

Magis

Formation for Mission



Stewardship
Simplicity
Sharing
Service

Official Publication of the Magis Deo Community
August 2018 Issue



The World Cup

Become heroes for
the right reasons

Generation gap

Finding the middle ground

Patriotism

Marching forward amidst
the challenges

Suyuan

Rediscovering love

ME Weekend

Connecting to God to
reconnect the bond

About the Cover



In this month's issue, respective writers contribute their insights to strengthen our patriotism towards our beloved country. The nation saw a divide towards the current administration, for our diversity as people allows us to have our own respective political views.

It is an unending battle between who's right and who's wrong. Mobs light their torches online in the comments section, and others raise their statement cardboards in the streets. But the main questions should remain: is the Philippines moving forward, or are we stepping back? Where do we find our middle ground? What will be written in our future?

Because of these, illustrator Levenspeil R. Sangalang of Magis Youth, enlivened his vision of this division. What could've been a fully-formed heart is pulled back by strong ropes due to our differences. To transcend all these, we must always put God at the center, because to be truly patriotic is to never forget what God wants us to achieve: unity.

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Calendar of Activities: September - December 2018

September

2 Community Celebration
28 Golf tournament cum Magis Night at Phil Navy
Golf Course, Taguig

November

18 Community Celebration & Advent Recollection
23-25 Marriage Encounter Weekend (MEW)

October

7 Community Celebration & Election of
Pastoral Council
19-21 Annual Ignatian Retreat (AIR) at
Sacred Heart Novitiate, Novaliches, QC.

December

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The World Cup

From shocking upsets to sweet victories, the world has been in the grip of soccer fever the past weeks. The World Cup, held every four years, is participated by the best soccer teams from around the world. In fact, qualifying for the World Cup is already a feat and honor, considering the series of highly competitive tournaments each team has to go through to be qualified. Hence, it is not surprising that each participating country becomes one and united in supporting its team, while enjoying the excitement of every pass, every kick, and every goal of the game. But more than the victory and excitement, the World Cup provides the opportunity for people to express their deepest love and loyalty to their flag and country.

As our country celebrates National Heroes Day this August, we can perhaps draw inspiration from the World Cup in expressing our own sense of loyalty and patriotism. The Japanese team earned the respect and accolade of fans and fellow players when they left their locker room clean and orderly, after a painful loss to Belgium. At such a heart-breaking moment, very few people can possibly pay attention to small details like cleaning their locker room and even leaving a "thank you" note to the host, Russia. But not the Japanese players, whose traditional values revolve around discipline, honor, and integrity. This kind of discipline is what our country badly needs today, especially in situations where we lack the facilities and infrastructure to accommodate everyone. It extends to following simple traffic rules, proper waste disposal, and queuing and waiting for our turn, whenever necessary.

While there were many star players and famous personalities at the World Cup, Croatian President HE Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic stood out because of her humility and simplicity. Accordingly, she travelled to Russia by economy class to watch the semifinals. She even sat with the crowd until she was recognized and moved to a VIP box. During the awarding ceremony, the rain came pouring down but she continued to stand without any demands while hugging and greeting her team. What a beautiful lesson and example our government officials and even leaders of small organizations can emulate to embody the true meaning of leadership by example. In Magis Deo, simplicity is one of the core values we espouse, and it is important that we observe it in every occasion, from the big gatherings such as community celebration to the BCGG meetings. Remember that **we are called to serve and not to be served** (Matthew 20:28).

After the World Cup, there were coaches and players who resigned or retired, as they believed they did not perform according to expectations. How many of our leaders today have the courage to do the same out of *delicadeza* and



Photo by Londonist

genuine love for our country? How many can at least cease running for election to give way to more capable and deserving leaders? Sadly, there are very few, if we can even name one. This is definitely not what we recently witnessed in the House of Representatives where every position, from speakership to minority leadership, was contested by those who are still hungry for power... and wealth?

Much as we want to be united again and move forward after the 2016 national election, we are still a very divided nation, trying to associate everyone with a political color based on his/her views and opinions. Fake news is rampant. Poverty and unemployment remain high, while prices of basic commodities have significantly increased, no thanks to the inflation rate that is the highest the country has experienced in the last 5 years. In its desire to improve basic services to the people, the government hopes to generate more revenue through the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law. On the other hand, there are some who believe otherwise and blame the new tax law for the increasing prices of goods. Peace and order is said to have improved, and the crime rate is significantly lower now based on the latest data from the PNP, crediting it primarily to the intensified war on drugs. But the subsequent killings of priests, politicians, and journalists and the many unsolved cases of drug-related deaths may negate all these positive indicators. The issue of West Philippine Sea, the proposed change in our constitution and form of government, and the conflict between the government and the church are just some of the major issues that continue to challenge our sense of nationalism, genuine love for our country and support for our leaders.

Amidst all these, each one of us is called to become a hero in our own little way. We are not asked to fight like Jose Rizal or Andres Bonifacio, but we can start by knowing our Gifts and discerning how we can utilize these gifts to serve. Our Sacred Space Book reminds us that a hero is a person who takes action to help people. That is what the Holy Spirit calls us to do. We too are called to serve, to not be afraid. With the Holy Spirit already dwelling in us, there is no time to waste. We need to take action now and assist those around us, be they a family member, a friend, a co-worker, a stranger on the street; be it our environment, our nation, or our world.

Just like the World Cup, we are challenged to fight, win, and show love for our country. After all, Magis Deo was formed 30 years ago in response to a political situation, right after the EDSA revolution.

Magis, Shine Like a Pearl...

Jojo and Jane Aldeguer, Chronicles BCGG

Do you know that Magis Deo is already 30 years old (Pearl anniversary) this 2018?

Yes! Magis Deo was founded by Fr. Ruben Tanseco, SJ, and was incorporated in the early months of 1988. In 2013, we had a big Silver thanksgiving celebration. Boy, have we gone a long way. For our newbies, it is worthwhile to have a glimpse of Magis Deo then.

Magis Deo formally began in 1985 as a response of a group of encountered couples to the political situation leading up to the snap presidential election in 1986. These pioneering couples felt the need to respond to issues outside of themselves. They felt they were being called to a mission to do more for God. Fr. Tanseco developed the Couple and Family Spirituality Program for these couples and the Marriage Encounter graduates that followed, to encourage them to grow spiritually by becoming persons for others, couples for others, and families for others. In Fr. Tanseco's own words, "*Our encountered couples and families are called to implant themselves where they really belong – the wider community, the nation.*"

Magis Deo's name was coined by Tina Mossesgeld, inspired by St. Ignatius' view that we should choose the greater (magis) good, the more loving option, or that which will bring us closer to God. Back then, the Marriage Encounter Weekend (MEW) Classes didn't have class numbers. They were named Alpha 1, Delta 4, and the like. Magis Deo's early BCGG or Basic Christian Growth Group didn't have a name. They were simply composed of couples. The 1987-1988 Pastoral Council was composed of Joey and Nina Yuson, Tony and Aida del Rosario, Monchito and Tina Mossesgeld, and Tony and Bambi Narciso. They were regarded as the "pioneer reliable" generation. Philip and Malu Panlilio were the first Pastoral Council Chaircouple from the "new" generation of Magis servant leaders following the "pioneer reliable."

Yes, you got it right, the Panlilios continue to lovingly serve the community this 2018, again as Chaircouple.

