

The background of the page is a photograph of a school fence. The fence is made of metal posts and wire, with a concrete base. Behind the fence, there are several large, leafy green trees. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The text is overlaid on this image.

# The Assumpta Technical High School: A Story of Hope and Inspiration

By Stella Maria Mendoza



# ATHS



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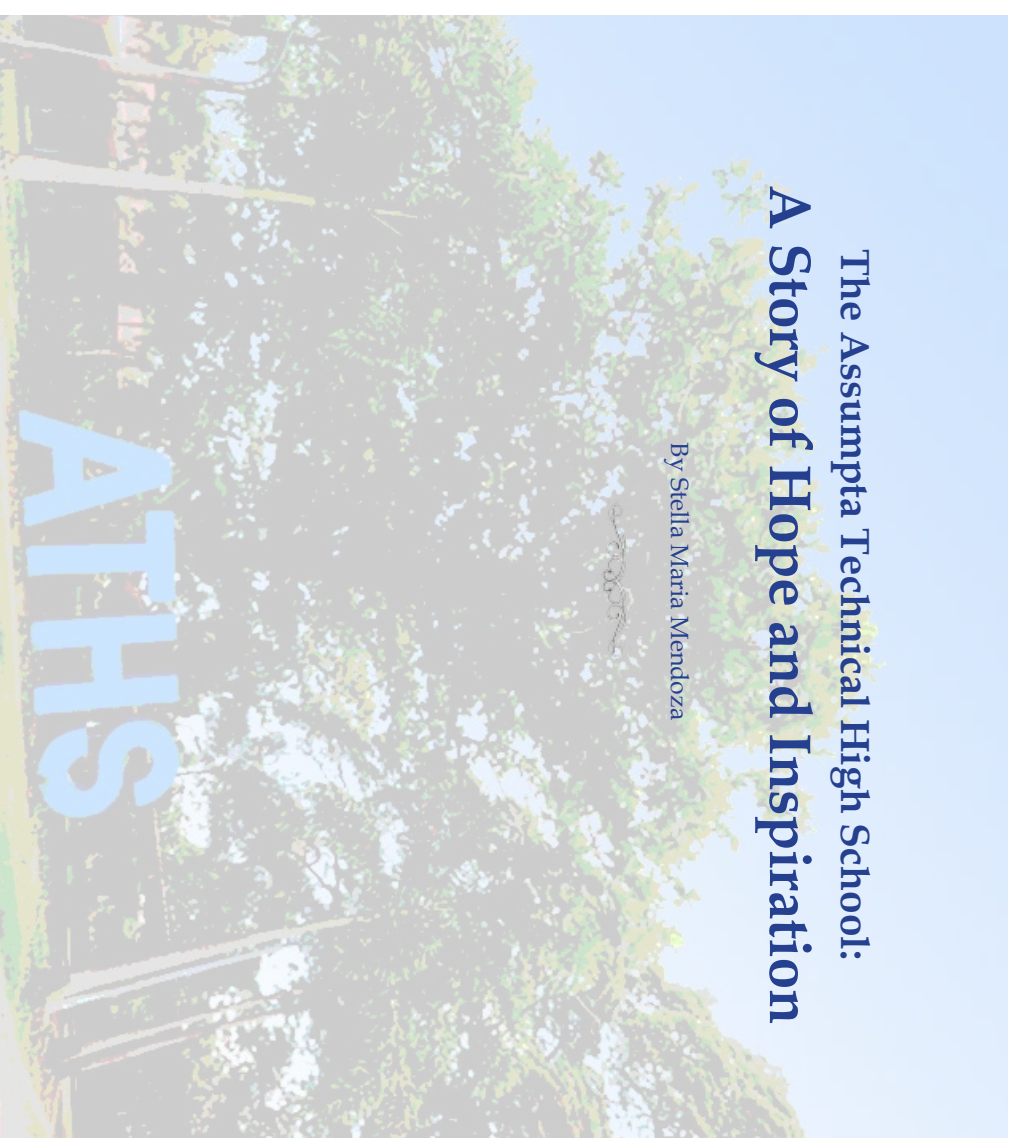
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## Foreword



**Assumpta Technical High School: A Story of Hope and Inspiration** is an account of how God's dreams for humanity has become a reality through the indomitable spirit and unshakable faith of all those involved from all sectors of the society: the rich and the poor, lay and religious, young and old. Through Assumpta Technical High School (ATHS), a whole society was transformed as well as countless lives of individuals throughout the many generations of students, faculty and staff, members of the Board of Trustees, sisters, benefactors and friends. It is indeed fitting that as the school celebrates the Golden Jubilee Year of its foundation, this book comes to light to proclaim the marvelous things that the Lord has done to His people.

Pope Francis, in his latest encyclical, *Fraternity and Social Friendship*,<sup>1</sup> invites the whole humanity to advance on paths of hope. For him, "hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile"<sup>2</sup>. It is this hope that has filled the hearts of all those who were involved in this adventure, whose individual and collective stories fill the pages of this book.

One such path of hope is the path of transformative education. According to St. Marie Eugenie, "to educate is to allow the good in every person to break through the rock that imprisons it and to bring it to the light where it can blossom and shed its radiance."<sup>3</sup> This transformative education is rooted on faith in Jesus Christ and expresses in its three pillars: faith formation, academic excellence, leadership for service to the wider community. ATHS is owned by Mother Rosa Memorial Foundation, Inc. a social development foundation that was born out of the love and gratitude of the

<sup>1</sup> Fratelli Tutti, Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship,

<sup>2</sup> *Greeting to Young People at the Padre Félix Varela Cultural Centre*, Havana, Cuba (20 September 2015); *L'Observatore Romano*, 21-22 September 2015, p. 6.

Assumption “Old Girls” to Mother Rosa Maria Pachoud, a French nun and educator who spent 61 years of her religious life in the Philippines. Like the grain of wheat that falls deep into the earth, her death brought more life to this country that she had embraced as her own.

Another path of hope is that of a genuine lay-religious partnership of our “Old Girls” and members of their families who partnered with the Assumption sisters and embraced the mission fully. ATHS was brought to life and sustained throughout the years by the real complementarity of vocations of both lay and religious where the gift each one, whether it is financial, technical or human was put together and harnessed for the education of the young, who possess the intellectual capacity but lack the financial resources for higher education. ATHS offers a double curriculum of a regular secondary education program and technical and vocational training. At ATHS, the students are nurtured and helped to reach their full potential as human beings and as children of God. Here, “the poor deserve the best just as anyone else”<sup>3</sup> and they are given opportunities to develop their talents and gifts geared towards the total development of the person rooted in the Christian faith.

This book is recommended to all educators who believe that “those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy.”<sup>4</sup> It is a stirring testament of God’s enduring love and a reflection of the best in our humanity. It is a story of hope and inspiration for the present and future generations of students, faculty and staff, Board of Trustees and sisters.

My deepest gratitude goes to Ms. Stella Mendoza for her love and dedication to Assumption, her love of the poor and for making the collective and individual stories about Assumpta Technical High School come alive in these pages. Jubilee blessings on all those who contributed to the work and completion of this book.

Sr. Lerna Victoria Panganitihan, r.a.  
Provincial Superior  
Religious of the Assumption

<sup>3</sup> This was a conviction articulated by Mother Milagros Dayrit, r.a. founded on the Social Teachings of the Church

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 126:5



## Introduction

**M**anolito (Lito) L. Tayag will proudly tell you that he is the son of a farmer. As a farmer’s son, his destiny might have been limited to remaining at the farm had it not been for his father’s alternative vision of his future and the presence of the Assumpta Technical High School (Assumpta).

He proudly narrates how his father would always tell his sons, “I want you to learn how to farm but I don’t want you to be farmers.” Lito continues, “He saw greater potential and a bigger future for us outside of farming, but we were not to be ashamed of farming and in the process, we learned how to plant rice.”

He recalls going to school in his slippers so as not to ruin the one good pair of shoes he had. In Assumpta, he bloomed in intellect and as a leader. His intelligence and discipline won for him a scholarship to the Ateneo De Manila University. He would later parlay his college degree into a career in information technology. Today Lito is Country Managing Director of Accenture Philippines one of the largest Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) firms in the country. He oversees some 50,000 employees who provide management consulting, technology and outsourcing services globally.

Lito is also currently the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Mother Rosa Memorial Foundation (MRMF), which owns Assumpta. When one visits his home, he will show you a special room where his father’s plow hangs prominently. It is a reminder of his roots. As a graduate of the Assumpta Technical High School Class of 1978, he is solid proof that a good education is the greatest equalizer.

What did it take to transform a poor child like Lito Tayag into a high achiever? This is a question that many educators have grappled with through the years. Education is an important tool for improving social capital and reducing poverty not just in the Philippines but all over the world.

Educating children raised in rural poverty to attain high achievement is an exceptionally difficult challenge. There are many impediments to uplifting the life of the rural poor. For one, schools are few and distant, requiring investments in transportation or, perhaps, long and sometimes dangerous treks to and from school. School expenses for uniforms, projects, and other hidden fees can be prohibitive.

Malcolm Gladwell, best-selling author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, speaks of an important factor that makes it difficult for the poor to get ahead through education. He states:

The difference between being privileged and being poor ... is the number of chances you get. "Disruption is not fatal to life chances (for the privileged)." Privilege "buys you second chances." But if you're a poor kid, you do not get the same number of chances.

*Malcolm Gladwell, podcast Revisionist History*

In 2012, UNESCO reported that in the Philippines, only 73 out of every 100 children enrolled in public schools will finish their elementary education. Of these 73 children, only 54 will remain to finish high school.

Chance and luck are two factors that are not usually in the poor's favor. Little things can set back a family. A mother's illness or a father losing his job are temporary setbacks for those with privilege, but they can be fatal to the chances of someone born poor. When one considers other conditions – such as poor infrastructure, low family income, large family size, lack of nutrition, living conditions not conducive to learning, and the low quality public elementary education, or neighborhoods that are poorly policed or have insurgents – the odds of succeeding increase.

It would seem that it would take a miracle for a child born in a poor rural area to obtain the type of education that propels them into a top-ranked college or university. They would need second chances to overcome the difficulties that they face. To paraphrase a well-known saying – it takes a village to provide such second chances. This "village" comes in the form of parents who place a high value on education, good schools focused on high achievement, principals and teachers who are willing to go the extra mile, and donors who help keep good schools afloat and functioning.

This is the story of one such good school – the Assumpta – a high performing private school dedicated to educating the children of the poor in San Simon, Pampanga and its nearby towns. Started in 1970, the school aimed to provide a high-quality education for the children of farmers and unskilled workers. This mandate has been its steadfast commitment for the past 50 years. It has taken the village – the whole community of teachers, sisters and donors – to keep the school running through steep increases in education costs, an economic collapse, political upheavals, and the growing competition for teachers who are pirated away by other educational institutions.

The Mother Rosa Memorial Foundation (MRMF) owns the Assumpta Technical High School. The MRMF is a social development foundation organized and run by the alumnae and friends of the Assumption College in Makati in memory of Mother Rosa Maria, r.a. Its main project is running the Assumpta, which began as a school with a dual curriculum following the regular secondary education program and also providing a technical education program.

Traveling north from Manila to Pampanga, one passes a tollway marked by a nearby church steeple. This is the landmark of Assumpta that greets you before you arrive at the campus. Entering the school grounds, one is struck by the verdant green of acacia and Banaba trees, the flaming orange of the fire trees, and the muddy blue of its lagoon surrounded by geese and sheep.

Assumpia has grown from a population of 92 students in 1970 (59 who completed High School) to a full Kindergarten to Grade 12 School with over 2,000 students before the 2020 pandemic. Throughout this growth it has remained faithful to its mandate to provide an education for poor students. It has been able to survive by shifting from a school that heavily subsidized tuition fees by adopting a socialized tuition fee structure. When it started in 1970, the MRMF subsidized 100% of school's expenses. The subsidy was reduced to 63% in 1996. It went further down to 36% in 2002. Today, the MRMF subsidy is less than 2% with the school funding 98% of its expenses from its own tuition fees and other creative income generating projects. This is despite the total school budget having grown from P92,000 in 1972 to currently over P55 Million Pesos.

In 2011, Assumpia was one of first 20 high schools nationwide invited to apply for PAASCU Level III Accreditation. It was one of the first 17 high schools in the country to achieve PAASCU Level III status. It is also the first high school to receive PAASCU accreditation in Region III. Its best students are able to qualify for admission to the top universities in Metro Manila. Its roster of graduates includes business managers, doctors, barangay captains, architects, priests and religious, a Department of Education Superintendent, Municipal Mayors and a Vice Mayor in San Simon and Minalin, Pampanga. It has received several honors and has become a school of choice in its area of service.

Studies cite common factors found in high performing schools. These include a culture of high expectations, collaborative leadership, close teacher-parent communication, caring teachers and staff, among the most critical factors. These characteristics are found in the Assumpia story.

This story will explore how Assumpia developed a winning school culture. This history of Assumpia will not be told chronologically. Instead, its story unfolds through several important themes in its development. It will celebrate the many people who contributed to realizing the school's vision of a community school. The book will study how the school's dual curriculum of a full academic load and a technical education contributed to a culture

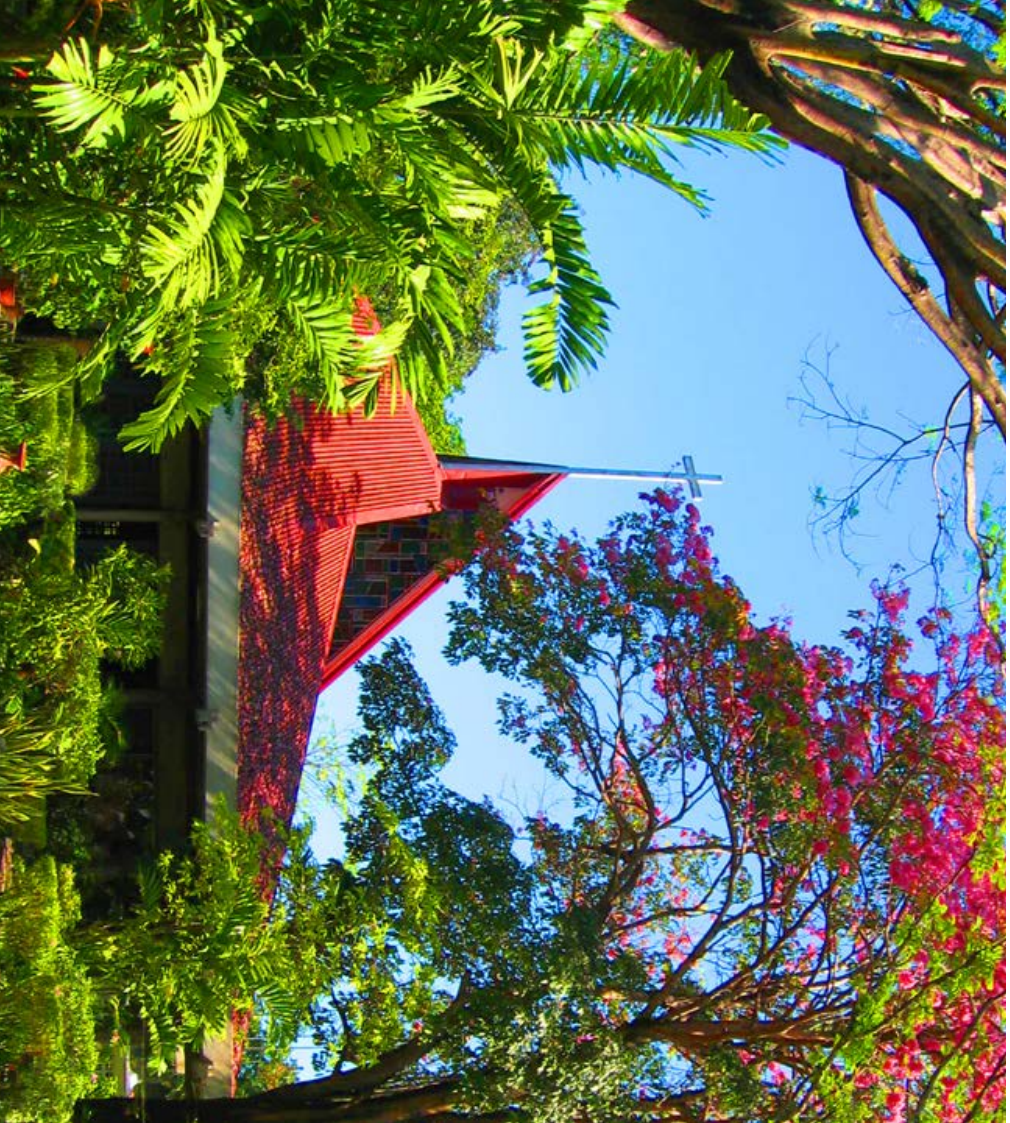
of high expectations. It will investigate how the school's lay-religious partnership and core team leadership strategy created a collaborative structure. It will commemorate the school's leaders and staff who, through their dedication, provided its students with the sufficient number of second chances to rise above their setbacks and limitations. It will detail how the subsidized tuition fee scheme is essential to maintaining its mandate to serve the poor.

The progress of the school has not been linear. It has moved forward and backwards in order to address challenges as they arose. It experienced setbacks and near calamities. But through it all, Assumpia has relied on a solid foundation of commitment to excellence in education and the belief that in education lies the key to breaking out of poverty.

This book is written for everyone – both internal and external audiences alike. The external audience includes other schools that may be interested in emulating particular aspects of the Assumpia education, other congregations who are keen to learn how a healthy lay-religious partnership evolved, and other Kapampangan who may not have studied in Assumpia but have heard much about the school and wish to know more about it. The internal audience includes the students, alumni, and former teachers who wish to learn more about the school's history and its success. Most importantly, this book is for the new Assumptian teacher who wishes to commit himself or herself to this school. This book will provide him or her with Assumpia's traditions, culture, values, and achievements. This was written with the hope that more teachers will find their vocation in Assumpia and continue to help the school evolve into an institution of learning that prevails during challenging times with its private Catholic education for the poor.







“Mother Rosa Maria was an institution, as famous and enduring as the college to which she dedicated her life. But her greatest satisfaction came, we imagine, from the gratitude of her wards whose lives became richer because of their contact with a noble and compelling personality.”

*Manila Chronicle editorial  
June 29, 1965, on the occasion of  
Mother Rosa's death*

Chapter I

## The Beginning

**I**t all began with a death and an excess of funds. You could say that the Mother Rosa Memorial Foundation was born on the day that Mother Rosa Maria died. At her death, the alumnae, who loved Mother Rosa very much, took up a collection to provide her with a fitting burial plot. Finding that an excess of funds had been raised, it was decided that the balance of the funds would be used to fund the alumnae's works of mercy. This started with a day care center in the San Andres District in Manila and eventually the Assumpta Technical High School. But who was Mother Rosa? And what is the MRMF?

### **Mother Rosa Maria Pachoud de L'Enfant Jesus, r.a.**

The religious order to which Mother Rosa belonged is called the Religious of the Assumption, an apostolic congregation rooted in the contemplative tradition. Saint Marie Eugenie Milleret founded the Assumption in Paris in 1839 and today the Assumption has communities in over 32 countries. St. Marie Eugenie's vision was to transform society through education. She sought to provide girls with an education in which their Catholic faith played a central role. Mother Rosa held on to this vision of education and was essential to the foundation of all that she would build in the Philippines.

The Assumption of Mother Rosa's time remains the same as it is today – a congregation committed to prayer that is both personal and strongly community-oriented. The Assumption sisters take turns for daily Adoration and gather five times a day for the Liturgy of the Hours and for daily celebration of the Eucharist. Then as now, the sisters live in intercultural and intergenerational communities of sisters where the gifts of each person can contribute to the good of the whole group.



The Assumption came to the Philippines by way of Spain. The Queen of Spain was a champion of the Assumption schools in her country. When the colonial government in Spain decided to establish a public-school system in the Philippines, the sisters of the Assumption were requested to manage the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila. This school started in early 1892 but was closed in 1896 due to the war with Spain.

In 1904, with the Philippines now under American rule, Msgr. Caudi, then Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines approached Pope Pius X to request that the Assumption sisters return to the Philippines after the war against Spain. Responding positively, Mother Marie Celestine, who succeeded Mother Marie Eugenie as Superior General, agreed to send a group of sisters, including some who had been in Manila during the first foundation but also a few new ones. One of the new recruits was Mother Rosa Maria Pachoud, r.a.

Elonore Pachoud, as she was called in her family, was born in Grenoble, France in August 1873. Mother Rosa Maria arrived in the Philippines on May 29, 1904 after a six-week sea voyage from Europe. She came as part of the first contingent of sisters to restart the Assumption in the Philippines. Mother Rosa Maria was from the generation of sisters who

lived closely with the Foundress, Mother Marie Eugenie; she was accustomed to seeing her in the gardens of the motherhouse. She took to the Philippines immediately. She was not part of the original group of sisters who had come to manage the Escuela Normal in 1892, but she made the Philippines her home until her death in 1965. She taught French, arithmetic, history, science, English and economics. She was named Superior of Assumption Convent on Herran Street in Manila in 1931. It was a post she held until she was named Vicar for the Far East in 1947. She was called "Notre Mere" (Our Mother) by her students.

Mother Angela Ansaldo of Assumption Herran Class 1932 recalls that when Mother Rosa took over as superior, she would send the seniors off on field trips for social work. She also inspired the Assumption school song. She was Mother Superior during the crucial years of establishing Assumption Herran and during the critical years of World War II, which saw the bombing of both the school in Herran and the community in Baguio. With her sisters, she undertook a four- and-a-half day walk from Longlong, Benguet to Tubao, Pangasinan to flee the Japanese army. She oversaw the rebuilding of Assumption Herran and the start of the Assumption in Japan. Mother Rosa was named the first Provincial Superior or head of the Assumption in the Philippines in 1953.





One of the first expansion areas of the new province was in Osaka, Japan. At that time, Japan was still reeling from the effects of the war and was in no shape to begin a foundation. Mother Rosa Maria, then Provincial, turned over to them funds given by the United States Government as war damage indemnity for the bombing of Assumption Herran. In that way, tragedy was turned into grace. In grateful remembrance, Osaka's first Assumption building was named the Mother Rosa Building. She remained Provincial Superior until 1960, overseeing the expansion of Assumption in Herran, Iloilo, Baguio, Osaka, Japan, San Jose, Antique and San Lorenzo, Makati.

She was greatly loved by her students and sisters. She had a famous expression – *Skip it!* – or as translated in contemporary parlance *Let it go!* It was an expression of her simplicity and sense of humor. She only asked that one do her best with what she had, confident that God asks for nothing more.

Before her death, Mother Rosa was to receive for her great works of faith and education recognition in the form of the Presidential Medal of Merit for Education from President Elpidio Quirino in 1950, the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur from her country of birth, France in 1954 and the Medal Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice from the Archbishop of Manila on the day of the blessing of the reconstructed chapel of Assumption Herran.



After 61 years in the Philippines, Mother Rosa Maria passed away on June 27, 1965. She was deeply mourned by her sisters and former students. In her indomitable way she again unwittingly turned tragedy into grace with the creation of the Mother Rosa Memorial Foundation.



### Assumption expands its mission

In the year that Mother Rosa died, Assumption in the Philippines began an expansion that took its mission of education into areas previously unexplored. Whereas at the start, the Assumption served well-off communities in urban areas, it now sought to cater to the middle-class and the poor in rural areas and in far-flung provinces. In 1964, it opened a community in Baguio City, which would include a school for the indigenous peoples of the surrounding upland area communities. In 1967, the Assumption sisters went to Sibolom, Antique and there helped put up a Catholic Grade School. In 1968 and 1969, they established communities among the urban poor in Malibay, Pasay City and Barrio Obrero, Iloilo. It was only a matter of time before the Assumption Manila alumnae, inspired by the expansion work, would join the sisters in a totally new effort.

### The Mother Rosa Memorial Fund

The Mother Rosa Memorial Foundation started in 1965. The original incorporators of the MRMF were Gil R. Carlos, Raquel Gonzales de Leon, Carmen Bayot Garcia, Jose Ma. Ansaldo, Aleli de Guzman Quirino, Josefa Filart Venko, Celinea Lacsion Heras, Teresa Araneta-Albert, Concepcion Zaragoza Ortoll. In its first Board of 1965 were Zenaida Quezon Avanceña, Remedios Rufino and Teresita Campos among others.

The goal of the Foundation was to continue the good works of Mother Rosa through projects that serve the poor. With the funds available, it started outreach projects that included a day-care center and a clinic as their outreach project in Barrio Kapampangan in San Andres district, Manila. During one of their visits sometime in the late 1960s, the barrio captain of Barrio Kapampangan, Eladio Carlos presented them with a letter of request for a high school to be built in his hometown of San Simon, Pampanga.

