

Reflection on Regency *Sco. Sidelizio Ornai Pereira, SJ*

The Regional Superior of the Independent Region of Timor Leste, Fr. Mark Raper SJ, the delegate of the region, Fr. Leonardus Dibyawata SJ, The Superior of Residência Santo Inácio de Loiola, Fr. Roy Ragas SJ, all the Jesuit priests, fellow scholastics, brothers and sisters, good evening.

Before I start sharing my experiences about regency, let me cite the document by Fr. Kolvenbach on regency as a stage in formation. “The specific aim of regency is to deepen the spiritual integration and the human maturation of the Jesuit in all its aspects, through serious and responsible commitment to an apostolic activity, with its objective demands of organization, regularity, adequate evaluation of time and means used, of collaboration and service to others”.

I start my sharing by telling a short story of mine regarding the process I was going through during my regency at Colégio de São José.

First of all, I would like to thank God for all the graces and blessings He has bestowed upon me during the one and half years of my regency.

Before the beginning of the school year 2011-2012 in East Timor which usually commences in January, I gathered together with the education team at that time which was composed of Fr. Plinio Gusmao Martins, SJ, the headmaster of CSJ, Fr. Roy Ragas, vice headmaster for administration and finance, Sco. Acacio Pinto, SJ, assistant moderator, Sco. Savio Freitas, SJ, the chairman of language department and over all coordinator of music and arts. During the meeting the team appointed me to be the prefect of discipline of CSJ. I accepted it and I knew that it was not going to be an easy job for me to handle, but I believed that with the grace of God I would be able to cope with the challenges and obstacles ahead of me at that time. I then started thinking about how the students would react when they heard about me being appointed as their new moderator or prefect of discipline. I was even thinking that there would be a lot of negative reactions from the part of the students, especially after the biggest and most famous event in the history the Independent Region of the Society of Jesus of Timor Leste about running and administering CSJ that occurred in 2010.

On January 7th, 2011, we began the school year with the Mass of the Holy Spirit to mark the commencement of the new school year during which time the headmaster, Fr. Plinio Gusmao Martins, SJ, announced my appointment and the new rule to be implemented. I could notice that the students did not expect me to be their new prefect of discipline. One other thing that made them really curious about me was their eagerness about how I was going to implement the new discipline code, which I was not involved in planning. After the announcement, some students approached their former prefect of discipline, Mr. Sabino da Costa, to ask if I was a strict person. He told them, “you will see”. I was indeed very strict and tough in my decisions, especially during the first semester. Despite my strictness to the students, I was aware of myself and I knew what I was doing.

As we began the new school year, we, the new team implemented a tutorial system of which I was the coordinator. There were 18 houses for tutorial programs. Each house was named after a Jesuit saint. And each house had one tutor to guide and listen to the desires and feelings of each student. The tutors were the teachers themselves. The purpose of the tutorial system was to encourage the students to express their feelings, experiences and observations about their involvement in the school. It was also an opportunity for them to know each other’s struggles and difficulties. And my

responsibility as their house coordinator was to hold the primary responsibility for supervising the 'whole education' of each student in my care. My task was to ensure that each student experienced and embraced one of the central ideals of Jesuit education - the 'well rounded person': 'Our ideal is the well rounded person who is intellectually competent, open to growth, religious, loving, and committed to doing justice in generous service to the people of God.' (Father Peter Kolvenbach, SJ quoted in *The Characteristic of Jesuit Education*: 166) 'The ultimate aim of Jesuit secondary education is that full growth of the person which leads to action – action that is suffused with the spirit and presence of Jesus Christ, the Man for others.' (*The Characteristic of Jesuit Education*: 167). My main job was to help the tutors in explaining what Jesuit education is, so that they in turn would help the students by explaining what is "man and woman for and with others?" What is "Magis"? And what is AMDG? These would have to be incorporated into the 3Cs of the school, which were competency, compassion and commitment.

