Since the last bulletin a lot has happened and probably this bulletin will not fully capture all the events in detail. However, we hope that the news we share with you will show how alive the project Journeying Together is, while recognizing the challenges that continue to face us.

ADVANCED SKILLS TRAINING

Following the Orientation Program, the Brothers went for a two-week break, before returning to Shillong to begin the Advanced Skills Training Program (AST). The program was held at the Salesian Sisters Centre where the Brothers were made most welcome. The Sisters soon tuned into the Brother’s wavelength and have become most supportive of Journeying Together.

The AST prepares Brothers to engage with people at the margins of society. It is an experiential learning process in Community Engagement. The Brothers learned the skills now needed in order to work in any Edmund Rice ministry at the margins.

This was the first ever AST and both participants and TST were very pleased with the way it went. The overwhelming message from the participants was that they felt well prepared to venture forth to their new communities in India, Zambia and the Philippines in coming months. Many expressed a new found confidence in themselves as Brothers in mission.

The workshops on Project Cycle Management and Community Engagement were rated as the most significant by the participants. The other components including Advocacy, Child Protection, Journeying Together mission approach and Financial Management, were all appreciated as relevant and necessary for a Brother in mission. The week spent with a family in a village in the West Khasi Hills was universally regarded as a transforming experience by the participants. The overwhelming hospitality of the people touched the Brothers and gave them a good feel for life in a rural setting.

BUILDING THE COMMUNITY HOUSES IN MEghalaya

The houses for the three new communities are still under construction. The rains in Meghalaya continue to disrupt the progress and require a lot of flexibility on the part of the workers. The contractors, workers and the village people have shown great support over these few months to make things happen on the ground. Our engagement with the local community has already be-
gun as we continue to consult them at every stage. As the time for the Brothers’ arrival into the villages gets closer, there is a great sense of excitement. The Hub Community house in Jyntru will be blessed on 10th December 2017. For this event, the village people are already beginning to prepare a welcome for the Brothers.

MISSIONING CEREMONY

The final event of the AST was the Missioning Ceremony on 8th October at the Lurshai Centre, Shillong. The unpredictable weather kept everyone guessing until the last minute but the rain clouds passed and we were able to sing “On Eagle’s Wings” in the sunshine outside. We did indeed feel carried on wings throughout the two programs so that now there is a group of Brothers ready to Journey Together.

Sunil Britto explained the theme, “Journeying Together in God, to God”. Following that three participants Con Dsouza, Allan Mwashi and Arvind Beck shared very honestly on their personal experience of the preparation program. Then all participants were given a local Khasi shoulder bag, symbolizing travelling lightly on the journey ahead, and a Khasi shawl, symbolizing the all-embracing love of God which wraps around each of us. Gospel quotes were shared with everyone as wisdom for all our journeys ahead. Finally hands were laid on the eighteen Brothers with an invocation of the Holy Spirit.

The participants were most encouraged to see such a large crowd gather ... Religious from many Congregations, friends of the Brothers, former Brothers, the Brothers from local communities, as well as the Salesian Sisters of Lurshai Centre. They had all contributed in different ways to a successful AST.

The participants departed the next day ... one for Cebu, Philippines; five for Kenya en route to the Zambia Cluster and twelve heading to a Khasi language course, before moving to their new village communities in January.

The whole group had tried hard to journey together ... following the wisdom of the African proverb: “If you want to travel fast, then go alone. If you want to travel far, then go together”.
THE LANGUAGE COURSE

Twelve Brothers reassembled at the Lurshai Centre, Shillong on a bright sunny morning to begin their two month Khasi language and culture program.

The Brothers were very fortunate to have enlisted the services of Kong Alma Syiem as their Khasi language teacher. Kong Alma is well acquainted with the Christian Brothers as she is a graduate of St Edmund’s College. Since then she has devoted her life to teaching at Loreto School Primary School, Shillong until her retirement. She has written Khasi language primers for primary age children which have proved very popular with the student Brothers!

As well as learning the basics of Khasi grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation the Brothers also have the support of some Salesian Sisters and another primary teacher as tutors in the afternoons. These sessions revise the mornings’ learnings and provide opportunity for some conversational Khasi. Other days the Brothers learn and practice Khasi prayers and hymns as well as learn how to lead prayer services in the villages. One day a week Dr. Desmond Kharmawphlang from the North East Hill University, Shillong outlines a key feature of Khasi culture.