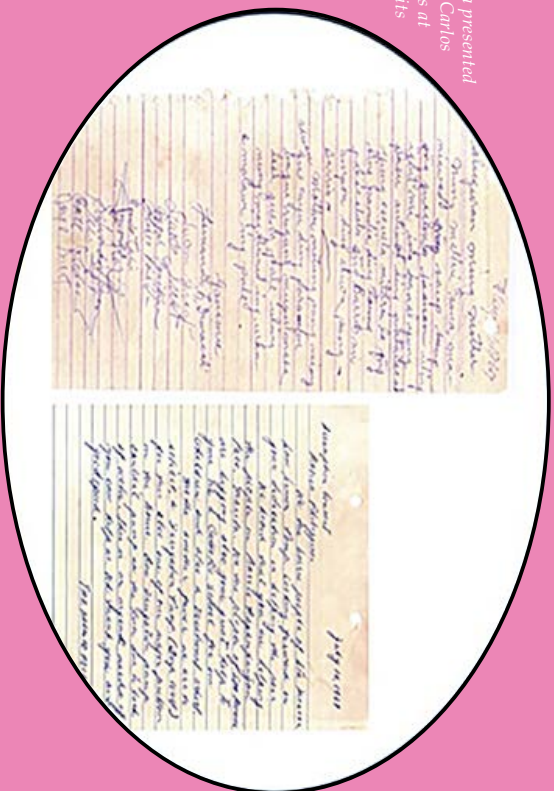
### San Simon, Pampanga

In the mid-1960s, San Simon, Pampanga was a fifth-class municipality, predominantly agricultural with a large unemployed population. Central Luzon was the birthplace of the *Hukbunlap* (Huk) insurgency that started in the 1940s as a rebel force against the Japanese and was only quelled in 1954 with the surrender of its popular leader, Luis Taruc. However even after 1954, the Huk movement and its leadership persisted, operating primarily from a stronghold in the province of Pampanga. With the failure of subsequent Philippine administrations to implement the long-promised land reforms, the Huks—although split into factions and, in some areas, merged with new insurgent groups continued into the 1970s as an active anti-government organization.





The letter in Kapampangan presented by Barrio Captain Eladio Carlos in July, 1967 to the sisters at Assumption-Herron and its translation in English.



Since the proposal was to open a school, the MRMF turned to the sisters who were the experts in running schools. But since the proposed project was for a vocational school, for which the sisters had no prior experience, permission had to be first sought from the Assumption Mother House in Paris before the project could be started. As Alumnae President and member of the MRMF Board at the time, Zenaida (Nini) Quezon Avancena, was instrumental in obtaining permission from the Mother General of the Religions of the Assumption for the Assumpta school project. The Philippine Province was hesitant to open such a school for the following reasons: one, it did not have enough sisters to form a community; two, the school was to be co-educational; three, it was going to start in high school which was against the Assumption policy of early spiritual formation at elementary; and, four, the sisters had never handled a technical education curriculum.

It was agreed between the MRMF and the Philippine Province that if MRMF could get approval from Paris, the sisters would go ahead and open the school. The responsibility to get permission from the Mother General fell on the shoulders of Nini Quezon Avancena and a small group of friends including Lourdes Alunan, Teresita Campos, and Emma Rotor. In answer to the four issues raised by the sisters, they made a simple, direct appeal: San Simon was a hotbed of insurgency and the Church

had no presence there. This reason prompted the Mother General to agree to establish the school.

The MRMF agreed to take up the challenge and soon began preparations for starting the school. Nini Quezon Avancena remembers that they first consulted with a Jesuit priest on how to start the school, but when he realized they only had P60,000 in seed money, he laughed at their audacity. But with faith in their undertaking, they started raising additional funds. One donor promised to match the amount of funds they would raise and soon they had enough money to start building. An alumna and MRMF Board member, Raquel de Leon, donated a piece of land in Sta. Monica, San Simon for the school.

The work at hand gelled into a unique partnership between the MRMF and the Religions of the Assumption. Most schools build ties with their alumni to continue their work of education. But the ties between these two groups were even more special. They were bound together not to further enrich their alma mater, but to create a totally new project in an unfamiliar place and for a different clientele, mainly the children of farmers. What made it work? One factor was the unique combination of lay and religious persons that forged this partnership. But who were the MRMF members?

### Mother Rosa Memorial Foundation

There have been over 100 people involved in the MRMF Board of Trustees during its 50 years in existence. In its early years when the school was just beginning, the sisters on the Board included Mother Esperanza Cruz-jing and Mother Natividad. Mother Milagros Dayrit, as the longest serving member of the community in San Simon was a member of the Board from its beginning until the year before her death. At one time or another, its Board included former provincials in the persons of Sr. Maria Angela Ansaldo, Sr. Maria Estela Infante, Sr. Josefina Maria Magat, Sr. Vicenta Eloisa Javier, Sr. Marie Emmanuel Melocoton, Sr. Maria Josefina Matias, Sr. Sheryl Reyes and Sr. Lerna Victoria Panganthion. All the sisters assigned as Superior of the San Simon community were members of the Board.

The lay members were almost equally divided between the Assumption San Lorenzo alumnae and friends of the Assumption including spouses of alumnae who were prominent in business, the banking industry or in philanthropy. Priests and brothers of other academic institutions have also been part of the Board at different times. It would take many pages to introduce each one. Suffice it to say that in each decade, a particular chairperson had been able to capture the spirit of solidarity and commitment needed for that time.

As mentioned earlier, in the 1970s Nini Quezon Avanceña and Remedios Sunico Rufino were

instrumental in getting the school off the ground. In the 1980s board members like Ambassador

Jesus P. Tambunting, Miguel Magsaysay and Manolo Avanceña were critical to the growth of the MRMF community development projects with the San Simon farmers. In the 1990s, Asuncion Trillana, Rosalie Naguiat, Josefina Manahan and others were crucial in supporting the income-generating projects of the school. Ambassador Bienvenido Jan and Jose Alberto Quidros and Geronimo Velasco contributed greatly in growing the school's infrastructure and making it more financially sustainable.

Lito Tayag, the Chairman of the current Board, is a member of the new crop of Assumpta alumni empowered to contribute meaningfully to sustaining their school through participation in the MRMF. Besides Lito, the current MRMF board includes: Erinda F. Velasco (Vice Chairman), Rosalie H. Naguiat (President), Mariane M. Pratte (Treasurer), Asuncion O. Trillana, Sr. Lerna Victoria Panganthion, r.a., Sr. Estela Maria Rocetes, r.a., Sr. Josefina Maria Magat, r.a., Yolanda S. Yabut, Irma P. Medina, Ma. Victoria P. Cruz, Joseph C. Musni, Enrique M. Guevarra, Charissa Velayo, and Manuel R. Roxas.

It would be impossible to profile all the distinguished members who have served the MRMF Board. A few descriptions of some of these members captures the diversity in backgrounds and talents that they brought to the work of the MRMF.

### Zeneida Quezon Avanceña

Maria Zeneida (Nini) Quezon Avanceña is a graduate of Assumption Herran High School 1937 and the first elected president of the Alumnae Association of Assumption (AAA). Prominent in society as the daughter of the Commonwealth President of the Republic of the Philippines, Manuel L. Quezon, Tita Nini as she is now known fondly, is a cornerstone of Manila society. She is a well-known activist and advocate. She continued her late mother's advocacies and remains active in the Philippine Red Cross. She is best remembered for her activism during Martial Law.

She was a member of the Concerned Women of the Philippines and Kaakbay, where she championed human rights and press freedom, called for the release of political prisoners, the removal of US military bases, nuclear disarmament, and debt cancellation among many advocacies. She was at the forefront of the open struggle to oust the Marcos dictatorship. She was at the frontlines during the EDSA "People Power" uprising that overthrew Ferdinand Marcos and during the EDSA 2 mobilization that forced Joseph Estrada to step down. She was unafraid to early on call for Gloria Arroyo's resignation. While taking on progressive causes she was known to her companions as a quiet leader.

Tita Nini's involvement in an area known to harbor communist insurgents and the



birthplace of the Hukbalahap, was made all the more significant in that early in life, she had lost her mother, her sister and her husband of two years to an ambush by the Hukbalahap in April 1949. A single mother of two, she was to eventually remarry and have seven more children. One of them, Manolo Avanceña, became Chairman of the MRMF from 1998 to 1999. True to her values, when land reform was instituted, she and her family opted for voluntary land reform during the Corason C. Aquino presidency. She turned to Mother Milagros (whom she had known from school and more intimately in MRMF) to help her organize and train her former tenants and prepare them to manage their own farms.

### *Ambassador Bienvenido L. Tan*

Tia Niri was also instrumental in bringing in new members to join the MRMF Board. One of her recruits was Ambassador Bienvenido L. Tan. Ambassador Tan was the Chairman of Republic Glass Holdings and PIFC Redevelopment Corporation as well as a director of several other company boards. He was also Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany during President Corazon Aquino's administration as well as a Commissioner of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. As a philanthropist, he counts many foundations that he has personally set up such as the Salome L. Tan and Elena P. Tan foundations, and chairmanship of other schools and foundations such as the Philippine Business for Social Progress, the Alaala Foundation, Xavier School, and St. Theresa's College, Manila among many others.



He recounted that when Tia Niri invited him to join the MRMF Board, the Assumpta school had just enough funds to sustain one month of operations. As a business professional, he helped the school transform itself by taking on a more sustainable financial position. He did this by challenging Assumpta to expand. He also brought in a lot of financial resources from his own network of friends and other foundations.

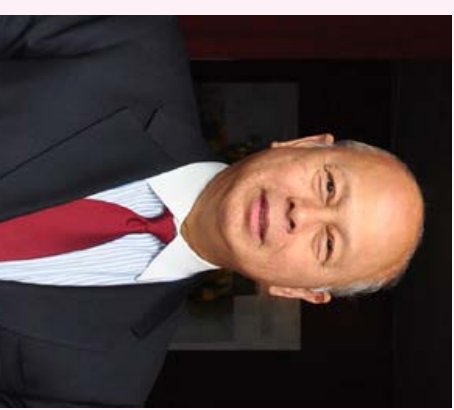
Unlike other male members of the MRMF Board, Ambassador Tan is neither a husband nor father of an Assumption alumna. His link to the Assumption is through his mother. He recounts that his mother was a student of the Assumption Free School in Herran, Manila. During a time when a girl's education was undervalued, his mother had to make her own arrangements for schooling despite the fact that her family had the means to send their sons to the Ateneo de Manila. To attend the free school, his mother had to live with a poor relative. They were so poor that she remembers eating one piece of tuyo for their meal, starting with the fish head for breakfast, the body for lunch, and finally, the tail for dinner. She attended free school until Grade 7 but never resented her parents for the hardship. Through this connection, Ambassador Tan recalls meeting Mother Rosa when his mother would bring him on her visits to the Assumption.

### *Ambassador Jesus P. Tambunting*

Ambassador Tan was preceded in the MRMF Board by another Ambassador, Mr. Jesus P. Tambunting, another distinguished businessman and banker. His daughters, sisters and wife are all graduates of the Assumption. His wife's aunt was Mother Maria Angela Ansaldo, the first Filipino Provincial of the Philippine Province of the Religious of the Assumption and one-time Superior of the San Simon Community.

A banker by profession, his greatest contribution to Philippine business is the Planters Development Bank. At a time when corporate banking was the more conventional path to success, he blazed a trail by providing banking services for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and rural entrepreneurs. For this, he was named Entrepreneur of The Year in the Philippines by Ernst & Young (EY) in 2009. He was also Philippine Ambassador to the United Kingdom in 1993 to 1998.

Active in community and civic work, he was co-chairman of the Philippine-British Business Council, member of the Board of Trustees of the Philippine Business for Social Progress and the Carlos P. Romulo Foundation. He was also made a Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem by the



Vatican in 2004. In 2017, he was recognized as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in recognition of his work in enhancing Philippine-UK ties. He credits his experience with helping the farmers of San Simon, through the MRMF, as influencing his decision to take the unconventional path to SME and rural banking that he took.



### Manolito L. Tayag

Lito Tayag, current MRMF Board Chairman, and ATHS 1978 graduate grew up in the shadow of Assumpta. His family hails from Sta. Monica, the same barangay where Assumpta is located, which is just a kilometer away from his house. He remembers going weekly to the ATHS chapel for the Saturday 4:00 p.m. Mass. The sisters would ask him, "Do you want to study here?" He readily said he would like to. As a boy, he watched the school as it was being built and dreamt of going there. Young as he was, he knew that there was no better option. The next nearest secondary school was the Pampanaga Central High School, a significant distance away. He is part of the 5<sup>th</sup> batch of Assumpta graduates. Some graduates before him did well enough to qualify for college in Manila,



some of whom studied at the Ateneo de Manila, the University of the Philippines (UP) and the De La Salle University.

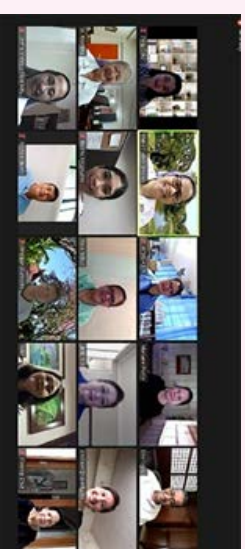
He remembers what Assumpta was like in the early days. "Most times," he shared, "my mother would prepare me a very modest lunch of boiled egg and rice, but it didn't matter how meager my lunch was. At noontime, 6 to 10 of my classmates would join me for lunch. We would lay out our respective lunches and share them in common. This was my first lesson in sharing."

With the help of the sisters, he applied to study for college at the Ateneo de Manila. He remembers a Jesuit priest, Rev. Fr. Raul Bonoan, would frequently visit Assumpta because he was close friends with the sisters. Fr. Bonoan was then the Dean of Admissions and Aid at the Ateneo. Ten of them took the entrance exams that year and three of them passed. He also passed the UP and La Salle entrance exams. But the Ateneo scholarship came with lodging at the school dormitory and this – plus the fact that Jose Rizal was an Atenean – was enough for him to decide to choose Ateneo.

His Ateneo education helped secure him a job in the information technology industry. His work included two assignments to the company's offshore unit in the United States. While in there, he was offered work in a top

financial investment company. Instead of taking the prestigious job, he decided it was time to come home. Apart from his role as Managing Director, Lito is also Accenture's Corporate Citizenship lead for ASEAN, overseeing all corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs in the region. He is personally involved in the implementation of key CSR initiatives in the country.

While all the members of the Board give generously of their time and treasure, some staying in the Board for more than 10 years, they have also gained a lot by being on the Board. As mentioned, Ambassador Tambunting credits his change of heart from pursuing commercial banking to doing rural and SME banking partially to his experiences with the San Simon farmers. Manolo Avanceña had the good fortune of joining the Board and was also a beneficiary of Mother Milagros' support for strengthening the farmers' organization when their family opted for voluntary land reform. Of his exposure to the Board and to Mother Milagros he says, "It brought me back to the faith. Mother Milagros never preached, never talked about prayer. She would simply say, 'Manolo I'm going to mass are you coming?' But working with the poor, though I was out of the church for 25 years, I was touched by a lot of experiences, and slowly I returned."



These are but four of the over 50 lay members who have been part of the MRMF – members who have seen it through difficult times and have also shared in its successes. They are one half of the partnership that is MRMF. The other half comprises the Religious of the Assumption



Sr. Rosalina Ladrado, r.a. (first principal)



Sr. Magdalena Pia Gonzaga, r.a. (sacristine)



Sr. Milagros Dayrit, r.a. (first superior)

*Three of the four pioneering Sisters in community have already gone to heaven. We are grateful for their years in San Simon which marked our mission with their unique charisma.*

Sr. Melania Sunga, r.a. was the youngest member of the original community and is currently in our community at Xavier University, Cagayan de oro



### The First Assumption Community in San Simon

Since it involved education, the MRMF Board had established that it would not pursue the San Simon project without partnering with the Assumption sisters. Mother Milagros Dayrit, a Kapampanggan from the town of Magalang, was designated as the first Sister-in-Charge of the religious community in San Simon. The first community included three other sisters: Sr. Magdalena Pia Gonzaga, Sr. Melania Maria Sunga, also a Kapampanggan, and Sr. Rosalina Maria Ladrado who was named first principal. The sisters arrived to start the community in San Simon on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June in 1970.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1970, the first mass was celebrated in the community, coinciding with the visit of the Provincial Superior, Mother Marie Marthe. Joining the sisters for mass were 60 members of the San Simon community, including the carpenters who built the school and members of a youth club. A social worker, Sr. Feliciano of the Congregation of St. Joseph came with some boys and girls who brought along their guitars to accompany the singing. In this way the Assumpta Technical High School began with song, community, hope and much faith.

Of the first four sisters, Mother Milagros was to stay the longest and made an indelible mark

in her work with the San Simon farmers and community. Milagros Dayrit was born to a landed family in Magalang, Pampanga on 23 October 1915. She studied in Assumption Herran until High School, then continued her studies in Assumption in Ramsgate, England. From there she entered the Assumption Novitiate in Val Notre Dame in Belgium. Mother Milagros was one of the sisters who survived the war under the care of Mother Rosa.

After World War II, when the sisters wanted to restart their school in Manila, Mother Rosa commissioned Mother Milagros and another sister to cross the Pasig River in a *banca* to get the necessary application from the Bureau of Education. Unfortunately, the *banca* capsized and all the papers sank to the bottom of the Pasig. Returning to Malate, Mother Milagros excitedly narrated their adventure to Mother Rosa who upon seeing only one sister anxiously asked, "But where is the other one?" This scene in the river was repeated later in Mother Milagros' life. In the early years of the San Simon community, Mother Milagros would visit the barrios. One time she was riding a *banca* to see some farmers across the Pampanga River. Unfortunately, the *banca* capsized, completely drenching Mother Milagros who went home dripping wet to the merriment of her sisters.





Mother Milagros was connected to the MIRMIF from the very start. She organized classes in Barrio Kapampangan in Manila where Assumption High School students taught poor children and, she was in charge of the Free School in Herran. What made Mother Milagros even more remarkable was that in the beginning, she very reluctantly agreed to join the first community. Much like Nini Avanceña, hers was a past with a tragic connection to the insurgency movement.

Her nephew, former mayor of Magalang, was killed by the Hukbalahap. But much in the spirit of Mother Rosa, she was obedient and gave herself wholeheartedly to the mission despite her early misgivings. Mother Milagros' enduring legacy in San Simon was in organizing the Farmer's confederation, the Ugnayang Magsasaka ng San Simon (UMSS), into a cooperative federation. This is the work that she later replicated in Negros Occidental, Tarlac, Lake Buhí, Nueva Ecija and Quezon Province.

Sr. Rosalina Maria Ladrino, the school's first principal, was born in Iloilo. Unlike Mother Milagros she was not educated in the Assumption. She is likewise known for her work with the poor, in particular, the urban poor of Barrio Obhero in Iloilo. She is also remembered for establishing the Assumption's Justice and Peace desk and for influencing many student leaders across the country.

Sr. Rosalina was named the first principal and took charge of ongoing formation of class advisers and subject teachers, as well as being Physical Plant coordinator. Prior to joining the community, she was working in an Assumption school in Miami, Florida.

The other Kapampangan, Sr. Melania Sunga, remembers the criteria set for selecting sisters for the first community. Given San Simon's reputation as a hotbed of the insurgency, the sisters needed to be physically and mentally healthy, psychologically balanced and spiritually secure and it was a bonus if they could also speak the local dialect. Being a Kapampangan on her father's side, Sr. Melania was chosen to join the first community. She joined in the same year that she made her perpetual vows, making her the youngest of the four original members. She felt the least qualified to be a classroom teacher as she joined the Assumption right after graduating from High School. She started out as a First Year Adviser and Christian Living Education teacher. She would join Sr. Milagros for three summers to study in the Jesuit-run, Institute of Social Order, to gain more skills in community development work. The fourth sister was Sr. Magdalena Pia Gonzaga, who was tasked with care of the chapel and the sacristy and the school clinic. Like Sr. Rosalina, she hailed from Iloilo.



The first community's life was rather unstructured. With scarce resources and being unfamiliar with their surroundings, the sisters were open to any kind of help. Sr. Ana Maria, a member of the second group of sisters in San Simon, remembers that they lived like an extended community with a lay person, Celina Hernaez, living with them. Ms. Hernaez was helping Mother Milagros with her community development work. Sr. Ana narrates that in the early days there were no trees in the San Simon property on which the convent stood – it was just a dry rice field in the middle of nowhere.

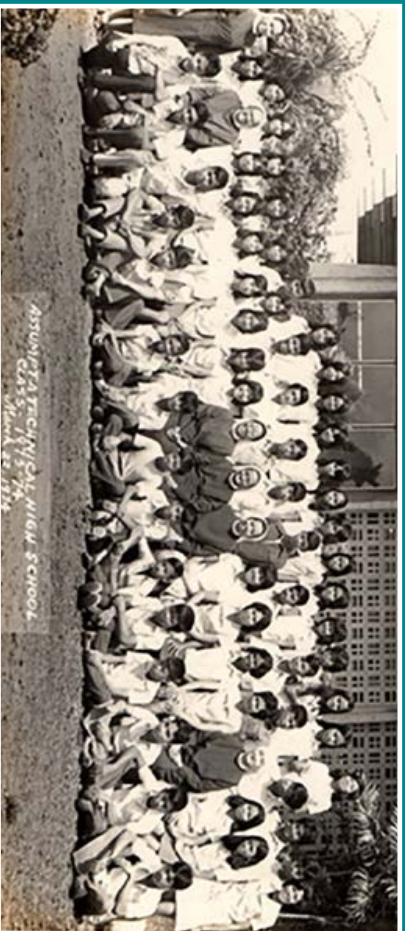
The MRMF Board members would visit regularly. In particular, Miguel "Mike" Magsaysay, of the Magsaysay Lines shipping group, would come every week to check on the sisters and the school for any repairs needed. He served on the MRMF Board from 1973 to 1990. He had taken over his wife, Cecilia's Board seat. Cecilia Magsaysay was on the Board from 1970 to 1973. His daughter, Mariane Pratte, would later follow her father in the MRMF Board as its Treasurer. She remembers the many Saturdays some members of the family would join him in Assumpta as he went off to talk to the farmers while they would join the sisters in prayer.

Sr. Iris Marion Clark, an American sister was also part of the second community of sisters. She was once known as Sr. William, but she changed her name to Iris when masculine

names for sisters were no longer used. Sr. Iris was from Miami, USA, where she taught in a parochial school before being asked to work with the poor. She arrived in the Philippines the day after Martial Law was declared in 1972. On a stopover in Bangkok, she received the news about Martial Law from a telegram from Paris, which cautioned her that it was "Safer not to come." She came anyway. She was happy to be welcomed by Sr. Eloisa Maria Hervas, her Superior and someone she had been with in the USA Novitiate. Right away, she was brought to San Simon where she taught English, mathematics and physics.

In 1973, Sr. Iris started the Electronics department. She recalls her early years in Assumpta, "I was very grateful to God that he sent me to San Simon when I first came to the Philippines. I learned all of what is the best in the Filipino from my encounter with the people in San Simon, through its students and teachers. It made me realize we have so much that we can give to others without knowing that we are getting so much more back. I got from the students there an understanding of how God works. You don't need a lot to be happy. They were hardworking, most of them had a good family life, and my understanding of how God is a loving God came from being with those students."





## High Achieving, High Poverty Schools

**H**ow does a school cater to students from a high poverty area obtain and retain high standards?

Research on the characteristics of effective schools serving high poverty communities have identified critical factors that must be present. These include a culture of high expectations and caring for students, a safe and disciplined environment, a principal who is a strong instructional leader, hardworking, committed and able teachers, and a curriculum focused on academic achievement that emphasizes basic skills in mathematics and literacy.

Becoming such a school requires an evolution as an educational institution. For Assumpta, this was extra challenging since the school they envisioned was offering a different curriculum for a different clientele in an area unfamiliar to the sisters and lay partners of the MRMF. Assumpta had to become an institution that knew how to learn. It began with the challenge of learning how to be effective. Effectivity in this case meant learning how to transplant the Assumption brand of education on the fertile soil of San Simon. How was Assumption education to flourish for the poor when it had been designed to cater to affluent students? How was it to thrive as an educational institution for girls and also for boys? And how was it to succeed as a technical school as well as a rigorous academic institution? Another great challenge was how to become an efficient and professionally-run school. Only upon taking on these challenges of becoming effective and efficient and conquering them, was Assumpta able to begin to learn to expand.

I did not consider going to any other school. The Pamanga Central High School was in my barangay therefore nearer to my home. But once I learned I passed in Assumpta, I did not consider any other school. Assumpta was a byword for providing a good education.

- Azor Sitchon,  
ATHS Class of 1976

We know your school for being one of the best High Schools in Region III. May we request our laboratory assistant be allowed to visit your Science laboratory for exposure in laboratory management?

- Excerpt from a letter from  
Holy Angel's University





All these characteristics focus on the leadership and human capital, the quality of persons who led the school, and those who taught in the classrooms. In this chapter we will focus on the principals, or chairpersons as they are known in Assumpta, and the teachers who have contributed to the formation of AHS. Some were great instructional leaders, others led by example showing great wisdom or strong commitment. Together they created a school with a clear mission focused on discovering and liberating the best in each of their students – the mark of an Assumption school.