And now after 30 years, Fr. James Gascon, SJ is our Spiritual Director. We continue to grow with our nearly 300 active members spread out in 24 BCGGs grouped into 3 sectors – North, Central, and South. The Marriage Encounter Weekend, the entry point to the Magis Deo Community, is conducted three times a year in the months of February, July and November; each weekend is attended by an average of 16 couples. Our Community Celebration, held every first Sunday of the month, through the Community Services Ministry (CSM), has an average attendance of 200, 45 of whom are youth. Still through the CSM, the community looks forward to various activities like Couple's Night, Magis Golf, and Family Day. The Outreach Ministry's Suyuan reaches out to various communities through one to two Suyuans a month, sponsored by one or two BCGGs. The Outreach Ministry aims for 100% BCGG involvement in Suyuans each year. Youth Ministry activities include ComCel talks for young adults, crafts and fun activities for toddlers and kids, Summer Camp, outreach/tree-planting, and Retreats. The Formation Ministry has an array of programs to deepen our relationship with God, i.e., Annual Ignatian Retreat (AIR), Prayer Orientation Workshop, Spiritual Deepening Retreat (SDR), Retreat in Daily Life (RDL) through the Center for Ignatian Spirituality (CIS), and Shepherd Formation. The Praxis Ministry continues to uphold the value of the roles of the BCGG in the community through participation in all ministry activities using each member's gifts. Finance is consistently a good "father of a family," making sure that the community has a healthy positive financial position and sufficient resources to enable Magis Deo to sustain through the years its fair and wider reach to our less fortunate brothers and sisters through the Suyuan, educational scholarships/assistance, calamity assistance, and various programs.

What can we look forward to in the next couple of years?

Only WE can answer this, as we embrace our mission "to help build God's kingdom here on earth in response to His unconditional love and His call and invitation, in the Ignatian spirit of Magis (more), as a community, as individuals, couples and families..." through the Magis Deo Community.

How are we celebrating our 30th year?

Celebrations are not just about parties, souvenir programs, etc. Celebrations can be the actual rejoicing, rekindling, re-igniting. Similar to the spirit of Magis now... excited to partake of our breaking of the bread-breakfast at ComCels, eagerly listening to the various talks, engaging our whole family and having our children join youth talks and activities, praying as one for the petitions of our co-members, participating in the various programs, and giving of our treasures through our love offering.

Our celebration need not be an event. More importantly, Magis Deo is celebrating it with energized involvement. So Magis Deo... there is no other way to go but REVVED-UP. Like a pearl, we look forward to a shining Magis in the coming years!

Susan Concepcion, Archangel Gabriel BCGG

Fr. Silvino “Junjun” Borres, SJ, the guest speaker at our July 1, 2018 community celebration, talked about the conversion of St. Ignatius of Loyola and how we can apply his conversion experience to our own personal conversion.

Fr. Borres defined conversion as “the turning, as the consequence of a great internal struggle, from *self-seeking*, egoism and egotism, vice, sin, evil, unbelief, enmity towards man and God, to *selflessness*, other-seeking, altruism and humanity, virtue, purity, holiness, faith and love of God and man.”

Conversion is not a single, once and for all event or an overnight thing. It is an ongoing process of turning to God more and more as time goes by. *Metanoia*, Greek for conversion, means to turn around, to be re-oriented in how one lives. In conversion our orientation in life changes. As Catholics, our orientation should be love for God and this love includes love for humanity. It means turning from the material world to a world where God is at the center, the be-all and end-all of our life. With a change in orientation comes a change in behavior. When our behavior is not in harmony with our orientation in life, we lack integrity.

Fr. Borres gave the story of Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo’s novel, *Les Misérables*. Valjean was imprisoned for stealing bread to feed his sister’s children. Upon his release, Valjean stole valuable silverware from Bishop Myriel. However, the Bishop told the police he gave the treasure to Valjean. Experiencing mercy and forgiveness, Valjean becomes repentant and has a spiritual renewal. The hatred in his heart for the world that treated him as an outcast, is replaced by kindness, mercy and compassion.

The conversion of St. Ignatius was in two phases. The first was when his leg was shattered by a cannonball at the Battle of Pamplona. He had two painful surgeries, one to break and reset his leg, the second to remove a protruding bone. While convalescing he asked for something to read. He was given two books – one about the life of Christ, another on the lives of saints.

As he read, he would reflect, and he began to notice the movements of his spirit – the things he used to enjoy left him empty while the things of God made him contented and at peace.

The second phase of St. Ignatius’ conversion started in Montserrat where he offered his sword to our Lady of Montserrat and pledged to turn his life over to Christ. From Montserrat he went to Manresa, enthusiastic to start a new life following Christ. He still had many doubts, and his way towards God was centered on himself – he wanted to do God’s work based on his way of thinking and doing things. His experience with a Moor illustrated this. Unable to convince the Moor of the virginity of Our Lady, Ignatius grew agitated and wanted to kill the Moor. Fortunately, at the fork of the road, Ignatius’ mule took a different direction, and the Moor was spared. From this encounter Ignatius realized that in the name of honor, he was willing to kill. A lot of the old Ignatius was still there – “a caballero with an acute sense of honor and a quick temper, ready to settle disagreements by violence.” He came to realize it was not the honor of Our Lady he was protecting but his own.

Like Ignatius, many times in a conversion experience, the old person remains. Ignatius wanted to be counted, to be noticed, to be recognized. He wanted to do things for God so he could win His favor. Ignatius realized there is nothing more enslaving than this. Holiness is not something he could create for himself by his own merits. Holiness is a gift from God. Things changed for him only when he surrendered to God and allowed Him to take over.

The third point of Fr. Borres: Conversion is “borne of and sustained by our relationship with Christ, demanding a personal attachment to Him. His impact on us integrates into our behavior, motivates our whole way of being and living and brings unity into ourselves.” Ignatius’ prayer was always “Place me with Your son.” In his conversion, Ignatius found that his fidelity is not to his own perfection but to Christ who called for his deeper commitment.

In the words of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, the 28th Superior General of the Society of Jesus, “attachment to Christ is a radical attachment.” It is “exclusive of any other option,” meaning, it is full, entire, and calls for detachment from any other good or value. Second, “everything must be surrendered.” Third, it also means that there is a need to “adopt, like Jesus, the radicality of his dedication and solidarity with one’s fellow men.”

Applying St. Ignatius’ conversion, we should remember that conversion is allowing Christ to fully take over our minds and hearts. It is fidelity not to religion, not to our own ideas and ways, not to our own perfection, but only to Christ who calls us to a deeper commitment.

In closing, Fr. Borres gave some points to reflect on:

1. In our life, we have cannonball experiences where we need to be interrupted to shatter our self-made projects. What has been your Pamplona? What have been your cannonball experiences that led you to confront the illusions and myths of your life?

2. Ignatius tried to fill his emptiness with gambling, womanizing and dueling. We have ways of filling the void we feel. Some overeat, indulge in compulsive shopping. Others become addicted to gambling, to sex (or to soap operas!). Becoming addicted to work can be a tempting way to protect ourselves from our inner longing for God. *Inventory your ways of hiding from the hollowness in your heart that only God can fill. Describe these experiences of emptiness and inner aching.*

3. What have been your Manresa experiences? What are your purifications from desiring to be known and recognized, to simply accepting that one is loved by God, and surrender to His love and mercy. Recall those experiences when you try to impress God with your good works.

Continue on page 8

Empathy: Connecting the Generation Gap

Reaching out across Generations and Bridging the Gap

**Talk of Fr. James Gascon, SJ ||
03 June 2018, Magis Deo Community
Celebration**

Reported/contributed by: Alex Reyes
- Prodigal 102 BCGG, Ney & Pinky Rosas
- Chronicles BCGG, Marlyn Angeles -
Thessalonians BCGG

With modern medicine and health care, people live longer and five generations co-exist today: Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z.

Veterans or traditionalists were born in the years 1925 to 1945. They strongly value hard work, frugality, conservatism, caution, unquestioning respect for authority and setting and obeying rules. These values helped them survive and thrive in the difficult period between World War 1 and World War 2 when peace and stability seemed so fragile.

Baby Boomers were born in the years 1946 to 1964 when the global economy grew steadily after World War 2. The value for hard work transformed from "working to live" into "living to work" so that gains are secured for the future. The world is no longer seen as an insecure, unsafe place but as a place rich with resources to be put at one's disposal and service. The formula for success was to exploit every opportunity to make your fortune so you can be a "self-made" person.

