

# FFRGOC SEMINARIAN SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

## OCTOBER 2021

By: Elizer M. Ruiz, Program Director

Since 2020 to the present, people have resigned themselves to accept “abnormalcy” as the normal way of life due to the global Corona virus pandemic. Despite the various efforts [vaccination, lockdown, government mandates on social distancing, wearing of facial masks & other protective personal equipment, work from home, virtual/online schooling, etc.], being implemented by health organizations and government leaders to put an end to the spread of this disease, it remains unabated.

Saint John the Evangelist School of Theology [SJEST] in Palo, Leyte where all the four (4) FFRGOC seminarian scholars attend school has not been spared from this pandemic.

The seminarians continue to face a great challenge to remain healthy, to avoid contracting Covid and to continue their studies virtually or online. They have to adjust to the new normal: forego face-to-face studies in the classroom setting and deal with intermittent internet connections. They also have to study harder and work independently to cope with the new challenges posed by the lockdown.

According to *Brother Jeffrey Bano's* experience, when one of the seminarians in the Minor Seminary tested positive for Covid, all seminary staff, personnel and seminarians had to go on quarantine for twenty-one days. Then they were told to go back to their respective homes and continue their formation at home. He said that “...it was a totally new and different experience to work according to one's schedule. He had to be on top of things and had to prioritize things and manage his time well.”

In August this year, two of the nuns in the seminary contracted Covid. Thanks to God they are now fully recovered.

It is only this first semester of school year 2021-2022 that the seminary opened its doors to admit seminarians. Those taking the HSPFY (Human Spiritual Pastoral Formation Year) are the only ones located/assigned to various places specified in the program.

This school year, we start with three (3) seminarian scholars in the levels of HSPFY, Theo 3, and Theo 4. The fourth Seminarian who recently graduated is undergoing courses leading to his diaconal ordination.

### Arnold P. Bagon, Theo 4

This semester, Seminarian Arnold is enrolled in fourth year Theology at SJEST. For the second semester of Theology 3, he completed 22 units of



academic subjects with a weighted grade average of 1.65 [grades ranging from 1.0 to 2.2]. Frt. Arnold is a parishioner of the Diocese of Borongan, in the Province of Samar. Currently, Frt. Arnold is a full

scholar of FFRGOC.

Like other seminarians and students, Frt. Arnold encountered difficulties during this pandemic. Because everything is done through the internet, he said “...I felt as if I was not a seminarian but only a lay student studying theology. It was really a chaotic year because of the chaotic condition (brought by the pandemic).” However, he added “...I realized that life, without the experience of problems, struggles, difficulties, and challenges, is a life without success. So, in spite of all these things, I never gave up answering the call of God. I am grateful to the words of Pope Benedict XVI because it somehow enlightened me to persevere in my journey towards priesthood. His words are really encouraging especially for me who aspires for priesthood. As a future priest, I have to entrust everything to God so that I could really be free - from anxieties, worries, problems, struggles, and difficulties. Because being free from all these things is a sure foundation that a future priest could have.”

Frt. Arnold further said “...Now, I am already in my last year of formation/studies in the seminary and soon to be ordained a priest, God willing. However, this year seems to be more challenging and a struggle for me because a lot of work has to be done: thesis writing, preparation for major exams such as synodal exams, comprehensive exams, thesis defense, etc. Honestly speaking, I am a little bit afraid, but I entrust everything to God. I always pray to Him to guide me and help me for the rest of the things I cannot do. As a famous saying goes, ‘do your best and God will do the rest.’ Life is not always about

problems, struggles, difficulties, and challenges. Life sometimes is gracious, gifted, blessed and loved. As another famous saying state 'there is always light at the end of the tunnel.'

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Federation of Filipino Rosary Groups of Orange County for the unconditional support extended to me as I carry on heeding the call of God. May God continue to give you all the best... Thank you and God bless!"

This school year is the last for Frt. Arnold Bagon in the Seminary. He is expected to graduate in June 2022. God willing, he will be ordained first as a Transitional Deacon and then as a parochial priest.