What makes Assumpta different? Assumpta offers a regular academic Basic Education curriculum with technical courses beginning in the first year (now 7<sup>th</sup> Grade). The academic courses prepare its students for college. The school is known for the high number of students who pass the National College Entrance Examinations (NCEE) at an average far surpassing the provincial average. It also has the reputation for producing students who pass the entrance examinations of prestigious

colleges and universities in Metro Manila and Pampanga. Moreover, most who pass are also offered scholarships. For those unable to advance to a tertiary education, the technical courses are supposed to prepare the students for immediate employment after high school. Most importantly, the school is distinguished for its Christian ideals whose evidence are lives committed to serve their communities and those in need. This ethos is contained in Assumpta's institutional mission:

*To educate towards transformation of Persons and Communities who are rooted in Jesus Christ;*

*Motivated by an on-going process of learning that is leading them towards becoming committed Christians;*

*Free and capable of making responsible decisions in favor of LIFE;*

*Equipped with skills, knowledge and culture necessary to participate in the growth of the community.*

### Learning to be Effective: Faith and a Culture of Caring and Discipline

Sr. Ana Maria Meloccon (Principal, 1972-78) recounts that at the beginning the focus was on establishing a good scholastic foundation. This was a mission that the congregation was familiar with having established good schools in Manila and Iloilo. However, as a first-time principal and teacher, Sr. Ana Maria's utmost concern was how to implement not just the regular academic curriculum but also the vocational or technical one. To prepare herself, she wrote her masteral thesis on an agro-industrial curriculum for Assumpta. Armed with the insights from her study, she went about strengthening the technical subjects.

The technical subjects first introduced were agriculture for the boys and sewing for the girls. Sr. Ana Maria recalls their early days fondly: "I had to look for the agriculture teachers. Once I had the agriculturists, we planted two hectares of rice. Other sisters also helped. Sr. Iris said she knew how to plant rice. One day, she went into the field and immediately sank knee deep into the wet soil and tumbled over, giving the sisters a good laugh. For the girls we had sewing. I contacted Cinderella (the clothing store) because they were doing smocking. Later on, we had electronics. The children were very motivated.

The Mother General came in 1976, and she asked what the disciplinary problems were, I said, 'None,' because children were very motivated, they cleaned the school and did the gardening."

Second, Third, and Fourth year students were required to devote six hours a week to vocational courses, while First Year students spent four hours a week in training. For most students, their vocational courses helped to provide livelihood skills for supplementary income. It was hoped that students who could not finance their college education could be equipped with livelihood skills they could use after graduation.







The requirement to spend almost ten hours a day in school gave the students discipline and a seriousness that marked the Assumptian. They learned to be resourceful and responsible. Lito Tayag shares, "The focus of the Religious of Assumption was to uphold the same standard of education that we have in San Lorenzo for its mission schools. Regardless of the economic standard, they never

compromised on the quality of education in the school. Even before my batch, there were many who went on to study in the Ateneo and La Salle as scholars. We were all given that kind of academic discipline. We would always come to school early and end up going home late. There were two or three extra hours for our technical subjects, but academics was not compromised. You had the sense you were attaining a complete education. The vocational component trained us for the realities of preparing us for a livelihood. It was an education of the hands as well as of our minds and hearts. Education of the hands in the form of acquiring vocational skills balances the academic education. I chose to study electronics in Assumptia. We were the first group that made money by selling our Christmas lanterns. Sr. Iris spearheaded and bankrolled our project. Up to now I'm pretty decent at fixing electrical things. If I see a piece of equipment, I can still diagnose

the electricity requirement and electronic components needed. But more importantly, application is the discipline you acquire, the ability to execute, the creation of projects. My best project was a lampshade made of bamboo that stayed in my house for a long time. It's a completely different thing to know how to execute a project."

Sr. Iris recounts that many of the students in the early years were able to get scholarships to college partly because their English was very good and that in Assumptia, they were taught and encouraged to speak up and ask questions. She recalls meeting a former student who was studying in Ateneo, she asked him, "How is your math?" He replied, "Sister, I am doing fine in math, but my classmates are wondering why I speak with an American accent!"

The students of the time remember that many of their teachers were the sisters themselves. In the very early years they set the tone for what an Assumption school should be. As in other Assumption institutions of learning, the Christian faith was to be the center of the school experience.



Azor Stichon, (Batch 1976) remembers fondly, "I cannot forget our masses, almost daily mass or at least three times a week. It would be the center of the school week. We formed a choir." Evelyn Cordova (Class of 1979) also remembers the daily masses and the morning talk, "The contribution of Assumpta in my life was to help me get to know Jesus." In this way, the school's culture mirrors a fundamental principle of Assumption education – that education flows from faith in Jesus Christ.

From the start, there was a very marked culture of caring for the students. Chit Manlapaz (Class of 1977) recalls, "During my time in school both sisters and lay were teaching, we could see the family spirit within the school. Our parents felt we were safe if things like floods happened because they knew the sisters would take care of us. When I was in second year, there was the

great flood. I remember Mother Lourdes took a curtain and sewed us new uniforms out of the curtain because our clothes had been damaged by the flood. In 1972 and again in 1974, there were two great floods. These calamities did not stop until 1979 when the highway was raised. During these times I saw the school become a relief center for the community. The impact of that experience instilled in me the perception that Assumpta is not just a school of choice but a community school. All the resources of the school were for the community."

Babes Yambao, a teacher from the late 1970s remembers, "Mother Angela was very motherly. Every morning she would do the Stations of the Cross. She was very old school, she would teach us how to behave, even the proper way to enter a car: to sit at the very end so that others would not have a hard time coming in. Even about gossiping, she would say 'You are professionals, did your gossip prepare you to be a teacher?' She was very loving. She even researched the meaning of my name. When we went on retreat, she would send us personal notes." In this and many other ways, the sisters showed the importance of character formation of both the teachers and the students.

Another fundamental principle established by Mother Foundress, St. Marie Eugenie of Jesus, is that education in Assumption is a process of liberation for the human person and for the transformation of society.

Azor Stichon (Batch 1976), narrates how the Sisters brought their own personal touch, "Mother Josefa captured our hearts and minds, and she was twice my class adviser in first year and in fourth year. She had her way of bringing out the best in us, making us comfortable, making us transparent."

Lito Tavag says he learned leadership, "One of the biggest influences were the sisters,

they were very hands on, and they were our real teachers. The key lesson I got was about leadership, I was doing well academically, but Sr. Ana Maria said you have to go beyond academics and you have to have your influence. It was an important lesson, so I started to step up and take on more leadership roles. I was core commander for the Civilian Army Training (CAT), the de facto leader of the batch, since we had no student council then."







### **Learning to be Efficient: Developing Professionalism**

In the 1980s, the school, with a decade of effective operations behind it, was to begin a new phase of its evolution. The focus now was on even getting better, learning to be professionals and for the Jay teachers and staff to start assuming leadership and ownership of the school. During this phase, the school began to become more of a learning organization.

A learning organization requires a strong visionary leader, a systems perspective, a flexible organizational structure, and a collaborative culture where learnings are shared.

PAASCU One of the mechanisms that helped to develop a systems perspective and create a collaborative organizational structure was joining the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools Colleges and Universities (PAASCU). The PAASCU is a group of educational institutions that voluntarily banded together as a private professional educational agency to grant recognition to educational institutions that maintain above average standards. This recognition is granted by being awarded the status of an accredited school. PAASCU does not expect all schools to be identical. Rather, it evaluates the school according to its stated philosophy and

objectives, taking into consideration the nature and needs of its students and the school's individual context.

Before Assumpta attained its PAASCU accreditation, no other school in Region III had ever attempted to do so. When Assumpta was granted accreditation, the school became the first in the whole Region to be accredited. PAASCU introduced systems thinking through its criteria for evaluating schools. Schools are asked to review nine areas of operations that include its: (1) Philosophy and Objectives; (2) Faculty; (3) Instruction; (4) Library; (5) Laboratories; (6) Physical Plant; (7) Student Services; (8) Administration; and, (9) School and Community.

To become accredited, a school would begin with a self-survey of the nine areas, highlighting their best features and pointing out the areas they thought would need improvement. Developing all the materials required to do a self-survey was a herculean task in the beginning, lasting several months and requiring dedicated teams for each criterion. A PAASCU team of educators would visit using this self-survey report as their take-off point and would review their written and spoken testimonies and observe classes. After a three-day visit a report would be made on whether the school had passed and could be accredited for the next five years.



Before this accreditation process was introduced, Sr. Josefina Magat who was the principal in 1981, decided that it was time for the school to articulate its vision and mission. In the decade prior, especially after the beatification of Mother Marie Eugenie in 1975, there was a new focus on learning her life story through dramatizations and through her writings. But it was only in 1981 when St. Marie Eugenie's philosophy of education was incorporated into the school's vision and mission.

Babes Yambao remembers Sr. Josefina as a transformational leader who helped them with the vision for the school. She recounts, "Sr. Josefina gave the impression that she was the principal, this was after the previous years when the person of the principal changed quite frequently, but she came in and immediately was in charge. She brought discipline; we started to have a direction, and with her guidance, we formulated a vision statement. To craft the vision statement, we had meetings with the different sectors in the school and community." Collaborative work is a trademark of the Assumpta and articulating the vision involved the critical sectors including the farmers, parents, faculty and sisters.

Sr. Josefina thinks back on how she had to broach the idea of PAASCU very strategically. She explains, "In 1982, I challenged the faculty to consider engaging the PAASCU in a professional assessment of the school without right away elaborating on the demands it would take. I simply explained that we would examine all areas of the school and once approved, one big benefit would be our continuous self-improvement."

As expected, it was hard work from the very beginning. Armed with the PAASCU questionnaires, Sr. Josefina formed different teams and strategically made the faculty and staff vote for the lay chairperson to head the task at hand but always with her behind to accompany the process. The teams worked on their respective areas after school hours and she met each group on Saturdays for coaching. She now tells of their very gratifying experience of daring into the unknown. "We submitted our first PAASCU report in 1983. Right away we had our preliminary visit after which we were informed that the school passed and was ready for the formal survey the following school year. We received the formal PAASCU accredited status on our initial attempt! We were the first in Region III to be accredited and the first too in the country for a vocational/ technical high school. A real collaborative effort of the whole school, the success was celebrated by all and the sense of ownership of the process stands to this day.



*The Assumpta Family of Educators who braved the PAASCU for the first time and laid the foundation for the succeeding accreditation years.*

"I experienced God's presence with us right on my first year as school principal (1979-80). One day, a truck arrived at the school after school hours and it contained science equipment. There were so many instruments, that they filled the gallery. It turned out that there previously was a survey by the First Lady of the needs of science laboratories in the country. Sr. Ana Maria submitted a list for Assumpta, but the equipment was delivered during my time as principal. So, our science laboratory was really well equipped. We had one microscope for every two students. This allowed them to be hands-on during their science classes. And when we prepared for the PAASCU, we secured the laboratory and we could say the steel bars on the windows were made by the carpentry department and the curtains were done by the garment trade class."



Some of the commendations received during their first attempt at accreditation spoke of the school's growing culture of collaboration, the centrality of the faith in all subjects, the vocational courses, and the focus on community.

Excerpts from the PAASCU report include the best features of the school in 1983:

- The Team commends the leadership and ongoing efforts of the school to clarify its thrust and to integrate and internalize its Philosophy and Objectives. This is expressed through the painstaking endeavor to share responsibilities among themselves entering into a process of building team work with a core group of participative leadership.
- The inclusion of the whole school faculty in the religion teachers' training to help deepen both knowledge and practice.
- The team commends the provision of student-made library furniture to cope with the immediate needs of the library.
- The team commends the pedagogical structure set-up of a systematic instructional exchange between the school and the San Simon Integrated Rural Development Project (SSIRDP) allowing the students to learn beyond the classroom and books. The students' involvement in the Sama-Samang Sikap Kristiyano program is an excellent venue for barrio integration.

Part of the preparation for PAASCU involved formulating the school's vision, mission and objectives. The faculty, staff, parents, farmers and sisters articulated the vision, mission and objectives of the school, inspired by the charism of the Religions of the Assumption. The faculty's participation in crafting the mission statement deepened their commitment to the Assumption's mission of education. Over time, the teachers and staff began to assume their own growth and formation. This period also marked the lay faculty's participation in the administration by becoming members of the experimental core group representing the subject and service areas they coordinated.

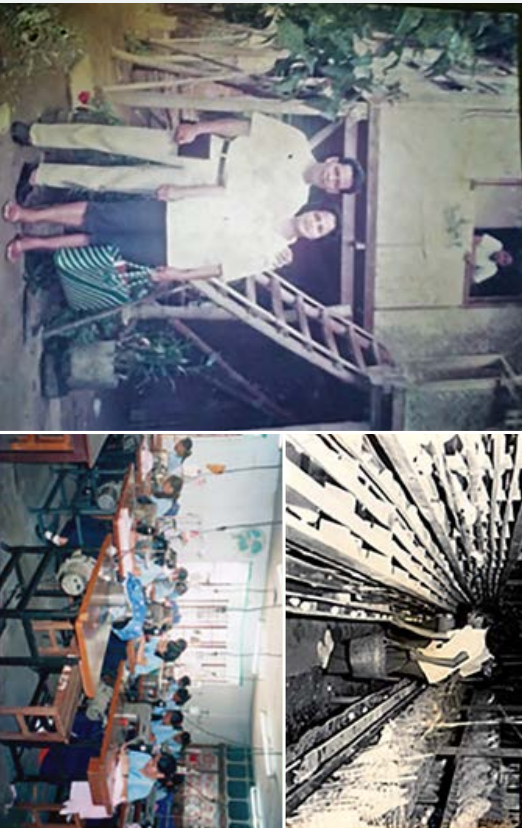
The deepened commitment of the faculty to the school's mission was noted in the 1994 PAASCU Resurvey report that stated:

"The Faculty is commended for their living-out the vision-mission of the school, motivating them to integrate such values in their relationship and close collaboration between and among the faculty, parents and the members of the San Simon Integrated Rural Development Program. Also commended is the good number of ATHS alumni in the faculty who have come back to share their values, knowledge and skills. This new professionalism did not come easily."

### Discipline

Babes Yambao reflects on Sr. Josefina's strong leadership at that time. "I was scared of Sr. Josefina, she was strict with teachers who were late. During test days, she would not let them start proctoring if one teacher was late. But we learned. She gave us discipline, she taught us professionalism. I remember her telling us, 'give justice to the children, give them what is due to them, if you do not teach well you are being unjust, you cannot dismiss until the bell is rung.' She also emphasized ownership, she would tell us, 'this is not the mission of the sisters, when you came it became yours, you must show malasakit.'"

She adds, "Sr. Josefina really focused on academics, on instruction. Under her we started to have weekly faculty meetings, we started to experience transparency in decision making, not so much in the area of finance but on those which professionally affected the personnel. There was a forum for the concerns of the teachers and we had more consultation sessions during the faculty meeting. There was training of teachers on how to moderate meetings and record minutes as we took turns assuming the responsibilities. It was very simple, but we started to develop a system."



### Strengthening Vocational Education

Sr. Josefina recounts how she also worked on improving the technical subjects. She relates, "In Agriculture it was just farming, rice and vegetables when I arrived. We explored other areas to maximize the learning experiences of students and hopefully, even of the wider community. Enthused by possibilities observed in several model farms visited by the Agriculture class, the department was able to introduce six more modules: raising fish, chicken layers, chicken growers, hogs, cows, and 5 breeds of milking goats. Rice growing was only once a year because of the floods but methods and student practices were improved so production of about

30 to 40 cavans per harvest was eventually raised to 120 cavans without expanding our land dedicated to rice farming."

She shares another story, "In Garment Trades, I observed students sewing skirts and blouses using pages of old newspaper because even their old clothes at home were still fully used. Mother Angela, our Superior then, used to receive visits from former classmates in Assumption-Herran. The daughter of one of them owned a garment factory in Manila and was engaged in whole scale export industry. I made a daring visit and found a perfect source of excellent garment cut-ends. Our sewing

students had ample practice in developing skills for making shorts, skirts, jackets, blouses, casual dresses, and semi-formal attire - to their delight. Happier were some jobless mothers to whom we entrusted the students' finished products for them to sell in the barrios without having to invest on any capital at all. The garment trade department had their income generating project and the parents earned modestly in the beautiful cycle involving our graduates of Manila and the young Assumpians of San Simon."

Sr. Josefina further narrates, "For the Carpentry classes, once I challenged the teacher to do away with the fourth-year written examination and instead, assign the students to apply all the skills taken up in their specialization years by constructing a real house. He was very hesitant but I prevailed upon him especially when another faculty member offered to take care of all the materials, and when the students excitedly accepted the project to build his house as their final assessment output. This dream was presented at a faculty meeting to resolve the problem of time. One science teacher had a bright idea which all concerned teachers accepted. The Carpentry students were to focus on the house construction, full time, for one quarter after which all their school periods would be allotted fully to academic subjects. The whole school happily assumed all the ramifications of this arrangement especially the adjustment

needed in the already finalized class schedule. Again, it was not just a learning experience for the carpentry department but for the whole institution. A Mass was celebrated by our elderly parish priest during the house blessing and addressing the whole school population, he did not hesitate to show how moved he was to see that the school could push a learning experience that far. We celebrated together the carpentry boys' achievement and all their schoolmates' sense of pride

### The Challenge of Martial Law

Professionalism during those years required courage. Sr. Josefina retells a story of how challenging it was to manage a school during the time of martial law, "I would attend all government meetings. During one meeting of mostly private school administrators, the DECS official announced that the complete set of textbooks for all levels and subject areas were already prepared and ready for sale. I examined some copies and confirmed my guess that they contained a uniform introduction highlighting the justification for the Martial Law regime. I talked to some priests and religious women and challenged them that they could make better learning materials for their needs. I was called aside by the DECS official who told me, "I will allow you not to take those books for your school but please do not speak out in the assembly." He visited me the following weekend and I shared about our curriculum, showed him



the educational materials we were using, and explained how those books I could not accept for our classes were not compatible with what a Catholic school should stand for. He also shared his own personal convictions and we became good friends after that.”

Babes Yambao admired her courage, “Sr. Josefina also instituted the first student council – creating the Assumpta Student Board (ASB) with the Student President attending the Wednesday faculty and staff meetings once a month to update them of current student concerns. Later, as soon as Martial Law was lifted up, the school paper, “Bigkis” was also launched.

Since the first PAASCU attempt, the school has consistently been granted its accreditation status. In 2009, Irma Medina as chairperson received a letter from the PAASCU Executive Director, Concepcion Pjano, inviting the school to apply for Level III Status. Assumpta was chosen as one of the first 20 high schools to apply because it had already been receiving clean 5-year reaccreditation. Among these 20 candidates, only 17 finally qualified. Assumpta, forming part of the first batch of level III PAASCU accredited high schools nationwide has well maintained the status.

#### **Harold Espinoza**

Assumpta’s growth, however, was not without some setbacks and painful lessons. One involved the death of a student.

Harold Espinoza was an exemplary electronics student judged to be one of the best in his class. As part of the curriculum, one class requirement was the handling of live wires. This was taught in both the Third and Fourth Year. The test involved isolating the wires and insulating them. Upon investigation, it was found that Harold completed isolating the wires and insulating one wire. The bell rang for lunch break but Harold joked his groupmates that he felt he was being electrocuted yet went on working. Then he called out to one of them, but accidentally touched one live wire which had not been insulated. He and his groupmates were within sight of his instructor. Seeing that he was indeed being electrocuted, his groupmates pulled the ladder he was on and called out to the teacher, Mr. Caballero, who arrived in time to catch Harold and break his fall. The school nurse immediately administered cardio pulmonary resuscitation. Harold was rushed to Macabali Hospital and then transferred to Makati Medical Center. There was no legal fault or negligence on the part of the school, but the administration felt the incident created a moral responsibility to help the student and his family. The school paid for his hospitalization, very generously supported by the high school alumnae of Assumption-San Lorenzo, and also contributed to support Harold’s expenses after his discharge. Assumpta likewise extended various forms of help to the family which were very much appreciated. Sadly, Harold remained in a vegetative state until his death in 2005.

#### **The Leadership of Babes Yambao and Irma Medina**

Assumpta’s growing professionalism resulted from the careful training provided by the Assumption sisters as well as the dedication and commitment of the teachers and staff. Babes Yambao, Assumpta’s first lay principal, was hired as an English teacher in 1977. Through the years she moved on to also teach Religion, and then became English and Filipino coordinator in the first experimental Core Group formed to manage the school.

For her professional growth, she enrolled in the FIRE program in Ateneo to strengthen her qualifications as a Religion teacher. She later completed a master’s degree in Education.

From this post she assumed the role of Academic Coordinator in the late 1980s. She was also appointed PAASCU Chairman in the 1990s, shepherding the school through various PAASCU accreditations. Finally, in December, 1993, she replaced Sr. Mary Ann Azanza as Chairperson of the Core Group because she had to attend a formation session in Paris.

However, when Sr. Mary Ann returned at the end of that school year, she received a new assignment. But before she left, Sr. Mary Ann pronounced her perpetual vows at the school chapel of Assumpta, surrounded by her family, friends from Manila, Sisters from the different Assumption Communities and the Assumpta teachers and staff. After this, Miss Yambao was asked to continue being the head of the school, a position which she held until school year 2005-2006. Her dedication and style of



leadership gave stability to the school. After 12 years in top administration, Miss Yambao happily returned to her original love, the classroom teaching, while leading again the English department and humbly witnessing to a professional and uncompromised dedication to educating our Assumptians.

Replacing Babes Yambao as Chairperson was Irma Medina of batch 1981. She started out as a Nutrition teacher. She would be instrumental in professionalizing the technical courses. Leng Manalastas (faculty member 1972-2010) attests to Irma’s influence, “She was very good at improving her department. Irma worked very hard to professionalize vocational education.”

Irma herself recounted how she learned to transform her department, “I recalled Sr. Josefina had an agenda and how she followed up on things after they were discussed. I visited other schools and organizations, like the Erda Foundation and I wanted to imitate

their best practices. By benchmarking with other institutions, I learned how to improve our vocational curriculum, and how to place students in their specialization.”

In 2013, Assumpta was one of the five Catholic schools chosen to be showcased during the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) National Convention in Cebu. A video was presented to show the Assumpta's significant milestones and its contribution to poverty alleviation and quality education in their community. Assumpta was also recognized by the DepEd Region III Regional Director for attaining the fifth highest overall mean percentage score out of 171 private schools in the SY 2012-13 National Achievement Test in the Division of Pampanga for the private secondary school level.

In 2014, Assumpta hired an Organizational Development specialist, who helped the school improve its organizational structure, prepared a succession plan and instituted management systems.

### Learning to Expand

After 37 years of operating as a secondary education institution, Assumpta in 2007 decided to spread its wings and open a pre-school. In 2008, realizing that there was a larger market for its educational services, it opened its Grade School starting with Grades 1 to 4. Since then

it has bloomed into a full basic education institution from pre-school to Senior High School. The school population rose from 512 high school students in 1996 to 1,445 preschool, grade school and high school students in 2011, and to a complete K-12 population of 2,071 in school year 2017-18. This fast growth necessitated an expansion of facilities over the years. The campus area has remained the same but new school buildings, laboratories, workshops, libraries, canteen and computer facilities were either built or had major renovation. This current school year, despite the adverse effects of the pandemic on the local and national economy, the school population still surprisingly reached 1,991 enrollees. For their protection as well as that of all the educators, ATHS felt called to adapt to an entirely new experience of expansion - that of entering into the unfamiliar modalities of distance learning as challenged by the corona virus. To this new reality, the whole school has responded with professional readiness, admirable generosity, and a courageous commitment to keep on learning as an institution.

Assumpta also expanded or transformed its technical education curriculum. In the very early years, the vocational choices were limited to agriculture, carpentry, garment trade and later, also electronics. By mid-'70s these grew into six courses with the addition of Business Distributive Arts (BDA) and Food Trades. Over the years, these courses would change to adapt



to evolving market demands and industries. Computer Programming and Computer Technology were introduced in 2004 and also Hotel and Restaurant Services, Basic Health Services responded to the growing need for health care workers. Carpentry evolved into Wood Arts and BDA became the new course on Accountancy and Entrepreneurship.

For SY 2016-17, the technology and livelihood education courses included Computer subjects for Grade 7 and 8 and the exploratory technical courses of drafting, entrepreneurship, food service and home nursing for Grade 7. By Grades 8 to 10, students focused on one of seven courses including bookkeeping, bread and pastry production, caregiving, computer programming, computer technology, food and beverage service and furniture and cabinet making. With the introduction by the Department of Education of the Senior High School level, Assumpta opened its doors to the Grade 11 class in SY 2016-17 offering the General Academic Track with strands on ABM (Accounting, Business and Management) and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the Southeast Asian region a third expansion took place – a replication of the Assumpta and its mission. Assumption in Thailand is closely linked to St. John's University in Bangkok where the Assumption sisters have their community house. From this base they teach English and work with the Bangkok Catholic diocese. The founder of the Catholic St. John's University, Ajarn Samai Chinnapa, deeply appreciated the mission of the Assumpta after his Executive Director Chinarong Monthien Vichienchai visited the Philippines in the 1990s. The Assumpta inspired the replication in 2000 of the mission of a technical high school in a rural community in Thailand – the St. John's High school in Thabom, Loei. Like Assumpta, St. John's High School began as an administered school of the Religious of the Assumption. Like Assumpta's origins, most of the villagers are farmers. Again, like Assumpta, St. John High School's commitment to the sisters has grown from running a High School to also offering a preschool and primary school, the Mahathai Suksa Thabom School (but in this case one owned by the Diocese of Udonthani). The total enrollment of both schools is over 1,000 students hailing from some 60 villages.

