

# The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Presence of the Congregation of the Mission at Adamson-Ozanam University in Manila

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## **Introduction**

With various events, the Province of the Philippines celebrated the Fiftieth Anniversary of the presence of the Vincentian Community at Adamson University in Manila. The opening celebration took place in January 2014, and celebrations concluded in December, 50 years after the Congregation of the Mission signed the initial contract in December, 1964. There was a symposium to celebrate that event. During the symposium, significant events from the distinct periods of the history of the university were highlighted. Different presenters reflected on the past, the present and the future of this institution, including the author of this article, who participated in the beginning of this endeavor and who was involved in some of the discussions with regard to the implications of this new ministry for the Province. Therefore, this article will be limited to a discussion of those events related to the beginning of this ministry: that first period between the years 1964-1977.

## **Genesis of the celebration**

In 2012, there had been a celebration in Manila to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity to the Philippines. On that occasion, there was a presentation of the various apostolic activities of the Daughters and the Vincentians since the time of their arrival. On the last day, there was a brief historical summary of what today constitutes one of the principal ministries of the Congregation of the Mission in the Philippines, the University of Adamson. The commitment that the Congregation made in 1964 seemed to be an abrupt break from the traditional ministry (the formation of the clergy) that the Congregation in the Philippines had developed in such a successful manner for more than one hundred years. The preparatory commission for this celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the University felt that it would be good to explain the reason for this change and at the same time to show that this new ministry was a faithful development of the Vincentian charism.

The Province of the Congregation of the Mission in the Philippines, the members of the university faculty, and the students asked for an explanation of this change and all that this meant for the Congregation of the Mission. Father Joaquin González (Visitor of the Province of Madrid, and responsible for sending personnel to the Philippines) and Father Teodoro Barquin (a member of the Provincial Council during this time) were invited by the Rector and the Board of Directors of the University. They provided much insight as they responded to the many questions that were raised by younger confreres, members of the faculty, and many students during an Open Forum as part of the symposium.

### **New vision for the future of the Congregation of the Mission in the Philippines**

In 1958, a very significant change was made in the administration of the Province when Father Leandro Montañana was appointed Visitor. Because of the various successes he achieved as Visitor, he could be seen as one of the primary historical figures of the Congregation of the Mission in the Philippines. Today, the confreres in the Philippines realize that they are indebted to him. The historical event that the Congregation is celebrating this year is the result of his ministry. Father Montañana saw the need for a new vision and a new horizon for the future of the Congregation in that country. He also realized that for all of that to happen there was a need to make significant changes in the administration of the Province. He understood that those changes would demand much physical energy and a strong determination to confront the resistance and the objections to the proposed changes.

All of this would have to be done with prudent discretion, selecting activities and ministries that the Province should undertake. With the assistance of a new Provincial Council, Father Montañana, in light of the signs of the time, envisioned new perspectives for the future ministry of the Congregation of the Mission. At the same time, he was also aware of commitments the Province had entered into with the various Diocesan Bishops, including the formation of diocesan priests, which had always been viewed as a glorious ministry of the Congregation in the Philippines. The time, however, had come to look toward the future rather than the past.

Father Montañana, with the members of the new Council, established guidelines rooted in the Vincentian charism, guidelines that would give direction to the changes that were to be made in the administration of the Province, such as:

- Promotion of native vocations and establishing formation programs for those vocations;

- Reaching out to the lay Vincentians through the promotion of the principal branches of the Vincentian Family: the Vincentian Marian Youth Association, the AIC, the Miraculous Medal Association, and the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul;
- In accord with this new vision for the future, a focus was placed on formation of youth, initially viewed as a primary apostolate of the Congregation their seminaries and schools.

The administration of a university could be considered as an opportune moment to accept a new Provincial commitment, one in which the Congregation would be able to continue to engage in a ministry that had been begun in the schools and the seminaries. This ministry is in accord with the charism of the Congregation. The Provinces in North America, where confreres have been engaged in the ministry of higher education for quite some time, affirmed this reality.

### **Preparatory steps to acquire the University for the Congregation of the Mission**

The Adamson Family was the owner of the university; nevertheless, the buildings belonged to the Congregation of the Mission. In the 1940s, after the Japanese war, the university began to rent the buildings. The lease agreement ran out in December 1964, and as a result, the Adamson Family wanted to renew that agreement. With that purpose in mind, the Family asked for a meeting with the Congregation of the Mission and so Father Leandro Montañana represented the Province in those discussions. Father Montañana went to that meeting with a decision that had been confirmed and approved by the Provincial Council: *it was impossible to renew the lease agreement*. Two options were given to the owners of the university: leave that place and look for another site or negotiate the sale of the university; if an agreement could be reached the Congregation of the Mission was willing to buy the university. The second option, in case both parties could reach an agreement, would be a very difficult step for the Province. Father Montañana and his council would have to prove to the members of the Province that the acquisition of Adamson did not signify some type of institutional escape from the traditional ministries of the Congregation.

