The Celebration of the Fusion in Madagascar
August 12 – 28 2016

On the 12th of August 2016, it is with great joy that we received the decree authorizing the fusion of our two congregations. Between that date and the celebration in Madagascar on August 28, our sisters of the Red Island had only 15 days to prepare. Fortunately, the date had initially been planned also to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of 4 sisters.

These fifteen days was one long moment of preparation for the celebration on the 28th of August. Everyone and everything was mobilized, each one helping each other, living solidarity, with much joy, mixed with a little anxiety – because it was necessary that each sister had the proper "wedding garment" for the “wedding feast”. Even the sister that came from France and the other from Guinea who was there to visit her family had their new habits. We were now one congregation and no one wanted to look different.

The arrival of Sr. Charo, 17 days before the celebration was a great help for all the sewing and repairs that needed to be done, as well as to encourage the team that had worked so well. The sisters were very grateful and they have asked me to communicate their gratitude.

It was also a great joy for me to have made the trip with Sr. Jeanine BERTRAND, who was sent by Sr. Daniele and her former Council, to represent the sisters of France. Jeanine was for many years, their Superior General and eventually also was in their General Counsel and knows the sisters. They welcomed her with joy – and together, we were privileged witnesses of God's work in this future Province.

We arrived in Antananarivo on August 24 at 1:00 in the morning. It was only on the 25th that we left the capital for the city of Fianarantsoa where the regional house is. We stopped at Manandona, a community located on the way, for lunch, after a stop at the Antsirabe market to get provisions for the celebration. The second stop was Ambohimahasoa, where the celebration was to take place. This house is considered the “mother house” in Madagascar; it is the first house and one of the five houses that belong to us. We had just enough time to say goodnight and to unload the provisions, and we continued to Fianarantsoa.

We had to continue to Fianarantsoa, because I had to meet with the bishop of the diocese where we have five of the ten communities that are in the country. It was this same bishop who would preside during the celebration on the 28th of August. I also wanted to meet the sisters who have freely chosen to take another path. This recognized right to choose freely, however, marked the celebration with a tinged of sadness. Only one of them participated in the celebration. Faithful to their initial choice, they have each asked for the indul of secularization. They all returned to their respective families on the 2nd of September to wait for the response of Rome to their request.

Sr. Jeanine and I had 46 kilos each of baggage allowance, and I can assure you that we were loaded far more than the Magi. We carried with us, a good allocation of the Rule of Life and Congregational crosses, for each of the sisters, and large wooden Congregational crucifix-crosses for each house that was a gift-gesture from the Southeast Asia Province that was appreciated by all. We also brought the two volumes of the Foundation Texts for each community, and a full set of 6 volumes of Sainte Marie Eugenie’s Chapters for the Regional House. The rest will be sent by the “numerous” other occasions that lie ahead.
Upon our return to Ambohimahasoa, it was with surprise that we noticed as we came out of the Mass in the morning of August 27, that the parish priest repainted, with a purple coating, a part of the rectory as well as the parish car, to mark the occasion. He is new to the parish, but he was happy to live this Church event with the sisters whom he can rely on for the mission. He also contributed his thoughts for the liturgy to celebrate the fusion.

On that evening of the 27th, we attended a beautiful prayer vigil to prepare for the celebration the next day where each of the four jubilarians gave their testimony.

On the morning of August 28, the hill where our house is located was dotted with "beautiful violets". The long procession of sisters in lilac (pale violet) followed by the concelebrants and the altar servers in white, was a beautiful flowing “bicolor stream” to contemplate. The Christian community opened their eyes, discovering for the first time, the color of the new habit of the sisters. That words of admiration that have so far not been heard, began, first of all from among the sisters themselves.

The family of the jubilarians were represented by some twenty persons. And the fact that it was a Sunday did not prevent some fifteen priests to participate in the celebration.

The presence during the Eucharist of the three congregations of the Assumption Family (AA, PSA, and ORA) who have preceded us in this huge island was very comforting for us all. Our new sisters felt welcomed by this larger family, of which they are the "last born" in the island, but by the turn of events have become, in the words of Father Etienne, Provincial of the Assumptionists in Madagascar, the “elders” of the Assumption family.

The sisters were very touched by the presence and participation of the Provincials of Africa, in the celebration. Although Charo represented the Region of Central Africa, it was good that all the Provinces of the Assumption in Africa were likewise represented there.

We were very moved during the Eucharist, especially during the renewal of vows when each sister pronounced her name aloud into the microphone, but even more moving was the ritual of obedience. After that, each one received the cross and the Rule of Life, before returning to her seat. The celebration was well animated by a choir consisting mainly of our sisters. At the end of the Eucharist, Bishop Fulgence did not fail to note the
peaceful joy he could read on our faces, and he encouraged us to pursue the path.

After the words of thanksgiving of each other and closing the four hours of celebration, we took the time for a sumptuous lunch embellished with dances performed by the sisters, their parents and friends, until 4:30 in the afternoon. Needless to say we were very tired at the end of the day, but happy, radiant and thankful to our God.

We felt your presence and those of Saint Augustine and Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus, were very palpable.

« How good and how pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live in unity. » (Ps 133, 1)

Thank you to all of you who have accompanied us with your prayers!

Sister Martine Tapsoba

1 After Greenland, New Guinea and Borneo, Madagascar is the fourth largest island of the world. The 507,041 km² of land were once covered with green rainforest, but the slash-and-burn techniques of the Malagasy farmers, later aggravated by commercial exploitation of the rainforest has led to heavy erosion, which has exposed the laterite soil all over the island. Because of this Madagascar is now called the “Red Island”. By Sandra Evers