Generation X was born in the years 1965 to 1980. This generation was raised by the influential and career-oriented Baby Boomers but did not want to follow in their footsteps, having been disillusioned by their parents' "live to work" attitude. They see the world with cynicism and distrust and seek escape through enjoying life as much as they can.

Generation Y was born in the years 1981 to 2000. It is the first to grow up with the internet as a significant part of their lives. The effect is a great value for speed, instant results and employing short cuts to achieve goals. The way their parents did things were slower and thus not necessarily the appealing way.

Generation Z was born in 2001 to the present. They are most exposed to rapid technological advancement. For them the internet is not only a significant part of their lives but an intrinsic and essential part of it. Through the internet and particularly social media, they are active inhabitants of the global village.

A generation gap is a difference in attitudes springing from varying contexts among different generations. Generation gaps make every generation unique. Generations differ from each other, but no generation is better than others and no generation is worse either.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency to make judgments and it is usually the younger and less established generation that gets put down. Excessive focus on and disdain for differences can easily result in division and even conflict. Ignoring or suppressing the differences though can lead to mediocrity and stagnation. We are called, instead, to recognize and also honor these differences as well as the commonalities so generations can dialogue with each other and mutually grow. In dialoguing with the younger generation in particular, it is important to understand the context they are in and to help them cope.

How it is to be Generation XYZ

1. More and more people around them; cities are too crowded; one has to fight for space
2. Dwindling resources: competing for resources and opportunities
3. More and fiercer natural calamities
4. Growing and more incidence of "blended families"
5. Pressure to excel because of too much competition in all aspects of life
6. Longer life span: growing adult population

The main contextual difference between the younger and the older generations has to do with the fact that the world is now built around the internet and the technologies which access it. Because of this, physical presence is almost no longer necessary for interactions and learning to take place.

Virtually, we can go nearly anywhere in the world, have conversations with strangers, immerse ourselves into different cultures and belief systems. All of this is within reach of our fingertips and available instantly. In the same way that users of these technologies can easily access helpful content on the internet, they can get exposed to unhealthy content such as pornography and bigotry. Internet addiction is also a very real threat because of the promise of instant gratification in the virtual world. The "posting" culture can also lead to self-absorption and narcissism.

The older generations only dreamed of and developed this world and are just migrating into it. The younger generations are born into it. They are natives of this world and can more easily take advantage of its benefits. They are also more vulnerable to its dangers. The question arises – Does the internet use of young people need to be regulated and how?

How do we deal with this new context?

1. Think before you click:

- Is it TRUE?
- Is it HELPFUL?
- Is it INSPIRING?
- Is it NECESSARY?
- Is it KIND?

2. Four important issues in dealing with the internet:

- a) PRIVACY: Nothing is private online: uploaded materials are available to all (kahit email or private message is accessible)
 - Privacy is always compromised: a text sent can easily be shared with someone else
 - A question of boundaries: boundaries are loose and not solidly fixed
- b) ACCURACY: Not all information is true: (e.g., FAKE NEWS). No one entity regulates content
 - Accuracy of information should always be validated, challenged and processed
 - Information should not always be taken at face value
 - Accuracy: responsibility of the user (saan mo kinuha, what is your source)

- c) PROPERTY: Once you upload, you no longer own it. The world owns it (even pictures)
- There are no property rights over the internet: even in cases where it is involved, implementing it is next to impossible
- Difficult to establish identity of user with absolute certainty (you are never sure if the person you are talking with is the true person you think he/she is)
- d) ACCESS: Anyone can access information you upload
- All is vulnerable online only if you enter the online world
- Open arena out there with unlimited access, where one can remain incognito
- Access to knowledge is not an assurance that we make good decisions

3. Other issues/considerations:

- a) Many of the values we cherish are slowly lost in the younger generation
- High incidence of depression among the young because of overstimulation of the brain due to electronic use
- If there is anything that you need to dialogue with your children, it is to regulate the use of the internet: Let the brain rest
- b) Lack of "God experience" of the young
- c) The older generation is unaware of what's best to do and how to deal with the young

Bridging the gap

The key to bridging the generation gap is empathy – bracketing one's feelings then putting oneself in the other's situation. It involves listening with the self, the ears, the eyes, the heart and with undivided attention. When the older generation can do this with the younger generation, and vice versa, there is mutual empathy or in Christian language, mutual compassion.

Questions that promote empathy

1. What do you like best about your own generation? How does this make you feel? (HDTMYF)
2. What do you like best about the younger generation? (HDTMYF)
3. What do you like best about us as a family? (HDTMYF)

Areas for reaching out

1. Respect

- a) Recognize inherent worth of all human beings.
- b) Eliminate derogatory words or phrases from your vocabulary.
- c) Speak with people: not at them or about them.
- d) Practice Empathy: Walk a while in the other's shoes. Practice.
- e) Earn respect from others through respect-worthy behaviors.
- f) Consider other's feelings before speaking/acting.
- g) Treat everyone with dignity and courtesy.

2. Affirmation

- a) See first what is positive or good in the other.
- b) Claim negative perception as always personal. If we do not know how to affirm, we become fault finders and look for what is wrong rather than for what is right.

- 3. **Trust:** Try relying upon someone's talents or goodness (each one of us has his/her own talent/kakayahan).

4. Spirituality: How we model our faith

- a) More than Piety.
- b) A life lived with God (our children hopefully see how we live or model our faith).

Concrete steps to empathy

1. Ask
2. Involve
3. Open
4. Protect
5. Educate
6. Model

When we are encountering another generation, there is a mystery before us. A mystery is not something to solve but to experience. In the end, it is accepting the other as a mysterium. If generation gap is about attitude, then we need to embrace a new attitude.

Praying Over... *Continued from page 6* Prayer of Detachment

I beg of you my Lord, to remove anything which separates me from you, and you from me.

Remove anything that makes me unworthy of your sight, your control; your reprehension;

Of your speech and conversation, of your benevolence and love.

Cast from me every evil that stands in the way of my seeing you,

Hearing, tasting, savoring and touching you; Fearing and being mindful of you;

Knowing, trusting, loving and possessing you; Being conscious of your presence and, as far as may be, enjoying you.

This is what I ask for myself
And earnestly desire from you. Amen.

Blessed Peter Faber, SJ

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability – and that it may take a very long time.

And so, I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on, as though you could be today what they are (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.

Give the Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you,

And accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

3 June 2018 Community Celebration

Photos by Anchit Chua Chiaco



Bucket List

Delsa Sangalang, Samaritans BCGG

I read a quote by Saint Augustine that says, “The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page.” In these modern times where everything is accessible through the internet, many might think we have already seen all that the world has to offer through websites, but it’s totally different and more exhilarating when you actually see the world up close and personal. Traveling allows you to expand your vision and your grip on reality and broadens your perspective, forcing you to think about your own country. Studies show that travel is good for one’s physical well-being, as well as mental, psychological and emotional health. I agree – traveling gives me the opportunity to step away from the daily grind and routine; and I feel happy, relaxed and recharged after every trip.

I’ve made a list of the places I want to see before I die. There are 50 foreign destinations and 25 local spots in my bucket list, and so far I’ve crossed out almost two-thirds of these wanderlust-worthy destinations. Some of those trips have been with the whole family but most have been with my favorite travel buddy, my better half Cesar. Most of my cherished memories are from the times I traveled with them, seeing new places, living through new experiences, learning and having fun together, and forming stronger bonds. And that’s why a portion of our annual family budget is allocated for trips. Cesar and I often go to travel expos where airfares and accommodations have promo discounts so we can get good rates. I believe that money spent on travel is an investment for me and family. As Mark Twain said, “Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do.” And for me, traveling to see more of the world is one of those things.

Coming from a major development in my life, exploring the United Kingdom with Cesar for 2 weeks last June provided me a happy transition from work and gave me a fresh start at becoming a full-time mom to my kids and wife to my husband. I know that you should not cram many places in only a few days of travel for maximum enjoyment but I’m a huge fan of budget travel so the more places we see in a day, the more fulfilled I feel although it’s also a bit tiring.