### Physical Expansion: The Architect as Artist

A former student walking into Assumpta today would be struck by how much the campus has expanded both architecturally and in its landscaping. Several more school buildings dot the campus than there were in the early years. Ricefields and barren areas have turned into a training center, a cooking laboratory and a duck filled pond with a center island. Much of the beautification of the school's landscape, is the work of Sr. Josefina Magat. She recalls the many benefactors and architects who worked to transform the school over the years. One architect in particular, labored with much heart to transform the place that was his own school. The school in its present form is marked by his artistry.

"When I first arrived in San Simon in 1979, I found a welcoming campus dotted with a row of agogo trees on one side under which many students used to share their packed lunch, as well as some almost invisible young acacia seedlings, and rich santan shrubs blooming all year round. Many colors of bougainvillea bloomed in summer highlighting the administration building that linked the impressive chapel, donated by Macario Palanca and family, and the Sisters' convent donated by Pacita Madrigal Gonzales. Architect Felipe Mendoza designed this complex which amazed the Religious of the Assumption. They thought they would see a simple native structure, something

made of "sawali," but their former students who spearheaded the project said, "The poor deserve the best." The original edifice sprawled with two more wings. One side housed a small library, a few classrooms, and the science laboratory; the other wing was unfinished with only three classrooms donated in the name of three sisters – Ana, Rosa and Susana Madrigal. After a few years, Batch 1958 of Assumption-Manila donated a classroom. This was followed by Batch '57, completing the wing with their two additional rooms. Behind this building was a small canteen, a "bahay-kutob" for the faculty area, the old electronics building back to back with the carpentry classroom, and a big piggery. The rest of the property was a 3-hectare rice fields which eventually gave way to a major poultry project. The Mother Milagros Training Center rose in the area very much later. There were no neighbors in the immediate vicinity then and the silence gave such a serenity that was welcoming and friendly.

Today, in contrast with what was in the late 70's, Assumpta welcomes us first with its major symbol of its Catholic education – a huge chapel, shaped like a boat, as if "stirring the faithful" towards their God-given destiny. The original structures still remain but very much refurbished to serve the clientele better. A new two-story building to the right named after Erlinda Velasco houses the junior high school, with its prayerful oratory donated by Luz Morales. Beside the expanded canteen, a huge



gym stands, made of what was originally in Assumption-San Lorenzo, prior to their modern sports complex. Another two-story structure was initially funded by the Velasco family to meet the urgent need of the fast growing grade school. An impressive structure nearby is the three-story science building and senior high school area named after Soledad Pangilinan. It is built on stilts. The fish pond under, as well as the surrounding fruit orchard,

form part of the science laboratory. The pride of Assumpta in all these progressive physical development of its campus is another alumnus, Joseph Musni of batch '77, whose excellent expertise is behind each artistic and efficient project. His secret in each endeavor not only in Assumpta but also in all his projects in the Philippines and abroad, is his early morning quiet and chili-dike conversations with the Lord after starting each day with the Gospel. "





## From Subsidy to Socialized Tuition

When I was invited to join the Board in 2000, I discovered that they only had enough funds to cover one month's salary of the teachers and staff. I approached Romme Velasco for a grant and he stipulated that he would give the funds if the sisters were willing to raise the tuition fee. This was in the hope that in the future, tuition fees could cover the expenses needed and future grants would no longer be needed. At that time the average tuition contribution was just P460.00 a month. I wrote the sisters with the decision. I told them that we either raise the tuition or the teachers would need to work without pay. They of course objected to this and said that if they raised the tuition fee the parents would take their children out of school. I told them that if the parents would do that it would prove that the school was no good! Luckily, they were proven wrong, the tuition fee was raised, and the school population went from 400 students to 420 students the next year.

*Ambassador Bienvenido Tam*

At present, school revenue accounts for 95% of the cost and the remaining 5% is provided by the MRMF.

*(MRMF BOT Report 2010)*



Private schools for the poor exist in nearly all developing countries. In the past, private education catered mainly to those who could afford its steep tuition. However, since public schools cannot keep up with the growing population, an increase in the demand for schools enticed the private sector to enter the education market. Another factor influencing the growth of private schools for the poor was the low quality of education in many public schools. The Religious of the Assumption started to open schools for the poor in the 1960s and 1970s, in keeping with the growing understanding of the church's social mission. The greater challenge was to keep these schools financially viable and sustainable for the future.

Private schools that accommodate low-income families are inevitably at risk of financial difficulties and even failure. They depend heavily on tuition or financial aid from the founder (pensions, church donations, etc.). They are often offered tuition in kind (such as a family's farm produce or manual labor). They are often overly dependent on a single charismatic founder.<sup>5</sup>

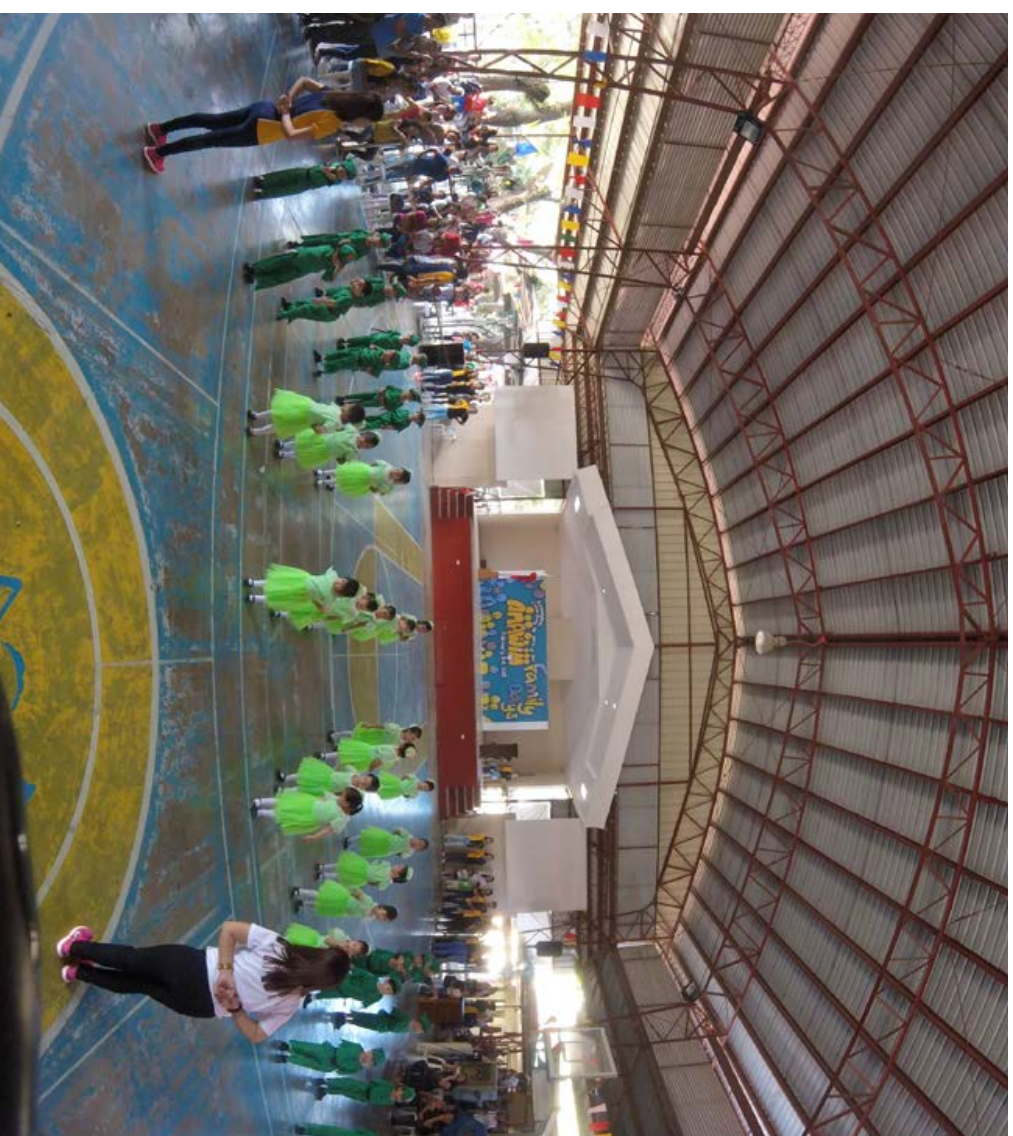
Today, Government has come up with various schemes to assist private schools such as through vouchers or subsidies. Private schools have also had to adopt innovative business models to finance their schools for the poor. The Omega schools in Ghana, for example, started in 2009 and operate on a daily fee payment system in order to provide mass access to "low-fee" private education for the poor at the lowest cost. By 2013, they were operating 20 schools across the country offering nursery to Junior High School. But

balancing financial viability and providing quality education remain big challenges.

The story of Assumpta's evolution to financial sustainability is one of struggle to find the appropriate business model that enabled it to stay faithful to its mission of educating the poor while maintaining its standard for quality education.

Assumpta started with a subsidized tuition model that needed to evolve for sustainability. This evolution was challenged by the need to maintain its commitment to its mission to educate the poorest. Its funding strategy changed from donations and fundraising to school-based income-generating projects to the current more sustainable socialized tuition scheme. Through it all, it maintained its values and mission by following a process of discernment and shared decision-making.

<sup>5</sup> Heyneman, Stephen and Stern, Jonathan, "Low Cost Private Schools for the Poor," *International Journal of Education Development*, 2013







Looking back, ATIS in its early years relied heavily on the MRMF for almost everything. In 1972, the school's expenses totaled P96,900. The MRMF had contributed and solicited donations of P182,200 giving it a comfortable excess of funds in the amount of P85,000 or almost 9 months of funds needed for the next year.

Azor Stichon, Batch 1976 recalls his student days, "They were giving us free recess, not every day, but frequently we were given milk and bread. During that time, floods were frequent. The sisters would collect donations of relief goods and clothes, so we were priority beneficiaries for the goods and clothes. We were paying P4.00 a month tuition, some of us could even pay in kind, bring a chicken or the harvest of their farm as payment."

As principal Sr. Ana Maria wrote many solicitation letters to raise funds for the school. She would request donations from companies for specific cost centers. In 1978, for instance, she wrote to a maritime company seeking support for the operations of the agriculture department:

"Assumpta being in the heart of rice fields by necessity offers an agricultural department specializing in agronomy.

This schoolyear we are lucky to have a professor who is a graduate of UP Los Baños and has many plans to put up our agricultural school, make it the center of experimentation for our service barrios to emulate. Our cost expenditure to run the whole department is P26,541. Once the three hectares of rice will be fully operated and managed properly, the agriculture department will be self-liquidating."

In 1976, the MRMF pegged its subsidy for the school at P11,000 a month or P110,000 for the whole year. By 1978 this subsidy grew 65% to P18,000 a month.

In 1979, the Ministry of Education called the school's attention because their teachers were receiving salaries below the minimum wage. Minimum basic pay for a high school teacher was at P484 per month, but some Assumpta teachers were receiving just P320. Salaries were adjusted resulting in another subsidy increase from P18,000 to P25,809 monthly. At the time, the Board was trying to live on their capital investment income which was only P10,000 a month. To come up with the balance of P15,000 a month, MRMF started a yearly fund-raising campaign and approached various firms to sponsor either technical classes or a teacher.

The sisters were also doing their share. Sr. Angela, in a letter to her former students who lived in the US, wrote in 1981:

“All modesty aside, this Assumption insertion of San Simon is considered by the whole Congregation as one that best implements our thrust towards justice and liberation (so dear to Mother Marie Eugenie) and one that bridges the gap between rich and poor. Our farmers and students know that our tuition fee can be a minimal P15 monthly and the barrio organization effectively seen through by efficient community workers only because concerned well-to-do Christians like the PBSP and MRMF assume the burden of subsidizing the apostolate. Incidentally, MRMF is your creation and you can be proud of the Board of Alumnae and their husbands (Avanceña, Rufino, Fernandez, Magasay, etc.) who perseveringly feel responsible for the P35,000 monthly expense of the school and the P24,000 they add to the PBSP financing of the SSIRDIP in the barrios. The big worry is that the PBSP annual P155,000 subsidy ends in 1982. DO help us then with your fervent prayers... concretely speaking it would be a big financial boost were you to help increase our scholarship fund P300 yearly to see a HS boy or girl through his/ her tuition or P1,000 yearly for a scholarship and to lighten the school's administrative expenses and academic expenses per student. I'm

surprised –and you're probably shocked – at this “financial proposal” at the end of what was intended to be a friendly letter of affectionate embrace. Doesn't sound like me, does it? But I am barely three years here, in love with the place, the people, the mission, the Kingdom in San Simon, and I know it will be a grace for you to remember and participate in this work of the MRMF of the Alumnae.”

In a special Board meeting in 1985, the members noted that after 15 years of the school's operation, the Board was still subsidizing 90% of the school's costs. It was envisioned that one day this subsidy would shrink to just 50% of the expenses with the balance coming from the school and parents.

In a 1986 MRMF board meeting, several possibilities for augmenting the school's income were considered. Lists of foundations and embassies that provided grants were collated and suggestions were made on possible income generating projects such as a fishpond or piggyery.

In the same year, a three-level fishpond was developed on the school grounds. Using their own savings, the sisters constructed a classroom for the agriculture students. Plans were also being studied to open a garments factory that might hire the students' mothers to help them pay for their children's tuition.

On the fundraising ventures, Ambassador Tan struck a moderate note. He offered a word of caution saying that the school should make sure that there would be no cause for them to be accused of commercializing their education and exploiting the children. He suggested that the school stress that the profit activities of the school are used to defray the expenses of the school since it runs on donations.

With the help of Sr. Fe Emmanuel Beltran, r.a., who was principal from 1986-1988, the school learned how to approach international donors for assistance for the school and for the school's income generating projects.

In 1987, funds from grant-making organizations like the German Misereor and the French Inter-aid were sourced. Inter-aid granted the school a one-time grant of P210,000 which was used to help augment the teachers' salaries. The Board granted an increase in teachers' salaries amounting to P20 per day to keep up with the public school teachers' salaries of P2,100 per month versus Assumptia's pegged at P1,456.

While still maintaining the same number of students, the subsidy grew further 400% to P90,000 a year by 1988. The students were paying a fee of P15.00 per month. In 1988 the Board organized the concert “Kah (Ledesma) Sings for San Simon” as its fund-raising project. A total of P855,600 was raised from ticket sales and P414,000 from advertising sponsorships for a net income of P813,925.



In the mid-1990s, Sonjie Trillana recounts that Jose Alberto “Bebo” Quiroz joined the MRMF Board at the invitation of Mother Milagros. At the time, the task of subsidizing the school was at its heaviest. There was a long stretch when the Board was in charge of raising P400,000 a month to keep both the school and Insodev (its social development arm) operational. The cost of education then was at P10,000 to 12,000 per student. It was clear that either the enrollment base or the tuition income had to be raised. The Board, under the leadership of Chairman Bebo Quiroz, was able to build up a trust fund of P12 million through constant fundraising. Bebo not only contributed greatly to the fund, but he would also continue to provide donations for classrooms even after he left the Board. Unfortunately, this effort of constant fundraising also exhausted the funding base that the school had relied on and in subsequent years, it had become very difficult to raise funds from the same network of donors. The trust fund that was built up was gradually depleted to pay for the Board's monthly contributions.



By 1996, the strain of 26 years of constant fundraising started to be felt. Talk of closing the school started to crop up. That year, the MRMF subsidy declined to 63% with the balance of funds of 37% coming from tuition income, locally sourced donations, and small school-based income-generating projects.

While 63% was an improvement from 90% subsidy, this was far from the 50-50 sharing arrangement that had been envisioned 11 years before. During the period 1996-2004 the school population remained largely the same with an average of 540-560 students, but the total budget of the school doubled from P4.5 Million to P8.9 Million. This meant that while the MRMF share shrank from 63% to 36% by 2002 the actual subsidy rose from P2.8 Million to P3.1 Million in 1996.



During this period, the school tried to help with small income-generating efforts from its canteen, garments and carpentry departments. It also collected donations from its alumni and Jubilarians and the American Women's Club. One of its income-generating efforts was Lanya Zita, a furniture-making business. It operated from years 2000 to 2005 and in that time generated P771,000 for the school. But by 2005, despite efforts to revive the business, it closed due to the difficulty of meeting the standards of the export market clients. For a time, the school also tried to operate a large-scale Japan-funded poultry project and piggery.

Unfortunately, this period of income-generating projects also coincided with the Mount Pinatubo explosion which blanketed a large portion of the Pampanga province in ash, including the school. The Mount Pinatubo eruption of 1991 was declared the second largest volcanic eruption of the century. It produced high speed avalanches of hot ash and gas, giant mudflows and a cloud of volcanic ash hundreds of miles across. Assumpta is just 48 km away from Mount Pinatubo and the school was covered in ash.

Sr. Marie Emmanuel Melocoton, Superior of the San Simon community at that time, remembered the chaos then.

"The day after the eruption, I and a social worker went to assess the havoc the eruption caused in Pampanga. I was

overwhelmed by what I saw. The trees were drooping with the weight of the lahar. The rivers were covered with the volcanic ash, the crops were nowhere to be seen, houses were buried in lahar and only the roofs were visible. People were in shock, lost, walking about, not quite understanding what really hit them. Their stories were difficult to comprehend. Their experiences were unimaginable. Some however were trying to assert some control over the situation and were beginning to dig out their belongings and to retrieve whatever they could find."

Babes Yambao, spoke of the difficulties in maintaining the income-generating projects during these times. She recalls, "We could not find feeds for the animals, we did not know where to find water. For several weeks after the eruption, the chickens did not lay eggs. We had two large houses of layers. We were subcontractors of Monterey for the piggery. We sold the eggs at Minalin. This was the start of the decline in income generating agriculture projects. One class gave a generator to help us with the water. The agriculture teacher took care of the poultry but was not a full-time poultry manager. We tried so many projects."

These valiant efforts of local donations and income-generating projects did not decrease the subsidy. Nevertheless, the efforts were much appreciated. Ms. Yambao relates that,

"there was no quota for income-generating projects from the MRMF Board. But we could see the difficulties of the Board in raising funds. The income did not add even 10% to the budget but the Board appreciated our efforts."

From 2000 to 2004, the school undertook an experiment to raise the tuition fee through a 60-40% scheme whereby 40% of the students paid at least 50% of the actual cost of education, while 60% paid the regular AHS tuition fee. This was applied partially, starting



with first year students so the effect was gradual. In the year 2000, the MRMF subsidy was 52% of the total budget and by 2004 this had shrunk to 12%, with the subsidy shrinking from P4.2 Million to just P1.08 Million.

The socialized tuition fee scheme with a base of P650/month was suddenly implemented. This meant that from a previous tuition of P200/month, the amount the students would pay was raised to P650/month. It augmented the school revenue and MRMF felt less burdened financially. It seemed that the school had found a financially viable strategy to keep the school from closing.

#### A Mission Crisis

However, over time the financial burden that was lifted translated into a mission crisis. The parents, community and the faculty started to question whether the school under this scheme was still focused on the mission of educating the poor. Changes were also being discussed in the sisters' community about their continued presence in San Simon. From 2000-2004, the school, the sisters and the students' families were not immune to the effects of the financial crisis that took place in the country in 1997. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 saw the economic collapse of certain Asian countries; Philippine economic growth sank from 5.1 in 1997 to -0.5 in 1998. Ms. Yambao recounts the discussions at the time during a meeting of the sisters called the Provincial Chapter:

"During the financial crisis, the Assumption Provincial Chapter discussed closing one community. There was talk of pulling out the sisters from San Simon. We argued that the lay administrator would have a difficult time without the sisters' community. It was the sisters who raised the issue. One of the sisters did a questionnaire to see the reaction to sisters leaving San Simon. There were also calls to open other communities. San Lorenzo community was also doing a discernment on whether to close the college. Sr. Melania would share with us the problem of donor fatigue. The school had to survive through tuition fees; so we did a study on the fees. There was a proposal that from P200 per month it would go up to P650. There was a clamor from some sectors for Assumpta to become a paying school. I wrote a letter to the Provincial asking if the school could be part of a discernment."

#### The Discernment

The discernment was a collective process of reflection and questioning that included participation from a big group of representatives from the different sectors. The teachers and staff, sisters, parents, the Board members, alumni of the school and the community met over several months. The discernment objective was to articulate and confirm the direction of Assumpta given the many changes over the years and to determine

if the school was still faithful to its original mission of serving the poor.

Mr. Rey Barnido, an Organization Development consultant who helped the Religious sector reanimate their missions, was assisting with the discernment of the San Lorenzo apostolate and was also asked to help San Simon.

Mr. Barnido summarized the highlights of the discernment process. He recalled that the discernment was initiated due to the financial crisis experienced by the Board. He explained that the participants were asked similar questions on the perceived nature and/or proposed nature of the school as well as their vision for the school's future. He noted that the participants unanimously agreed that Assumpta is and should continue to be a paying mission school with a socialized tuition structure with a large scholarship base. It should strive to be independent of subsidy which may mean requiring a specific amount of the enrolled students to pay full tuition. All participants agreed that the school is owned by the Foundation, although it should also be self-governing with all stakeholders participating in management. A majority of the participants also preferred that the school should maintain a dual curriculum and continue to offer technical skills training in addition to academic lessons.

To answer the question of the tuition structure, a new system was proposed. The school

would move from a subsidized tuition scheme to a socialized system. This socialized tuition scheme would be a rainbow scheme with 42 levels of payment, starting at P250 and with a P50,000 difference between each level. The new tuition would be set according to each family's capacity to pay. Home visits, which were standard procedure for the school, as well as family records and barangay endorsement, were to help to set these limits. Instead of a base pay of P650 per month this was reduced to P250 to make it possible again for, say, an ordinary tricycle driver to send his child to Assumpta.

The discernment process from April to September 2004 resulted in three concrete decisions:

1. *ATHS is now a regular paying school with a large scholarship base – an attempt to establish a community where the paying and the less paying stand as equal partners in creating a learning environment.*
2. *ATHS is owned by MRMF whose membership truly reflects collaboration and partnership among all stakeholders. ATHS is now a responsibility of all the sectors who care for its continuation.*
3. *ATHS has its dual curriculum that truly prepares graduates for the college of their choice and prepares them for life – a move to reinvent the technical courses so that the thrust is towards forming life skills, not merely work competencies."*



A second discernment took place on 24 April 2015. It resulted in four concrete outputs:

1. It was confirmed that the mission on the preferential option for the poor would be continued. More than 50% of the learners are still subsidized and it was concluded that the apostolate is still consistent with its mission.
2. The need to review the computation of the tuition fee ceiling relative to the cost of education was decided.
3. MRMF still has a commitment of P1.2 Million for the operations of the school, and this still has to continue.
4. It was decided that the composition of the Board should be a healthy mix such that Assumpth will have a larger participation. The composition of the 2015 MRMF board was as follows:
  - 5 ATHS Alumni
  - 3 Religions of the Assumption (Provincial Superior, Sr. Mary Sheryl Reyes, *r.a.*, Local Superior, Sr. Mary Francis Talampas, R.A., and Commission on Apostolate Head, Sr. Josefina Maria Margat, *r.a.*)
  - 1 AAAA President of Assumption San Lorenzo
  - 4 Assumption Alumnae
  - 2 Friends of the Assumption

In 2006, on the second year of the discernments' implementation, 50.3% or 169 out of 336 students in the freshman and sophomore years were paying tuition fees in the range of P2,500 to P8,000 while the

remaining 49.7% or 167 students paid tuition fees in the range of P8,500 to P21,000. Despite moving from a P650 to P250 base tuition, the MRMF subsidy shrank further from 12% to 9.5% in 2006. To date, the MRMF contribution of P1.2 Million is 0.9% of the budget.

Mariane Pratte, current Treasurer of the MRMF Board, remembers how impressed she was with the way the lay leadership of the school took on the task of aligning the school's operations with its renewed mission. She says, "What amazed me was how the school learned to be more self-sufficient. It was as if we opened a door after the discernment process and the direction of Assumpth completely changed."

#### The Expansion

It was also during this time that a more efficient business model was proposed that would allow the school to become truly self-financing. The discernment reinforced the great demand for Assumpth's education. Building on that, Ambassador Tan decided to challenge the school even further. He relates,

"The other situation I contributed to was on finances. They used to be a high school only, but I said how can you have a high school only when you do not have a feeder school...they started with adding a kinder and prep and now there is a continuing group of people who are imbued with the spirit of the Assumption."

After a careful study of market demand, the pre-school was opened with both nursery and kindergarten classes in 2007. The pre-school students paid a regular fee of P730-900 per month. Challenging them even further, Sr. Josefina suggested that instead of just opening Grade 1 in the next year for the graduating preschoolers they open Grade 1 to Grade 4 in 2008. After all, the school had already established its name and they had a sure market. By 2010, the school completed its grade school level until Grade 6. So that formation would not be left to chance, the policy of not accepting transferees after grade 4 and after second year was upheld.