This intensive language and culture program is a key element of Journeying Together. When a Brother can understand, and speak the language of the people it makes a fundamental difference to the level of engagement he will be able to manage. It enables him to participate much more in the life of the local community, including their religious services, meetings and social events. This in turn helps him to settle into that community and feel part of it more quickly.

MEANWHILE IN TAMALE, GHANA

The third Orientation Program is being run to cater for those Brothers who had been unable to obtain a visa for the second OP in India. Having the 3rd OP so closely following the second one has been a challenge. A lot of preparation work was needed in setting
up the Paul Noonan Formation Centre in Tamale. Were it not for the trojan work done by Br Patrick Nuanah, a member of the Brothers’ community in Tamale, the program would not have started on time.

The team of Sr Brigit Mathew PBVM, Chris Meehl, David Gibson and Donal Kirk prepared the program and when the twelve Brothers arrived from Sierra Leone, Kenya, Tanzania and Oceania, all was ready to launch the OP. The twelve participating Brothers are: Ackim Simasiku, Alysious Sefoi, Amandi Mboya, Bill Colford, Bonaventure Muunga, Dominic Kargbo, Emmanuel Allieu, Joseph Kapalua, Leo Liyungu, Peter Malama, Clifford Scott and Ian Robertson.

THE OPENING CEREMONY

The opening ceremony took place in Tamale, Ghana on Sunday 17 September. It was a moving and significant event in the life of the Congregation. We were delighted to have many Brothers, religious and friends including Archbishop emeritus Gregory Kpienbaya and the Vicar of the diocese, Fr Matthew Yetiere joining the celebration. It was a real blessing to have a representative of the District Leadership Team from Sierra Leone, Br Andrew Turay, who is visiting the Brothers’ Choggu community.

The ceremony began with dancing from the students of Kanvili Catholic Secondary School. This was followed by the ritual of the calabash where the invited participants were offered water as a way of welcoming the stranger. The choir from the parish of Saints Peter and Paul provided beautiful singing during the ceremony.

Br Chris Meehl gave an inspiring reflection on the significance of Journeying Together. Then each participant expressed their readiness to enter into the process when they were invited to form the inner circle where they brought a lighted candle to affirm their commitment. Then the invited guests extended their right hand in blessing over the participant Brothers. The choir ended with the song, ‘We are Companions on the Journey’. Light refreshments followed and people mingled and got to know each other.

TST PRESENCE IN ZAMBIA

The TST has continued to engage with the Zambian Cluster, the Hub and the South Central District Leadership Team (SC DLT) with regular visits and meetings. The recent combined meet-
ing, facilitated by Michael Burke, of the SC DLT, the Hub community and Chris Meehl in August looked at the Roles and Responsibilities of the SC DLT and the Hub. The work is in preparation for when the SCDLT takes over the governing role of the Zambian Cluster in November this year. The complementary roles of SCDLT and the Hub in relation to the Cluster communities have been developed over past months. This regular dialogue has steadily built a collaborative relationship between the two teams and goes a long way to ensure the future viability of the Cluster. Both the SC DLT and the Hub have made it clear that they want the TST to continue to be involved in the Cluster after November.

The Cluster recently received pleasing news that its application to Misean Cara has been approved. This will allow the Mission Communities to move ahead with their local communities in developing new projects. They are already working in a variety of ways including a Youth Project with fish farming, school coaching classes for drop outs, visits to the elderly, single mothers/widows, physically challenged, orphaned children and the chronically ill, and agricultural inputs to young women. Planned is a Youth HIV prevention/Life Skills project. The Brothers are engaging with volunteers and local “Champions” to implement these projects.

THE STORY OF JOURNEYING TOGETHER

David Gibson has written The Story of Journeying Together which charts the development of this project from the earliest inspirations of previous Congregation Chapters to the present day. The book reflects how the Congregation has continued to seek ways of responding to the needs of our time in creative and challenging ways. Many of those involved in this project over the years are interviewed and their opinions contribute greatly to the story of this Congregation venture. The book is available on Amazon.co.uk or other Amazon sites.