First in our itinerary was of course London, the capital of England and the United Kingdom. Awestruck by the magnificence of the place, it was great to see the imposing Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, Trafalgar Square, the historic Tower of London, Tower Bridge, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Kensington Palace, and Buckingham Palace. We didn’t fully see though the iconic ‘Big Ben’ clock tower since it was under renovation, including the interiors of the Royal Albert Hall and Shakespeare’s Globe Theater since they were preparing for some plays.



We went next to Cardiff, the capital of Wales. The revitalized waterfront at Cardiff Bay includes the Wales Millennium Centre, the Norwegian Church and Mermaid Quay. We spent a few hours just sitting and drinking beer by the bay, watching the day unfold along the seafront. The Central area of Cardiff is pretty compact with the main attractions close to each other, making getting around on foot quite easy.

Set in the beautiful rural Warwickshire countryside, on the banks of the river Avon, we visited Stratford-upon-Avon, the birthplace of the famous playwright William Shakespeare. Of course, visiting Stratford wouldn’t be complete without watching a Shakespearean play so we capped our stay with the fascinating King Lear at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) Theatre.

After Stratford, we visited York, a walled city in northeast England founded by the ancient Romans. We gazed at its huge 13th-century Gothic cathedral, York Minster, wandered around the cobbled streets and through half-timbered houses of the Shambles and visited Yorkshire Museum and gardens.

Finally, we went to Edinburgh, Scotland’s capital. It has a medieval Old Town and elegant Georgian New Town with gardens and neoclassical buildings. We walked along the streets of Old Mile where we saw St. Giles Cathedral, bought some Scotch whisky, and viewed Edinburgh Castle from the outside. We had a short but fun time climbing Arthur’s Seat which is a peak in Holyrood Park with sweeping views of the city.

We celebrated our 21st wedding anniversary with a day tour at the Kingdom of Fife, passing through Forth Bridge, visiting Falkland and of course spending the whole afternoon in the Scottish town of St. Andrews. St. Andrews is the birthplace of golf so you can just imagine the excitement of Cesar, an avid golfer, upon seeing the Old Course. We spent a full day taking in some of the dramatic scenery of the Scottish Highlands, a visit at Glencoe and Urquhart Castle and a cruise at Loch Ness.

During our trips we make it a point to take a lot of photos since these are our ultimate souvenirs, and the opportunity to see these places could only be once in our lifetime. So I asked myself again, why travel? Because I want to, because I feel happiest doing it, and because I still can. I’m anticipating and looking forward to our next trips. I’m very excited and really hoping to see the end of that bucket list crossed out, in God’s time and loving grace...

Our spiritual journey with Transfiguration

Levy and Roxanne Espiritu, Transfiguration BCGG



August 6 was the Feast of the Transfiguration and what a better time to reflect on our journey with our BCGG and write about it. We have been journeying with our Transfiguration BCGG for 11 years now, since August 2007 when we shepherded ME Class 90. Of the original 26 couples in this class, 7 couples became a BCGG in November 2010; 5 couples remain active to date.

The start of the journey was erratic, uncertain and unstable in terms of schedule, logistics and commitment. But from the onset, we were always impressed with the ability of these couples to have deep and meaningful faith sharings, thus showing great potential of making it through an Ignatian journey.

As a group, we persevered and continued to live with the struggles and personal challenges of shepherding the BCGG. There was even a time we were faced with the possibility of getting dissolved and redistributed to the other BCGGs because of erratic attendance and the irregularity of our prayer meetings. But the group refused to be broken apart and made a decision to stay on and hold meetings even with just two couples present.

We managed to meet at least twice a month. Then, we were left with four couples as one couple stopped coming due to the horrendous traffic they have to endure going to the meetings. There were a lot of times we had to cancel meetings due to lack of quorum; there were many instances we were tempted to just dissolve the group altogether.

Then, a miracle happened. We invited said couple to a social gathering and when they saw us still together, they decided to return to the fold. Their coming back re-ignited our commitment and re-affirmed our desire to uphold our BCGG and save it from apparent demise. We were so inspired by their decision that we were meeting every week without fail.

The inherent desire to sustain the BCGG and continue developing the full potential of the couple members was further bolstered when we were given the Group Praxis Ministry to handle.

We saw the need to straighten out reluctant and passive BCGGs like ours. And realizing how important the community involvement and participation of a BCGG is to members' spiritual growth, we discussed with our BCGG members the support and the cooperation we needed from them in order for us to credibly undertake and perform well our ministerial duties.

Our BCGG members were apprised of the challenges that awaited us. Gratefully, they welcomed the challenge with open minds, hands and hearts.

So far, our BCGG has been so present if not represented in the community activities.

We started consistently attending community celebrations, participated in BCGG interfaces, sponsored ME candidates, attended the Harana, and even capped the month with a Suyuan. For the first time in our eight years as a BCGG, we felt very integrated with the community.

ON PATRIOTISM

James, Brother of John BCGG

In his book *Jesus Before Christianity*, author Albert Nolan mentions that in the society where Jesus lived, money was the second most important value. The dominant value was prestige.

After prestige and money, the fundamental concern of society at that time was group solidarity. We have seen through the ages to the present time that the Jews have manifested a remarkable sense of solidarity. It is from this concept of solidarity that I drew my understanding of what PATRIOTISM is all about. Love of self, family, extended family, friends, co-workers, community, country and complete union with GOD.

— **Lito Gonzales**

How to Show-U-an (SUYUAN) my love for my country?

Do I love my country? This is a question that can easily be answered “Yes.” But how do I show my love for my country? For me, showing love for our country starts from the FAMILY. The moral foundation of people starts with and is formed in the family. A dignified and God-fearing person eventually becomes a good citizen, who cares and loves, and has an obligation to his country.

I can say that being a part of SUYUAN is my simple way of showing my love for our country. Why?

A GOOD FAMILY begins with the relationship of husband and wife. A solid relationship based on moral values results in good children.

Conducting a Suyuan for couples is one way of helping them enrich their relationship, become better parents, who in turn will raise better children – better citizens.

My wife and I are inspired to become SUYUAN sharers at the soonest time, so we can share the gift we received from the Lord – that of being part of and members of Magis Deo.

Happy Couple – Good Family – Better Children – Responsible Citizens – Peaceful Country

- **Noel & Neri Gascon**

Our New Found BCGG Family: James, Brother of John

We had our ME Weekend (ME Class 118) four years ago and we co-sponsored ME Class 121. Seven months ago, we were adopted by James Brother of John BCGG, our new family when it comes to spiritual growth and family life.

I have been a Magis Deo child (and now adult) since time immemorial: my parents were part of ME Class 14 way, way back. They were with the Suyuan and the Outreach Ministry, and I saw them conduct many Suyuans and facilitate BCGG Prayer meetings. They were shepherds of Fishers of Men BCGG. My dad has since passed on; and my mom is with Sirach BCGG.

My wife Ana and I are now with James, Brother of John BCGG, with Tito Lito Gonzales as our Shepherd. At last year's Magis Deo Family Day in Ateneo, my mom and Tita Josie Llamas introduced us to James, Brother of John BCGG. We were hesitant to join at first since we did not know the members; we also feared we might not be able to commit ourselves to as BCGG members as we have two little ones, aged 4 and 2. Nevertheless, we gave it a shot and started attending their prayer meetings. We attended their Christmas party at Tito Lito's place and we were warmly welcomed by the entire BCGG and our Titos and Titas from John BCGG. We then started attending prayer meetings. While we weren't able to attend week on week, we felt we had found a new family in this BCGG. The sharings during our prayer meetings taught, and continuously teach us how to pray, love and give thanks to our Creator; how to see Him every single day of life. Our new-found family also guides us on how to live in accordance with His teachings. Our sharing of our day-to-day experiences is very helpful for us, a young couple.

