RESPONSE TO OUR QUESTIONNAIRE

We want to thank those who responded to our questionnaire regarding the bulletin. In general, it seems that people are happy to receive it. Some requested that the format be in one column rather than the usual two columns. Hence the changed format for this issue. Some would like stories from the hub and mission communities. The cluster in Zambia have their own bulletin which I hope you are also receiving. It can be found at www.journeying2gether.org/bulletins/. Overall, it is gratifying to have received many affirmations for the bulletin, and this motivates us to keep it going!

PLACEMENT EXPERIENCES

The brothers who have volunteered for the second Orientation Program have been through a period of preparation in their home provinces. Here follow their experiences in Kenya, Zambia, India and Philippines.

KENYA

The Brothers from the East Africa District had a varied selection of ministries during their placement. Melkizedeck Buteyo and Edwin Wekullo worked with some former pupils of Ruben School to carry out research on the effectiveness of the school in the lives of former students from Ruben Primary. They interviewed several hundred former students and summarized data in a report to the Centre Director. It was “community engagement after the event”, assessing what impact Ruben’s educational programme has had on students.

Allan Shunza, Kelvin Ouma and Isaac Odongo worked under the umbrella of Mukuru Promotion Centre, a large outreach centre, run by the Sisters of Mercy in Mukuru slum, Nairobi. They did field work with the school social worker, visiting families and assessing needs, and also worked in a drop-in centre for children at risk. Community engagement with these children is challenging but rewarding once you win their trust.
Silverio Mukinisu was working with the Edmund Rice Karibu group, which is the arm of Edmund Rice Camps in Nairobi. He was filling the large shoes of Br. Peter Cole, providing Edmund Rice vision, guidance and hands-on support for the local youth who run the ministry. Wycliffe Maisiba was on his thirty-day retreat in preparation for his Final Profession.

For each of the Brothers this experience of local involvement was a great preparation for the orientation program ahead, especially in focusing them on the methodology of community engagement. It has been an enriching experience for each of the Brothers, and concluded with a short debrief and a retreat to enable them to identify their learnings from the time, and then to pray over the meaning of these months for their vocational journeys.

**ZAMBIA**

Our brothers who are on their community/ministry experience here in Kabwe have been very much engaged in the work at the Missionary Sisters of Charity centre since the beginning of the year. The centre comprises a community school at primary level, an orphanage and a hospice for both male and female patients.

The brothers spend most of their day teaching in the community school, alongside the teachers. The school has 266 pupils enrolled and these come from very poor and deprived backgrounds. Most of their families have no bread winner and so accessing basic essentials is a major problem for these families. At the mid-morning break the brothers help with the serving of food to the pupils and this is an important part of the school day for all concerned.

The brothers enjoy having time with the orphans, even the very young ones and admire very much the love, patience and kindness of the Sisters towards these vulnerable children, who range in age from infants to teenagers. Spending time listening to and comforting the patients in the hospice is another aspect of the brothers’ ministry. This enables the brothers to come close to the reality of suffering and sickness which is so much part of the lives of many families in the compounds of Kabwe.

Our community life here is never dull as we are ten in number and we get along very well together. The signs and sounds of youthful exuberance are all around us. The brothers look after
the community garden and also the chickens which we raise for our own use. Both of these projects are flourishing at the moment. Our regular community meetings help us to gel together as do our daily prayer and sharing.

**INDIA**

Over the last 8 weeks we have had various life-enriching experiences in the villages of Assam and Meghalaya. Sent two by two, we stayed in the houses of certain families in these villages. Our primary objective was to observe their way of life, to see what nourished their lives, what gave them meaning and also study their customs and rituals, and to learn from their relationship with God.

So during our stay with them, we chatted with them, visited houses, prayed for families and listened to the many stories that people shared with us. There were times when we were asked to help in the local schools and we either taught the children or ran training programs for the teachers.

We were in awe of their quest for life, of the manner they coped with the ravages of nature, of their Job-like surrender in the midst of suffering. Their hospitality was over-whelming, and there seemed to be an open-house attitude prevalent in most of the families we visited.

In our observations and interactions with the people, we noted that happiness went beyond possessions and circumstances, thus proving it was “an inside job”! It was obvious that the poor are the most vulnerable to being exploited and shows why they are more dependent on God than those that are self-sufficient. We saw that vested interests prevent the poor from improving their lot, and yet, like all people, the poor like their dignity respected. We agreed ultimately, that basic formal schooling was fundamental to human development. The Immersion Experience thus furthered the rationale for OWITF, and helped us in bonding together for our Journeying Together.

**PHILIPPINES**

The community of Dennis, Ian, Moy and Theo spent the time from 9th January until recently in placements with people made poor in Cebu City. The placements were:

Dumpsite Dwellers – visits to three major rubbish dumps around Cebu City and the communities living on or beside them.
Resettlement Villages – visits to three major resettlement villages for people formerly living in urban slums and as scavengers on dumpsites.

Urban Slum Dwellers – visits (by day and night) to slums around Cebu City.

