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My EAPI Experience–Students Write Tributes to EAPI

Brother Masini Kaswamili, Fr. Chang Jun Kim (Luke), Sister Stella Akinwotu, SSL, Ms. Pia Hong Sun Mee

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Brother Masini Kaswamili

My name is Masini R. K. from Tanzania. I belong to the Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel Congregation, East Africa Province. The Province is comprised of five countries, namely Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and Malawi. Our mission is education, mainly to the youth. I came to EAPI after being exhausted in the field of teaching and administration in our schools for a number of years. And therefore, I felt the need to rest and landed here in the Philippines for a Sabbatical.

From January 6th to May 3rd, 2024, I enjoyed my spirituality classes here. Different modules were taught by different fathers of the Society of Jesus. The modules were enlightened, thoughtful, enriching, enthusiastic and opened up the mind to see the brightness in the darkness of the world. There was an experience of joy, peace, knowledge, spiritual growth and fulfilment from the modules.

Last but not the least, I thank the whole group of 60 strong people of God, the faithful priests, religious men and women, and the laity. I thank the director and the coordinators coming from different faces of this globe for their charming and friendly personalities that made the campus welcoming to each one of us regardless of our positions and the mission we had. Here we experienced peace and harmony.

Take care, and be blessed, one and all. *Asanteni sana*. (In Swahili, meaning “Thank you very much!”)

Fr. Chang Jun Kim (Luke)

I was ordained a priest (a part of the Diocese of Suwon, South Korea) in September 2004. I was commissioned as a military chaplain with the rank of captain in July 2008 (now my rank is a lieutenant colonel). Up to the present, I have worked at eight different bases.

On the one hand, I was a minister at the military parish, doing everything that being a minister requires. On the other hand, as a military chaplain, I have worked in educating, counselling, and encouraging the soldiers and the officers.

Due to various ministry and military requirements, my spiritual life has been neglected. I expected to grow spiritually, leaving aside the ministry, and putting my entire focus on the renewal of my spiritual life. Up until now, including the last term at EAPI, I have lived as if I was on retreat. In that time, I healed my wounds, discovered the meaning of the past, and gained spiritual and physical strength to live in the future. I am especially grateful to my spiritual leader, Father Chong, who led me well, and to all participants who awakened me to minister for the Catholic church with hope and passion. Above all, I praise the amazing grace of God who I came to realize loves me deeply, despite my own shortcomings.

Sister Stella Akinwotu, SSL

I was born 65 years ago, a Nigerian and a Yoruba by tribe. I entered the Institute of Sisters of St Louis in October 1979 and made my first profession in August 1982. My final profession was in September 1988.

I worked as a teacher, school counsellor, and pastoral worker. I was once a director of our Vocational Skills Acquisition Centre and Retreat and Catechetical Centre. I also worked as a formator and a member of the Nigeria Provincial Leadership Team. My last assignment was organic vegetable farm work. I had worked all my life and sometimes held two apostolates concurrently. Therefore, I came for a sabbatical for rest and renewal.

The possibility of living and journeying together despite our cultural and individual differences is a big take-home for me. Indeed, a synodality community is possible. The spiritual activities such as spiritual direction, Masses, retreats, monthly adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and my prayers have been of great spiritual upliftment. I also saw the importance of self-care. I have been helped to look at my “containers” the way I see, view, do things, and change those that could change. I pray for the grace to accept the “containers” I cannot change, the ability to change the ones I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

When coming to EAPI for Sabbatical, my intention was to rest, slow down and have time for myself. A space to pray and get in touch with my Lord in prayer. For many years I have always kept working with no time for myself or time for relaxing. Now I would like to spend this time deepening my spiritual life. I need time to adjust into prayer. I experienced being truly relaxed here at EAPI. I was happy with the different modules that helped me for my mission at hand.

The retreat that we had in Tagaytay was very much appreciated. I’ve never had such an experience, but I am prepared and looking forward to letting go of the past and looking forward to the future in the years to come. I am energized and ready to work with my Provincial. It will be my first time to be with her in full-time work, but I believe in God that everything will be according to God’s will and not human thinking. May God’s will be done.

I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to my well-being while staying here at EAPI especially to the facilitators. Thank you very much.

Ms. Pia Hong Sun Mee

Upon marriage, I followed my husband's family and converted from Buddhism to Catholicism. One day, fifteen years later, suddenly, I felt unfamiliar looking in the mirror. "Who am I?" "Who am I?" It was a voice resounding from deep inside. I am a daughter, a sister, a mother of two children, and a wife to a man. A math teacher, and a devout Catholic. But it looked like islands floating in the sea. I prayed hard because I thought I would find the sea if I prayed.

Around that time, I came across the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, and I began to awaken. When I closed my eyes, I was with God, and when I opened my eyes, I was on the cliff called the world. If I jumped off a cliff, it was on the wings of an eagle, and as a result I had grown up. And 25 years have passed. A prayer community was formed, and responsibility gradually increased. In recent years, I have continued to experience the death of people close to me. I was exhausted due to concentration for a long time. That's why I came here to EAPI.

I am a layperson who is not good at English. Here, I am a child. I could feel the nonjudgmental consideration and warmth in everyone's eyes. My room is like my mother's womb. It grows overnight and greets the new morning with excitement. I felt relieved and focused on prayer. I prayed until the core of my heart became one big rock. The things I wanted to be but couldn't become, the things I should have done but couldn't, and the sorrow of separation, all gathered together to form a large rock, and on that rock, on the altar, was the body of Jesus.

Only then did the fear, anxiety, and panic within me burst out from inside me with a persistent cough. I lost weight and stayed up all night for several nights. On the one hand, I discovered myself anew through learning in class and sharing with them.

As the Passion of Jesus approached, an 8-day retreat began. The wind was strong in Tagaytay. The wind made the clouds flow quickly. Every night, I watched the clouds drift by and saw the stars. The fear, anxiety, and panic

within me became a point of contact with Jesus, and my heart became warm with the desire to die with Jesus.

After the 8-day retreat, we returned to EAPI and participated in the Passion procession of Jesus for 5 hours in the Sacred Heart parish. The corpse of Jesus was so vivid. In the middle of the night on Good Friday, I walked around the empty campus and found Jesus. The darkness and silence shook my abyss and the dawn light began to burst. I was resurrected with Jesus.

As I write this, I am deeply grateful to my new family in EAPI. We haven't even broken up yet, but I miss you already. I tried so hard to become a good believer, to pray and study hard, but I experienced that God was with me in my helplessness, and that he was more heartbroken than me and died with me. He was born anew within me.

Imagine a vibrant table, microcosm of the world, where 21 nationalities weave a tapestry of cultures. Languages ebb and flow, punctuated by laughter and clinking of glasses. Despite the occasional struggles to understand a phrase or a joke, a sense of shared humanity binds this diverse group.

This is the essence of community life—a beautiful paradox where differences become bridges. We come together, not in spite of our religious backgrounds or varied spiritualities but because of a fundamental human need for connection. A single God worshipped in different tongues and with distinct rituals. Faith transcends these outward expressions. It's the silent understanding that flows beneath the surface, a shared belief in something greater than ourselves.

This gathering is a testament to the power of community. It reminds us that beneath the surface of our varied cultures and traditions lies a common thread in the desire for belonging, for understanding, and for the comfort of shared experiences.