

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HISTORICAL EXHIBITION IN MIYAZAKI

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Introduction

My talk is divided into two parts. First, I will talk about the course of the historical exhibition of the Caritas Sisters of Jesus. Most of our members are of the second generation and who therefore have no longer witnessed the beginnings of our congregation. At present, we are faced with the task of keeping all our historical memories so that we could hand it down to future generations. The historical exhibition is our first and is the most valuable symbol of our congregation.

The second part of my talk is about the importance of safekeeping our historical memorabilia. I shall share with you the significant challenges encountered and what we still have to carry out in completing this symbolic representation of the Caritas Sisters of Jesus. Allow me also to share with you some of the pictures taken from the historical exhibition in Miyazaki.

I. THE HISTORICAL EXHIBITION HALL OF THE CARITAS SISTERS OF JESUS

1. The process of setting-up the exhibition

The Caritas Sisters of Jesus was founded in 1937, and as a footnote, we recently celebrated our 75th anniversary in our birth place, Miyazaki, Japan during the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on 10 June 2012. Ahead of our anniversary, the historical exhibition hall was opened on 23 December 2011. It was intended to be the edifice of the congregation where people who visit could reflect on our journey from the time of our foundation until our present apostolic services.

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As a matter of fact, the building of the exhibition hall has long been a dream since the establishment of the Japan Province in 1999¹. I will go through the process, from the circular letter of the Japan Province, the Province Bulletin, the circular letter of the general councillors and the official report of the General Chapter.

2. The House of Spirituality Project

The congregation of the Caritas Sisters of Jesus was founded in Japan and approved by the Holy See with pontifical right granted in 1998. Subsequently, the General House and Japan Province were separated and as a result the Japan Province was established on 24 March 1999. Formerly, the General House in Tokyo was the center of all Caritas houses, thus overseas missionaries like us were sent from there.

Though the General House was moved to Rome in 2008, there were joint meetings frequently held between the General Council and the Japan Provincial Council, particularly from the time of the establishment of the Japan Province until the 12th General Chapter in 2004. The issue often discussed during the meetings was the “Caritas no sono” (Caritas Garden) master plan².

The “Caritas no sono” was the grand plan for an overall reconstruction of five institutions, namely: (i) the Nursing Home for the Aged; (ii) Children’s House; (iii) Kindergarten; (iv) Nursery; and (v) Baby’s Home. This was to make the “Caritas no sono” meaningful as the birthplace of the congregation. The main aim of its construction was to build a “lifelong formation house” (1999)³ or a “House of Spirituality” (2001)⁴. The idea came from the desire of our sisters to have a lifelong formation which was the theme of the origin of our congregation.

During the 12th General Chapter discussion progressed on building the House of Spirituality as a place where sisters from different provinces from different countries may gather and study the spirituality of the congregation through spiritual exercises and seminars. However, the decision to build the House of Spirituality was put on hold until the next General Council Meeting. Subsequently, the General Council decided to build a

¹ General Council and Japan Provincial Councils Joint Meeting (GC and JPC meeting) on 9 November 1999, *The Circle Letter*. Vol. XLII. Japan, General House 1 January 2000.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ GC and JPC meeting on 26 May 2001, *The Circle Letter*. Vol. XLV. Japan, General House 1 July 2001.

Historical Exhibition Hall instead of the House of Spirituality. With this, the implementation of the new building project was then delegated to the Japan Province⁵.

2.1. The Exhibition Hall as a project of the province

As a result of the decision of the General Council Meeting, the previous House of Spirituality project was changed to the Exhibition Hall, and from the congregation level, it was assigned to the province. In response to this development, the Japan Province planned for a temporary exhibition hall to be located at the ground and second floors of the Caritas House (which was the former Kindergarten)⁶. In addition, the Japan Province organized a “History Committee” in April 2007 to promote this project. The History Committee commenced to plan on how to gather information for the “Caritas no sono” and for the exhibition, of which preparations involved the collection of testimonies and historical calendars. Furthermore, the committee made a handbook which gave a brief explanation of the home ground of the congregation. The committee likewise improved and refurbished the temporary area provided for the historical exhibition⁷.

