



The Serra Club of Arlington
Minutes for Tuesday 05 April 2022 | Luncheon Meeting
The Portofino Restaurant | Arlington, Virginia



GUEST SPEAKER – FATHER CELSO ACABADO TABALANZA, CONGREGATION OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY (CICM)

Born in 1965 in the Philippines (South of the Island of Luzon) and entered the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1983. Made his first vows in 1988 and his perpetual vows in 1995. Did his Philosophy and Theology in the Philippines. Was sent as a missionary to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1992. Studied French in Belgium and Swahili in Democratic Republic of Congo to be able to communicate to the Congolese People the Gospel of Christ. Worked in the Archdiocese of Kisangani in the DR Congo in the Mission Post of Banalia deep in the forest. In 1996, he was ordained a priest in the Philippines on September 7, 1996 and returned a few weeks later back to Banalia to continue his mission work and where soon after, was caught in the middle of two civil wars. In 2001 he was sent as a missionary to the United States. Studied Spanish in Mexico to serve in the Diocese of Brownsville, Sacred Heart Parish in Mercedes, Texas from 2002-2010. In 2011, he received an assignment as a Pastor in St Bonaventure Church in San Antonio, Texas. In 2017, he was appointed Provincial Superior of the US Province of the CICM (Missionhurst). He celebrated his 25th Sacerdotal Anniversary on September 7, 2021.

Highlights from Father Celso presentation below are with respect to his experiences as a missionary and include:

- The word vocation – “want to serve people”
- Chose CICM as they were “the first to visit his house” and joined “to see the world,” then realizing it would be as missionary.
- Given a list of missionary destinations to choose from, he was sent to his “last choice” – The Democratic Republic of the Congo in central Africa
- Many interesting experiences including: visiting villages and being provided for by the people; a lot of storytelling; language barrier given classic Swahili versus local Swahili; expectation for at least 30 minute homilies given the substantial distances locals had to travel to Mass; village “stops” for death; and, so many bad people “like eagle ready to descend” leading him to take up the role as shepherd for the sheep. A very humbling experience being a missionary.
- Was captured by the rebels and wrote a book on the experience (distributed at the meeting). Developed the mindset that “God, my life is yours” in troubling moments. Learned to trust in God.
- Other: Speaks seven languages; needed therapy for traumatic experiences; CICM in 21 countries and is the main source of missionaries; and, must serve overseas or “CICM not for you.” Reflected on the abandoned children in China. Website: www.missionhurstCICM.org