

## **Arts, Humanism and Spirituality and the Consolidation of the Pastoral Youth Ministry**

A past twelve years saw the gradual unfolding of the pastoral youth ministry of the ODN Sisters in the Philippines. Within this period, several youth groups started to emerge in the places where we are present.

**Lestonnac Peer Circle (LPC).** LPC was born out of a need to respond to queries from university students about religious life. Mostly active members of Catholic Center Campus Ministry (CCCM), Iligan City, these young girls wanted to know how to discover one's call to religious life and what to do with it. Coming from outside the city and many from public high schools, they had very limited experience of direct contact and exposure to a sister's life. Being in the CCCM was a firsthand close and friendly encounter with women religious. Equally intriguing for them was to find the sisters not wearing the habit, something that was unusual for them. The curiosity and genuine interest of these young ladies, set against the workload of being a pastoral staff of CCCM, made it difficult to be addressed on an individual basis.

On the other hand, apart from their desire to know more about the ODN Sisters and their life, there was also an evident need for formation and accompaniment with respect to enhancing deeper self-awareness, developing self-confidence and nurturing a sense of belonging to a group that nourishes and supports their spiritual or prayer life. It took some time to discern how to respond to these concerns and eventually forge a group of young people in CCCM identified with the Company of Mary. Another matter was what would be the name of this group that would aptly capture what it sought to be? Thus began the process of individually sharing with the prospective members the desire for such a group under the care of the sisters. It was a welcome idea and several were eager to also help discern its appropriate name.

On July 2002, more than a dozen young girls met for the first time to lay the experiential foundation of Lestonnac Peer Circle. LESTONNAC affirms the identification of the group with the ODN Sisters and their spirituality. PEER signifies the nature of its membership as belonging to the same age bracket. CIRCLE is used to highlight the objective of providing a space where everyone is welcome in friendship and equality.

**Lestonnac Flame Circle - Xavier University (LFC – XU).** In 2004, the Campus Ministries of Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan offered to the religious partners and collaborators the chance to come up with auxiliary organization that would form part of Xavier University - United Religious Organization. It was an opportune time for the sisters to start a group of our own in this Jesuit institution. Thus, LFC was born. The strength of this group that has been sustained up to the present is its tutorial apostolate. It continues to attract members especially education students because of the opportunity to practice teaching in an urban poor setting long before they become professional teachers themselves.

**Lestonnac Youth for Better Future (LYBF).** Originally just Youth for Better Future, this group started in 2005 and is housed in Niña Maria Learning Center (NMLC) in Tambo, Macasandig, Cagayan de Oro City and is mainly composed of NMLC scholars. It started with

voluntary membership but on its third year, the older members saw the benefit of having it part of the counterpart activity for youth scholars.

Unlike the first two Lestonnac groups, LYBF is special in its being a community-based youth organization. The kind of formation they receive trickle down to the local community and not just the NMLC family. They became actively involved in the local Church community and even in socio-cultural activities of barangay Macasandig. As the first captive group to experience the AHS pedagogy, the initial steps taken to integrate Art, Humanism and Spirituality in their formation became a core way of proceeding imbibed by some alumni who are now reaching out to a relocation community of Typhoon Sendong survivors in an attempt to build community among the youth in the area. It is their way of paying forward and they hope that the youth survivors could eventually do something concrete in their new-found community.

**Lestonnac Flame Circle - Capitol University (LFC - CU).** October 2012 saw the birthing of LFC – Capitol University, a private, non-sectarian university within Cagayan de Oro City. The founding moderator was a directee in the Retreat in Daily Life Program. He saw the thirst for things spiritual among a group of his students. October being a month of the Holy Rosary, he offered to journey with them in the daily recitation of the Rosary. This nurtured in them the desire to provide continuity to the experience. On November 30, 2012, the sisters scheduled a whole-day youth camp activity, which was an encounter of all young people under their pastoral care. It was to be held in Lestonnac Youth Center. The CU students were invited to join to see whether they could integrate themselves to the group. It turned out very positively. There was a strong affirmation of their desire to belong to the ODN youth. Thus, LFC - CU began.

The coming of LFC - CU was a validation of the need to come up with a structure to encompass all ODN youth groups and alumni. There is no ODN presence in Capitol University but a Lestonnac flame is there burning. The same glitter can be perceived among some members who would be finishing university studies. In 2011, some members of LFC - XU started asking what would become of them once they finish their university studies. Would that mean an end to their belonging to the Lestonnac circle? It was a valid question and an invitation for discernment.

**Lestonnac Youth Philippine Network (LYPN).** Last May 3 - 5, 2013 ODN Asia held its first ever province-wide workshop seminar on Arts, Humanism and Spirituality. Sisters from Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines came and they were joined by the representatives of all Lestonnac groups in the Philippines. The whole activity became a common formation experience for both the sisters and the young people. A significant output of the gathering was the creation of the Lestonnac Youth Philippine Network. It consolidated their collective desire to journey and grow together as young people nurtured and nourished by the ODN charism and spirituality. Likewise, having established the network has made them feel more empowered to be able to reach out to others and assured of being accompanied on the process.

**Art, Humanism and Spirituality Asian Encounter 2014.** The creation of LYPN

became the forerunner of the holding of AHS Asian Encounter held last August 29-31, 2014 at Lestonnac Youth Center, Cagayan de Oro City with a total of 75 participants, 14 of whom are ODN sisters. Highlights of the activity included the input on the theological and scriptural foundations of AHS; session on the deepening of one's faith as a young person in the context of the present globalized culture, art workshops, and a visit to a relocation community of Sendong survivors in a mountainous barrio of Cagayan de Oro City called Indahag. The participants witnessed an ExpresArte Program which showcased the output of the art workshops given by the Lestonnac Animators during the four-day AHE Mission Camp last May 10-13, 2014. It was followed by a visitation to the family of the children. With what they had seen, heard and touched, the visit to this community of Sendong survivors served as an eye-opener to many dimensions in life and a first-hand experience for the youth participants and the sisters to witness how AHS can be truly a tool for personal empowerment and community building. At the end of the encounter, some participants wrote about AHS Encounter 2014: "...made the youth come closer to God despite the differences in culture, language, nationality, etc."; "...opened me to the reality that God is always thirsting for my life." A participant noted that the most helpful moment in the three-day activity was the experience in Indahag. "It somehow summarized the whole encounter."

Arts, Humanism and Spirituality as a path of evangelization with and for the young people has truly arisen among the ODN youth in the Philippines a real "search for reason to live, to believe, to hope and to make commitment".

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