

THE SACRED HEARTS FATHERS IN SINGAPORE

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THE BACKGROUND (1928 – 1958)

During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia between 1943 and 1945, all 23 Dutch SS.CC. missionaries were interned. Twelve of them died while eleven survived the concentration camp. Some of them were kept in Indonesia, while others were held in Changi prison, Singapore.



Fr. Isfried Meijer

One of those who survived the Changi camp was **Fr. Isfried Meijer**. In **1928**, he was moved to Singapore from Indonesia to start a mission office as procurator supplying material things to the whole apostolic Prefecture of Pangkalpinang and acting as host for passing missionaries. He stayed till 1933 in Singapore at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd from where he could regularly visit the missions of the Bintan, Karimun and other islands in Riau archipelago.

After the liberation in 1945 he did not return to Indonesia but resumed his task of procurator in Singapore. In the next few years he moved to the place of the La Salle Brothers in East Coast Road where he served as chaplain to the Brothers, gave catechism class and tuition. He was also pastor to the Dutch community in Singapore. He is the first SS.CC. member working in Singapore.

In 1957 when the late bishop Michael Olcomendi was unable to find priests for the **Apostleship of the Sea** and for the new church to be built-in **Queenstown**, he asked Fr. Meijer whether his Congregation would be able to assist him. Fr. Meijer passed the bishop's request on to his provincial superior in Holland. It was accepted, and three SS.CC. priests were sent by the Dutch province to assist the diocese of Malaka-Singapore.

This is how the first Sacred Hearts community was started.

THE FIRST COMMUNITY (1958 – 1963)



Fr. Odo Tiggeloven

In February 1958 **Fr. Odo Tiggeloven** came from Holland as the first member to be welcomed by Fr. Meijer. **Fr. William van Soest** came a few months later, and **Fr. Alfons Bergmans** arrived in September.

Fr. Alfons was appointed as chaplain to the Apostleship of the Sea (Stella Maris), the pastoral care for the seamen. He lived and worked for twelve years in the special Seamen's House, located behind St. Theresa's church.

The other two priests were meant for the future church in Queenstown: Fr. van Soest as building priest and parish priest, with Fr. Odo as his assistant.

As the Congregation did not have a domicile in Singapore, its members had to live in separate places: Fr. Meijer at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Bras Basah Road, Fr. Odo at Holy Family parish in Katong, and Fr. William at Our Lady of Lourdes parish, the last two being appointed as assistant parish priests.

Later Fr. Meijer moved to East Coast Road where he became chaplain to the La Salle brothers at St. Patrick's, Fr. Odo became chaplain to the St. Joseph Institution in Bras Basah Road and Fr. van Soest moved to the Cathedral, from where he could better prepare the new church to be built in Queenstown.



Msgr. Dominic Desperben

Msgr. Dominic Desperben, a French SS.CC. missionary, came to Singapore in 1961 and stayed at the Cathedral. He was apostolic prefect of the Chinese island of Hainan till he was expelled by the communists in 1953.

This was the pilgrim situation of our first community in Singapore from 1958 to 1963.

COMMUNITY LIFE (1963 – 1967)

1963 was an important year for the new community as **Damien Hall**, the first part of **Blessed Sacrament Church**, was completed. It was not only used for worship, but also as temporal accommodation for Fr. van Soest and Fr. Odo. One of them worked and slept in the kitchen and the other in the meeting room, but at least they had a place to call “their own”.

The presbytery as the second stage of Blessed Sacrament Church project was ready a year later. Now there was a proper home for the missionary priests. Fr. Desperben and Fr. Meijer consequently joined the community in the new presbytery. There were now 4 Sacred Hearts priests, two of them semi-retired and two fully active. Fr. Alfons remained staying at the Seamen’s House. By that time Fr. Odo had left for Taiwan to learn Mandarin. **Fr. Jan van Berkomp** took over his post as assistant priest for two years.

It should be noted that in all these years, Fr. William van Soest, assisted by Fr. Odo, was not only busy planning with the architect and contractors, but also in building a Catholic community in Queenstown. He had to raise funds for the new church buildings as well. We should not forget that in those days only a limited number of HDB blocks had been built in the area, so the Catholic population was only a few hundred people. Where could he get the money for this grand project from? Fr. van Soest tried his best in all sorts of ways to raise funds, especially through his friendship with many people.

When Damien Hall was ready, it facilitated many fund-raising activities organized by the Building fund Committee such as Variety Shows. All the same, the construction of the church proper was delayed due to lack of money and therefore was only completed by May 1965. Fr. van Soest had to be congratulated and thanked for this wonderful project he realized for the Singapore diocese, though he suffered a lot under the burden of debts.



CHANGES OF PERSONNEL (1967 – 1975)

In 1965 a diocesan priest from Hainan, Fr. Joachim Choy, joined us for two years. In 1967 Fr. van Soest was succeeded as parish priest by **Fr. William de Bruin** who previously worked as a missionary in Indonesia. In the same year, the new team of Fr. de Bruin and Fr. Odo received an additional member by the arrival of **Fr. Kees van Diepen** as the second assistant priest for the growing parish. He was a newly ordained priest.



Fr. van Diepen, Fr. Desperben, Fr. de Bruin and Fr. Odo

In 1968, Fr. Meijer went back to Holland for retirement.

In 1970, Fr. Bergmans, after working for the Apostleship of the Sea for 12 years, returned to Holland.