Looking back, with our James family we have had many different, fun, meaningful and spiritual activities: family outing (swimming in Los Baños), Visita Iglesia (7 old churches in Laguna), Washing of the Feet (during Holy Week), and of course, our weekly prayer

meetings. At the Washing of the Feet, we as a couple were deeply humbled and moved, and even had goosebumps. We didn't want our feet to be washed by our members, but they were very warm and made us feel very welcome. During the family outing, we saw the fun and lighter side our James family – from karaoke singing, sharing stories, playing and swimming with our children, and, of course, sharing sumptuous meals. And every time we have our sharings at prayer meetings, the experiences and learnings are fresh and different. Hearing and learning from other members' life experiences and how they see God in daily life, is very valuable to us, a young couple who want to be the best spouse to each other, and the best parents to our children.

This past month, we were tasked to be the couple facilitator. Although I have not been present at prayer meetings lately (Ana and I decided I will stay and look after the little ones during weekends), we feel very blessed and are very thankful for the experiences that we have, and will encounter with our James BCGG family. The past month has been very enriching for Love (Ana) and me: going through the process of the Examen, writing and creating our own prayers, knowing and understanding how to pray properly, and seeing and thanking Him in the everyday situations.

When Tito Lito asked who wanted to write an article, we wanted to write and share our experience as the newest member of the BCGG. We are very thankful and blessed to have found our James family, to have a group that helps us journey through life's ups and downs, emotionally and spiritually. We look forward to building and sharing more memories with our James BCGG family, continuously learning how to put into action our Community's name, Magis Deo, which means more for God. - **TJ and Ana Pestaño**

continue to page 13

Of Different Kinds of Hunger

Josephus Jimenez, Cana BCGG

There more than 10 to 12 million Filipinos today living below the poverty line. Among them are the poorest of the poor who are jobless, homeless, and often hopeless. They are the people who beg for alms in the streets, by the doors of churches, and in marketplaces. Some of them scavenge the garbage for some bones and leftover food thrown away by fast food chains and restaurants. Others peddle newspapers and iced water, candies, and cigarettes to earn a hundred pesos a day for rice, cheap viands, and other foods. There are even streetwalkers, child prostitutes being peddled by their own parents to be ravished by dirty old pedophiles who come here pretending to be tourists and businessmen. A number of the extremely poor Filipinos, just to survive from starvation, sell their own bodies to foreign and local predators.

There are millions of Filipinos who do not even know where their next meal will come from. These are the people who just live in the sidewalks with their children and their old folks, sleeping at night with cardboard boxes and papers as their beddings and nothing else to protect them from the elements. Others crowd themselves under the bridges or inside temporary shacks made of scrap on top of canals, rivers and esteros. They are surrounded by mud, pests, rodents, and foul smell. They do not have clean water and stay unwashed for many weeks, exposed to all kinds of infections and diseases. They often roam around looking for food from garbage bins, and hope that some kind souls would give them a few coins. They are often hungry for food and for physical nourishment. But this is not the kind of hunger that I am most worried about.

There is a more profound and deeper kind of hunger that ails the Filipinos, and it is more destructive and alarming. It is the hunger for meaning in their lives, and the purpose for living. Even the rich people who live in their mansions inside exclusive villages and enclaves are afflicted with this more threatening kind of hunger. In fact, there is a serious phenomenon nowadays of millennials slashing their wrists, jumping from buildings, drinking poison, and harming themselves. They are driven to suicide by depression and anxiety. Broken homes and broken families, shattered marriages, annulments, separations, and divorces often inflict so much pain on the children. And no amount of money or luxuries can serve as an antidote to the pain and trauma that the young suffer.

Rich people who do not have a spiritual life, or do not have a strong relationship with God, would often seek happiness and comfort in drugs, alcohol, sex, and gambling. They try to hide their inner hurts and anger via the power of chemical substances and hedonistic activities of the flesh. But these things could never assuage the anguish in their souls. They always end up more and more depressed, until the ultimate exit is suicide or crimes of passion. This is the hunger that can ruin the people and destroy the whole nation. The poor may be very hard-up but they always look forward to the next garbage bin to yield more food. They have faith in God and they have affection for each other. They are not actually the poorest of the poor.

ON PATRIOTISM, *continued from page 12*

Magulang

Mapagpalang Araw, Handog ng MayKapal,
Alaala ng kabataan, ang sa aki'y nagpaparamdam,
Kalogayahan ang nangingibabaw,
Kapag ako'y nagbalaliktanaw...

Ako'y lumaki't umusbong, sa isang payak na pamumuhay,
Dinanas ang hirap, sakin ng kalooban,
Magulang ay di man lang nakapag-aryl, di rin nabiyayaan,
Nang ginto't pilak na sa ating bayan ay ganap...

Nguni't sa kabilang nito, ako'y nagpapasalamat,
Pinalaking may respeto't takot sa may lalang,
Bininyagan at hinandugan ng sapat na pagmamahal,
Hinubog upang lumaking may dangal at karangalan...

Dasal ko sa ating Poong Maykapal,
Kami'y patuloy na bantayan, sa mga araw na aming
daraanan,
Bigyan ng lakas, liwanag ng kaisipan,
Upang mga kabataan ngayo'y aming magabayan...

Itong sulat ay handog ko sa bagong mga Ninyo,
Magulang ay mahalin, bigyan ng respeto,
Dahil sa kabilang nito ng mga pangyayaring ito,
Sila'y patuloy na gagabay kahit na sa kabilang mundo...

- Elmer & Meg Fajardo



May 27, 2018. Anchit's 70th birthday. We started the day with early morning Mass after which we drove his sister, Gigi, to the hospital to be admitted for her third and hopefully final round of treatment which would take another 30 days. She was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML) in November 2017.

The hematologist-oncologist came by and asked Anchit a question, the answer to which would allow him the opportunity of a lifetime to give life, literally.

"Anchit, are you willing to donate your stem cells to Gigi?" The response was spontaneous, "Yes, of course!"

Gigi is the youngest of five siblings, single, 64 years old. Her diagnosis came as a shock to family and friends because there is no family history of leukemia, and Gigi was a health buff. It hit her like a death sentence.

The treatment for the cancer had been grueling to say the least: three rounds of high dose chemotherapy to eradicate malignant cells in the marrow, whole blood and platelet transfusions as needed after chemo, medications to support the treatment. Now, a decision had to be made to give Gigi a potentially longer-term solution to her problem. A peripheral blood stem cell transplant (bone marrow transplant) would replace malignant cells in her marrow with healthy stem cells from the donor who would have to be a sibling. Without the transplant, chances of relapse would be higher and Gigi would have to undergo maintenance chemo every time a relapse would occur. Not all transplants are successful, we were told, due to risks of rejection and infection. Gigi chose to go through the transplant and the family supported her decision. (Note: Stem cells are immature cells present in the marrow that divide and produce red and white cells and platelets. After transfusion to the recipient, they find their way to the marrow where they engraft and grow, hopefully in about 60 days.)

Blood matching of the siblings was initiated in February, 2018. Two sisters were a no-match while two brothers were a part match. (Blood matching for transplant purposes is more complex than just matching blood types.) Anchit was last to be considered because he has a history of hepatic infection. Eventually, he became the only possible donor as weekly blood tests revealed an uptrend in Gigi's antibodies against his older brother's antibodies which would result in rejection of donated stem cells. No virus or antibodies were detected in Anchit's blood.

The stem cell harvest and transplant was set for June 15. We took extra good care of Anchit to make sure he would be a healthy donor. We asked our friends here and abroad, priests and nuns, and our Magis Deo community to pray for a bountiful harvest and a successful transplant.

Compared to the complexities of the disease and the various blood tests administered to ensure a safe harvest and transplant, the actual procedure, I thought, was quite simple. The harvest was done in Anchit's hospital room, and the transplant in a nearby room in the Stem Cell Center. A machine harvested 3.8 million stem cells from Anchit in 1-1/2 hours. This was done twice for a total harvest of 7.6 million stem cells. The target was a minimum 5 million stem cells for Gigi's petite body. I watched in awe as the machine drew blood from the donor, separated the stem cells from the whole blood and the platelets in one plastic bag, and returned "unneeded" blood to the donor's system. This was all done through a catheter inserted into the vein in the groin. The plastic bags with Anchit's stem cells were then brought to the blood bank for the stem cells to be counted, then brought up to Gigi's room for transplant much like an ordinary blood transfusion. Within a few hours, Gigi received a gift of life in two plastic bags!