Since the acquisition of the university seemed to do just that, that is, seemed to break with the traditional and historical ministries of the Congregation (formation of the clergy), there was a need to clarify the continuity of the institutional apostolate in this new area of ministry, which was about to be accepted and undertaken. In a Provincial Assembly it would have to be demonstrated that the poor and the less favored members of society would have an important role in this new ministry.

Furthermore, it would have to be shown that in accepting this new ministry, the province was faithful to the Vincentian charism. Also, as the financial situation of the province was precarious, means would have to be found in order to purchase the university.

At that time, the Congregation had a plot of land that housed the provincial headquarters of the Philippines and other buildings that were leased to the university. Outside Manila, there was another plot of land where the apostolic school was located. The province had no income except that which the confreres received from religious services and its ministry in the seminary: fifty pesos a month for the rector, and twenty pesos a month for the professors. These revenues were not sufficient to cover the ordinary and necessary expenses of the province. To cover the costs of acquiring a university, other means had to be found. Fortunately, they had recourse to the provinces in the United States who generously came to their rescue. They provided a loan on very favorable conditions. The request for the acquisition of the university showed the importance of moving out into a new area of evangelization, in a direction that was distinct from anything that the Province had previously done. At that time, there were few bright prospects for continuing our traditional ministries.

The acquisition of the university included a series of conditions that had to be fulfilled. The President of the Board of Directors would be the Visitor of the Congregation of the Mission; two members of the Adamson family would have seats on the Board of Directors, which is a lifetime commitment of the Adamson family unless they resign or are removed for some legitimate reason. The executive president at the time of the sale would continue in that position. Three years later, on February 26, 1967, another change in the administration occurred: the Board of Directors elected Father Leandro Montañana as president of the university and the former president was given the title, president-emeritus. Because of that change total control of the administration and the management of the university fell upon the Congregation of the Mission, the Province of the Philippines.

### **Legal name of the University**

From the time, that Adamson University was acquired there were many different opinions with regard to changing the name of the university. The name Adamson was derived from the founding family who came to the Philippines from Greece. Three members of this family were chemical engineers and soon after their arrival in the Philippines, they established a school of industrial chemistry. Research laboratories were set up in this school and those laboratories were highly accredited and were known as the best industrial chemistry centers in the country. Because of the renown that this center of education had acquired, the

National Ministry of Education in the Philippines decided to elevate its status and on February 5, 1941, officially conferred upon this institution the name, Adamson University.

Soon after acquiring this institution, the change of its name became a matter of great concern throughout the Province. Various reasons were set forth to change the name. First, the university had to be given a new name in order to point out the change that had occurred and that name had to encompass in some way the Vincentian charism. Thus, the Province would demonstrate in an external manner that this new ministry was not outside the competency of the Congregation of the Mission. Second, the Province had done the same thing when in 1960 it acquired the Colegio de López Jaena in Jaro; it was renamed “De Paul College”.

Father Leandro Montaña and his council were inclined to keep the name Adamson in order to communicate to the public that it continued as the same university that was esteemed and revered by the Filipino community as a highly qualified engineering center. In order to accommodate the various opinions, the Province agreed to keep the name “Adamson” but would give the name a Vincentian touch by adding the name “Ozanam” – thus Adamson-Ozanam Educational Institution, Inc. Today, that is the legal name of the university.

### **Why Ozanam was chosen to become part of the legal name of the University**

All of us who are familiar with the name, Frederic Ozanam, agree that it is most appropriate that his name should be associated with this center of higher education that is administered by a Congregation that shares the Vincentian charism. A well-known scholar in Vincentian studies, in one of his works on Frederic Ozanam, affirmed that *the Conferences of the Vincent de Paul Society, groups that Ozanam established during the nineteenth century... these conferences were a lay vision of the Congregation of the Mission*. Today, Frederic Ozanam represents a powerful commitment to the Vincentian charism, to make the Church’s social doctrine a reality. As an apostle of charity and who followed the strategies of Vincent de Paul, Frederic Ozanam is seen as one of the best contemporary interpreters of Vincentian spirituality. Therefore, to add his name to the official name of this Vincentian institution of higher education was most appropriate because it gave a Vincentian character to the university. That decision was made in light of the following reasons:

- Ozanam was an exemplary student at the University of Paris and during an age of rationalism was recognized as a defender of the faith;

- During the XIX century he made a significant contribution to the promotion of the lay character of the Church, something similar to what Vincent did during the XVII century;
- As a professor at Lyon and the Sorbonne, he was a defender of the truth;
- As a deep thinker and a man of action, Frederic can be viewed as a model for students with regard to their present and future commitment and also be a model for professors who are called to defend the dignity of the human person.

The selection of the name “Ozanam” provided the new center of higher education with a Vincentian character. Father Leandro Montañana, a great admirer of Frederic Ozanam, is rightly credited with having chosen that name. The generations that followed have expressed their gratitude for this wise move. In the different courses and congresses that have been organized by the university, the innovative spirit of Frederic Ozanam, who during the nineteenth century defended the church and opted for the poor and for youth, has been continued and given new life.