Very quickly, the school population grew from 609 students in 2006 to 1,429 students in 2010. In schoolyear 2019-2020 the enrollment was 2,070 students. It was agreed that the school should have a maximum of 2,125 students, otherwise building and capital requirements would need to expand.

#### Other Sources

Usually, the grade school with more grade levels and thus with larger student population, and with its teachers especially in the lower grades who are generalists, has a bigger revenue than the high school. But with the mandate to provide a high school education for all children, the Government has had to tap private schools to provide seats for students who cannot be accommodated in the public schools. Through its voucher program, the



government's Educational Service Contracting (ESC) scheme improves school quality, relieves congestion in public high schools, maintains the financial viability of private secondary schools (more than one-third of private secondary school enrollments are supported by the program), keeps the overall costs of public secondary education in check, and encourages households to invest in education. Starting in 2003, Assumpth received P303,500 for accepting students who could not be accommodated in the public schools. This government subsidy increases annually as the enrollment continues to also grow in number. For the previous school year (2019-2020) the school has received P10,846,260 from the ESC which is a substantial help for the school and for all the grantees.

Another source of funds has been the Philippine Province of the Religions of the Assumption. In 2014, together with the other Assumption mission schools, ATHS received P4Million to augment the employees' salary, to give a monthly rice subsidy, as well as to provide all permanent personnel with a

MEDICARD health insurance. These subsidies continued until 2015 after which ATHS could already assume the adjusted salaries of teachers as well as their rice benefits. The Province continues to this day to take care of the MEDICARD. As the enrollment went up and the school revenue increased, ATHS in turn, joined the group of Assumption schools that contributed and started to build up the Solidarity Funds intended to support all Assumption mission projects. Even if Assumpta could not immediately contribute the required 10% of gross tuition fee income, it right away received financial aid from the Solidarity Funds especially in the form of TEA (Transformative Education of the Assumption) Scholarship grants for both grade school and high school levels. The initial contribution of ATHS was only P516k in 2008 as it was allowed to only gradually move towards contributing the actual 10% of the tuition fees for each year. In 2019-2020 however, ATHS was able to contribute P2.9Million.

The expansion to grade school required a corollary expansion of the school campus buildings. Since 2006, new buildings with classrooms have been constructed. With the windfall of additional tuition income, the school has been able to pay for these buildings through borrowing, albeit at very low interest and through donations.

Ms. Rosalie Naguiat, MRMF Board President stated that the period August 2006 to July 2007, coinciding with the canonization of St. Marie Eugenie- marked a time when several events led to the transformation of the mindset of the benefactors, the beneficiaries, the educators, Assumption sisters, and board members. During this period their faith and courage in the school seemed to make all things possible. MRMF was able to secure funding for the construction of 20 classrooms, two audiovisual rooms, a library, an oratory and a staff room. The first building was inaugurated in March 2007 and named the Erlinda F. Velasco Building. The second building was inaugurated in September 2007. Funds for the building came from loans and grants from Mr. Gerónimo Velasco, Ambassador Tan's family foundations, the McMicking Foundation and other foundations. The loans were secured for three years with a 9% interest.

#### **A Fire in the School**

However, there were also some setbacks. In March 2011, a fire broke out in the school, consuming the faculty room, the pre-elementary building and the science laboratory. Fortunately, the fire struck at 4:00 p.m. on a Saturday. No school children were present during the disaster. Immediately after the fire, the students arrived and helped clear the debris. The fire raised the need to provide a circumferential road around the buildings







to allow emergency fire trucks and personnel to reach even the inner structures. It was also agreed that all old buildings should be rewired to prevent another accident. It was estimated that the school would need P 3 Million to renovate the pre-school building alone.

Donations from several sources came pouring in to help the school rebuild from the ashes as well as to add more necessary buildings for the complete K-12 program. The Province of the Religious of the Assumption assumed the rewriting of the original structures in the campus as well as the major renovation of the convent with the generous participation of an alumna, Ging Monthola. New and much better equipped science laboratories were relocated and enriched with new devices and equipment with the usual help of Ambassador Bienvenido Tan. While the new pre-school building is now called the Remedios Rufino Building, the first three-storey building

in Assumpta is named after Soledad V. Pangilinan, the mother of the principal donor, Mr. Manny V. Pangilinan.

The school, with a more solid financial foundation, was able to bounce back despite this setback. Reflecting on the calamity in their annual report, the school realized that blessings were to be found among the ashes. "In our 2011 conflagration experience, we discovered that we had something bigger than what the fire could destroy: our strong determination to rise from the ashes. This, we did with courage, not alone but in solidarity with many, as God patiently erased painful memories brought about by the fire and turned them into gratitude and joy. There were numberless generous people who came to our rescue and extended help where it was needed most, especially among our own Assumpta alumni."

### Senior High School

With the introduction of the Senior High School level, a new round of construction ensued including a three-story science building, additional grade school classrooms, and a well-designed board room. The Junior High School area named the Erlinda F. Valasco building is equipped with necessary facilities for classroom sessions, Library-AV work and creative presentations. The additional classrooms at the Soledad V. Pangilinan building are appropriated for Senior High School classes.

### Self-sufficiency

Assumpta attained self-sufficiency in 2011. It did so by keeping true to its mission while maintaining its high standard of education. With all the changes taking place, Assumpta shifted from a homogenous school of predominantly poor students to an economically integrated institution for students from both the middle and lower sectors of society.

Reflecting on its socialized tuition fee scheme, Assumpta realized that it was not just an economic matter. The ongoing formation of character has made an impact not only among the students but also on their family members. The tuition scheme resulted in a mix of students including those from the

barrios and others who were more financially capable. Experiencing school together and sharing the daily routine of student life provides both groups valuable opportunities to naturally develop in them the fundamental awareness of their diverse socio-economic realities. Sensitivity to each other's needs and an appreciation for one another's gifts have inspired friendship among them and a sense of solidarity.

### Recognition and Thanks

School Year 2011-2012 closed with Assumpta being one of the first seven schools in the country to be recognized in the pioneering search for the Excellence in Educational Transformation Award given by the ABS-CBN Bayan Academy, Rex Bookstore, and Knowledge Channel Foundation. Assumpta was awarded for "Innovations in Administrative Systems and Processes for School Sustainability," underlining the socialized tuition fee scheme in operation for 15 years. The award cited that "the collective discernment and participative decision-making process of ATHS helped to institutionalize all their major planned changes. It is an effective mechanism to balance the school's commitment to its mission and, at the same time, remain sustainable over a long period of time."

On his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, in 2013, Assumpta found the opportunity to thank Ambassador Tan for contributing many of the significant changes to the school's direction and survival with the following tribute:

*"As Chairman of the Board, Ambassador Tan was instrumental with the rest of the Board in pushing for the socialized tuition fee. Because of this the Assumpta reclaimed its original mission of helping the poor. He was instrumental in major shifts that took place in the life of Assumpta*

*towards economic stability. He challenged the institution to open a pre-school department and eventually a grade school department. He was able to bring in the family of late Gerónimo Velasco to help. In his personal capacity he donated a substantial amount of money to increase the salaries of teachers in 2011, a long-desired dream of the administration. He filled two HIS science laboratories with laboratory instruments and provided for the Grade School department as well. He shouldered the landscaping of the Soledad*



Pangilinan building. He is also a constant donor to the Assumpta relief operation which happens almost every year and he subsidized the educational Bangkok trip of some of the Assumpta teachers in 2011. His answer: "My money, my time, my talents my reputation are not mine. I am only managing all of these for my boss in heaven and I have been paid very generously by the same boss in my work. I have been paid with peace that I enjoy, paid with a wonderful family, paid in funds I have control of, paid hopefully because of the example of a happy and fulfilled life that others can see."

Finding the right strategy for financial sustainability meant balancing the school's financial needs with its commitment to its mission. True to this mission, the school explored ways to maximize demand for its services and provide a stable source of funding from its own core mission of education instead of relying on non-core business income. It was able to do this because it had carefully maintained the quality of its education and hence, the demand for it. Finally, it owes its financial success to the many stakeholders, and especially the dedication of the MRMF Board to its continued survival, success, and significance.







#### Chapter IV

## Lay-Religious Partnership

I remember Mrs. Rose Gutierrez running after a sister who did not return a book that she had borrowed, she told her 'you have to pay a penalty for being late', the sister objected, but Mrs. Gutierrez stood her ground. " I also remember when Sr. Costa was a student in 1981, she was late to class and she did not bring her excuse slip, so she was not allowed to enter the classroom. We did not allow her in until Sr. Josefina her superior came and said "*Ako po yung runway ni Sr. Costa* and this is her excuse slip please allow her to enter the classroom." This had a great impact because it showed that even the sisters had to follow the rules.

*Chit Mantapanz, Batch 1977*

The team comments the faculty's strong partnership with administration in the decision-making processes especially those concerning faculty development and instruction, and strong sense of community spirit, generosity and volunteerism among faculty to deepen the missionary character of the school.

*PAASCU Chairperson's Resurvey Report 2016*

In the General Chapter of 2000, the Religious of the Assumption adopted the term " Assumption Together" to describe its lay-religious partnership. It signified the unity among Assumption sisters and their lay friends. It signaled the call to lay-religious partnership in various ministries and projects. Today, Catholic educational institutions are characterized by many lay people in positions of leadership. However, this partnership was not an overnight phenomenon.

In 1970, the Philippine church still absorbing the lessons of Vatican II, operated within a still very clerical-oriented society. Priests and religious were accorded deference in all things. The laity was seen to be operating under the religious both in church and in schools, with the religious being the 'mature' guide not only in matters of faith but also of organization and leadership

One of the most marked characteristics of the Assumpta is its lay-religious partnership. This partnership today manifests itself in the lay management of the school that partners with the sisters in the governance of the total MRMFE project. The San Simón religious community is unique in that its annual community plan is a joint undertaking of both the sisters and their lay partners.

### *Lay Leadership in Catholic Schools*

The history of lay leadership in Assumpta is one of fits and starts. It is a story of a partnership that evolved, sometimes



contentiously, other times smoothly, but always fixed on the ideals and values of a committed and active Christian way of community life. It is a story of sisters who led with openness, graduating from the role of mentor to the lay to learners with the lay, to sometimes being humbly schooled by the lay. It is a tale of the laity learning to stand up, finding their voice and confidence and owning the school's vision of itself and mission for society. It is, most of all, an account of many friendships between the lay and the sisters, built up over time and strengthened through trials, tears and triumphs.

The challenge is not only to learn to cooperate, but of how Catholic educational institutions react to the challenge of continuing to build their identity and community when under lay leadership. This leadership is not individualistic but a communal one, disseminated at different levels within and outside educational institutions. This shared leadership recognizes the gifts and responsibilities of each member, and the shared task of becoming an "educational community for evangelization which involves students, parents, teachers, administrators and religious in an atmosphere animated by key values (educational, social, spiritual, etc.), which becomes a real experience of the Church focused on evangelization and the welfare of young people."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*, which was published by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 2014

For the Assumption, this lay management in Assumpta is part of the larger lay-religious partnership of Assumption Together, a congregational project which aims for a common vision of justice, peace and care for creation becoming an integral part of our lives. "Solidarity and sharing become our way of life and where the young find reasons to live and make commitments. Being Assumption Together, the laity and sisters give witness to communion in diversity." This spirit has been manifested even much earlier and recognized by the Province during the 100th year of the Assumption in the Philippines. The only group among many individual awardees to receive the Assumption Centennial Award was the ATHS faculty and staff of lay and religious.

### **Shared Management**

On an experimental basis during the school year 1981-82, a core group composed mainly of two sisters and three elected lay administrators became the official constitutive administrative body of the school. This was a vital step in the formation of lay teachers for different positions of responsibility. The lay members of the Core Group were chosen for their competence, commitment, and potential to operationalize the philosophy and objectives of the school. They animated their respective academic, technical, and service departments. After a few years, based on some participative process of evaluation, the school reverted to being administered again by the sisters but soon, a second try at shared management was

attempted and the polished structure remains functional to this day.

Sr. Josefina recounts how this experiment in shared administration unfolded. "Before joining PAASCU in 1982, I really wanted them to have a sense of ownership of the life of the school. I thought the best way to form them was to concretely involve them in decision-making and actual day to day running of the school. I presented the idea of team management during one faculty and staff meeting. Together, we brainstormed on the different possible representations to cover all the areas of Assumpta education. Once the body assessed that we had covered all areas of the life of the school with the three new offices suggested to join the principal and the treasurer, both of whom were sisters, we looked at the qualifications each of the three lay positions would require. They were hesitant to identify possible lay persons who could form part of the team. Nobody could fit all the qualifications they listed. So, we settled at looking for candidates who could approximate best each of the three slots we reserved for lay members. Nominations were made. We made time to explain why for each nominee. We prayed over the new plan and the following week, we went into voting by secret ballots. I prayed hard asking God to give me persons I would be able to work with. After the election, our experimental team called "core group" as the faculty suggested got on the routine with our weekly team meetings. While





the general good. We passed that preliminary visit and were delighted to be told that we were ready for the formal accreditation the following year.

#### Lay Management

Babes Yambao, the first lay principal recalls her trepidation at ascending to a new and more challenging role, "I was scared to lead the (Core Group) meetings and to attend the MRMF board meetings. At first, they said I would not need to join the MRMF board meetings. But after only a few months they asked me to go to the board meeting. I would not be able to sleep for three days before the meeting. I would have to ask the Board for permission to spend the excess money or to raise the teacher's salaries. Mr. Quiros was chairman of the MRMF board at the time. He was very gracious and kind. He would come out to greet us before the meeting. Mrs. Marixi Prieto was also very kind when we would present options for the teacher's salaries, she would back us up. She said, "They (teachers and staff) work very hard, they passed the accreditation, if only we have more I would like to give more." In the end they would always approve the higher budget proposed."

After many years of service as Chairperson, Babes was happy to relinquish her position and become a regular teacher again. She recalls, "The Sisters formed us not to be attached to our positions and even when we leave, the same commitment is there. When I look back,

I did not have the proper education, it was a big gamble on me, but I always felt their trust. When I was Chairperson, it was sometimes hit and miss, but I never felt they undermined me, they never disrespected my decision, they trusted us fully and they were there when we needed them. When we go to seminars with different schools, other lay administrators would ask how our sisters did it that even the financial management was also entrusted to us. They said it has never happened in other congregations. The highlight for me was when we had to manage our first PAASCU without the sisters. But even then, their behind-the-scenes support was there. Sr. Josefina would come to bring Mrs. Arcadio, Academic coordinator of Assumption Antipolo and Rita Atienza, Academic Coordinator of Assumption San Lorenzo to comment on our reports and preparation. Cory Villalana of Assumption San Lorenzo was also there. This was in 2006 my last year as Chairperson of the Core Group."

This trust, however, was not arbitrarily given. Confidence was built up through specific strategies. From 1988 to 1992, the school was focused on the human development of the lay. As early as 1980, some teachers, on their own, had started to enroll in graduate studies to update themselves. The administration offered full subsidy to any interested faculty member who decided to take up a master's degree. A scholarship program for the faculty started in 1988. Three-fourths of the faculty and staff

members look up graduate studies to improve themselves and prepare for leadership.

The year 1989 marked the beginning of real lay administration in Assumpta. When its part-time principal Mother Carmen, left for Africa in February, 1989, the lay members of the Core Group had to temporarily assume administration of the school. It was also at this time that the student services department was represented in the Core Group bringing the membership to seven. This structure lasted for three months.

At the start of School Year 1990-1991, the religious superior, who at the same time represented the finance department joined the Core Group to now total eight members. After consultations, an evaluation showed that the number of Core Group members was too big against the total population of teachers and non-teaching staff. The following School Year 1991-1992, the Core Group reduced the membership according to the needs of the school. The Core Group shrank to just six members: the Administrative officer, academic coordinator, practical arts, student activities and student services, religion/social studies coordinator and the religious Superior of the community. In School Year 1993-1994, the first lay chairperson was elected by its members. As the lay faculty assumed the mission, the number of the religious in the community decreased.

taking care of specific areas of responsibility and assuming the school administration as a team, the process of lay formation based on actual experience also simultaneously rolled out. This pioneer team was to meet the first PAASCU accreditors in a matter of months. I was questioned for my decision to take risk in putting the choice of lay administrators into voting. I had to bring out the other values of participative decision-making on the part of the electors, sense of responsibility in assessing the restructuring of school administration, and objective weighing of pros and cons for

### Partnership

As all this took place, another partnership needed strengthening – the relationship between the lay in Assumpta and the alumnae of Assumption San Lorenzo. In a 1987 Board meeting, Mrs. Tambunting commented that only few among the alumnae really know what San Simon is all about. The MRMF did not yet exist in the 1960s when those who were then active in the association were still in school. The alumnae do not really feel responsible for San Simon because the Old Girls involved in the Assumpta were doing so as individuals and not as members of the AAA. Contact between the MRMF and the Assumption College has so far been limited to a few exposure trips or involvement in one or two fund-raising projects. In response, the AAA formed a committee to define its relationship with the MRMF and the Assumpta to determine how they can work together. Eventually, it was decided that the AAA would always be represented in the MRMF Board.

### Second Lay Chairperson

In the same year, the Board asked the school to start a process for choosing the next head of the school. From within the Core Group and faculty, five members were appointed to discern whether they were called to be the next head of the school. Together they undertook a three-day retreat to help with their discernment. The committee appointed to propose the next Chairperson then chose three

candidates from among the five. The Board reviewed the profiles of the three candidates and they unanimously chose Ms. Irma Medina to be the second lay chairperson of the school.

Irma was a familiar figure to the Board who had seen her many times during their meetings to report on the financial status of the school. In Ms. Yambao's Core Group she came in first as Practical Arts coordinator and was instrumental in bringing many changes to her department. She noticed that the Practical Arts teachers were passive in meetings, and they seemed to lack confidence, so she crafted and implemented a formation program which included home visitation and Biblia-Rasal with their families. She also realized that the Practical Arts periods were used for the singing practice and other school activities, so she suggested the shortened period which would allow all teachers to meet their classes. She observed that the Practical Arts subjects were not included in the schedule of the quarterly examination, they used their regular periods to hold their quarterly exam, so she suggested that they be included in the schedule of the quarterly exam. She dreamt of a time when the Academic program and the Practical Arts Programs were on equal footing in relation to quality, so she applied for TESDA Accreditation in 1995. Trade tests for Baker, Industrial Sewing Machine Operator, Sewer, Industrial Building Wiring, Consumer Electronics and Furniture and Cabinet Maker were initiated.



She noticed that there was no basis for budgets, so she taught her teachers bottom-up and needs based budgeting. She would ask each department to make a plan and to build a budget based on that plan. She checked how much of their funds was actually spent and, in the process professionalized the TLE departments to learn how to plan, spend and economize. She was able to get funding for a computer room. She was also put in charge of income-generating projects. Through her husband, she worked to get contracts for the construction of door jambs and flash doors for

the carpentry students. She also had to learn how to balance between the need to support the funding of the school while not sacrificing the students' learning. Her commitment was not without cost. With all the work she was doing, she noted that she was getting paid less than her classmates from St. Scholastica's College. Tempted to leave to earn more for her family, she would invariably come back to her commitment. "I decided not to leave because I believed in my own history and the mission of the school to help and it could help so many like me. God will provide, I always felt."



This sacrifice came at a great price. Irma, a graduate of Assumpta in 1981, struggled all her life as a student. She remembers preparing for school with only three blouses, two skirts and no shoes. It was only in her fourth year that she was given hand-me-down shoes by a classmate. It was so old she took care to only wear them at 4:00 p.m. for CAT training so as not to get a demerit. As a student she had to live with a relative, as her house was four jeepney rides away from school. She would get up at 4:00 a.m. to prepare the breakfast for the family. On weekends she would wash their clothes. After she graduated, she continued to help their family send their children to school. As the oldest of nine siblings, she was expected to help with the education of her brothers and sisters. A bright student, she received a scholarship to St. Scholastica's College, Manila where she took up Nutrition. She tells the story of how even after graduating from Assumpta, the sisters continued to keep watch over her progress. This paved her way to coming back to serve in Assumpta:

"I was Secretary of the Assumpta Student Board, and I graduated Best in Food Trades. Sr. Josefina wrote Ms. Marion David, St. Scholastica's admission officer, to allow me to take the test without payment, the admission test was just P100, but I could not afford it. I received full scholarship with a P700 monthly allowance. I had no

money for photo copying, so I would hand copy my books. When I did not have any money, I would just walk to school. I would bring rice from home. I would pray the rosary with fellow scholars and after five mysteries we would reach the school. Sr. Josefina visited us in our boarding house where I had a bed space that I paid P160 a month for."

"After graduation, I came back to Assumpta and to say thank you, I cooked for them steamed Lapu Lapu with Thousand Island dressing. Sr. Josefina asked me to get the nutritional status of the students. So, I did a study for Assumpta. She asked me to teach science and then I also took over religion classes. We did not know how to make lesson plans, so we wanted to study education. I wanted to qualify in teaching, so I got units, but I had no money. To augment my pay, Sr. Fe Emmanuel asked us to make the planilla and in exchange she gave us funds for tuition, so every summer I would study. Sr. Irene Cecile and I were the first teachers who started to take our Masters, and then after Sr. Fe Emmanuel opened the opportunity to study to all the teachers. I was able to finish Educational Management. I was coordinating TLE at the time and for my thesis I did an evaluation of the TLE programs."

She brought her management prowess to her next task as Finance Coordinator. She noticed that the sisters were prone to give scholarships despite the absence of funds to cover the tuition. She transferred the discipline she instilled in running the TLE department to the whole school, asking for mini-budgets per department. She also noticed that donations solicited by and received at the school were automatically sent to the Board and recorded as Board donations. She decided to retain these donations and better reflect the contributions the school was making to its own sustainability.

Irma recounts, "In 1997, I asked permission that ATHS-generated income would stay in the school, it was always reflected that MRMF gave 90% of the school budget but in actuality there was more that was generated by the school. ICP, donations, subsidy from government, Assisi Foundation, American Women donations, were not reflected as school generated funds. After that I would present these as Assumpta generated income. We realized how much we were really generating."

Another major change she made was in the organization of the school itself. Irma recalls, "In SY 2013-14 an Organization Development specialist was hired in order to help craft a more responsive organizational structure. This brought us to revisiting internal areas in our

school that needed to be reformulated in our desire for a greater relevance in the delivery of service. Transitioning together to the new structure was both exciting and challenging. Also, the San Simon Community Plan was jointly crafted by the Sisters as well as the lay educators in order to synchronize together the efforts of the Lay and the Religious of Assumpta in realizing the five focus areas of the Congregation as expressed in the Assumption Province of South East Asia. This participation in the life of the Congregation made us see that we did not belong only to ourselves; rather we were part of the bigger family of the Assumption and of the Church. We are all connected. We are co-responsible for the life and mission of the Church."

Irma shares that she learned to be an empowered lay administrator by being a good student:

"I would sit down with Ms. Sonje Trillana (Assumption Province Commission on Finance) and ask her to teach me how to do forecasting. I do not mind being taught by several people. Before the Board meeting, I would sit with the people in the Board who asked many questions and told them my plans before the meeting and it helped to give them all the details so that they supported my plans during the meeting."

Sonjie Trillana, a MRRMF Board member and former head of the Assumption Education Development Fund or AEDFV, recalls how AEDFV was instrumental in helping the lay leadership of Assumption's mission schools to manage their finances. In AEDFV workshops, Assumpta's treasurer together with other finance officers of other Assumption mission schools learned how to improve their budgeting and financial management. She remembers that Assumpta learned fast and very soon was able to share with the other schools their best practices in managing the school finances and their scholarship program. Sonjie recalls that Assumpta distinguished themselves by the business-like way they ran the school, it was business with a heart.

Irma also contributed to the organizational sustainability of the school by developing a succession program for all senior management positions and instituting a retirement program for the teachers. Recently she came across the classmate who gave her a pair of shoes in her fourth year. She offered to buy her shoes. She remembered fondly that her classmate's father was a shoeshine boy. Reflecting on her life she says, "God has given me more graces to overcome my sacrifices."

#### **Assumpta as a Formation Community**

The empowerment of the lay led to some confusion regarding the roles of some sisters and the lay. In the late 1990s, some of the lay felt like it was their turn to play a role in

the formation of the sisters as lay-religious collaborators. In Assumption schools, the Superior is considered head of the apostolate. In the big schools of San Lorenzo, Antipolo and Iloilo, this means that while they may not be the administrators of the school, they are part of the governance of the school and automatically sit on the Board of Trustees. In the mission schools, the role of Superior is sometimes even more pronounced in terms of helping the principal raise funds, network with stakeholders, and deal with the local church and local government on top of their governance role. With the Assumpta Core Group coalescing as a collegial body, the Superior and sisters of the San Simon community had to learn to develop a more collaborative role.

