



Articles from December to February 2023

*Novitiate Break Time, by Novice Sujith Alwis*



During our Christmas time, we have had our simple but meaningful celebrations in our novitiate community in Tudella. We had the opportunity to travel to Anuradhapura and Jaffna as pilgrimages visiting different Buddhist and Hindu temples and being exposed to a different way of living, environment, and we stayed in Jaffna at the Salvatorian formation house. After returning, we spent time with the Christmas decorations of our community with the lights and the Crib. Also, we supported the choir of Ekala parish for singing on Christmas Eve Mass, the 24th night and

31st night. And some of the novices went to celebrate a Christmas party with children at the Franciscan Fathers' place and Charity Brothers' Center. So it was a really joyful time for novices and brothers to connect with people outside, especially the children.

Also, we not only had those activities but we did some special manual work on our property. Our house now looks much better.

The 2nd of January was our Foundation day. We had a big celebration in our community. We invited brothers, sisters, fathers, and lay people. It was a very good experience for novices' because we got to know more about our brothers and other people that came to our celebration. We enjoyed ourselves a lot on that night. We had prepared good food and drinks, and people were enjoying themselves by dancing and karaoke music.





## *Kandy Profession Retreat, by Novice Elijah Watehou*

Kandy is a large town in the center of Sri Lanka. It is located to the northeast of Sri Lanka's biggest city, Colombo, and the majority of people are Muslims and Buddhists. It's a very pleasant place for tourists. Our retreat center, run by the Jesuits, is a place for different groups for retreats. For many years the Marist Novices have had retreats there.

From Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, a week after the New Year, we went to Kandy. The purpose of our retreat was for the four of us second-year Novices to prepare ourselves for our first profession in the next two months. It was not all about preparation, but also a moment of discipline for us to think and make decisions for the betterment of our lives and the life of the Marist community around the globe.



Our Novice master drove the four of us, plus two first-year Novices, for the company. We drove approximately 4 hours, and halfway to Kandy, we had breakfast in a restaurant. We arrived in Kandy at 9:45 am and stayed in the Jesuit retreat house in which one brother, a priest, and two chefs live in a house of 20 rooms. Having lunch at 12:30 pm we went and had our rest. Then right after dinner, we had an orientation. We briefly went through what will happen during our 9 days of retreat with Father Baylon, our retreat master. After our 6.30 pm meal, the Retreat started.

The schedule was 6:30 am Breakfast, 11:45 am Mass, 12:30 pm Lunch, 3 pm Conference, 6 pm Reflection Points, and 7:30 pm Dinner. Apart from that, we had to make our own timetable for prayer and reflection. It was interesting to program my day like this, like a ritual of shorter moments throughout the day.

For me personally and according to the sharing of three of my fellow novices, we were all enjoying our retreat. It is also helpful for us that we learned many things from Father Baylon who accompanied us by his intelligence and knowledge. At the end of our sharing, I could say that was very grateful for the whole experience.

At 9am pn Sunday the 15<sup>th</sup> we completed the 9<sup>th</sup> day of our retreat. On our way back home, we visited some places in Kandy mainly, a Buddhist temple and on the way home we visited the Pinnawala Elephant Sancturay and had lunch in a restaurant near the river, where the elephants were bathing. And at 3pm we left for home. A wonderful experience!



### *Trivia Night, by Novice Pech Ruen*

We had a special activity on the night of Friday 27th January. It was a special game which helped us to support one another in the group, and also, we had so much fun. It was not just a game, but it was a review our lesson activity as well. All the questions were connected to what we had learnt in our formation. Personally, through this activity, I could see that I had gained much knowledge from the lessons (many others had this experience, but a few novices might have been asleep when answering the questions!). I think we should have this activity again after we finish our next semester, which could help us see how much we have got from the classes.

### *Our Jaffna Trip, by Novice Dedimo Soares*

Last year, we went to Jaffna and visited both the Buddhist and Hindu temples. It was a good experience for me and also for my fellow novices.

We never expected to go there. But it so happened that we were able this quite an amazing experience.

I was really grateful for having been able to climb up the hill. We had some notebooks to write down the meaning of some of the Buddhist terms lifestyle of the Buddhist monks and their prayer methods. When the time went on, we separated from one another for personal reflection and prayer. It was a stunningly beautiful view and we felt peaceful within us and the Holy Spirit touching us.

We had accommodation in a Salvatorian house in Jaffna. We had a joyful celebration with the community because one of the priests celebrated his birthday.

As for me, it was a good opportunity to learn and understand their culture and to learn something from them. The following day I was so happy when we went to a small Island but it was thinly populated.

I was very comfortable and happy because when we went there by boat so it was a very fantastic day. Some of the brothers were shocked and screamed in fear it was the first time they had traveled by boat in the sea

We could experience the background and know Hindu and Buddhist culture it was the first time I came to know it and know the religions in Sri Lanka.

One thing that really struck me was when we went to visit a Hindu temple, people asked us to take off our T-shirts.

I felt unhappy and embarrassed. Then I saw other people doing the same.

Thus, I changed my mind. In addition, I wanted to inside and wander around to see what it was like inside on Hindu temple. We too had to wash our feet before going in.