I must confess that to my surprise, most of the students misunderstood all these Jesuit terms for education. For them, Magis was to have a lot of activities without caring about time, discipline and schedule. This for them was for what it meant to be "man and woman for and with others" for AMDG. That was why I together with the team tried our best to explain to the students that Magis is the quality and excellence of our performance. Magis is not about having a lot of activities. Magis is how we can organize ourselves to do better within the time given to us. Magis is about how to work within the budget. Magis is to discipline oneself in studying, praying, playing games and participating in the activities. Everything has its time and space. This is what Magis is. And we do this for AMDG.

It was not an easy task for me to discipline the students according to the vision and mission of the school in accordance with the characteristic of the Jesuit education. Some students told me that beating was the way to discipline them because this was what they were already used to. They further emphasized that violence was necessary for disciplining the Timorese. In my own experience, I know that beating is not healthy for the mental growth of a person. So, I told them that we don't feel the impact of the violence at the present moment; the impact would happen to us later when we moved on to the next stage of our formation and life. I was firm enough to tell them that for as long as I was still their prefect of discipline I would never use violence. I told them that there are many ways to discipline students. I had to say that because as a Timorese I want the students in Jesuit school in East Timor to know that whatever we do, it has to be in line with the characteristic of the Jesuit education.

For me, integration in education is the whole thing. It involves good cooperation among the team. It involves good and deeper understanding of the Jesuit way of education. And I personally think that the students must be able to understand the characteristic of the Jesuit education. This motivated me to discipline the students according to the code of discipline, through dialogue by asking the reasons why this happened and how that happened in order to help them think better and enabled them to make a good reason.

Moreover, I take this opportunity to share some of the challenges I faced during my regency at CSJ. After three months of my regency, I had to deal with the police because of vandalism about me and my assistant, Mr. Egidio Lay. What the unknown people wrote about me and my assistant on the wall and gate of CSJ at that time, I honestly say that it was really nasty. No student dared to confess who had done that. The only thing that I and the headmaster could do was to ask most of the third year students to kneel down in front of the statue of St. Joseph and promise that they did not do it.

This way was really helpful as they told us who was responsible for the vandalism. We found out that the person was someone we had expelled from CSJ because of disciplinary issues. This did not end the obstacles. After a few more months, I had to deal again with the police because a former student of CSJ broke the glass window of one of the classes during the feast day of St. Ignatius. When the police were looking for him, at one time, he together with his other friends, was waiting for me at the gate of CSJ in order to beat me up and if necessary to have me killed. I was just relaxing. Nothing actually happened. I believed that no enemy or terrorist would announce his attack before the action. This was all drama in the context of terrorizing me mentally and emotionally. In addition, the most unforgettable accident was when a single parent came into my office and started intimidating me, saying that if his son were expelled from the school, he would kill me and the homeroom teacher. He complained and complained about the rules of CSJ in my office. After complaining about everything, I finally told him to leave my office and I was still firm with the decision that his son should be expelled because he was already beyond the boundaries. But this single parent was not satisfied with what I said and so he went on to threaten the homeroom teacher of his son. Many teachers surrounded that single parent, explaining to him that the rule of the school is not to be played with. He finally accepted and quietly left the school.

There were so many dramatic experiences that I will not share all, but what I learnt from all these obstacles is the perseverance in my call to the Society of Jesus. I knew that I was not alone. I believe that God who has called me to this vocation is with me. The difficulty can be an opportunity for growth, clarity of vocation and discovery of new talents and gifts.

What really consoled me during regency was the trust from the Society of Jesus through the education team. Being prefect of discipline has widened my perspective about the good and quality of Jesuit education. I learnt to make decisions. I learnt how deal with the students and parents. Even though I did not have a background in education, I was happy because I learnt by experiencing it directly. There were trials and errors on my part because I was also limited in my knowledge about education. But this has become the source of motivation and encouragement for me to pursue a course in education.

In my conclusion, I would like to thank Fr. John Mace SJ, Fr. Mark Raper SJ, and the education team Fr. Plinio Martins SJ, Fr. Roy Ragas SJ and Sco. Savio Freitas SJ for all the support and encouragement you all have given me. I would also like to express my deep gratitude for the community in Residência Santo Inácio de Loiola and all the Jesuits in this region for your support and continuous prayer. It is to let you know that even though I have completed my regency in East Timor, I am officially still a regent on studies. As I move on to my studies, let's continue to pray for one another especially for our region.