### **Expansion of the university campus and an increase in enrollment**

The first two decades of the administration of the university were extremely difficult. The Board of Directors had to confront many different challenges: an increase in enrollment, which demanded an expansion of the facilities; better university standards; the search for qualified faculty members of the various schools of specialization; appointment of qualified Vincentians to important positions of responsibility; expansion of the university (more buildings); more stable financial base. When the Congregation acquired the university there were approximately 3,000 students. The campus and its buildings were limited in space – half the main building was occupied by the provincial community and the offices of the parish of San Marcelino. The financial situation of the Province was very precarious and, therefore, no thought was given to the necessary expansion of the campus and its buildings.

In 1965, however, the Marian Center, an effective instrument in Vincentian evangelization, constructed a building within the parish complex. This center had a twofold purpose: to spread devotion to Mary and to serve as a residence for the Vincentians who ministered at the university. As a result, the university was able to increase its classroom space, using the area that had been vacated by the members of the Vincentian community.

In the early 1970s the Provincial Council was presented with an opportunity to buy fifty hectares of land outside Manila. The offer was

very tempting because this would provide space for the much desired expansion of the university and the fact that this land was located outside the city presented many possibilities for the future of the university. Nevertheless, this offer was not accepted because there was still a large outstanding debt that had been incurred at the time of the acquisition of the university. Even though Father Montañana and his council felt that the price of the land was very reasonable (it could have been acquired at a very low cost), nevertheless in light of the financial situation of the province, it was viewed as too risky.

### **Golden years of the physical expansion of the university**

When viewing the expansion of the facilities of the university there are two significant milestones. The first occurred in 1972 when the university acquired the building that today is known as the Cardinal Rufino Santos Building. This large building, which stands several stories high, belonged to the National Electric Company (Meralco) and is the present seat of the university's administration and the school of architecture. Two years later, in 1973, another property, adjacent to the university was acquired. There the life of Frederic Ozanam is remembered in a place that bears his name and is also the home of the school of engineering. The chemical laboratories that are famous throughout Asia for their research in the area of industrial chemistry are located in the same building.

The second milestone, which occurred in 1977, was viewed as more significant and transcendent with regard to the future of the university: the acquisition of the complex of buildings and land on which the school of Saint Teresa was located. It was a very profitable acquisition because it allowed for a greater expansion of the university: the complex was composed of 15,000m of land and five buildings. The cost of this property, its location and its prestige as a center of learning – all of these were seen as positive elements that favored the acquisition of that property. Because of the importance of this acquisition, the Province utilized all the available means in order to fulfill the terms of the contract. The owners of the school were the Sisters of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary.

In order to purchase this property, the Board of Directors sought the legal and financial assistance of the president of one of the nation's most prestigious accounting firms. The contract of sale was about to be signed when the president of a hospital (who wanted to obtain the buildings in order to convert them into a school of nursing), voiced his intention to use every means in order to purchase that property. Thus, the result of this was the doubling of the price that had been offered by the Congregation of the Mission. Cardinal Jaime Sin, at the request of the Vincentian Community (who were his formators in the

seminary at Jaro), intervened and explained why that property should be sold to the Congregation of the Mission:

*The school of Saint Teresa is a prestigious Catholic school with a large number of students and an alumni association whose members have had a sound Christian formation. After graduation, they have continued to give witness to their faith as they establish good Christian families. From the time of its establishment, this school has engaged in an excellent ministry of evangelization through means of education. As this institution enters into a phase of change, it is obligatory to do everything possible so that this institution does not fall into the hands of new owners who are guided by ambition and personal gain. Under the administration and the leadership of the Congregation of the Mission, the original aims of the school will remain in place and will be reinforced with the seal of the Vincentian charism.*

## **Epilogue**

With the acquisition of that property, the university was now positioned and gifted with the material means to increase its enrollment to about 20,000 students, to better the quality of the various faculties, and to raise the standards throughout the university. This was a period of much success that was experienced in all areas of the university. When the school of Saint Teresa was acquired, new buildings were constructed, for example, the Father Montañana Center, which today houses the university library. Several other buildings were renovated, buildings which today house the school of pharmacy, the school of business administration, an auditorium, the chapel, a theatre, and an art gallery.

The progress that was accomplished during the period of 1964-1977 (the focus of this presentation for the first part of this symposium) and that continued in later years was due to the administration that followed this period. The material and formal progress of the university can be attributed to the vision, the courage, and the work that was accomplished by the members of the Congregation of the Mission, the various faculty members, the members of the distinct branches of the Vincentian Family, and all the employees of the university.

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the presence of the Vincentian Community at the university is an appropriate moment to express our appreciation, gratitude, and admiration of all those persons who, through their ministry and dedication, have contributed to this progress. We mention here in a special way those confreres who followed the founder, Father Leandro Montañana and served as president: Father Rolando Delagoza, Father Jaime Belita and Father Gregory Bañaga. All of those confreres, with their unique gifts, gave a Vincentian character to the university and advanced the forward progress



of that institution. In order to perpetuate that work and the work of the Adamson family (the founders of the university), the building that houses the museum was dedicated and blessed on August 25. There, in a very artistic manner, one is able to view much material that presents a history of the university from the time of its establishment.

Translated from Spanish by CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.