Schools welcome new teachers and the religious community composition also changes from year to year. Sr. Josefa once suggested to Sr. Vicenta, the new provincial superior who immediately followed her, to pay more careful attention in assigning sisters to San Simon. "As the lay mature in their professional assumption of the apostolate and grow in their awareness of the vision of a healthy lay-religious partnership, it is important to choose sisters who could be ready, or at least open to learn, to be partners with the lay in a mature and supportive manner." In one instance, there were problems about how the sisters discharged their roles in the school. As participants in a Provincial Chapter,



some lay were courageous enough to bring up some of these difficulties. The issue of complementarity of lay and religious vocations instead of competition was clarified. In time, relationships improved as specific roles were valued properly in the animation of the school. It was clarified that there should not be competition between the lay and sisters but rather that there is a complementarity of vocations between both. In time, the relationship grew as the lay began to better understand the role of the Superior in the Core Group as part of her role as head of apostolate and the sisters began to see that despite their

diminished role, they had an important one to play in owning the mandate of the school and in the MRRMF.

As the lay developed in their management role, the religious noted that the school was fertile training ground for young sisters to learn how to work with the lay in a cooperative manner. In 2005, the Assumption Provincial Sr. Marie Emmanuel Melocoton, shared with the MRRMF Board their desire that San Simon be the formation community for the congregation's postulants.



### Joint Community Plan

An important feature of the lay-religious partnership is the lay's role in the life of the parish. In the San Simon community, this is most evident in the annual community plan of the sisters. The community plan is a document of the Religious of the Assumption that maps out how each religious community wishes to live out the locally translated three-year Provincial Plan, which is a direct concretization for the province of the latest General Chapter mandate. Each religious community is expected to continue growing in its familiarity with the current conditions and challenges of the local milieu. This is the relevant focus of their living out the direction of the whole congregation. Communities with attached apostolates usually also consult the lay heads of the school in developing their plan. San Simon takes this one step further. The lay in the school participated in the data gathering phase in as early as 2008 and eventually joined annually the religious community in formulating a plan that both groups would live by. An excerpt from their Community Plan 2012 follows:

*Four 'laaves' amidst a 'school of fish'!*

*A truly life-giving lay-religious partnership is one significant feature of San Simon. It is manifested not only in our assuming together the mission of Assumption Education but more especially in our*

*continuous growth in living the spirituality of St. Marie Eugenie of Jesus at home, in the parish, and in the school. Our desire is that as we break bread together, may JESUS be recognized.*

*Given this gift...*

*It behooves our Assumpta Community to joyfully live a sharper focus on our auto and on-going formation towards a clear and uncompromising living of our respective lay or religious identity in order to forge a more relevant complementarity of vocations in our local milieu and become more fully the Church animated by JESUS CHRIST.*

Chit Manlapaz explains the process of formulating the community plan. The local superior, as in any other Assumption community, is the head of the apostolate. She therefore sits in the Core Group to ensure that the mission remains faithful to the direction of the congregation. At the start of each school year, during the regular in-service training, she, together with the other lay delegates, echo to the whole faculty and staff the recent provincial chapter. How the perspective is seen in the local context is immediately pursued. For ecology for example, we divided ourselves into three groups and gathered data on the current reality and needs of the three municipalities of San Simon, Apatit and Minalin. We did our EPCRS analysis. To have a



common grasp of our wider community, each group prepared posters, matrix of data and possible responses based on the principle of "see-judge-and act" and reported to the whole assembly. We were able to grasp the bigger context of our school and situated our plan for the year. Now that we have been making and living our common San Simon Joint Community Plan for more than a decade, we are grateful to have a guide that translates the General Chapter mandate into our local context and feel one with the whole congregation in living our common mission in the Church. Even when Sr. Josefina who started this joint community plan was transferred to another assignment, the school together with the next community of sisters continued the process.

Sr. Mary Francis Talampas, once a superior of San Simon, also lived their joint community plan. She recounts how it came about: "Agnes Pangilinan, Sr. Lyda Margarita and I were delegates to the last Provincial Chapter. To echo the chapter to Assumpta, we planned to make them experience the same things that happened in the Chapter. By replicating the experience of the Provincial Chapter, the lay of Assumpta were able to express their reality and align with the direction of the province. In my experience they knew what was happening in the congregation and at the tip of their fingers they could speak about St. Marie Eugenie."

This familiarity of the lay with all things Assumption is facilitated by the critical roles they play in the Assumption Province. To illustrate, Irma is part of Assumption's Commission on Transformative Education which takes care of all Assumption schools in the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand. Agnes and Chit has, for many years, been a member of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission. They are a bridge between the Assumption Province and the school. The school even takes the congregational priorities as monthly themes for it to learn about and try to live by.

Each new Assumption religious community that comes to San Simon learns how to collectively contribute to this lay-religious partnership. In reviewing a Joint Community plan, one past community felt that while it was a beautiful document expressing the joint plans rooted in the congregational priorities, it was limited in how the sister's contemplative life is presented. To address this, they added to the plan a section on religious life.

This amendment reflects how the lay-religious partnership is a dynamic endeavor. How it tries to maintain and balance the concerns of both the lay and the sisters; to assert their common vision and values while finding ways to live them appropriately and in complementarity to their own vocations.

Assumptia has fully come into its own as a formation community. Sr. Nilda Hechanova, r.a. expresses it this way, "There was a time, especially in the early years, when Assumptia needed the sisters. Now it is reversed, and we are the ones who need them. Assumptia is a place of formation. This is the place where you can see lay partnership at its best and many people learn from its experience. If we continue to be here it is because the community offers rich formation ground so that we can learn what team partnership and team decision-making is about. I, who have been an administrator for so long, am learning so much from them."

Sr. Lydia Margarita, a member of the previous community, expresses the value of the sisters in San Simon today, "I feel as I live in San Simon, the sisters' community is a home for the graduates and former teachers to come back to. The current school leaders are very close to the sisters and also the second liners. There is a certain strength of the religious community that draws the lay back."

From their experience in shaping a lay-religious partnership in Assumption, the Assumptia has contributed a model of an empowered lady that is able to manage the school academically while sustaining it as an Assumption school with its vision and values intact. The Assumption sisters assigned to Assumptia learn that their value to the school



is in the quality of their religious life and how it infuses in the school a culture of prayer and reverence through their adoration, liturgy and community life. They also discover that being part of a formation community requires a humble attitude of willingness to learn lessons from the lay on how team management and lay partnership work. Sr. Angela Ansaldo, after finishing her long term as first Filipina provincial, was very happy to be named local Superior of the very rural



San Simon community, a stark contrast to her city background. She entered into this unfamiliar reality with an attitude of humility, genuine interest and respect that make the partnership possible. The sisters are also a bridge to the past of Assumptia, helping its graduates see how the continuity of their presence influences the students' formation. Furthermore, the sisters serve as conduits between the lay and the MRMF board members in upholding the history of the San Simon project and its links to Assumption San Lorenzo, past board members, and the congregation as a whole. The sisters constantly refresh the heritage of Mother Rosa and her counsel to, "Establish yourself in a Divine milieu so that in the midst of changing circumstances and places, you will always be at home with God."





## A Community School

According to the Coalition for Community Schools, a community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement lead to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Assumpcia arose out of a need for both education and development in San Simon.

It was only in the 1980s that the school decided to focus its efforts exclusively in San Simon and its neighboring towns of Minalin and Apalit. Previous to this, the school accepted students from any town, including Angeles City. Focusing solely on San Simon, Minalin and Apalit helped to center both its educational and development efforts more effectively.

Education may be the main vehicle by which the MRMF and Assumpcia help to develop San Simon and its neighboring towns, but it is not the only intervention it provided the community. Over the years, several initiatives have been tried to build up the community. They included efforts at helping the farmers of San Simon organize themselves and build up their assets and enterprises, assistance in rehabilitating flooded communities, developing employment opportunities for the youth, political engagement during Martial Law, advocating for environmental changes, and student engagement in community building and development. This section of the book tells the story of these different engagements and how they transformed Assumpcia as a dual center for education and for development and advocacy.

For her work with the farmers in San Simon, Mother Miliagros was given the Mother Teresa of Calcutta Award in 1998. She also worked with the Manobo and B'Laan tribes of Davao and played a major role with Mt. Pinatubo victims to make their lives economically secure.

*Magalang Historical and Cultural Heritage*

### *Ugnayang Magsasaka ng San Simon*

It started with a series of floods. In 1972, the Philippines was hit by Typhoon Edeng which caused flooding in Panganga and Bulacan and was quickly followed by super Typhoon Gloring which lingered for 10 days. Three other typhoons followed in quick succession (Hanning, Isang and Komsing), which prolonged torrential rains over Luzon. A song was written about this calamity titled “40 Days” because the rains went on beyond a month. When the Great Luzon Flood of 1972 was over, the nation counted 565 deaths (485 by drowning), 5.5 million people directly affected by flood, and P2 Billion in damage to property and agriculture. It was the worst disaster in the Philippines since World War



II (that is, until the Luzon Earthquake of 1990 and the Pnathbo eruption in 1991).

Having just started the school two years earlier, the Assumpta mobilized to help the flood victims. In 1972 and in 1974 (when another super typhoon occurred), the Assumpta became a center for the collecting and distributing relief goods.

Chit Manlapaz recalls this period of time, “We first became a relief center in 1972 and repeated many times as a series of other calamities happened. We were honored by the EU (European Union) and USAID (USA International Development) because we would give financial reports until the last centavo on how the money was spent. We were commended for transparency because we were given millions during the lahar period in this area.”

With the region submerged for two months, the focus on relief work transformed into the need to rehabilitate the livelihoods of the area. The farmers survived the flood, but with their houses and their rice fields destroyed, starting anew was difficult because no agency was willing to provide them loans as they still had outstanding debts with the government. The low productivity of farmers, absence of credit facilities and technical knowhow and the frequency of typhoons and floods resulted in dire poverty. Only a few individuals owned almost all the irrigation systems in San Simon.

Finding no other recourse, they approached the MIRMFI for long-term assistance. Mother Miliagros, sensing the need to offer more than palliative assistance, decided to take a Social Work course in order to understand how to start a development program. Celina Hernaez joined her in this effort and was present for the beginning development work of the MIRMFI. Mother Miliagros enrolled in *Kautilarim*, the Religious of the Good Shepherd’s sisters training center, and together with Celina Hernaez learned about community organizing and rural development.

MIRMFI board member Mike Magsaysay was another person who was passionate about the plight of the farmers. Mike was a successful businessman, husband and father of Assumption alumnae, and a dedicated member of the MIRMFI. As previously mentioned, he helped in establishing the Assumpta, visiting the sisters regularly during the weekends and looking into the mundane details of the school’s maintenance and repair. During the 1972 floods, he helped organize the San Miguel Riverside Irrigation Association, an initiative which other barangays later followed. He would also visit the farmers, listening to their problems and conducting seminars on values, finance and management.

In 1976, after yet another flood devastated Central Luzon, the MIRMFI and other funding agencies responded further and launched an intensive community education program in the

barangays of San Simon. The recipients were the different farmers associations and eventually, with the help of Mother Miliagros and the MIRMFI, they decided to federate into a farmers’ coordinating council the *Ugnayang Magsasaka ng San Simon* (UMSS). The UMSS was initially composed of four farmers associations: the Damayan Irrigators service association of Sta. Cruz, San Miguel Riverside Irrigation Association, the Bagong Slang Irrigators Service Association of San Juan and the San Jose Irrigators Service Association.

UMSS received training in community education, rice production and irrigation management, agribusiness development, health and nutrition program and Christian formation. MIRMFI, the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) and other agencies provided assistance to the UMSS. As a result of the training, the farmers were able to attain group ownership of the irrigation systems of all its member associations. This led to a dramatic increase in harvest yield from 70 to more than 130 cavans of palay per hectare, and to the recognition of their obligation to pay loans resulting in a 100% on-time repayment of every loan by the farmers in the early years.

In 1983, UMSS purchased a piece of land and set up a warehouse for storage of their harvest and a rice mill to produce their own rice through the help of Misereor, the funding arm of German bishops and Catholic Relief Service



at very minimal interest. An Ugnayan farmers training center, built near the warehouse the assistance of USAID for use as base of their

operations and to support their expansion areas. By the 1980s, the UMSS had grown into a partnership of eight farmers associations, eight landless rural workers associations, and six Out of School Youth (OSY) groups.

In 1986, MRMF Board Chair Ambassador Jesus Tambunting and head of Planters Development Bank (PDB), announced that the bank was looking into the readiness of the Ugnayan to establish up a credit window for soft loans. A fertilizer dealership was also put in place and actions to get accreditation for Quedan financing were set on track.

While working on their own livelihood and community programs, the farmers worked together with Mother Millagros to spread the benefits of their training and education through the San Simon Integrated Rural Development Program (SSIRDIP). The success of the UMSS drew requests for assistance from eight farming communities in nearby areas. Eventually, this led to SSIRDIP going to Jalajala, Rizal to help train the farmers who were receiving 150 hectares of land from the Meralco Foundation. They also provided technical consultancy to farming communities in Negros, Davao and 17 barrios in Tarlac that aspired for a farmers training center patterned after UMSS.

The UMSS received support from international funding organizations like the USAID and the Basque government to support their work. By 1987 they had 22 staff that were operating their warehouse, a loan window, and a fertilizer dealership. They also provided training programs in cooperative organizing, rice production and irrigation management and agrribusiness development. The women members of the association, organized and funded by the Christian Children's Fund, eventually set up and managed the cooperative's general store, *Agunian ng Katalihan ng San Simon, Inc.*

In 1987, taking note of the development occurring in San Simon, Corazon C. Aquino, the President of the Philippines, remarked in a speech to the Department of Agriculture,

"To generate such a commitment and cooperative involvement, our agrarian reform program must have a strong training, education and community organization component. I have seen what these factors can produce in San Simon, Pampanga. There I saw self-reliance, produce dignity and generate energies that many said our farmers were not capable of."

As part of her commitment to a more inclusive Government, sectoral representatives were invited to the House of Representatives, a precursor to the current party list representation. Romeo Angeles, head of the UMSS was selected as the sectoral representative for farmers to the Eighth Congress of the Philippines.

Some years earlier, Assumpta began to operationalize their vision of a community school. The year III course in economics had a segment on "Masagana 99" and the teacher taught the academic side of it. We thought of inviting the farmers to share their actual experience of it and how they would evaluate the program. During their sharing they gave a rather different perspective from

what was taught in the book, the farmers considered Masagana 99 a good program.

However, they believed it failed because it did not have the "education component." From this brief experience of involving the farmers in the formation of the students, a new level of enthusiasm towards planning more formative and mutually enriching programs developed. The farmers became weekly partners of the faculty in giving more practical sessions on team building and leadership training to the upper levels of students. On the other hand, these third and fourth year students shared their skills in electronics and basic electricity, carpentry, sewing, and bookkeeping with interested parties in the barrios on some scheduled weekends. A very special relationship among the farmers and the students became mutually affirming as collaboration between Assumpta with its formal education and SSIRDIP with its non-formal education program intensified.

Lerna Pangantihon, a social worker at SSIRDIP, recalls that during her job interview it was the farmers themselves who conducted her interview. She was so impressed with their confidence. She recalls how they would even sit in on her trainings and give her comments afterwards to help her improve her delivery and content. In them, she saw the models of empowerment that she had only read about as a student of Social Work.



### Mother Teresa of the Philippines

For her work with the San Simon farmers, Mother Milagros was honored in 1991 by the Ateneo de Manila with the Bulcas Palad Award (formerly the Peypoch award). It is presented to religious who witness to the prophetic role of the Church in today's world in the service given to her fellowmen, especially the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. This mirrored an earlier award given to Mike Magaysay by the Ateneo who received the prestigious Ozanam Award, as a Christian businessman, zealous co-worker of the Assumption sisters and distinguished alumnus of the Ateneo de Manila. Mother Milagros, in 1998, was also the recipient of the Mother Teresa Award for her achievements in social development.

Much like Mother Teresa (now Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta), many considered Mother Milagros a living saint. She lived a very austere life. Social workers recall that during trips to other provinces for training missions, she would sleep on the floor with them in places where appropriate lodgings could not be found. She made a special request to the Mother General that she be allowed to get up earlier and take an extra hour for the *orasyon* or morning prayer, so she could pray for the mission. Instead of waking at 5:00 a.m., she could be found in the chapel as early as 3:00 a.m. praying for her farmers. After breakfast

and early mass, she would ride a tricycle every day to go to the training center.

All these successes, however, were not immune to the many challenges that plague agricultural development in the Philippines. Agriculture is the livelihood of the majority of the poor, but sadly, has remained underfunded by Government. Agriculture has not only been neglected, but its agencies are thought to be among the most corrupt in Government. In addition to these challenges are the constant onslaught of natural calamities, the volatility of prices of agricultural produce and inputs, and the strangehold of middlemen over the distribution channels for traditional crops. The land reform program that started with so much promise was also disappointing in its support for the farmers and, in some cases, led to the sell-off of agricultural lands to big business and commercial concerns.

In 1990, the UMSS was spun off as an independent entity with its own Board of Trustees. In 1991, they were swindled by a group of rice traders to the tune of P1.3 Million. This was a big blow to their operations resulting in problems with loan repayments. In 1993, they requested that a social worker from the SSIRKDP join the UMSS as a Community Organizer supervisor to sit on their Board and help them deal with the banks in restructuring their loans. The social worker, Ms. Lerna

Panganthon, would eventually leave UMSS to join the Religious of the Assumption. Sr. Lerna is currently the Provincial Superior of the Assumption Asia-Pacific (formerly Philippine) Province.

Planters' Development Bank helped them restructure their loan. However, in 1991 and 1992, a series of floods and the Mount Pinatubo eruption disrupted farming activities and some members of the UMSS found themselves unable to make good on their loans. In 1995, they suffered yet another setback when they were swindled again by one of their financial consultants. They continued operations as best they could but, over time, fewer members availed of their services and facilities as more small farms were being sold off and converted for industrial or residential use. Following from these setbacks, they minimized their operations and rented out their facilities instead of operating them for their own members' use.

Sr. Lerna, the former SSIRKDP social worker, was asked to return to help them in their reorganization. MINKF stayed connected as an advisor. Tracing back to where their problems started, it became clear that there was a lack of proper procedures in some areas and the expertise needed to run their operations was weak. Sadly, when the UMSS/SSIRKDP was selected as the sectoral representative to Congress, a number of the more technically capable staff left to join him. It was also assessed that the farmers, who were proud to have been

trusted by the banks, were too trusting in their dealings with suppliers and clients.

Assumption sisters are used to being transferred to serve in different communities. With these problems brewing and the changing needs of the social development project, it was thought that perhaps the visionary leadership of Mother Milagros could be used elsewhere, and a more technically adept manager should be put in place to help the UMSS. It was a painful decision for Mother Milagros to leave San Simon. But as in many other decisions in life she chose the way of obedience.

Mother Milagros, at the twilight of her life, requested that she be allowed to move to Mindanao to continue to live near the poor. Through a life of prayer, she contributed to shining a light in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte in a Muslim and Christian community where tensions between the military and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) were brewing. Mother Milagros passed away in Kauswagan in February 2000.



The timing of her death was itself a grace. After her death, in April 2000, Kauswagan was under siege between the Philippine military forces and the Muslim insurgents who were trying to reclaim their camp. The sisters left in haste and in the nick of time escaped by boat. The siege resulted in the death of two soldiers, six wounded, and untold atrocities. Had she been alive, Mother Milagros would have had to make the hasty escape with the sisters.

Every year her beloved farmers, and others whose lives she had touched, visit her grave in Assumption Antipolo to remember the austere nun turned farmer's advocate, making their welfare her lifework. By her simplicity she vividly lived her motto: *Dilexiti me et tradidit semetipsum pro me*. "He loved me and delivered Himself up for me."

### Other Development Efforts

The UMSS and SSRIDP experience provided the greatest impact in the areas of social and rural development. However, they were not the only initiatives conceived to help the community of San Simon. In 1973, a study was conducted on the co-ownership of a rural bank to help the farmers finance their crops. The idea was explored because San Simon then was the only town without a rural bank. The idea however, did not prosper. In 1978, funds were collected to open a night school similar to the one Mother Milagros managed in Manila for

poor adults who had not finished high school. This too did not materialize.

A second effort on development through non-formal education was revived in the late 1990s through the Tri-Center Rural Enterprises Services Project (TRESPE). It was a program to assist rural entrepreneurs through training on growing their businesses to generate employment. Livelihood Corporation of the Philippines (Livecor) wanted to start TRESPE with the help of MRMF. Livecor obtained funding from a Belgian NGO (DISOP) of P14.1 Million but did not have funds for the counterpart of P2.7 Million.

In late 1998, the MRMF was invited to join the project and to provide the counterpart. On the first year of operation, the MRMF gave an amount of P800,000 as cost of participation. In late 2002, with the TRESPE project winding down, the TRESPE Management Committee requested the MRMF for an extension of another five years. The project cost was P5.6 Million and the counterpart was P1 Million. The MRMF approved the project extension on the condition that the MRMF would not release any funds for the counterpart. In mid-2006, questions on the projects and its assets again came up. The MRMF declined to participate in the project. The decision was made to transfer assets to a new foundation called FENMI (Foundation for Enterprise

Management Innovation) that was assisting 168 entrepreneurs with credit and training as of 2009.

Another project was the Lawa Multi-Purpose Cooperative. The MRMF was used as a conduit of funds from the Basque Government for the construction of the Lawa Multi-Purpose Cooperative. Ms. Lina Monserate was endorsed by the Foundation to look into the project and oversee construction. The training center was finished in 2003 and turned over to the cooperative in 2004.

The final project was Limya Zita (LZI), a furniture project set up to support Assumpia, enhance its carpentry technical course, and provide employment. LZI was established in 2001 by Ms. Mary Arne Colayco and Ms. Noni Carlos. By 2003, Ms. Clarita Magat took over the management of the operations with the objective of making LZI a manufacturer of world-class furniture while providing a reliable source of income for the ATHS. Shortly upon her takeover, furniture pieces were exported to countries such as France, Sweden, USA, Spain, and Dubai. The LZI export collection was launched in the EDSA Shangri-La Hotel. In 2004, LZI received an order for P3 Million worth of products, prompting LZI to rent a warehouse located in another town to be utilized for finishing and packaging. However, several issues plagued the factory including the lack of specialized

machinery needed to fulfill the requirements of their international orders. LZI remitted a total of P103,000 to Assumpia from 2003 to 2005. Not able to continue its operations, the equipment was sold, all obligations were settled, and the program closed.

### Political and Social Engagement

Aside from its community development efforts, the Assumpia was also involved as a community school through its political engagement. This political engagement was the most pronounced during the end of the Marcos regime during the Snap Election of 1986. Sr. Josefina, principal at that time, recounted their efforts on behalf of safeguarding the vote and advocating for non-violence:

"I was not satisfied with the quality of the textbooks provided in Social Studies. I supplemented the prescribed textbooks with other books like Constantino's *Miseducation of the Filipino*. We had many meetings with the faculty to conscientize the teachers about the issues of the day. This conscientization trickled down to our students. Little did I know that a number of our students were being recruited into some underground movements. They would attend evening teach-ins and would hear calls to violent action to which they countered how similar data and much more

facts were taught them in the classrooms but the response of MME (Mother Marie Eugenie) was non-violence. They were not in favor of the group's alternative position. This convinced us all the more to continue opening the minds of our students to the truth of what was actually happening in the country while strengthening their faith and spirituality formation."

"Before the snap election, it was announced that classes would be called off for one month. This was in SY 1985-86. I met the faculty and staff to reflect on the best possible action to take. After considering the different suggestions, the unanimous sentiment was not to waste the one month declared "no class" by the government but to make it formative. Classes were to be held in the barrios so students did not have to come to school; students were to be grouped by barrios of residence; subjects were to be modified to suit content to what would be most practical in case of a protracted revolution; and teachers volunteered to go and take care of the barrios. They were also open to invite to these barrio sessions students enrolled in other schools. Meanwhile a small team stayed in school to manage the news block-out by printing a newsletter every three days to keep all groups abreast with school news from all the barrios. One

student, Christin David, now a teacher at Assumpta, wrote to complain that a voting precinct in his barrio was being transferred to the second floor of the school building. This would inhibit volunteers who were tasked with observing the voting and vote counting. The parents and the wider community read the issue in the school newspaper and brought it up in the barangay council and got the precinct moved back to the original room on the first floor. This was a persuasive example of the power of student journalism."

"During the Snap Election, the sisters were assigned to critical barrios in pairs to help observe the voting. Sr. Marie Noelle and I took one precinct each in the same campus. Initially we were not welcomed by the precinct officials because we reported that the indelible ink the teachers were using was easily rubbed off. But in the afternoon, an incident changed their minds about us. An Armatite had gone off nearby and it scared the teachers. They started to rush through the counting. Sr. Marie Noelle came in with her ballot box from the adjacent precinct. We felt safer to keep the two ballot boxes in our precinct. In a while we heard more gun shots very close to our room. The teachers naming the precincts were scared and said, 'Sisters, our children are still small!' I too was very scared but

I had no children so I took it upon myself to walk to the door and right away I saw, holding an armalite, an officer whom I just met the week before. He was with two other armed men. We both recognized each other so his tone changed and became very apologetic. He claimed to be there to protect us but we refused to give them our ballot boxes. When they left, the precinct officials hurriedly finished the counting. It was evening and nobody was willing to drive us to town. Sr. Marie Noelle and I trudged alone carrying the boxes under our arms but in time the people saw that we were protecting their votes and started to walk with us. Luckily, after a while the school vehicle, with Peter our driver, came to pick us up. Ours were the only ballot boxes not yet accounted for in the municipal hall. We met the rest of the Sisters there, grateful that we were all alive. By midnight, we again accompanied the ballot boxes to San Fernando, where we stayed until morning and joined the trip all the way to Batasan in Quezon City. There right before our eyes unfolded unbelievable cheating. Disgusted and helpless, we joined the group in Aleneo where a field Mass was about to start. It was there that the CBCP Statement was read and every line seemed to awaken new hope within us."