Fr. van Soest succeeded him as chaplain. That same year, **Fr. Albert Renckens** arrived from Holland to be a part-time assistant in the parish and

part-time catechist in the diocese, because there were already two assistant priests there.

In 1971 however, Fr. van Diepen left the community and went to New Zealand. That same year Fr. de Bruin left the parish and was succeeded as parish priest by Fr. Odo.

To strengthen the team, **Fr. Francis van der Linden** came over from England to become assistant priest. Fr. Odo went on leave at the end of the year and did not come back.

Fr. Renckens became the new parish priest in the middle of 1972. A year later, to strengthen the team of priests in the parish again, the newly ordained **Fr. Anthony Hutjes** came over from Holland. In 1974, **Fr. Arnold Sloots** came over from England to succeed Fr. van Soest as chaplain of the Apostleship of the Sea. However he only stayed for one year and went back to England without a successor. In the same year, due to difficulty in travelling, Fr. Dominic Desperben who was serving as chaplain to the Little Sisters of the Poor, moved to Bethany House next to the convent. In 1980, he was admitted to Mount Alvernia Hospital, where he passed away.

CONSOLIDATION (1975-2003)

In 1975 a Singapore diocesan priest, Fr. Francis Lee, was appointed by the bishop to join our community for the sake of the Chinese speaking parishioners. He stayed with us till 1982.

On 30th of May 1983, Damien Centre, an extension of Damien Hall, was officially opened by Fr. Renckens.

In May 1985, a few days after suffering from a stroke Fr. Francis van der Linden suddenly passed away. The parish gave him a grand wake and a great funeral.

Who would succeed him? Missionaries from Holland were scarce. Fortunately **Fr. Fabian van Lieshout** was willing to come over from England where he had served for 28 years.



Fr. Felix Supranto from Indonesia came in 1997 to join the parish for a year.

The SS.CC. Asian Forum/Mission Seminar was held in Singapore a year later at Jalan Merbok (Canossian Sisters) under leadership of general councilor, Fr. Eduard Brion.

In 2000 Fr. Fabian retired as assistant priest of Blessed Sacrament Church but remained in the presbytery. He was succeeded by another Indonesian priest, **Fr. Gerardus Suyono**.

AT LAST OUR OWN HOME (2003)

On 7 August 2002, we received the keys of a maisonette the Congregation had bought in Gillman Heights (Block 1-D, #01-38).

After some planning the house was renovated, and on the first of April 2003 the first community moved in: Fr. Fabian, brother **Toni Blikon** from Indonesia who was studying English at that time, and **Fr. William Langenhuijsen**.

Fr. William, who worked in Indonesia for forty years, came to become pastor to migrant workers in Singapore.

On May 11, feast of Fr. Damien of Molokai, our new home which we call “Damien House” was blessed and officially opened by our then provincial, Fr. Fons Claes.



FR. MARTIN IRAWAN (2004-2006)

On 8 February 2004 three Indonesian brothers were ordained to diaconate at Blessed Sacrament Church.

On 24 May 2004 **Fr. Martin Irawan** arrived at Blessed Sacrament Church to replace Fr. Albert Renckens as parish priest. On 19 September 2004, he was installed by Msgr. Nicholas Chia in the presence of our provincial.



Three Deacons with Fr. Renckens

On 22 October Fr. Renckens came back from 1 month home leave and joined the Damien House community.

He was appointed by the provincial to be the coordinator for the two SS.CC. communities in Singapore starting October 30.



Fr. Martin Irawan with Msgr. Nicholas Chia

new provincial superior, Fr. Antun Wardoyo.

On July 10th 2006, we received a letter from the Management Council of Gillman Heights Condominium to inform us that the 1st phase of the en-block sale of the Condominium was finished. We await further developments. We may have to buy another house.

On 1st of September 2006, it was announced that Fr. Martin will be leaving the parish and go on a sabbatical year.

Due to international SS.CC. meetings in Singapore, at the Ordination Mass in Blessed Sacrament Church on 6th of February 2005, there were 18 SS.CC. priests concelebrating. Brother **Suwondo** was ordained a deacon and deacon **Remi Liando** to the priesthood.

On June 25 2006, the Chapter of the Indonesian province was opened. Six days later Fr. Claes informed us that we had a

FR. ANTHONY HUTJES (2006 -)

On 8th of October 2006, Fr. Anthony was installed as the new parish priest by Msgr. Nicholas Chia, while the new provincial read the appointment letter.

In early December 2006 Fr. Remi Liando and **Fr. Lusius Nimu** arrived in Singapore from Batam: Fr. Remi to be assistant priest in the parish and Fr. Lusius to live in Damien House to learn English.

On Christmas Eve of that year we celebrated the foundation date of our congregation during the mid-night Mass at Blessed Sacrament Church. Eight SS.CC. priests concelebrated with Fr. Renckens as main celebrant and preacher. Four of the priests were from Damien House and four from Blessed Sacrament Church. Fr. Odo who was vacationing from Holland was also present.

Fr. Javier Alvarez-Ossorio, the new SS.CC. Superior general, and one of the council members, Fr. Eduardo Pérez-Cotapos, paid a short visit to our communities here in February 2007.



Official opening of Damien Centre by Msgr. Eugene Vaz together with Fr. Anthony Hutjes

September 22nd 2007 was a great day for the brothers in the parish, as the New Damien Centre was blessed and officially opened by Msgr. Eugene Vaz.

In 2011, **Fr. Johan Wongso**, another SS.CC. priest from Indonesia, started serving in BSC and is currently the assistant priest.