Because her immunity is almost nil, Gigi has to be in isolation for 100 days to protect her from any and all possible infection. As of this writing, Gigi is on her day +52 of becoming a female version of Anchit. She is recuperating well in our home.

I had my own battles with cancer in 2005 and 2012, but leukemia is totally different and complex. The cancer destroys the patient's blood and cannot be excised as in tissue cancers. But I can only marvel at God's creation. Imagine, the human body can regenerate itself with the cells of another person! The disease is not always a dead end. The patient must hope in God's mercy and another person must selflessly say 'yes' to give her a part of himself so that she will have a chance to live. The doctors of course are instruments of God's mercy. So are all those people, some we do not even know, who prayed and continue to pray for Gigi.

We thank God for giving Gigi a second lease on life. She just celebrated her first birthday on July 31, the feast of St. Ignatius.

PROSE AND POETRY

Chacho Angeles, Thessalonians BCGG

DO NOT LEAVE ME

Do not leave me Jesus.
I cannot just lie here and watch You go.
My misery will be a heavy stone.
It will feel that I lost everything,
As you lost everything when
They crucified You.
I can see the panic in Your eyes,
I can hear the terror in Your voice,
I can feel the anxiety in Your heart.
I can feel the fever on Your skin,
And I can feel the sickness in Your gut.
As You felt then, so will I
When You are gone from me.

I want You here beside me,
With time at a standstill,
And with time to kill,
Your voice I hear,
I will have no fear,
Your presence I feel,
No more scars to heal
In my heart without chains.
Do not leave me Jesus.
A pound poem from: Hearts Without Chains by Ellie Goulding

MY MEMORARE

Remember our Lady of the Sacred Heart,
The great things the Lord has done for
you.
He chose you for His mother.
He wanted you close to His cross.

Let me learn from you:
True humility in my heart;
Ungrudging obedience;
Service without asking nor
Expecting something in return;
Acceptance of the cross
I have to bear in this life,
Pondering purpose,
Learning significance and
Finding meaning in the
Sacrifice Your Son made
On the cross for the Love of the
Father and the redemption of all.
Give me the strength to be
Faithful to my mission.

And as you did countless
Times with your Son,
Comfort me in your warm,
Loving embrace!

LIVING IN GRATITUDE

In my life are many things I am thankful for,
To different people and to my God.
The oceans, mountains, plains and rivers,
Our beautiful and wonderful world.
A garden with trees, shrubs, flowers,
grass,
Butterflies, birds, insects, other little
animals,
The rose bush with its fragrant flowers,
Our fruitful and hospitable country.
My family, immediate and extended.
Myself, a rose, with petals so soft and
Fragile, yet thorny to the careless.

Yet there is also darkness and death
Wrought by the wrath of nature and
The beast that lurks in all of us humans,
Coming all of a sudden and disrupting
Our normal lives, sometimes building up
To a crescendo of sadness, woe and
grief,
And I continue to live as best as I can,
Remembering the love in my heart
And in the community, the good things
That came, went or remained, but are
Always undergoing some transformation.
For these too I am forever grateful.

TOUCH ME

Jesus, Your heart was filled
With compassion and love
For this insecure, anxious and
Grieving widow from Nain.
You told her not to weep,
You touched the bier, said arise!
Death departed and life returned to
The widow's son

Come touch me Jesus, and tell
Me not to grieve, for everyday
I die with the pain of failure, loss,
Disappointment and sin.
Lighten my spirit, Jesus,
Lift the burdens weighing
Heavily on my soul, and dispel
The darkness that shrouds my being,
For Your sacred, compassionate
Heart, conquers even death.

Prayer for the Sick

Loving Father,
You know what is in our hearts, our joys and
pains,
Our dreams and our disappointments. "You
have Called us by name from the very begin-
ning."
Father I pray for dear Jane, Your faithful
Child, who learned to know and love You,
Despite the struggles of her life. I pray that
You grant her Your grace and Your Holy Spirit,
To strengthen her soul, to help her discern
Your will for her, to heal her ravaged body
And her broken heart, that she may feel the
Warmth of Your love for her. "Wherever you
Go, He goes with you, and wherever you rest,
He keeps watch." Father, make her feel Your
Loving presence. You knew her before this life,
And I believe You will be with her hereafter.

But she needs You now, more than ever
As she tries to keep body and soul together.
"He looks at you with infinite tenderness,
And cares for you with a care more intimate
Than that of a mother for her child." Father,
Carry her in Your arms, comfort her and
Dry her tears, and return the smile to her lips,
As You have done for me, for her family and
Her friends countless times in the past.
Together, we humbly come to You, to ask You,
Through Your Son Jesus, who suffered and
Died that we may live in Your love, that You
Bless Jane, and tenderly whisper in her ears
That You were, are, and will be, with her
With much affection and devotion, and that
You will forever care for her, because she is
Your beloved child! I, and all the lives that
She touched, thank you Father. Amen.

(This is for all my friends and relatives who are
sick, aged, or are having some sort of difficulty
in this life. They all are Jane.)

REFLECTIONS

Moment with the Lord

Jay-R & Leila Leccio, Transfiguration BCGG

As we enjoy our spiritual journey, discovering the gifts the Lord has given us, we deeply feel how Transfiguration, the name of our BCGG, is manifested in our lives. As Jesus Christ appeared as a new radiant being, we too are called to shine with radiance, as members of the Magis Deo Community.

Our interface with Sirach BCGG was a grace-filled evening for everyone. Shared experiences, insights, blessings, burdens, happiness and brokenness became part of our prayers as we believe God is always with us during these moments.

At the recent Suyuan, every member of our BCGG was full of gratitude to the Lord for giving us the perfect opportunity to use and share our gifts by serving the couple participants. The successful Suyuan inspired us; we know the Lord's constant



loving presence pushes us to give our best, and say "Yes" to Him all the time.

Another moment with the Lord was the recently concluded Annual Ignatian Retreat facilitated by Fr. Mon Bautista. We praised and thanked God for gracing us with a very intimate encounter with Him. Experiencing inner silence and stillness, we were able to discern God's concrete direction that inspired us to renew our commitment to love, to remain in His light, to get involved as His servant, and faithfully become a living witness of Christ. Tough and challenging these may be, we steadfastly trust God, for our Lord is compassionate and merciful (Sirach 2: 1-11) and His graces are sufficient for all of us (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Fostering Patriotism: Marching Forward in the Midst of our Nation's Daunting Challenges

Jessa Gavilla, Magis Youth

As we commemorate the defenders of our nation's ideals and freedom on the 27th of August, may we remember with deep reverence the battles fought and the lives lost in the struggle to liberate our nation from the yoke of slavery and anguish brought about by oppressors. Through the service and sacrifices of great patriots, a free country was realized. However, the fight is still not finished. Let us not be brazen in declaring we've achieved true freedom. We still hear, see, and experience inequalities, abuses, and injustices that continue to persist. At times our capacity to reason, to question and to be critical in the midst of these indignities, are suppressed.

Let us not succumb to abusive authorities that aim to subdue and manipulate us. Despite the frustration and cynicism that may take hold of us in the continuous pursuit of true freedom, there is no place for despair and complacency. To truly honor the heroes we commemorate, let us emulate the courage and patriotism they have shown and imprinted upon generations of Filipinos.

Paraphrasing former US President Barack Obama: "What greater expression of faith... than this, what greater form of patriotism is there than the belief that [the country] is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals?"

There is great work and purpose for each generation in the building of our nation. It is imperative that we recognize the power we hold, the responsibilities we have, our encouraging our generation to push forward relentlessly, firmly believing that each of us makes a difference. And most importantly: action. What we choose to do now will affect the next generation of future leaders.