In the same year, after the celebration of our congregation’s 70th foundation, the Japan Provincial Council Meeting decided to carry out more exhibitions to be conducted in Tokyo and Miyazaki under the three member councillors. The purpose of the exhibition in Miyazaki was to introduce the history of the congregation showcasing a collection of artefacts that define our humble beginnings while the exhibition in Tokyo was to show the historical transition of the congregation.

3. The Historical Exhibition and the House of Lourdes

Prior to the Miyazaki Exhibition Hall, the historical exhibition near the Tokyo archives of the General House was opened on 24 May 2010. It contained some of the files and documents gathered from the time the History Committee started its work in 2007, a summary of the foundation’s history based on testimonies and copies of some important documents together with many pictures. Moreover, there were also some related exhibits of the first

⁵ The report of 6 years by Mother General, *14th Official Report of the General Chapter*. Japan 2010, p. 124.

⁶ GC and JPC meeting on 25 June 2005, *2nd Provincial Bulletin*. Japan, Caritas House 20 July 2005.

⁷ 91th Provincial meeting on 3-5 May 2007 on the birthplace of the congregation, *13th Provincial Bulletin*. Japan 31 May 2007.

Mother General, Sr. Maria Osafune, and some books published by the congregation (i.e., commemorative publications and albums).

The committee also took care of the House of Lourdes where Fr. Antonio Cavoli SDB lived his last 10 years in Japan. This is located in the premises of the provincial house⁸. It was also properly restructured by the committee as Fr. Antonio Cavoli's Memorial Hall.

4. Preparation of the Exhibition Hall in Miyazaki

We could not help but be more careful in setting up the exhibition in Miyazaki since it is about the beginnings of the congregation⁹. Aside from the exhibition hall itself, three of the five convents in "Caritas no sono" were combined into one, which had the concept of the Mother House wherein any member who wished to visit the congregation's roots were welcomed. For this purpose, the convent in Miyazaki comprised a seminar room, a reception area and an exhibition hall.

Finally, the Miyazaki house was inaugurated in December 2010. It was also about this time when the preparations for the exhibition hall were in full swing. However, reassignments took place and there was a change of mother provincial, provincial councillors and members of the History Committee as well. The second Mother Provincial, Sr. Aloysa Hashiguchi, resigned from office by the end of March 2011. She was succeeded by the third Mother Provincial, Sr. Monica Kawabata, who was a former vice provincial. Openly, Sr. Monica Kawabata assigned Sr. Metodía Kawazoe, then current Vice Provincial, to prepare and continue this work with some members in time for the 75th foundation the following year.

5. Opening of the Historical Exhibition Hall in Miyazaki

The new members of the History Committee used the materials drawn together by the former members and proceeded to prepare for the interior finishing and display of the exhibition with the assistance of some cooperators. The details of the interior were designed by our cooperators while the data presented were managed by the committee. The interior was completed and blessed on 23 December 2011. However at that point, it was only the display of items that was finished. The final completion came in June 2012 and since then the exhi-

⁸ 90th JPC meeting on 2-3 April 2007. *Ibid.*

⁹ In a circular letter, the committee discussed the selection of members for the conceptualization of the exhibition hall and it needed to have some external professional support for the interior design and technique of the display. Cf 115th JPC meeting on 3 June 2009, 26th *Provincial Bulletin*. 31 July 2009.

bition hall has welcomed visitors from Japan and even overseas to view our congregation's history.