"Many groups questioned why we did not boycott the election. We explained that together with our faculty and staff, we studied the four scenarios postulated by the Jesuits then, and in our weekly prayer and reflection, our reading of the situation evolved and we decided that those were human calculations; that God could still make Himself more visible in the picture and we would like to give space to that. We therefore decided to actively participate in the elections not just by voting but by getting involved, as a school, in watching how precincts were being prepared, how registration of voters were being managed, and how voting was done on the election day itself. As NAMAREL members, the Sisters continued until the actual submission of ballot boxes from the barangay level all the way to the Batasan. We wanted to cooperate with God and we ended up in EDSA, together with the huge number of Filipinos willing to make vigil in the streets, pray, and show our common stand for genuine democracy. We only returned home after Marcos left. We reached San Simon filled with intense emotions, and a big sense of a real new beginning. The re-reading of what we, teachers, students and Sisters, lived during that unique month in our history, will continue to mark our Assumpta story."



Another notable social engagement was when the school joined in the efforts to respond to the crisis of the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption. Assumpita which is just 46 kilometers away from Mt. Pinatubo was at the center of the crisis. The eruptions affected the provinces of Tarlac, Pampanga and Zambales. There were 155 barangays affected in 3 cities and 63 municipalities. Ash deposits covered a land area of 4,000 square kilometers. An offer of food assistance came from USAID, with the request that Assumpita help prepare the meals and coordinate their distribution to the neediest families. Assumpita immediately set to work with the help of social workers from SSIRDIP. Sr. Marie Melocoton recalled the daunting task they were given,

“Every menu had to be made with the necessary ingredients and the cost. Goods had to be purchased and the volume was daunting. Weekly packages had to be prepared with the prescribed number of items, number of canned good, kilos of rice and bundles of vegetables, etc. Distribution took place very Saturday. The whole school was organized. Every item given had to be accounted for. Every centavo has to be reported. One could be disheartened by the demand of the work, but the need of the people was so great, it was hard to refuse the help. The work became a beautiful community effort of the faculty, students, sisters and social workers. Sometimes the packing lasted till the evening. No one

complained. Everyone was totally given to help fellow Kampangans in need.

Assumpita remembered that once upon a time they were the recipients of aid, victims of the great flood in Pampanga when their homes and livelihoods were destroyed. The gestures of support and kindness they received from many others during this time was etched in their hearts. The Pinatubo eruption was a great opportunity to respond with as much generosity and kindness. *‘Na kamíng dating kindílinga.... ngunyon ay maraming nang kumalíngá sa kapwa.’*

Tent villages were set up in different areas of Pampanga, temporary shelter for the thousands who lost their homes. December 1991 was the first Christmas celebrated in the Tent villages. The sisters decided to join the families in one of the tent villages for the Midnight Mass. The chapel was a large tent made up of the same material as the other tents, set upon the hardened lahar ground with plastic chairs. The atmosphere was one of quiet joy. Here God chose to live among His people. Here the event of God becoming man was going to be celebrated. Here the displaced people brought their longings, their desire, their hope and courage. Indeed, Christ was the light in the darkness.”



Even after the USAID food project was finished, Assumpita continued to reach out to other groups with donations sent by friends, sponsors and students from Assumption sister schools. In time, the SSIRDIP picked up these efforts to provide long-term assistance in the form of a housing project and livelihood assistance for displaced families.

### **Assumpita Outreach Programs**

This close involvement of the Assumpita with its community was not a one-shot deal but a relationship nurtured through many acts of service. Since the beginning, the school has maintained a steady pace of community

involvement. In the 1983 PAASCU first resurvey, they commended the school's community efforts:

The dynamic exchange of learning experiences happening between the school and community provides a rewarding educational experience both for the students and the barrio people. While the school has done commendable work in identifying the needs of the communities served, the team recommends that the school include a sharing of a deeper and holistic study of the social context of the community needs and base educational response on this.

Their efforts evolved to consist of two fronts. First, through social investigation the school collects data on the needs of the community and tries to shape both its education and its outreach according to the findings. Secondly, through acts of service the school has institutionalized the *Share a Care, Share a Labor*, and *Share a Skill* program. *Share a Care* is a program of interactions between each year level and select welfare institutions such as a prison, a drug center, youth center in the community. *Share a Labor* is the involvement of the school in the parishes as they contribute to cleaning the parish churches and assisting in medical missions. *Share a Skill* is a program where the students get to share their technical skills learned in school and the activities in their extracurricular clubs. Every year the projects for *Share a Skill* are planned according to the needs and opportunities that the social investigation reveals. Chit Manlapaz, who has spearheaded the community development program for more than twenty years, shares how the program evolved,

“The Sisters involved in the school in the early 80’s initially explored possible community involvements of students towards concretizing their faith formation with lived experiences in the wider community. It was very common then that table conversations revolved around exploring possibilities of bringing the school closer to the life of our people.

Mother Milagros and Mother Angela brought in so much wisdom from their years of experiences. The Assumption Superintendent, Sr. Maria Carmen visited regularly and enriched the on-going search for relevance of Sr. Josepha and Sr. Fe who would check varied areas in the curricular program until a framework in its initial stages pointed to a dream called “Sama-Samang Silkap Kristiyano” or SSK. This became a real program as ideas evolved in regular reflection sessions with the faculty and staff: “Share-a-Care,” “Share-a-Labor,” and “Share-a-Joy,” have become familiar formative experiences for the students. One area, the catechetical program, which still serves the wider community today, was initiated by Jesuit volunteers, Jimmy Aldana and William Mararon. They helped develop the program, oriented students, and organized the first send-off mass in 1982. After two years, Mrs. Leang Manalastas was tasked to organize, under the SSK, a kind of student involvement called Share-a-Care Program. In 1990, PAASCU commended SSK but challenged the school to refine its system of designing programs. We eventually learned to take careful consideration of the difference between expressed needs and real needs of the people we wanted to serve. We started adjusting our Catechetical service in consonance with the Archdiocesan Program as implemented in the parishes where our

students come from. Our Share-a-Care Program also became more developmental in nature as we adjusted the types of involvement to the readiness of each year level: for first year, it was “Caroling for a Cause,” for second year, it was visiting the Reception/Study Center for the Disabled; for third year it was a day of interaction with the residents of Munting Tabanan ng Nazareth; and for fourth year, it was a joint activity with the Aetas in Porac, Pampanga. Now, for senior high school, the students visit and interact with those at the Provincial Jail. These programs are integrated in the curriculum and become the venues for students to experience how their sensitivity to the social consequences of the Gospel is actually fruit of their academic as well as faith and spirituality formation years.

Later, in 2000, Sr. Sylvia Jopillo, r.a. taught us how to do Social Investigatory Research, bringing our outreach program to a new level. Aside from new skills learned by our junior and senior high school students, their reaped information on the realities of the barangays became valuable data for both the parish and the local government units in updating their areas of service for their constituents. In 2013 PAASCU challenged us again to make the social investigatory research an integrative core of the academic program, even as students developed the profile of the barangays being



served. Each academic subject identified the research segment appropriate for their discipline and the final analysis was discussed in the Ayalang Panglipunan class. The skills learned also refined our delivery of the catechetical program and later, the Archdiocese invited us to handle the Student Catechist Congress and our programs were shared with adult catechists in several parishes.

The school is also active in the area of community advocacy. This usually involves active participation in voter education in their communities. It has also included, with limited success, environmental advocacy to mitigate the effects of the SKK smelting plant near the school. In 1995, Assumpta representatives attended an orientation for a proposed soft drinks warehouse that was to be constructed less than 3 kilometers from the school. In time however, it became clear that what actually was constructed was a smelting plant, which under the law should not have been made operational near a school and within residential areas. Once



caused by the factory has been reduced by their conducting their operations at night. The water source of the school has also improved since it is now far from the SKK smelting plant. But the mango trees in the vicinity of the plant have become unproductive and farmers nearby have taken to selling their land.

The Faculty have their own outreach activities. They are frequently called to facilitate training sessions on Assumption education for the other Assumption schools. They also provide retreat services to other groups of educators.

Other significant involvements of the school include participation in the Diocese *Haring-Asa* feeding program, monitoring municipal ordinances, tree-planting, organizing activities with the *Acta* community like remedial classes and youth camps and promoting environmental protection of the Pampanaga River and Mount Arayat, landmarks of the Pampanaga province.

The school's outreach programs have an even greater relevance now that the school has opened its doors to middleclass families. The students from this economic group are enriched as they learn to interact with people of different backgrounds and come to understand the community school approach of Assumpta. Marie Vianny Sabile, Grade 11 had this observation on the school's outreach efforts:

"I started studying at ATHS in my second grade. One of the reasons why my parents sent me to this school is because they trust the education Assumpta gives to its learners. My father is an alumnus of the institution and my sister studied here too. He said that he wants us to be molded in the good foundation of the school in both academic and spiritual aspects.

When I was young living in a subdivision, I had limited friends in the area and I didn't really go out that much. I liked locking myself up in our house better in those days but Assumpta helped me walk through and enter the lives of different people in our society. Through the diverse programs offered by the school we are able to meet different people who need our helping hands particularly the disabled, orphans, elderly and inmates.

In 1970, San Simon was a fourth-class town, primarily agricultural, constantly plagued by floods, and marked by its poverty. In 2016, the PAASCU resurvey report indicated that 55% of students' parents are now college graduates, 31% are either unemployed (14% of fathers), retired or housekeepers and 16% are overseas contract workers. Only 5% of fathers are still in agriculture or fishing. San Simon is now a second-class municipality.

The community development effort through the years has evolved and will continue to transform with the changing needs of the community. Assumpta constantly keeps its efforts to remain relevant to their community and to share its vision of an engaged citizenry, capable of defending its democratic principles and striving for a better quality of life for all.



operational, the fumes and noise pollution from the factory started to become a distraction. A local body was formed that included then principal Sr. Mary Ann Azanza, the school Ibrarian Rose Gutierrez, an Assumpta parent and other members of the local community. They were able to get the local government to enforce a closure order for a month. During this time, they lobbied for the factory to lessen the pollution they caused. The DENR stepped in and proposed some mitigating measures. Unfortunately, the owners decided that the pollution device they needed to install would be too costly and opted instead to pay a monthly penalty to DENR. A former mayor of San Simon, an Assumptan, had also made plans for proper zoning to restrict areas used for industrial purposes. However, this zoning plan was not enforced with the change of administration. Currently, noise pollution





## Transformation

It has been said that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. For a school, the direct proof is in the transformation of the lives, primarily of its students, but also its faculty and staff. This chapter presents the personal transformations that have transpired because of the Assumpta.

Assumpta defines its ideal graduate with specific characteristics. These characteristics are to be translated into concrete actions in their family and community life.

The Ideal Graduate:

- Decides and takes concrete means as Filipino to participate in improving his/her barrio life, country, the global society and the whole environment;
- Assumes responsibilities within the family and community in building wholesome Christian relationships;
- Applies technical skills learned in his/her respective field of specialization and be equipped with life skills as well.
- Takes part in assuming responsibility for the school and actively responds to its needs;

- Qualifies academically for college education; and,
- Participates actively in the life rhythm of his/her parish and spreads the community awareness that he/she is part of the church.

In 1989, Sr. Irene Cecile Torres, an Assumpta graduate, developed her thesis on the *Effectiveness of the Assumpta Technical High School Education as shown by the Graduates 1985-1989*. PASCUCO recommended that this study be replicated in the future. Orlando de Leon, an Assumpta teacher, took up this challenge and developed a study using the same tools but covering graduates from 1978 to 2012. His study looked into 130 randomly selected graduates over 34 graduating classes. His study revealed the following:

- A majority of graduates (58.4%) finished their college education and an additional 10% pursued graduate education
- 28% were still attending college at the time of the study
- Only 3.8% of the graduates finished high school only

- Of the college graduates, 9% took technical or vocational courses
  - Of those who had completed college: 17% took up nursing and care giving, 15.9% education, 12% engineering, 9% commerce and information tech, 7% business and economics
  - Of those who graduated the schools they attended: approximately 50% went to colleges outside of Region III including well known schools in the National Capital Region (6% went to top three schools of UP, La Salle and Ateneo)
  - Of those of working age: 95% are working, 4% unemployed
  - Of those working 29.5% are in academe, 11.4% in medical field, 8% private employment, 6% accounting, or Banking and finance, 4.9% in construction, business, 3% agriculture, caregiving, cashieryng, engineering, government employee, sales rep), self-employed; 32% work not indicated
  - Of those who finished college 27% received academic recognition or honors, (broken down as 55% dean's listers; 17% academic scholars; 27% grantees)
  - Descriptive measures of family life of graduates: 70% were breadwinners or shared income with their family, 59% felt they were role models in the family, 30% counselor or mediators, 53% consulted by the family for important decisions; 65% initiated deepening of prayer life in their families
- Descriptive measures of community life 57% members of church organizations; 8% of bible study group, 14% catechists ; 10% in socio civic group, 3.8% government leader/official, 9% Namfrel or PPCRV members, 10% were in cooperatives, 2% in social development work
  - 99% felt ATHS prepared them for college

The research concluded that Assumpta education helped the graduates become responsible for their decisions in life, they became responsible for doing things with integrity in word and action, they became good examples to other people, and disciplined citizens.

One exemplar of an Assumpta graduate is Eulnique Guevarra. Currently, he is the President of the Assumpta Alumnae Association. His is a story of extremes, the heights of achievement despite the lowest of economic stations. His is a story of charity given and generosity repaid. During his time in Assumpta, most of the students were from the same economic class, children of mostly farmers and laborers and very few professionals. But he was acutely aware that even in this homogeneity, he was poorest of the poor. One of nine children, he would wake up as early as 4:00 a.m. to grind the rice his mother would sell to farmers. A good student, even from the start, he was the only child in



his family to graduate with both a high school and a college degree. The high school was Assumpta, he frequently ran over 5 kilometers to get to school each day because he did not have money for the fare. For merienda, he would have his fill from the faucet at the back of his classrooms. One of the sisters, noticing how thin he was, started giving him polvoron during recess with the excuse that they were testing it out on him. He would buy rice rais cooked adobo for lunch, the cheapest meal one could buy. He would buy them from the proceeds of snails he collected in the rice

paddies. Despite his poor circumstances, he consistently ranked second in academics and won many school contests. In his fourth year at Assumpta, he was called to the principal's office. Sr. Ana Martina, asked him why he wasn't taking the Ateneo De Manila College entrance exam. He said he did not want to bother his parents with the fare to go to Manila. Wordlessly, she handed him enough money for the day. He had hoped only to be able to study in the University of the Philippines, but here was hope that there was another plan for him.

He passed the test and received a full scholarship. In the Ateneo, he could not help his amazement and exclaimed, "Only God could have sent me to this school!" He joined the scholar's organization called Gabay, which helped academic scholars like to cope with life in the Ateneo. To help pay for the clothes, shoes and bags he needed, he tutored his classmates and younger students. While he studied at the Ateneo, he turned down offers of his richer dormmates to join them for snacks in the cateries outside school, thinking of his siblings who were doing manual work to help him with school expenses.

His first job was as a clerk in a bank. Even with his meagre salary, he helped his siblings send their children to school. From a clerk, he rose up to the position of branch manager, and while he did not achieve his dream of becoming an Assistant Vice President of the bank, he received the Branch of the Year award in 2004 and employed many more years serving the bank with integrity. At the height of his success, he was rushed to the hospital with a blood pressure reading of 200 over 160. As he was being subjected to various medical tests, he prayed and asked God for a second chance in life. He recalled a promise he made to himself earlier to repay the generosity he had received so unstringently throughout his life. Regaining his health, he took every opportunity to pay forward through "irrational generosity" to various people who needed

help. His generosity extended beyond his family to his neighbors, friends and other people he heard of who needed help. The one of which he is most proud is the P4 Million Endowment Fund he, with the full support of his family, created for the Ateneo Alumni Scholars Association out of his retirement pay. This he hopes will fund the education of not just one scholar like him, but one scholar after another who will graduate from the Ateneo.

Enrique Guevarra is an Assumptian exemplar not because he reached the highest heights one can in one's education and career. He is an exemplar because he learned that the true wealth in life is to live a life of sharing and integrity. His life is an example to fellow Assumptians and resonates with the model shown by his teachers.

### Assumptians as Teachers

One indicative proof of transformation has been the number of graduates who have returned as teachers in Assumpta to continue the work of education. They share their experiences as teachers and former students.

Christin David has been a teacher for more than 20 years. He reflects on how his Assumpta education continues to affect his daily life:

"I appreciate that when I was single, I lived with my parents and I was the negotiator between them. How was I able to do that, I got it from what I learned in Assumpta. I was the one who was looked up to in terms of decision making, for suggestions, because of the experience of the way we decide things here in Assumpta, the way we analyze things. All of these things I was prepared for. I was being readied for bigger things. I attribute it all because of my experience in Assumpta not as teacher, but the experience here of how we help one another strengthens me."

Gail de Leon of Batch 2002, speaks of what makes her proud to be an Assumptian:

"I am proud of the work of preparing the next generation of teachers in getting to own the mission. We are not just teachers, we are Assumption teachers. The difference is we are Assumption educators – you are giving your life, you are sharing Jesus with them, your model is Jesus when you teach. I am committed to transform the lives of these children just like the way I was transformed and now as a teacher I am still being transformed. I did not expect I would be in a position to face crowds, or I would handle a department, especially the English department. They say God will enable the unable – that is what I hold on to. I know my limitations and I'm working on them."

Hired as the school nurse, Arlene Carlos, batch 1988, discovered her love for teaching and academically prepared herself for it. She moved swiftly from classroom teaching to being the pre-school coordinator, to fully assuming the youngest department as head, to rising as Areling Panlipunan Coordinator, to eventually coordinating the whole Student Services and getting appointed as a member of the Core Group. She speaks of herself as an educator:

"How do I see myself as an educator – relationships before were very personal. People here really took care of you, you witnessed in them the fire and passion to walk the talk, the sincerity and *pugnahan*, that's how we were formed. When I was asked to take leadership roles, more than the management expertise, they looked at the being, the character, because that would move you to respond appropriately to the challenge. Now this is what we want to witness to the new teachers. One way to keep them is to manifest this and to make them witness it in you."

Agnes Pangilinan, Batch 1988, started as an accounting teacher and then became the school treasurer. She speaks of her high moments as a teacher:



“The high moment for me as a teacher was whenever my students passed the quiz. I felt I transferred to them some knowledge. When students would come back, and shared having pursued their dreams like those who became accountants and even CPAs. The students I would get in accounting classes then were usually the crème of the crop. I frequently had those who ended up as valedictorian or with honors. Accounting was also popular because projects were not expensive, we just needed paper. They also liked that in 4<sup>th</sup> year, they had a chance to come up with their small business. Some of them earned as much as P1,000 which was a lot of money then. One former student continued her business after college using the feasibility study she earlier prepared. Now I feel high whenever students come back and share how they pursued their dreams and had become accountants or even CPAs. Sometimes I even consult them with problems in the office especially on new tax laws. Two of them are lawyers and when we would call them, they would give their assistance for free. My high moments are when I see their success and how they help the school.”

### Memorial Benches

Dotting the landscape of the school are memorial benches. These wooden benches with sturdy iron legs are adorned with metal plates inscribed with names of deceased sisters who, at some point, were members of the San Simon religious community. The custom of memorial benches is a British tradition of remembering a departed loved one. A bench is located where one can sit and recall memories shared with those for whom they are remembered.

There are today over 30 benches with sisters' names on them and their dates of birth and death. Mother Rosa Maria's bench is near the chapel quite close to the one of Mother Milagros. There are also two lay persons with memorial benches. One is for Beryl Hall Smith, an American nurse whose husband served in the US Air Force and was active during the relief work conducted in Assumpta during the Pampanga floods of the 1970s. Kenneth Smith, her husband, was the one who came up with the idea of the bench. He and his wife had lived for some years here and had come to love the Philippines. Wanting her to be remembered in the Philippines he scoured other cemeteries and parks asking to put up a bench in her memory. It was finally in Assumpta that he found a home for his idea and which gave birth to the tradition of celebrating the many sisters who had loved and served in San Simon.



The other lay person is Marissa Tongol, Batch '74, a much-loved Practical Arts and Filipino teacher who is remembered fondly for bringing realism to her teaching. She was known for connecting her lessons to real life situations. She lived most of her life in Assumpta until her untimely death in 2010 at the young age of 53. She is an example of someone who transformed many lives and was also herself transformed. Sitting on her memorial bench,

one recalls the many teachers and staff who have given so much of themselves to the school. Some of them like Marissa were giving back as former students of Assumpta where they themselves grew up and were given opportunities to learn and serve. Through their life of service, former graduates of Assumpta realize their dream to give back to the school that has given them so much.





Chapter VII

## Epilogue

**W**e return to the question posed in the introduction: How do you make education work for the poor or how do you create a high performing school in a high poverty area?

It is clear from the Assumpta experience that it is a continuing challenge that requires a whole community to respond. This community response included a large community composed of the lay education managers and teachers who were dedicated to professionalizing the school's operations, programs and vision as well as the generous donors who gave of their time and financial resources but also challenged the school to rethink and reinvent itself. The religious sisters served as a crucial link between the lay faculty and the MIRMIF board; they also provided the rich inheritance of Assumpta's educational philosophy and social mission.

These three groups together were tasked to change with the times and yet remain faithful to its original mission of educating the poor. To do this they created a solid educational foundation focused on academic excellence, character formation and spiritual development. They

also had to grow and evolve the lay-religious partnership with the different partners learning when to take the lead and when to step back. Learning to find the right financial strategy that provided long-term stability and also ensured adherence to the mission was a long evolution.

Expanding the student population and developing the socialized tuition scheme has put the school on a growth trajectory that has been deemed sustainable. Faithfulness to its community school approach has created a school culture that continually challenges Assumpta's commitment and understanding of its mission.

The latest PAASCU visit had a new challenge to the social development program of the school to which ATHS considered going beyond their usual one-time event, and crafting, with the intended beneficiaries, a fuller program. The chosen place to adopt was barrio Sta. Cruz, one of the most impoverished areas in San Simon, and from where some of our students come. Since the project was envisioned within the context of education, the actual partnership was going to be with the public elementary school. A preliminary consultation was done, and ATHS sought the guidance, first of SACOP,



the social action arm of the archdiocese, and later of Sr. Sylvia, r.a. She had prior knowledge and experience in social development work and belonged to the Baguio community then. The program was to run from 2016 to 2020, involving all the departments in ATHS in a concerted effort to address the identified challenges in the adopted barangay. The project took off even as the school groped and faced learning experiences as well as unforeseen obstacles. Catechism classes were held for children and a recollection was conducted for parents, Share-a-Care and Share-a-Skill programs were implemented, relief operations came as needed after several calamities, and a school-based ITSDA training module on Bread and Pastry Production was rolled out. However, natural calamities and consequent disruptions of classes with the need to use Saturdays for make-up academic sessions impeded the completion of the project as planned. The calendars of the two schools were eventually difficult to synchronize. The delayed road repairs in Sta. Cruz also took a toll on the program as necessary trips could not be scheduled. Towards the end of 2018, activities got limited to sharing of school supplies, books and bookshelves. A simple evaluation and closure followed without anymore the benefits of their desired developmental planning and processing of activities together, for a mutually enhancing partnership.

### Future Challenges

Now that the pressing issue of financial sustainability and the challenge of building a Senior High School have been adequately addressed, the Assumpta now turns to two immediate concerns that will have an impact on its future.

One challenge is posed by the competitive salaries of public school teachers. The Philippine Government has kept its pledge to yearly allocate the highest budget to the Department of Education (DepEd). This has resulted in higher salary benefits for public school teachers. The starting salary of a public school teacher is P21,000 per month, a rate that most small private schools find difficult to match, much less for those in high-poverty areas. Public school teachers also have the benefit of taking out loans from DepEd partner agencies which are deducted from their salaries over three years. The Department of Education requires that a public school teacher has at least three years of experience before applying as a teacher. Many prospective public school teachers therefore work in private schools and after getting the requisite experience, transfer to the public school system.



This lure to join public education is evident in the exodus of 52% of the Assumpta faculty at the end of School Year 2013-2014. The resigned faculty included potential subject coordinators who had been trained for several years. Despite the setback, the school was able to recruit enough teachers for the next school year. It also looked at ways to augment teacher's salaries to be more competitive. For School Year 2015-16, ATHS accepted the offer of the provincial government of the Religious of the Assumption to finance for three years the salary augmentation of all personnel, their rice subsidy, and the premium cost for health insurance of all faculty and staff with permanent status. By the end of three years, ATHS was able to assume the adjusted salaries as well as the rice subsidy of all the employees. Meanwhile, the Assumption province offered to continue paying for the annual health insurance as their support for the school.