Leaders with patriotic hearts confront the uncomfortable truths and speak for what is right, and act. "I have more reason



to rejoice when I see humanity ever marching forward toward unending progress notwithstanding human weakness, failures, and aberrations," writes Jose Rizal in his correspondence to Fr. Pablo Pastell. "For this points to the glorious destiny of man, it tells me that man is made to be better than just flames to feed on and it fills me with trust in God's providence that He will not allow his work to perish."

Like Rizal, let us place our hope and trust in God's providence as we press on with determination and faith in the future, despite the daunting challenges. As we persistently push for progress – continuing what was started by our heroes – let us hold steadfastly to the hope we profess and believe that greater things will come upon our nation.

"Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." (Romans 12:12)

"The Lord says, 'Hold on to what is right and fair. Do what is right and good. My saving power will soon come, and I will show what is right.'" (Isaiah Chapter 56:1)

In these difficult times, His silence does not mean His absence. God will overcome for He who promised is faithful. Let us fix our eyes on God who is higher and mightier; let us anchor our hope in Him. When our hope is in God we have all the assurances we need. All of us are in a position to be used by God to make a difference and He will not be limited despite how ordinary and limited we think we are. The lives of the heroes we celebrate is a reminder of how God used the most unlikely people – the plain and humble, the unsung, and the downtrodden, to free our nation from tyranny, colonial and otherwise. If we are in God's purpose, we will prevail. Let us continue holding on to the great promise God has for us. In the midst of all that is happening in our nation, let us continue residing in the peace that is found in knowing that God is for our country and with our country.

Reflections on the AIR: Discernment

by Fr. Ramon Bautista, SJ | Sacred Heart Novitiate, August 3 - 5, 2018
Marlyn V. Angeles, *Thessalonians BCGG*

The past three weeks have been very hectic. I was very busy preparing for a series of workshops and talks, coaching pro bono for young women who were struggling in their work amidst their own personal issues on self-esteem, and attending meetings for a project which we had to roll out within two weeks. Needless to say, it affected my prayer time such that I found myself catching up on the quiet time in the car.

All these were meant to be. All these were all part of my journey to gain clarity on what and where I am being called to, and how I could best serve the Lord. These questions have been on my mind for almost a year now. Every time I sat down and thought through these, there was always something tearing me apart, pulling me in opposite directions.

Clarity started when I volunteered to coach (pro bono) a group of young women who were struggling with self esteem and confidence, given what others may call their messy past. These were brave women, wanting to make something out of their lives, struggling to be better than they were, and being so prayerful, seeking God in their lives. The coaching helped me realize I could be their companions, doing what I think I do well and finding joy in this.

The next week saw me facilitating a mid-year strategic implementation plan review for a congregation of priests. I knew I could not approach this like any corporate plan review session, since the mission is so much bigger than what corporate organizations sought: To love as Jesus loved. I cite this not to discuss how I designed the review. Rather, how hearing the priests speak of their mission, seeing how they struggled with the challenges they faced, encouraging each other, finding strength from the Lord and their prayers, gave me so much consolation. I was so blessed to have been given this opportunity to work and pray with them, and to see how my skills and learnings could help them.

What do all these have to do with the retreat on Discernment? Oh, a lot.

I started the retreat tired since there was hardly a time to really pause and take stock of what has been happening to me the past few weeks. But unlike other retreats where I started confused,

stressed out, I felt satisfied this time. Tired but satisfied overall. (Sure there were moments of fear and doubts but the overall feeling was gratitude and satisfaction.)

Thus, at Fr. Mon's first talk on the ideal retreatant and Duc in Altum experience (cast your nets into the deep waters), I was ready and willing to cut off from the world, immerse myself in silence, immerse myself in the Word, and confront myself, be healed and respond to the Lord's calling.

Overall the retreat gave me the needed break and silence to talk with the Lord, to listen to Him and even to myself. There was so much that happened. In the interest of brevity because of space, let me just focus on consolation (the second session) and how this gave me clarity as I tried to discern the direction of my journey towards and with the Lord.

The raw materials for discernment are feelings and direction. We discern feelings – joy, gratitude, peace, awe, etc. – which draw us to the Lord, His word, His values and virtues. Called our consolations, these could also mean the gifts and blessings we receive: the consolation of being a mother or father, of being a grandparent, of being a priest or nun, and for Mary, the consolation of being the Mother of God. These feelings register in our hearts deeply.

There are four aspects of Ignatian Consolations. These helped me to see more clearly where the Lord was drawing me to.

1. Consolations and vocation: All consolations are vocation-related, and oftentimes there is a vocation within a vocation. E.g., my vocation is that of a mother, a wife, and yet it also meant being a manager (when I was still working) and being in the helping profession (as a coach, consultant, customer service head, trainer and facilitator). The Lord blesses us in and through our vocations.

And truly, I experienced so much consolation in all these.

2. Consolation of our life story: The consolation of my life story is a story of how GOD has been good to me (to us). The key is to look at the consolations in one's life with a frame that sees them linked to one another and not as isolated stories.

What overall picture is emerging? Like gigantic jigsaw puzzles, these pieces merge into one bigger picture. Or like a symphony, individual notes create sounds but when put together produce beautiful music. And "going over these show how the Holy Spirit has been dancing with you in your life."

The question to ask is: Take away these consolations, what is left then? Who would you be?

As I reviewed my top consolations starting from my childhood till today, I saw the thread, and eventually the tapestry that was woven and which continues to be woven. I noticed where and when I was happy, and where the Lord has blessed me. It was in helping others, in their inner struggles, in their doubts, and even in their complaints. It was learning and mastering the skills that would enable me to help others in the organization. I found these too corporate, too unrelated to GOD then.

As I was called into different roles, all new to me, I felt being stretched and drawn beyond my comfort zone. I was being drawn to the edge of new areas with new experiences. All these experiences, including the difficult times (sometimes my desolations) helped me become better at helping others.

3. Savoring and Relishing

Consolations. Relishing and savoring consolation experiences make these consolations become a greater part of us. "We become what we relish." We develop an attitude of gratitude. Looking back, this is probably where I failed. When there was consolation, I failed to relish it. I was too much in hurry to do the next thing to pause and relish the joy and the gratitude. It seemed enough to say a 'thank you' prayer. Perhaps that is why it was easy to get discouraged when challenges came. The daily Examen makes it easy for us to remember and savor these moments. Perhaps that is why it was easy to get discouraged when challenges came. The daily Examen makes it easy for us to remember and savor these moments.

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Nakakatawa o Nakakaawa Na?

Cesar Sangalang, Samaritans BCGG

Ang tulang ito ay isang obserbasyon lamang
At humihingi ako ng paumanhin kung kayo man ay masaktan
Pangako kong igagalang din kung iba ang inyong pananaw
Basta magkaisa lang tayo sa pagtatanggol sa bayan

Bayan ni Juan, masaya na naman
Sa dami ng issue, tinatawanan lang
Masayahan lang ba talaga tayo o takot lang mangialam
Tatahimik na lang kahit sikmura'y kumakalam

Anong zarzuela itong nangyari sa kongreso
Nag agawan sa pwesto si Alvarez at Arroyo
Muntik nang di matuloy ang SONA ng pangulo
At hanggang sa ngayo'y patuloy ang gulo

Aba'y wala daw alam dyan ang Malacañang
Umiral lang ang demokrasya sa pagpili at botohan
Pero bakit si Inday Sarah ang tumawag sa mga congressman
O baka naman si direk Joyce Bernal ang siyang may kasalanan

Kung wala ka pang alam tungkol sa federalismo
'Wag kang magalala si Mocha ang magpapaliwanag sa 'yo
Kilala naman natin siya kung gaano kalakas at katalino
Akalain mong nailipat sa Naga ang Mayon volcano

Kayong mga tagapagtuyos ng human rights
'Wag n'yong pupunahin ang programa ng war on drugs
Di totoo ang EJK at konti lang naman ang pulis na scalawags
Nanlaban lang ang drug addicts kaya napatay agad