Street Children – connections through mobile schools, drop-in centres and feeding programmes;

Women working as Prostitutes – visits to sites (streets & bars) in and around Cebu City and Mandaue City where the women worked.

Prisoners – visits to two jails in Cebu City and Mandaue City, with young men (14 – 17 years) and women prisoners.

Badjao Community – visits to an indigenous community living on the margins of Cebu City

Drug Addicts – sharing sessions of Narcotics Anonymous with young men in jail, young women, and female prisoners.

Women recovering from exploitation – visits to three centres of a staged rehabilitation for girls and women, trafficked, drug addicted, and/or prostituted.

Placements were supervised by Divine Word Missionary (SVD) Community, JPIC-IDC (run by SVDs), Presentation Sisters, Missionary Sisters Servants of the Hoy Spirit and Sisters of the Good Samaritan.

TST TIME TOGETHER

Greetings from Shillong where the TST has gathered for our month together. The only shadow on this bright moment is the fact that Chris Meehl has not been able to get a visa for India.

We have always felt the value of having good facilitation to help us live a quality of community life that is vibrant and cohesive. So, we engaged Fr M.C. Abraham, a Holy Cross Priest to work with us for four days of intensive community building. These were blessed days where we deepened our awareness of our interpersonal dynamics and learned especially to reflect on the impact that each of us has on one another, often unconsciously causing some hurt or misunderstanding. What Fr Abraham wisely pointed out was that we cannot avoid hurting one another as we live together, but we can certainly avoid causing each other damage.

As part of our month together, we had immersion experiences where each of us entered into
the lives of people who are disadvantaged. Some of us went with the Bethany Society to visit families of blind children and some of us went to Mercy Home, an elderly care home to greet the residents. This immersion was a moment of real grace for us where the image of God was clearly seen in the faces of people.

“There is more to life than work”. How true! We decided to take a free day on 13th March and go to Cherrapunji, a must see tourist spot. Cherrapunji has an average rainfall of 12,000 mm per year, but on that day we had glorious sunshine which made the day a lovely moment of being together for the fun of it! Then last week we did an overnight excursion to Dawki, a town on the border with Bangladesh. Nothing more refreshing than being immersed in the splendour of nature.

We have been very happy to have the companionship of the College and the Scholasticate communities here at St Edmunds. The celebration of St. Patrick’s Day was a highlight. The Scholasticate community organized a series of party games all of which contributed to the enjoyable evening. We had a great evening of Brotherhood.

THE ORIENTATION PROGRAM

The Program begins on April 22nd and ends on July 30th. It takes place at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre 2 km from St. Edmund’s Campus in the forest and hills which circle the city.

The Program covers the essential elements of our OWITF Spirituality and Community Living through workshops and group work, with plenty of time for prayer and reflection. The aim is to equip each Brother to live in a new community within the Zambia or India Clusters. The input persons are mostly from India and include Alba Rodrigues, Andrew Pinto, Dayabai, Diarmuid O’Murchu, Dudley Mendonca, Gerard Alvares, Gloria Burett, Jerry Rosario, MC Abraham, Philip Pinto and Tony Hempenstall. Aurea Dias has generously accepted to be part of the OP Team which includes Sunil Britto and David Gibson.

We are expecting between twenty and thirty Brothers to participate and look forward to welcoming each of them to Shillong very soon. We ask the whole Edmund Rice movement around the world to remember and pray for the Brothers during this special time. You will be able to follow the events via the website www.journeying2gether.org.
LOCATION SEARCH IN INDIA CONTINUES

Members of the PLT and TST have been engaged in the last few months in the setting up of the new Cluster. The spot selected for the Hub community is a beautiful plot, along a stream in the village of Jyntru, 9 kms from Nongpoh town, on the way to Shillong. This place is about 100 metres in from the highway.

The first two mission communities will be situated in Patharlyndan and in Umtyr-khang. They are each within 3 hours driving distance from Jyntru.

Designs for the houses for the Hub and Mission Community are being finalised and Ruvan is supervising all the work on the ground in each of these locations. We are hoping to have the houses ready in time for the new communities to move into them in December 2017.

Ruvan with the help of Br. Lurshai Nongsiang have been working with the local people in these villages using the community engagement approach right from day one. They have had a remarkably warm welcome with large numbers turning up to the meetings to plan the location of the Brothers house and organise the local men to provide materials and labour. The land is Community land, donated by the Headman and his council, for Brothers’ use as long as they stay there.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF JOURNEYING TOGETHER

The recent publication on The Spirituality of Journeying Together includes over thirty articles on various aspects of Journeying Together. It was very gratifying to receive so many contributions from Brothers in various Provinces, all adding to a rich treasure of material for reflection, and use as discussion starters in community and inter-community meetings. The book can be purchased on Amazon in hard copy book or as an eBook on Kindle. I’m sure that the Brothers who wrote the articles would welcome any feedback on their article, and such dialogue might eventually lead to volume II. This writing forms a valuable addition to the existing Journeying To- gether Strategy Document, which understandably focuses on mission.