Currently, one of our sisters who had been involved in this project takes care of the exhibition hall and narrates the history of charity to whoever visits this exhibition.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF FILING HISTORICAL MATERIALS

1. Congregation level¹⁰

As previously mentioned, the Caritas Sisters of Jesus became a congregation with pontifical right after our 60th foundation and was separated from being the General House to the Japan Provincial House. It was at this time when we had to shift from local management to global management. This event made us recognize our charism and spirituality as it is being lived in more than 10 countries and this common understanding was given emphasis. This issue came up for discussion during the 11th General Chapter in 1998. After which, some members were directly assigned in the archives of the General House in order to work on cataloguing, filing and data documentation of important references. At that time when Sr. Agrippina Kashirajima was the Mother General as well as with the current, Mother General, Sr. Apollinaris Shimura, young sisters were sent to Rome to study "Spirituality", "Missiology", and "Consecrated life" considering too that many historical materials were written in Italian and Latin. As a result of this effort, delegates from provinces and vice-provinces participated in seminars such as the "Sacred Heart of Jesus Korea and Japan Joint Seminar" held in Korea in 2002 and the "Charisma Study" held in Japan with the guidance of the Salesian, Fr. Mariano Midali SDB in 2006.

With the revisions to the constitution and regulations together with the study on charism and spirituality since the 12th General Chapter, we realized the need for a more objective and critical study, thus we asked for the assistance of historians who were not members of the congregation (i.e., Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB and Fr. Mario Midali, 2008). Particularly, the study of Fr. Antonio Cavoli SDB done by Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB was an immense contribution to the historical study of our congregation and to the study of its foundation and early constitution.

Moreover, Sr. Apollinaris Shimura, current Mother General, formed a "Historical Study Team" in 2010 which intended to study and work on the history of the congregation, particularly before and after its foundation, under the supervision of a historian. The team held regular meetings with a historian several times in a year and it is the same team that supervised the writing of records, such as the historical summary and calendar used for the exhibition in Miyazaki.

It is in this way that the collection and filing of historical materials started. Through the congregation and even from the time of Kyugoin (Hospise) which is its predecessor institution, we have kept record, collected and filed as much materials of historical relevance. We were able to offer historical materials that enabled the study of our history and spirituality. These made clear connections to parts of our history that first appeared to be abstract and made the congregation's history founded on historical evidence. This then gave meaning to our painstaking efforts of gathering and collecting data, putting together the pieces of our past.

2. Situation of the Japan Province

In 2007, the History Committee began the study on the provincial level with six members, one as a full time member and the rest were staff. The plan was made for the collection of information and materials for the “Caritas no sono”. The committee had to trace the footsteps of the first Salesian missionaries in Japan when they arrived at the port of Moji to Miyazaki in 1926. They had to gather proofs of the surrounding area with a map of the Tano convent which was the first branch of our congregation. This was also because the committee produced a guidebook which explained the details about the home grounds of our congregation. Furthermore, the committee worked on collecting testimonies, identifying places and filing countless numbers of pictures. These proofs are now uploaded in the congregation's website.

In 2008 when Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB was at the General House in Japan we asked him to give a talk about the “Archives”. Thus, most members of the Japan Province had the opportunity to learn about the importance of archiving and its ecclesial Salesian meaning. Fr. Impelido also visited the conserved materials of the congregation.

The History Committee opened the historical exhibition in Tokyo on 24 May 2010. Afterwards, key members of the committee were transferred and the number of members was reduced from six to four. Three of them are new and not full time members. Only these four members made up the committee that prepared for the exhibition in Miyazaki and also took care of the exhibition in Tokyo. The History Committee was dissolved through the Provincial Chapter in May 2013 in as much as the exhibition in Miyazaki was finally completed¹¹.

¹⁰ The Report of 6 years by Mother General, *The Official Report of the 14th General Chapter*. 2010, pp. 116-129.

¹¹ One of the main purposes of the History Committee was to prepare for the historical exhibition. Cf Part I 2. The House of Spirituality Project.