### **Christian Paul B. Nieto, Theo 3**

Brother Christian Nieto from the Diocese of Calbayog, Samar is currently enrolled at SJEST as a Theology 3 student. He just completed the HSPFY Program. In his email to this author, Bro Christian mentioned that the program is broken down into various studies including home parish, diocesan, and family immersions, clinical pastoral education (CPE) and a 30-day Ignatian Retreat. The Program, especially the retreat, was conducted virtually or online due to the pandemic. However, the CPE required them to visit homes for the aged or visit hospitals risking exposure to the spreading COVID-19. One thing which Frt. Christian emphasized that he learned from the Program is that "...life of a priest is not for himself but rather he is for the community" and that "the demands of the ministerial priesthood are the demands of the Church." Further he said "...the program introduced me to develop my real self, to see my shortcomings and my strengths. With this program, I came to know myself deeply and understand myself intensely. I was able to recognize



my tendencies and my shortcomings and learned how to deal with it and how to put aside my personal feelings. I was able to see my comfort zones and let myself go beyond my limit in a positive way. Lastly, I learned

how to deal with different behaviors and attitudes of the community during my Diocesan immersion and Parish immersion."

Frt. Christian Paul Nieto's scholarship is partly covered (50%) by FFRGOC while the other half is paid for by the Placentia Rosary and Community Group, Area 7 of the Northeast Chapter.

### **Gino Tabino Cardona, HSPFY**

Frater Gino T. Cardona just completed second year of Theology and is now undergoing the HSPFY



Program. A native of Bangkal, Makati City, Frt. Cardona is from the Diocese of Maasin, Leyte. Like the other seminarians, Frt. Gino completed his Theology 2 virtually [facing a computer screen in the security of his seminary dormitory]. In his

Theo 2 second semester, he completed 21 units of academic subjects with a weighted average grade of 1.76. When asked to write a few lines for this column, Frt. Gino wrote: "Today, (the 7<sup>th</sup> of October) the whole church is celebrating the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. This also is the month of Rosary. It is an opportunity to give thanks for all the blessings I received in spite of the pandemic everyone encountered. I should not be afraid for I have Mother Mary who is always on my side to protect and to guide me through this dark hour of our lives. Likewise, my warmest gratitude from the bottom of my heart to all the people who are supporting me in my journey in this vocation especially the Federation of Filipino Rosary Groups of Orange County (FFRGOC). I continue my journey in response to my calling, and through this (HSPFY) program I dig deeper into my conscience in order to see where I need to develop in my human and spiritual formation. This Program will bring out the best in me and bring awareness to myself as a person."

Frt. Gino Cardona scholarship coverage is partly (50%) from FFRGOC while the remaining portion is sponsored by Elizer & Evelyn Ruiz from Placentia Rosary and Community Group, Area 7, Northeast Chapter.

### **Jeffrey Ambida Bano, MTh**

Brother Jeffrey A. Bano, a native of Eastern Samar and a member of the Diocese of Borongan, province of Samar, completed his seminary training and graduated from Saint John the Evangelist School of Theology in Palo, Leyte with the degree



of Masters in Theology (MTh). Brother Jeffrey has



been a recipient of FFRGOC seminarian scholarship program since 2016. Due to the pandemic and related restrictions imposed by the Philippine government, SJEST did not hold graduation exercises for the 2021 graduating class.

According to Brother Jeffrey, "My experience of my formation year during this pandemic was meaningful and memorable. I will

treasure all my experiences because these experiences helped me grow as a person. Maybe God allowed those to happen so that I could bring out the best in me and to trust Him always."

In his latest update, Brother Jeffrey, is currently attending the necessary training and programs leading to his diaconal ordination. He has spent the last two months with the Bishop of his Diocese and this portion of the program will conclude by the end of November 2021. The next stage of his training will be an assignment to different parishes for parish exposure. This is scheduled for four (4) months.

*"Sundan ang susunod na kabanata."*

### LIFE IN THE SEMINARY, A QUICK PEEK

