

HOMILY

By

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SLU President

Wednesday, 22 March 2017, 3PM
St. Aloysius Gonzaga Church
Saint Louis University, Baguio City

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IN MEMORIAM

REV. FR. PAUL P. ZWAENEPOEL, CICM (1924-2017)

Good afternoon!

I am honored that you could come to pay tribute to the great builder of Saint Louis University. *“Many thanks to our retirees and alumni, for joining us in this Eucharistic celebration to remember **Fr Paul Zwaenepoel, CICM.**”*

I understand that the Angeles University Foundation and the University of Sto. Tomas will have similar commemorations, in honor of Fr Zwaenepoel. Some time ago, Fr Zwaenepoel became an important figure in these two universities.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we honor in today’s Mass the memory of **Fr Paul Zwaenepoel**, another CICM missionary who at one point in his life said **YES!** to God’s calling to serve in the CICM mission at SLU. Fr Zwaenepoel died on 17 March 2017 in Belgium. He was 93 years old.

It was indeed a life well lived. Stories you hear from time to time from Louisians who had a chance to visit him in Belgium would narrate how Fr Zwaenepoel remained as sharp as ever; how he would regaled them with stories about the Philippines and SLU in particular that he so loved.

Fr Zwaenepoel was the second president of SLU, serving the term for twelve (12) years (1964-1976). Standing over 6’2, it would be impossible to miss him walking and attending ceremonies in the campus. Some of our retirees present

here might still remember him with actual encounters with and memorable stories about Fr Zwaenepoel.

The Legacy of Fr Paul Zwaenepoel

In concrete ways, how shall we remember Fr Zwaenepoel, especially for our young people here who never had a chance to meet him up close and personal? To help us recognize his great contributions to SLU, just imagine this main campus where we are now here at Bonifacio St., with no other structure except the Silang Building – which used to be the high school department during those days. This whole place was surrounded by forested hills on what was then called “Mount Mary.” That was the image of SLU when Fr Zwaenepoel became president.

Called to make a difference as the second SLU president, Fr Zwaenepoel envisioned the steady growth of student population in SLU in the coming years and the need to provide the space for offering quality programs and facilities. The SLU main campus then was in General Luna St., or in what we refer today as Gonzaga campus. Fr Zwaenepoel started the physical campus developments here in the Bonifacio campus. Another CICM confrere vividly recalls that Fr Zwaenepoel always had big plans for SLU.

And the many structures - built in the late 1960s until the 1970s in this campus - we see today and where thousands of our SLU alumni once spent their student years are what Fr Zwaenepoel monumentally left us with. These are: *The Otto Hahn Building, the Rizal Building, the Adenauer Building, the Burgos Building, the Perfecto Building, the Library Building, the Ladies’ Residence Halls, the former DZWT Building, the former Men’s Residence Hall, the SLU Hospital*, and all the other auxiliary units and offices, which all bear the mark of Fr Zwaenepoel.

A number of foreign governments (Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, and the United States of America), institutions, and numerous benefactors abroad donated many of these buildings and student service facilities. The rise of these tall school buildings, which was widely considered as an engineering and architectural achievement in those days, significantly helped shape the changing landscape of Baguio City since 1970s.

Ever a persistent negotiator and effective fundraiser, Fr Zwaenepoel was very successful in forging partnerships with international agencies to seek financial sponsorship for infrastructure and academic projects.

A good number of foreign students started coming to SLU to obtain undergraduate and graduate degrees, which Fr Zwaenepoel facilitated. We can say that Fr Zwaenepoel fifty (50) years ago pioneered the SLU linkages programs and strategy.

Last but not least, it is to the credit of Fr Zwaenepoel that we have the SLU-SVP Housing Project in Bakakeng, Baguio City, which was inaugurated in 1970 with 400 units. The project was meant to provide SLU employees and the parishioners of Saint Vincent Parish in Campo Filipino the opportunity to own houses of their own on affordable terms. This private housing initiative was undertaken before the government's PAG-IBIG project was introduced to the country.

Fr Paul Zwaenepoel, the CICM Religious Missionary

Though Fr Paul Zwaenepoel is and will always be remembered – and rightly so - as the visionary builder and brilliant administrator of SLU, in terms of implementing extensive infrastructure projects mainly through foreign grants, developing human resources, promoting faculty competence through scholarships for graduate studies here and abroad, and innovating academic curricula to meet the demands of the changing times –

Fr Paul Zwaenepoel was, first and foremost, a CICM religious missionary.

As a CICM religious missionary, Fr Zwaenepoel was sent to the Philippines in 1949, a year after his ordination, with no idea with what awaited him, except **faith in Jesus Christ to whom he professed to follow.**

In our Gospel reading today, we have witnessed an episode in the lives of the followers of Jesus. When things become unbearable like suffering and death, Jesus is there telling us to believe and have faith in Him. ***Faith in Jesus Christ is and will always be every missionary's essential virtue, his source of inner***

strength and happiness. We are all missionaries: sent to carry out God's plan for us.

Fr Zwaenepoel arrived in the Philippines at a time when the country was recovering from the destruction wrought by WWII. While initially assigned to do parish work in Baguio, it was not long when Fr Zwaenepoel was called to help in the CICM school apostolate. For 10 years he was professor and dean in what was before Saint Louis College. But he was destined for more in the emerging life of the first CICM university.

The 1960s saw the new beginning in Fr Zwaenepoel's important role in Saint Louis, especially when it became a university in 1963. It was a role he embraced fully, in keeping with the signs of the times.

It is no exaggeration that Saint Louis University reached a high point during Fr Zwaenepoel's presidency, as it became a prime educational destination next to the universities in Manila. His presidency and SLU's growing dynamic presence contributed to the transformation of Baguio City into an emerging educational hub. World leaders and dignitaries would visit SLU, for social and official functions.

Friends, as we remember with gratitude Fr Zwaenepoel and for the legacy he left us with, let us acknowledge his contributions as opportunities to build on for a better future of SLU. That is what he would have wanted.

In our hands now are the ongoing realizations of Fr Zwaenepoel's grand plans for SLU, perhaps in new forms and in new light. But definitely it has to do with continuing the good and beautiful CICM mission through the school apostolate. The CICM school apostolate is a journey we have to take together with faith in one another and in Jesus Christ, in spite of the uncertainty ahead of us. Like Martha in the Gospel, we are called to profess: ***"Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God."***

Conclusion

Dear Louisians, in the face of an uncertain future, we continue to give hope to our students whose future depends on the quality of education we give them here in SLU. We can renew to embrace this responsibility by believing again in what we Louisians can do.

Therefore, we conclude this moment of remembrance with a quote from Fr Paul Zwaenepoel himself: ***“Together, all Louisians shall build a new world of the people of God.”***

Amen.