3. The present task of the Japan Province

3.1. *Validation and credibility of historical materials and documents*

All documents gathered by the History Committee are filed and stored. These documents are all in large scale, especially the early pictures given by the old sisters with captions indicating the name and time when the picture was taken. Other pictures from the provincial house were also added with details specified. However, no one person could certify the authenticity of each and every material gathered. Nevertheless, we needed to continue filing the materials even as we found some pictures having no information or others with the wrong information on it. Thus, when we chose the materials for the exhibition, we carefully checked on its genuineness.

3.2. *Testimonies*

The History Committee also holds a record of the foundation's story with testimonies from its senior sisters until the year 2010. The contents of this record are not yet open to the public. As the members who shared their story were getting old, we would sometimes note a time gap or an exaggerated explanation added to their story. Thus, in order to accurately document the testimonies and verify places and dates mentioned, we started to record on video their actual testimonies.

3.3. *Archives*

Finally, I would like to mention about our archives in the provincial house. As the archives area of the province does not have enough space, there are currently two storage spaces, one storage space is for personal data and some important documents of the province and the other is for the convent's data. Since the storage for personal data and some important documents could only be accessed by the provincial secretary, I could not say much about its details, though I am certain that it occupies just a very small space.

At present, we also need to have a system of documenting data from videos and tapes. I am aware that the General House archives is gradually doing the conversion of data, however, data from the Provincial House is almost untouched. We need to convert and preserve events recorded in VHS and tapes. The reason why they are still untouched is because though the visual records are too many, there is still need to initially sort them according to their importance. Pictures as well of the primary congregation are almost completely filed, but there are just numerous pictures left behind without any data specified. Moreover, we also need to convert film and pictures into digital format.

The task of the archives committee is to make all submitted documents from every community slim in data. Around 40 communities and 450 members' data could not be managed single-handedly.

Another issue of the province is the preservation of the House of Lourdes which is a typical Japanese wooden house built more than 50 years ago. It was once damaged by termites and though it was able to endure a magnitude 5.0 earthquake from East Japan, there is no guarantee that it will still be able to withstand another tremor. Furthermore, in as much as the historical exhibition in Tokyo also needs to be improved, we are thinking of another good way of preserving its building together with the House of Lourdes and the archives in the future.

Conclusion

I transferred community from the Philippines to the provincial house in Japan right at the time when people were affected by the impact of the East Japan earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear plant in April 2011. At that period, the mother provincial, council members and office members had changed and I was assigned in the office. It was a big difference from 10 years ago when I left Japan. I had been surrounded with vigorous voices of students in the Philippines, but then I stayed in the quiet office. I had a little culture shock from being in a different atmosphere and it took me a while to adjust in my own country.

Though I took my major in history at university, I had no idea how to handle and organize a historical exhibition. Without knowledge and lack of time for study, I started to prepare for the exhibition. With the support of the General Secretary who was also in charge of the archives and the "historical study team", the preparations for the historical exhibition hall in Miyazaki was a successful one for the Japan Province.

To open the historical exhibition is to show our historical background to the public; it is to have a sense of oneness with society and is not to be seen as a selfish religious way of looking at our history as we objectively distinguish specific persons or events. This being the founding of our congregation was not only from and for the Salesians, and our work as sisters, but it is also with the support of the Miyazaki people. The beginnings of Kyugoin, the previous name of "Caritas no sono", was actually the work of the Miyazaki Parish. Fr. Antonio Cavoli SDB, who was then the parish priest together with the parishioners built the Kyugoin House. When Kyugoin ran out of funds to feed the people, they received donations from anonymous benefactors. I think that it was important for us that during the preparations for the exhibition we kept in mind the fact that our congregation was born by several mixed elements, like the church, the congregation and the local society.

I was involved in the preparations of the historical exhibition for 2 years and realized the importance of this work. As far as the roots of our congregation in

Japan, we have an obligation to study and tell our history. We should have more sisters to study our history and not leave everything up to the care of the General House. Moreover, I hope every member feels responsible to keep every kind of record, not only the chronicle of the community, but also a personal record to leave our footsteps to the next generation.