An experience of this nature is never forgotten. It was a remarkable and memorable one in my novitiate life in Sri Lanka.







## *“A Formator’s Thanksgiving”* by Br Rod Thomson

Moses had his burning bush moment where he was commanded “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” (Ex.3:5) And Jesus had some key moments of intense encounter with the Father, such as on Mount Tabor (Mt 17:1-9).

In a much humbler way I can say that I have felt compelled to take off my sandals, and felt my clothes a dazzling white ... in the very important ministry I’ve been called to, working in the Novitiate in Tudella.

On May 27 I will have been here for seven years, in a ministry of love and challenge. It’s a community effort, where all of us – the novices, myself and my fellow Team Brothers have loved and challenged each other. It’s about the give and take of work, community life, learning from my mistakes, and knowing when it’s time to slow down and take a break.

But during the year there aren’t many breaks, as each busy week turns into a busy weekend, etc! To give an example, as I write these few lines on a Tuesday morning, one Novice asked for his class presentation to be corrected, then 10 minutes later another Novice sat with me in Accompaniment for an hour, then after that a Novice preparing for his Profession on March 25 had some concerns about his trip home, I then had to organise the Stipend for our Spiritual Director working here this morning, and now, a few urgent emails later, I’m back writing this article. I think you get the picture. It’s a constant stream of encounters with “Jesus at my door”. And as well, with lessons to prepare and Workshops to organise, one of the challenges is to always remain fresh, and to facilitate an alive process amongst the Novices that continues to help them discern their call, helps them encounter themselves and a loving God.

Over 70 Novices have been here in my time. What a privilege, what a parade of burning bush moments I could mention ... from little moments and insights, to rich and deep experiences of prayer and liturgy, to wonderful travel adventures across this beautiful country. To mention just a few:

- the moment a novice during a time of sharing said that he felt the presence of the Spirit working and moving in this place (I too had a profound sense of the Spirit’s work here in that moment);
- the moments of personal insight or when a Novice cried in Personal Accompaniment with me, and I was able to be there, supporting him through it all, and see him come out the other side, the stronger for it;
- the moments of celebration just amongst ourselves or with visiting Brothers and Lay Marists. What great parties we’ve had here; what nights of dancing and singing!
- every Profession ceremony ... the joy on each young Brother’s face, the blessing he is to us all!
- and moments of welcoming and farewells ... tears again, saying a hopeful ‘au revoir’ rather than a final goodbye. Just as a healthy parent needs to have freedom and maturity to support their growing child, so too they need to be able to let go, to truly allow their loved one to fly. A Formator’s role, no less, is fulfilled when he sees his Formands fly.



... and doubly fulfilled if I have the opportunity to catch up with al70-plus 70 plus young Brothers in the years ahead.



*"We nearly won!" by  
Novice Edgar Salgueiro*



Last Tuesday, Br. Nicholas (Provincial) invited us to play a game of football with the students in Maris Stella School. We departed from here at 3:00 p.m. It's about 35 minutes to travel. When we arrived, many young boys were playing on the football field. So, it was nice to meet them. Hence, we took some time to prepare and warmed ourselves up before the game started. Before we began our game Br. Nick introduced us and said

some things in Sinhala about who we were. After that, all the players said their greetings, shook hands took our picture, and then we started to play. By halftime, we were beating them 3-1, but in the second half, they won 4-3. They were good, particularly as they ran and ran. In the second half, we were tired. *(Br Rod said that maybe we spend too much time praying, plus eating too much, and not enough time practicing!)*

It was a very nice time to play with them even though we lost. When we finished playing, we had some snacks and drank a lot of water. It was prepared by the brothers who helped us organize this game. We enjoyed our time and as we were having a snack we gave each other some feedback on the game. Some people shared funny experiences and some made jokes, so everyone laughed a lot.



And some of the Brothers walked around and took our funny pictures and made funny videos. This was a time that made us joyful and happy, even though we lost the game. We arrived back home at about 6:30 p.m., washed, then gathered in the chapel for some singing practice, before we had our dinner. We were tired but we continued enjoying our activities for the rest of the evening.





## Love of Manual Work, by Novice Ruben Belo De Oliveira

We have been living in the community for 9 months and we have experienced doing manual work and personal work in the afternoons, with our senior Brothers and fellow novices. We were so happy to do it in the community, because it was helping us to develop good habits in our lives to be responsible. Through this experience that we have, we grow together as brothers living in the community.



One of our projects has been to work on recycling left-over things, such as when we chopped down some old banana trees, rather than throwing the trunks away we chopped them up and added them to the compost. Another project has been to develop the front garden, clearing this and planting eggplants and flowers. With these projects we build brotherhood and learn how to deal with different problems that occur in our lives. When we do manual work, we always have fun together and enjoy sharing the different experiences that each of us has. From these experiences we will be growing something different in our life, particularly as we learn how to support one another in this community.



(above) Ruben taking up the 'frame' for some feedback during Group Accompaniment.

(Left) A new card game introduced by Br Réal called Skip-Bo. It's quite a hit!

(Below) Our new Table Tennis table!

(Below left) Presentation in Sr Catherine's English class.

