

## Asia Pacific Mission Studies

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### A Tribute to the Founding Figures of EAPI

Editorial Team

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# A TRIBUTE TO THE FOUNDING FIGURES OF EAPI

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## **Editorial Team**

We offer our tribute to the giants who laid down the foundations of what is now the East Asian Pastoral Institute, a living, thriving community of those dedicated in and committed to carrying out the mission and ministry of the Church to witness to the Good News to the entirety of creation, in their differing cultural, social, linguistic, national, geographical contexts. There are many who have given much of their lives to EAPI through the six decades of its existence and who have passed on from our midst, and among these, we offer tribute and convey our deepest gratitude to the following for the crucial roles they took in making EAPI what it is today.

## Fr. Johannes Hofinger, SJ (1905-1984)

Formed under the guidance of renowned catechetical and liturgical giant, Fr. Josef Jungmann, SJ, Fr. Joannes Hofinger carried with him a deep love for liturgy and catechesis when he was sent on mission from Austria to China, and further, the Philippines, and beyond. After years of missionary service in China, he was among those expelled in 1949 when the Communist regime took control, and subsequently came to the Philippines. What might have seemed a painful interruption in his mission became, in God's providence, the beginning of something greater. Although his long-cherished dream of establishing a "Catechetical Academy" in Beijing was never realized, that vision found a wider and more enduring fulfillment in the foundation of the East Asian Pastoral Institute.

Fr. Hofinger is remembered as a visionary catechist and missionary educator whose scholarship, pastoral zeal, and unwavering faith helped lay the intellectual and spiritual foundations of EAPI. His humility, warmth, and profound dedication made him not only an esteemed teacher but also a trusted spiritual guide. We give thanks for his enduring legacy, which continues to inspire the formation of leaders who serve with faith, depth, and joy.

## Fr. José Ma. Calle, SJ (1922-2025)

Fr. Calle devoted nearly three decades of his life to the East Asian Pastoral Institute as one of its founding members and guiding pillars. As the last surviving member of the original team, he stood as a living bridge between the Institute's beginnings and its unfolding mission.

From its earliest days, he helped shape EAPI into a center of pastoral renewal in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. With clarity of vision and generosity of heart, he formed priests, religious, and lay leaders, integrating liturgy, catechesis, and spiritual life into a coherent and transformative pastoral vision. His humility, gratitude, and quiet strength endeared him to generations of participants. More than a respected teacher, he was a spiritual father whose

wisdom was matched by kindness. In honoring him, we recognize a life wholly given in service to the Church in Asia. His legacy lives on in EAPI's enduring commitment to renewal, communion, and faithful service.

### **Fr. Alfonso M. Nebreda, S.J. (1926-2004)**

In 1965, while serving as a missionary in Japan, Fr. Nebreda was called to assume the role of the first Director of EAPI. With courage and foresight, he embraced the task of shaping a new institution at a pivotal moment in the Church's history. Building upon Fr. Hofinger's vision, he transformed what had begun as a modest center for research and publications into an international, intercultural, and coeducational pastoral training center serving the local Churches of East Asia. At a time when collaboration among priests, religious brothers and sisters, lay men, and lay women, in an extended period of shared formation was virtually unprecedented in the region, his initiative represented a bold and prophetic step.

Through diplomatic wisdom, steady leadership, and unwavering dedication, Fr. Nebreda established the foundational structures that enabled EAPI to grow into the pastoral, theological, and experiential lifelong-learning institution it is today. He united intellectual rigor with pastoral sensitivity, earning respect not only as a scholar and administrator but also as a compassionate guide. We gratefully acknowledge his vision and leadership, through which the Institute found both stability and direction in its formative years.

### **Ms. Teresita Nitorreda (1932-2015)**

Tess Nitorreda, fondly called "Tita Tets" by those who knew her well, joined the first class of EAPI in September 1966, and was subsequently invited by Fr. Nebreda to join the staff to assist in the multitudes of tasks of sustaining and promoting EAPI's work at the time. Born in 1932, she grew up in Lingayen, Pangasinan, and went on to study at the College of the Holy Spirit in Manila, graduating with a Bachelor's degree with a major in Physics. She went to the USA for further studies, and came back to teach at a private

women's school, when she was invited to take, and gladly took on, the role of advisor to a group of young women in Student Catholic Action who were studying in various colleges and universities in the Manila area. It was this engagement with SCA that likely sparked her interest to join the first class of EAPI. And the rest is history.

She went on to become a very important figure in the development and flourishing of EAPI since that time through the years until she retired in 1990. Gifted in communication and group dynamics, she played a decisive role in developing and implementing EAPI's formative programs, helping to ground its pastoral vision in experiential methodology and collaborative leadership. In an era when ecclesial institutions were largely clerical and male-led, her presence and competence stood as a sign of creative fidelity to renewal. Her legacy endures not only in the countless pastoral leaders she helped form across Asia, but also in the spirit of dialogue, participation, and synodality, as Pope Francis will later define as the spirit of Vatican II, which EAPI follows in its mission. In his recollections of the first ten years, Fr. José Calle wrote that "(h)er presence and position as a lay woman in the permanent staff, was emblematic of a new era. Aside from being an excellent communicator and administrator, she had special expertise in group dynamics applied to training people, and was recognized in South East Asia as the pioneer of Experiential Methodology, applied to Religious Education."