women; the average stay is four years.

Although the foundation receives financial assistance from a variety of resources from around the world, its budget is limited. Fr. Arthur invited those “visiting” the Philippines, to buy a CD that he and local musicians produced to help raise funds for the center.

The Higaonon Scholar Project was developed to help high school age children from the Higaonon tribe receive an education. The Higaonon are extremely poor and live in the mountains far from conventional education resources. In 2004 the SCJs opened a dormitory for the Higaonon to stay while attending a nearby school. Although they are supervised by an adult manager, much of the work of the house, including growing and preparing food, is done by the students. Approximately 30 students are a part of the program each year. Two alumni of it began studies with the SCJ community.

From Asia, the small groups went to South America, where they took part in an exercise developed by members of Argentina’s Dehonian youth program.

Using balls of colored twine, participants tossed the rolls of twine to each other, eventually creating a living metaphor for the web of relationships that we all are a part of. As Judith King noted on Wednesday, much of life is about relationships and our interconnectedness. This was a physical example of the web of relationships.



Polish friends: Fr. Piotr Kuszman, Fr. Artur Sanecki, Fr. Peter Surdel and Fr. Zdzislaw Smiertka

Following Asia, travelers went to Africa and learned about the Congo from Fr. Zenon Sendeke. Youth in Congo need formation and accompaniment. Many are lost, living on the streets after the desperate years of civil war. “We have to help young people know that life in Congo is not all about suffering,” said Fr. Zenon. “We have to help them escape their ignorance.”

The province offers a wide variety of educational opportunities, bringing experts to speak to youth on everything from information technology to health issues to the operation of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. “Youth hear about people tried in the International Court [from Congo’s civil war] but they don’t know that that is,” said Fr. Zenon.

The needs of Congo are many and the resources are few. “Send us books, send us movies,” said Fr. Zenon. “But nothing about war.” With the donation of five computers the Gradi-Jeunes youth program in Kisangani set up a small cyber café. “But our internet connection is not so good. You have plenty of time to pray the rosary between clicks on the web pages.”

The English-speaking visitors ended their world tour in Moldova where they learned about a number of initiatives aimed at youth from pre-school age through college. SCJs proudly pointed to a photo of a young woman playing in an orchestra. “She began with us as a young girl and now she is getting ready to graduate and take her first job,” said Fr. Artur Sanecki who helped with the presentation, along with Frs. Piotr Kuszman and Zdzislaw Smiertka. “We accompanied her from childhood to being an adult; it is a good feeling to see her grow.”

Issues and strategies

Following three days of presentations and reflection, several issues of “urgency” emerged. They were identified by conference organizers as media, schools and parishes – how are youth impacted in these areas and how can Dehonians have influence on them?

In linguistic groups participants discussed and identified strategies and actions for each issue, as well as the traits needed by a Dehonian educator involved in them. Participants were also invited propose other “urgent” issues.

Back in plenary, the groups reported on their discussions. In regards to media, there was unanimity regarding concerns about youth and social media. While there are abuses and dangers in it, social media is not in and of itself an evil, or even a negative aspect of society. However, young people need formation and guidance on the use of social media. Young people need to learn how to be critical consumers of mass communication.

Most of the strategies suggested revolved around education on the effective use of the internet at schools, parishes, in youth groups, and at home with the family. It is not only children who need education on the use of social media, but their parents as well so they must understand the impact of it.

Regarding media in general, several groups called for the continuation of meetings such as this one, which flowed from previous meetings in Salamanca. A network should be developed to keep the dialogue going and serve as a resource to one another.

Dehonians also need to be present in media, at times generating content.

What are the traits needed for a Dehonian educator in regards to media? Similar traits were echoed in regards to all of the issues listed: the person should be deeply spiritual, present, responsible. The person should be able to listen and interact well with others, especially youth. He or she should have a spirit of solidarity

In regards to schools and universities, several groups suggested that there be a common Dehonian curriculum, something that could be developed and shared with schools around the world. Commenting after the group reports, Fr. General said that Dehonians must also be present on the university level, not necessarily as administrators or operators of universities, but simply as a presence.

When it came to parishes, several groups noted the importance of NOT simply “waiting” for youth to come to them, but to GO to youth.

There were calls for a common Dehonian education project and a desire for a more coordinated educational and communications effort in the congregation. “We need someone on the general level to oversee this,” said one of the group reporters, echoing what several had suggested. The congregation needs to enhance its focus on communication and education.

Of course, the meetings in Salamanca and here in Neustadt are already a part of that enhanced focus.

After the small group presentations, the floor was opened for general comments. A topic of concern cited by several was that of abuse of the young. It isn’t an easy topic, but it is one that Dehonians cannot shy away from. Although there are congregational policies regarding abuse, each entity must have its own policy that is appropriate to the culture and laws of its country. Above all, the safety of children must be a concern of the gravest significance.

Working together as Dehonian educators

Five lay people, representing SCJ schools from several continents, decided that since they had the opportunity, they would meet. The meeting was an impromptu one that came together after Thursday’s lunch. The lay educators shared stories of their experiences and then talked about how they could better interact not only as educators, but with the students from their schools. It’s just a start, but initially, the group decided to begin with Skype meetings between faculty and students of the various schools. From that, they hope that relationships can grow among students across the world.

“I want to add that we are all very grateful to be here,” said Michelle Cyr of Quebec, reporting on the group’s meeting. “It has been a week of formation for each of us.”

Photos for today can be found at: <http://generalate.smugmug.com>



SCJs from Africa celebrate Thursday’s Mass