At the end of SY 2017-2018, there was a need to replace just 10 teachers. This shows, perhaps, that while the local public school system and the market for teachers overseas provide alternative opportunities for prospective teachers, there are also occasions when educators look for stability and programs for personal growth in schools like Assumpta. This can provide an even bigger draw for dedicated teachers.

What differentiates Assumpta is its excellent teacher training, community spirit and work ethic. Schools near Assumpta are eager to poach their teachers knowing they had been trained well. But Assumpta has realized that it can expect to lose a proportion of its teachers each year to the public school system. Assumpta has begun to recognize that perhaps, part of its mission may be to train excellent teachers for the public schools. The price of this mission is the need for the constant training of new teachers. Christin David talks about the situation:

“We have an induction program for the newly hired teachers. It gets longer every year, before it was just three days now it’s a little less than a month long. We go through all the programs- ecology, advocacy, Assumption philosophy etc. This started five years ago. At this point they are able to adjust. At least now the new teachers have a familiarity with the programs. After the induction program they become more curious and it stimulates interaction. The programs become a point of conversation among new and old teachers.”



The second challenge relates to the first. In the late 1990s, more than half of the faculty were graduates of Assumpta. This promoted a consistency in message, values and culture of the school. With the constant stream of new teachers at the beginning of each school year, it is becoming difficult to communicate the Assumpta culture to teachers who are new to the school.

School culture consists of “the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize a school?”

School culture is the shared experiences both inside and outside of school (traditions and celebrations) that create a sense of community, family, and team membership. Christin David describes the challenge of maintaining the school culture:

“Assumpta is very different now. We have difficulties in the transition when we need to get more teachers, it’s difficult when the new are more than the old. They bring their own culture. They tend to stay together, and their culture becomes dominant like the culture of doing just my own thing. When the bell rings they all go together. They are also noisier. Even the parents sometimes remark on it. With Orly, we occasionally gather the new male teachers in the *holing/kahlo* to let the them know what the culture

is. *Nakiking naman sila*. Little by little they try to adapt but not fully. Some are not able to adjust.”

Another challenge to the culture is the expansion of the faculty. In the late 1980s, the teachers and staff totaled less than 30; today there are more than 100. The turnover of teachers is so quick that not all teachers get to know one another. But there are attempts to bridge these differences. The regular home visits have now expanded to include visits to the new teachers’ homes to somehow build more personal relationships. Gail de Leon describes about how new coordinators are formed:

“Before I was appointed English coordinator, Arlene would ask me to moderate meetings. She gave us formation sessions, and this was already our preparation. It was formation on how to dialogue with teachers, she would let us experience it little by little, as Imna’s assistant she helped me learn how to decide how to be accountable. We had meaningful conversations (café style) and this was when I heard about the past experiences of former teachers on things that needed to be done. I am thankful for the people around me who formed me. I was formed by those who were here and

those who had left. Now I transfer this formation to my co-teachers by telling stories formally and informally during departmental meetings. When we have to make decisions, we base our decisions on past experiences that serve as our guides.”

A number of other measures to address these challenges are discussed by Christin David:

“Each quarter we allot days for what we call “integration day.” We talk about our content and which ways we can combine our efforts. We have many meetings as class advisers where we voice out our concerns and the group listens. New programs are presented to the whole faculty for critiquing. Even in our departmental meetings we ask for feedback. In our department we have a moderator and secretary. We check with each other on the agenda.”

In 2006, just as the school was beginning to expand into elementary education, 38 faculty and administrators answered a survey on school culture. The School Culture Triage Survey has been used by schools across the United States and Canada to accurately determine the present state of a school’s culture. The 17-item pencil-and-paper School Culture Triage Survey measures the degree to which three “culture behaviors” are present in a school or school district. These behaviors are:

- **Professional collaboration:** Do teachers and staff members meet and work together to solve professional issues—that is, instructional, organizational, or curricular issues?
- **Affiliative and collegial relationships:** Do people enjoy working together, support one another, and feel valued and included?
- **Efficacy or self-determination:** Are people in the school because they want to be? Do they work to improve their skills as true professionals or do they simply see themselves as helpless victims of a large and uncaring bureaucracy?

These three culture behaviors or markers provide insight into the overall culture of the learning community and, specifically, to the culture within the school walls. In the vast majority of schools that use the School Culture Triage Survey, the health or toxicity of the school’s culture positively correlated with student achievement.

In 2006, when the school took the survey, they scored a healthy average of 69.7 total points. The highest score that can be garnered is 85. Schools scoring within the range of 60-75 were rated as needing to monitor and maintain making positive adjustments. Among the 3,100 schools in which the survey was administered in 2006, no school scored beyond 75.

<sup>7</sup>Phillips, G. (1996). *Classroom rituals for at-risk learners*. Vancouver, BC: Educserve, British Columbia School Trustees Publishing.

In 2017, the survey was re-administered to an equal number of randomly selected teachers and administrators. After 11 years, the total score garnered this time was a high 80. This higher score supports that, since the first survey, a more purposive approach to school culture had been assumed and a culture of collaboration has been strengthened.

Statements that received the highest score in 2006 were the following:

- People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.
- Our school reflects a true sense of community.
- Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.

Meanwhile, statements that received the highest score in 2017 were the following:

- Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.
- Our school reflects a true sense of community.
- There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations including holidays, special events and recognition of goal attainment.

The surveys show that a school with a strong sense of community can strengthen its culture and, more importantly, build a culture of collaboration that helps sustain student achievement.

In the last few years, succession planning has also been taken more seriously. The succession program requires each position holder to identify a second liner. A training program is designed to prepare the second liner and operational plans are well defined for the transfer to the successor.

Despite the challenges, the foundations of the Assumpta remain sound, and many look to the future with much hope.

“We still see the community spirit among the teachers, among students it is still very much felt. In the past we also had classmates who were not as poor as the others. Even now when you go to a classroom you cannot see the difference in the way they treat each other; there is no discrimination. In project making we set a guideline to make sure that there is no incentive to favor spending more. We set a maximum amount for spending in any project. We encourage them to recycle and we do not include in the rubrics the type of materials used, just the content and quality of the project.”

*Marlene Simbulan*



“What is retained is the respect. You don't see the difference in economic status, it is not evident, and simplicity of life as it is lived by the students is still there. I hear from the alumni, they value their faith life once they leave school. Here at school that is given much attention, sometimes they feel daily adoration is a burden but when they go to college, they miss it. They continue to have a longing for Jesus, a prayer life. Assumption day is celebrated as a vigil, one day of prayer. We are able to bring a balance to their life, sometimes the basics are lost but we remind ourselves in teacher's meetings to keep going back to it.”

*Agnus Pangilinan*

With grateful hearts, Assumptans are moving forward, anticipating the celebration of the school's golden jubilee in December, 2020. This year is also the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pre-school department. The first batch of senior high school who started in Assumpta from pre-school graduated in April, 2020. This is the cohort used in the current study being conducted by Bayan Academy.

Sr. Josefina proposed this project to assess the effectivity of the curricular program which the group experienced from pre-school to grade 12. Fortunately, the initial findings have caught the complicated adverse effects of the big faculty turn over in the higher grades. It is a major blow among other challenges in

running the senior high school. Assumpta has recognized the serious consequences of several academic loopholes and is now grateful to have Bayan Academy's generous guidance in this regard. Professionalizing the school continues as it also works to complete its performance management and appraisal system, implement the personnel ranking system, and improve its employee benefits. In 2017, there were over 100 applicants for a handful of teaching positions. The value of being an Assumpta trained teacher has become a desired qualification for those who aspire to succeed as a teacher in public education.

Lito Tavag envisions with optimism Assumpta's future:

"I am not concerned by the challenges of public school. I hope public schools will increase standards, but I'm not concerned because there is a huge differentiator



in Assumpta education. Many students and parents want the students to come to Assumpta because it is academically balanced. The school population is an attractor, values wise, because we will continue to attract the best of the best. That's why we want to be clear about the type of contribution we make to society."

He poses a third challenge to the Assumpta and the MRMF:

"The school is already relevant. I would still look to the school to drive more leadership outcomes. Its biggest contribution is to developing leaders for southern Pampanga and even outside. People like me who live and work in Manila we will make our own contributions. We need to continue to develop those leaders who will make a contribution in Pampanga itself. My vision is that we continue this, not that I am unhappy, but we can do more."

"As Assumpta evolves, our contribution as MRMF will become less financial, the Board will have to link its contribution to the national agenda. We in the Board will have to find that role as we move forward in Assumpta. It is interesting to see the dynamics in the Board, we continue to need to see alumnae from Assumption Manila and alumni from Assumpta to lead the school to the future."

### The Edifice and the Cornerstone

From the north expressway (now called NLEX), the Assumpta's chapel steeple is clearly visible. It is this welcome sight that greets a visitor to the school. The chapel has been the school's heart and with its distinct cross atop the altar, its most enduring image.

With its ever-growing student population, the school had long realized that the original chapel could no longer meet its needs. Daily liturgical celebrations taken care of by assigned classes as well as all the special feasts marking the school calendar were done in the open gym. One of the hopes of the school, looking forward to its golden jubilee in 2020, was to have a much bigger school chapel. Challenged by the financial constraints, the students tried to anticipate the years it would take to raise the needed funds. As early as December, 2013 the officers of the student board launched a fund-raising campaign and challenged all the batches of alumni during their homecoming to put their acts together for this one big golden jubilee project. From table to table, the young student officers received commitments from their older Assumptan "Kuya's and Ate's." More activities followed involving other sectors especially the parents. Five years later, the project was formally proposed to the MRMF Board which officially approved it in a BOT meeting. Ambassador Tan right away donated the first P1M while other board members embarked on varied manners of



giving their generous support. Old girls from Manila and friends of the Assumption gave their much appreciated effort to realize the project while Assumptans continued with their loving share in cash and in kind. Construction started in 2018 but only after a meaningful closing ritual.

In keeping with its spirit of community, the school decided to hold a ritual on November 9, 2018 to allow all who love the chapel a chance to say their goodbyes before the building was demolished. The liturgy prepared for the event recalled how central the chapel has been in the lives of the students and alumni, teachers and staff, sisters and parents, MRMF board members and donors and the larger community by recalling that, "this place knows our stories."





"It has heard many cries for deliverance as well as many bursts of joyful thanksgiving for hopes renewed, directions clarified, weaknesses overcome, forgiveness assumed and celebrated, deaths humbly and faithfully accepted, as well as surprised blessings enjoyed. It has witnessed many lives evolved into greater nobility and stronger belief in Jesus whom we have encountered personally in the Eucharistic celebrations, in our daily Adoration, and in our quiet and friendly visits during our personal (almost secret) sacred time."

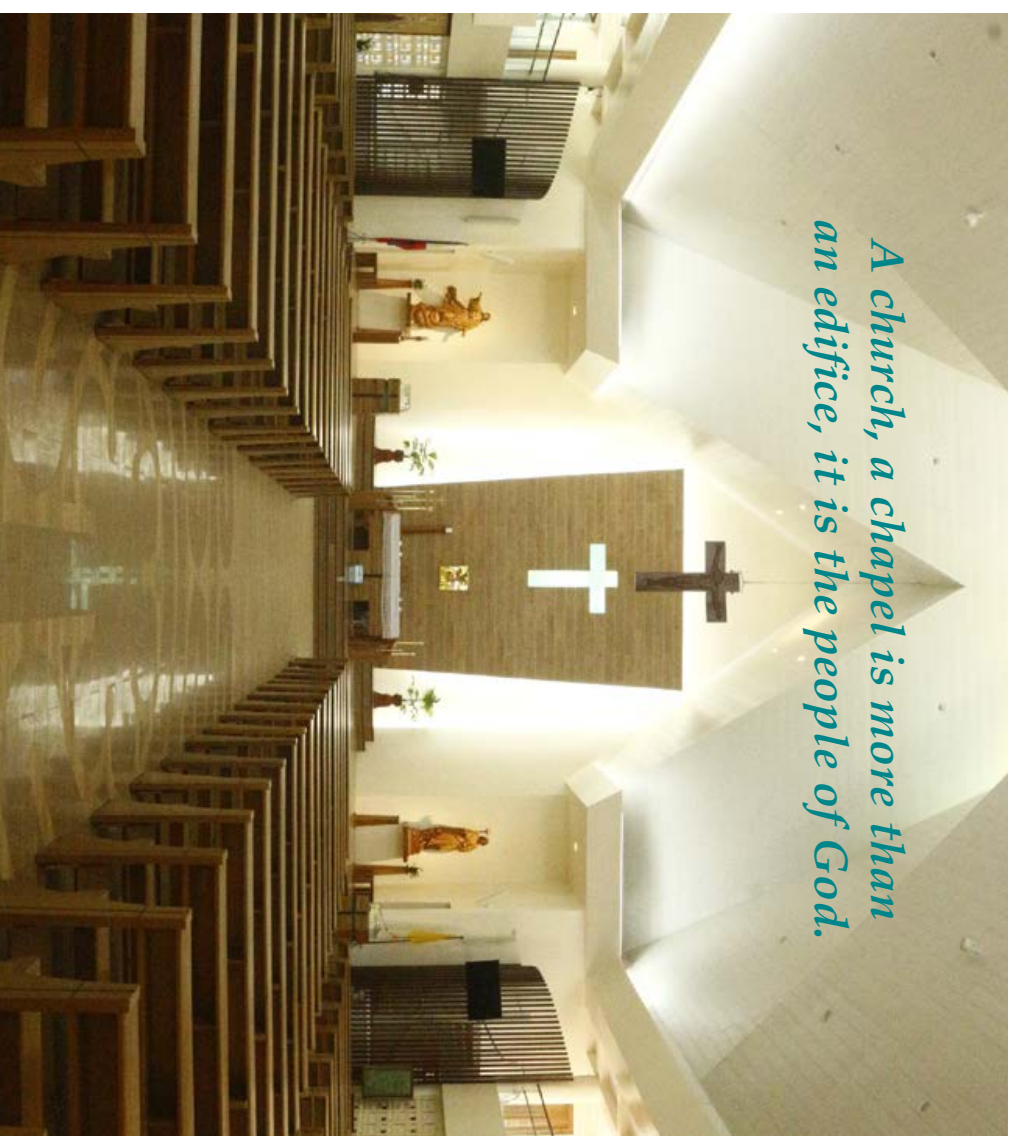
Part of the ritual included time for all present at the chapel that day to write goodbye letters. It is this shared history and experience of the chapel that makes it so hard for some to part with it in its current form. In a post-communication message, the struggles of some alumni were recognized, together with their pleas for alternative solutions:

"We are cognizant of the many Assumptians who have expressed their sadness, pain and disturbance at the news of having to give up this precious structure and to replace it with a much bigger Chapel for present needs. They have implored us to just keep this as an Adoration Chapel and build the bigger one somewhere in the campus. Others have proposed to keep the old structure as a heritage which it already is for them... "an Assumption heritage whose wealth lies in the memories it holds."

The reason that Assumptia can update a much-loved structure is the same reason: it has found an answer to the question of how to make education work for the poor. While the chapel is its central edifice, it is Christ who is the cornerstone. All the memories, encounters and prayers poured into and held in sacred trust in the chapel are not extinguished by the change it will undergo. They are forever held in the hearts of the people who love Assumptia. A church, a chapel is more than an edifice, it is the people of God.

In the same way, the school has undergone many evolutions, from a tuition free education to a socialized tuition, from a school exclusively for the poor to a paying school with a large scholarship base, from a high school to a full K to 12 education; its mission, which is its cornerstone has remained the same. This mission, held in the hearts of all who love Assumptia, continues to renew itself and is sustained by a community that keeps faith with its mission.

No matter how it is changed, the chapel, as well as Assumptia will continue to be a beacon for faith and hope amidst the challenges it finds itself in.



*A church, a chapel is more than  
an edifice, it is the people of God.*

### *Kaming nga dating musnos na kinalingga...*

The first draft of Assumpta's Vision and Mission statement contained a short preamble that captures the school's ethos of grace and gratitude, "*Kaming nga dating musnos na kinalingga. Ngayon ay maramong na ring kumalingga sa kapwa.*" It is a sentiment that is very real especially for the first batches of Assumpta, who tasted an education that was given as a free gift of benevolence.

In January 2020, the whole world woke up to a new reality of a looming pandemic. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. Many times more virulent than the common seasonal flu, the worldwide panic caused by COVID-19 is due to the lack of a treatment protocol or vaccine to fight this new disease. What started like a rapid fire in Wuhan, China in December of 2019, began by February in the Philippines. By February 2, the second country in the world to experience a COVID death was the Philippines. By March 17, the country was put under strict quarantine. By April, the country had over 8,000 cases. In June, this had grown into 37,000 cases and in mid-September, it further jumped to over 250,000 cases.

With no vaccine in sight for at least 18 months, the country's leadership declared that there would be no face to face formal learning for all levels of education in the next year. Assumpta was able to hastily conduct its last quarter exams and graduate its batches for the year 2019-2020. But due to the general chaos of the last months of the school year, with families either having to work from home or being furloughed or losing their jobs, the full amount of the final tuition was not fully collected.

During the planning for the next school year, Assumpta's focus was on how to implement online learning. Running a quick survey of their students, they tried to find out who of their students had the proper equipment and connectivity that is required for online learning. Their next focus was training the teachers to teach in this new and challenging mode of education.

The teachers had to be provided with the desktops and a reliable internet source to ensure the proper connections to their students. For the first time, the In-Service training was conducted online. By July 2020,

the school was ready to inform the parents of the plans for the next school year. In compliance with the Department of Education guidelines, the next school year would be conducted through online distance learning and modular distance learning. Fees collected for graduation ceremonies of the previous school year were to be refunded. The next school year would cover only nine months thus earning one less month of tuition payment for the school. The parents were informed that if the target enrolment of 2,200 students was not matched the school would incur a large deficit. Despite the looming deficit, the socialized tuition scheme would be implemented as previously done, with adjustments for lower tuition payments for families who had experienced an economic downturn.

In addition, all the teachers and staff in an act of solidarity with their students and their families decided to forego for the year their uniform allowance, performance bonus, unused sick leave, rice allowance, Christmas bonus, the connectivity assistance and even reduce the advisory fees of 47 advisors and the admin fees of the Team Heads. They also detailed the steps they would take to create other income streams for the school by selling their carpentry products, ornamental plants and seedlings, food catering, and bread, cakes and face masks production.

The generosity of the teachers and staff was an echo of the self gift of the school's leadership. Irma Medina, the school chairperson and alumna of the school, was facing not only the





biggest challenge of her academic career but also her last year in Assumpta. Reflecting on 36 years of service in Assumpta, that had seen all four of her children receiving Assumpta's transformative education and going on to becoming productive professionals in their own lives, Irma was inspired to offer her last year of service for free in response to the financial need of the school. Encouraged by her husband Boy, she chose in her last year to make her final significant act for her beloved alma mater: "*Kamting mga dating musmos na kinuhanga, Ngayon ay maraming narinig kumuhinga sa iba.*"

Hearing of the schools' and Irma's great gift, Sr. Lerna Panganitton, the Provincial Superior wrote back to say, "the light of your faith shines brightest during these trying times as you "walk your talk" and make a difference in the life of Assumpta." Sr. Marie Emannelle Melocoton, Provincial Counsellor echoed this sentiment in her own letter to Irma saying, "I feel that it is no longer that the lay share in the mission of the sisters but that you have totally assumed mission even to the "laying of your lives." In humble gratitude, Irma wrote back to remind the sisters that the inspiration for the act was their gratitude for the education they had received from the sisters apply summarized in St. Marie Eugenie's saying: Love dies without sacrifice.

The future will record the reaction of the teachers and staff to a planned Jubilee gift to be given in December of 2020 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> year of Assumpta. The cash gift is from the Religious of the Assumption Province of Asia Pacific in recognition for the teachers, administration and staff many years of dedicated and self less service. While the gift is not commensurate to their sacrifice in amount, it weighs in essence the depth of the mutual respect between the sisters and the lay for their shared mission.

I began this book with a question, "What does it take to provide the poor with an education that turns them into high achievers." The experience of the school in the evolutions of its transformative education turns the definition of high achievement on its head. High achievement does not only mean graduating from a top Manila school, earning a high salary, or working abroad. It can mean these things, but in its essence, high achievement in Assumpta means knowing how to share, how to care and how to give of oneself to the point of self-emptying. And in this self-emptying one not only discovers oneself and one's true purpose but finds the self joined into a community of praise, grace and love.

*All for Assumpta, All for Jesus!*

*Like Mary, they  
offer themselves  
to the action of  
the Holy Spirit  
so that the Church  
may be born and  
may develop  
more completely  
in the world*

(RL 91 paraphrased)







## Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge the Assumpita Technical High School for its support in the writing of this book. All those interviewed gave generously of their time. I am especially grateful for the assistance extended by the Assumpita Core Group for helping to research and review the important dates and events of the school's history. Writing this book was a delight but editing it proved harder than I thought. I wish to thank Sr. Josefina Magat who took the time to read through the initial manuscript, making the necessary factual corrections to the history and helping to update the book. Thanks also goes to Marlu Balmeaceda who did the heavy lifting of working with the printer and lay out artist. Special thanks to Randy Bustamante, the writer's whisperer, for giving me the confidence to pursue this writing project.

Any history by its nature is incomplete. There are too many many factors, too many actors to include to come up with a definitive and comprehensive history. This book, through the limitations of the author's time and perspective is a small offering of a slice of that history told hopefully in loving detail. Special mention goes to the batches of Assumptians I taught in the years 1986-1988. They were more my teacher than I was theirs. My exposure to their lives and struggles grounded me all these years

in my commitment to social development. There are many other voices and stories I may not have captured. Lives lived large or small that are just as noble despite not being told. This book is also dedicated to them. All those I may not have mentioned – students, teachers, staff, donors, sisters and friends. Assumpita is certainly in your debt for your dedication, example and love.

Months before she died, Mo. Milagros Dayrit, who had just transferred to Kauswagan from San Simon, for what would be her last assignment, was encouraged, by her Provincial Superior to write the story of her life's work. She agreed to do it only if I would visit and help her with the writing of her story. Unfortunately, by the time I heard of this, Mother Milagros had passed away.

This was the reason I felt brave enough to volunteer to write the history of Assumpita. So, this book is especially dedicated to Mother Milagros Dayrit. The whole of her life witness is reflected in the success of Assumpita. The blending of school and community, the common service of both the poor and the rich, the joint mission of the lay and the religious all combined to find God in all things and to glorify Him. *Dilexiti me et tradidit semetipsum pro me*: "He loved me and delivered Himself up for me."

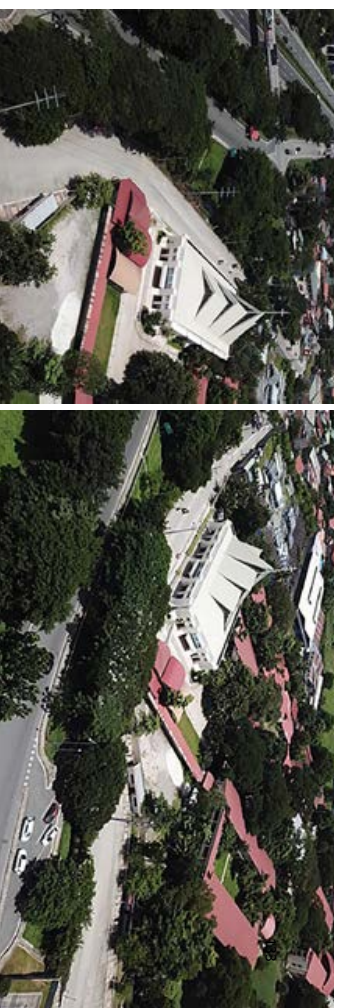


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1. Zenaida Quezon Avanceña
2. Ambassador Bienvenido Tan
3. Manolito Layag
4. Manolo Avanceña
5. Ambassador Jesus Tambunting
6. Leonardo Carlas
7. Azor Sitchon
8. Marianne Pratte
9. Asuncion "Soyite" Trillana
10. Celina Hernaez
11. Cecilia Hernaez Magsaysay
12. Sr. Josefina Magal, r.a.
13. Sr. Marie Melocoton, r.a.
14. Sr. Ana Maria Melocoton, r.a.
15. Sr. Iris Marlon Clarke, r.a.
16. Sr. Lerna Pangantihon, r.a.
17. Sr. Melania Sunga, r.a.
18. Sr. Mary Francis Talampas r.a.
19. Sr. Maria Nilda Hechanova, r.a.
20. Sr. Lyda Maria Evangelista, r.a.
21. Irma Medina
22. Adelaida "Babes" Yambao
23. Crispina "Chi" Manlapaz
24. Plartra "Leng" Manalastas
25. Aurora Saciao
26. Agnes Pangilinan
27. Kaye Ramos
28. Marvea Manalo Vergara
29. Angelita Carlos
30. Gail de Leon
31. Marilyn Simbulan
32. Christin David
33. Arlyn Carlos
34. Enrique Guevarra

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