Galit sa corruption ang ating presidente
Kaya tanggal agad sa position kahit mga department secretary
Pero sadya yatang malakas ang taga BOC
Naging director pa sa ibang agency

Bakit naman puro negative yata ang nakikita ko
Subukan natin silipin ang mga positibo
Bumaba na daw ang crime rate, Boracay ay sinarado
Lupa sa Luisita ipinamigay na sa tao

Excited na ako sa Build Build Build
Tumaas na din ang sweldo ng mga titser at pulis
Issue ng tanim-bala biglang tumahimik
Suporta sa OFW, excellent and impressive

Pasensya na at 'yan pa lang ang alam ko
Baka naman kulang lang sa publicity ang PCOO
FOI Bill sana'y makapasa na sa senado
P60M DOT ads pakibawi sa mga Tulfo

Bakit bawat kumontra sa pamahalaan
Ay kaagad na itinuturing bilang isang dilawan
Hindi ba pwedeng sabihin na sila ay nagmamalasakit lang sa bayan
At hangad din na tumulong bilang mamamayan

Sang-ayon akong kasuhan lahat ng may kasalanan
Sa nakaraang administrasyon kahit si PNoy pa yan
Issue ng Dengvaxia, MRT, Yolanda at kung ano pa man
Dapat silang parusahan kapag napatunayan

Mapagmahal sa mga babae ang ating pangulo
Kaya kulang agad si De Lima at tanggal si Sereno
Abang ka lang Bongbong sunod na si Robredo
Please lang wag ng kumontra, Trillanes at Alejano

Mataas na presyo ng mga bilihin
Yan ba ay epekto ng ipinagmamalaking TRAIN?
Mataas na inflation rate sinusubukang pababain
Pero watch out for Sotto, TRAIN 2 is coming

May bagong hatian sa West Philippine Sea
Lamang daw ang Pilipinas sa hatiang 60/40
Win-win solution sabi ni Cayetano at Roque
Sure naman na hindi isusuko ang ating sovereignty

Si Martires na pala ang bagong Ombudsman
Bago pa man manumpa'y may utos na ang Malacañang
Sibakin sa pwesto ang kawawang si Carandang
Don't you dare open Duterte's bank account!

Kayo man ay nagalit, nagising, o natuwa
Di ko po layunin na ipatanggal ang mga halal na lider ng bansa
Hangad ko lang ay punahin ang sa palagay ko'y di tama
Magdadasal, magbabantay, mag-aabang ng himala!

Wheat or Weeds

Reflection on the July 31 Gospel: Matthew 13: 36-43

Elyn I. Aracid, Easter BCGG

July 31 is the feast day of St. Ignatius of Loyola, a man of great inspiration and a model for spirituality. A big part of my values was shaped by the teachings of St. Ignatius. Here are some of the Ignatian virtues that guided my thoughts, words, and actions through the years:

1. Finding God in All Things – Being aware of God's presence in every moment of my life, even in areas where God is seemingly absent.
2. Cura Personalis (Personal Care) – Caring for the other person as a child of God. Every person is considered a human person with dignity.
3. Men and Women for Others – Having a spirit of giving and serving those in need, especially the poor and marginalized. We serve without counting the cost.
4. Amare et Servire – In everything, love and serve (the Lord!).

I was introduced to Ignatian Spirituality when I joined the Philippine Jesuit Prison Service (PJPS) in 2003. I was then fresh out of my battle with cancer. Just like St. Ignatius who discovered his calling while recuperating from his leg injury, I also had a sort of spiritual awakening after I realized how fortunate I was to survive aggressive pancreatic cancer. Being threatened that way gave me a new perspective in life. Yes, everything is gift. Everything is temporary. What I have is not mine.

I know I can never repay God for His generosity and mercy. But I can at least bring glory to Him with the life I'm living. As a prayer in Laudate says, "Lord Jesus, may your all-consuming love rule in my heart and transform my life that I may sow what is good, worthy, and pleasing to you."

Our Lord invites us to serve the last, the least, and the lost. PJPS was the perfect opportunity to express this intention. Prison ministry is not a popular advocacy. Many would rather help the orphans, the elderly, or the sick. After all, who would want to help a criminal? They are considered the scum of society.

Gathering the Fragments.

At the Jesuit community's celebration of the feast of St. Ignatius, the gospel was about the miracle of multiplication of the 5 loaves and 2 fishes. It was pointed out that after Jesus fed the multitude, He said, "**Gather up the fragments so that nothing may be lost.**"

"Fragments" also refers to the people considered small and insignificant by society. Jesus said nothing should be lost. Everyone should be saved. No exception. Through the mercy of God, everyone should be restored.

At the recollection of the PJPS community, Fr. Willy Samson, SJ, gave 3 stories about people who had doubts about helping prisoners.

1. Benefactor: "*I will help, but only because of you, Fr. Willy. Why would I help criminals?*"

Fr. Willy replied by quoting an inmate.

Inmate: "*Father, anong pagkakatulad at pakakaiba ng preso at ng laya?*"

Fr. Willy: "*Ano?*"

Inmate: "*Latat tayo may kasalanan. Tama po ba?*"

Fr. Willy: "*Tama! Ano naman ang pagkakaiba?*"

Inmate: "*Kami po nahuli na!*"

2. Volunteer

A prison volunteer went to Divisoria to shop for donations. In the jeepney she took going home, some men declared a hold up.

"Pasensya na po. Pakibigay lang po ang inyong mga wallet at cell phone. Salamat po."

As they collected the wallets and cell phones of passengers, they said, "Salamat po. Salamat po." When the hold upper reached the volunteer, he recognized her. "Ay ma'm! Kayo pala! Pasensya na po... Salamat po."



The following day, the volunteer complained to Fr. Willy about the incident. She didn't want to volunteer anymore. Before she finished her narration, a child came running and handed over the volunteer's wallet, cell phone, and a note. The wallet's contents were intact.

The note said, "*Dear ma'm. Kapayapaan kay Kristo! Ma'm, pasensya na po kayo sa nangyari kagabi.*" He explained that he had to act his part that night. However, he asked his companions to just give him the volunteer's wallet and cell phone, and did not take any other share. It was his intention to return them to the volunteer.

3. Fr. Willy

As a newly ordained priest assigned in PJPS, he went to the Bilibid to celebrate mass. He had just arrived when two inmates started boxing each other in front of him.

"Hindi na ginalang ang pari!" He was so upset that he didn't want to say mass anymore.

He saw the inmates in a new light when he learned the reason behind the fistfight. The prisoners were arguing who gets to carry Fr. Willy's bag!

Reflection point:

"We are not to assume the role of judges because we cannot tell the weeds from the wheat."

"Dear God, help me see in every face one who is Your beloved child."

Suyuan (Mandaluyong, Mandaue, Sariaya)



Sariaya, Quezon

Eli B. Prieto, Jr., Francis BCGG

Last May 26, 2018 Francis and Samaritans BCGGs jointly organized and conducted an outreach suyuan seminar at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Concepcion, Sariaya, Quezon. The presenting couple was Rudy and Lyn Ebardo (Francis). We were welcomed by Fr. Severino Hernandez, the parish priest. There were fifteen couples who attended the seminar. They were joined by two other singles whose spouses could not join them that day. It was a special day for Fely Redual (Francis) since one of the participants was her niece who was scheduled to be married at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish Church the following day. It was also a special day for Cesar (Samaritans) since four (4) couple participants are from Sangalang family. More could have joined the suyuan were it not for the several community activities on or near the date of the seminar.

That same day, there was a wedding in the church, and the reception was held beside the church. Since the suyuan was conducted at a covered open area at the back of the church, we were concerned about the distraction the wedding reception would have on the suyuan participants. However, God makes miracles. Instead of distractions, the wedding served as a present reminder for the participants of the joy and beauty of marriage, which many of them have forgotten or have taken for granted. The songs sang at the wedding reception, on the other hand, serenaded the participants. One of the participants even became teary-eyed when a wedding reception singer sang the suyuan couple's theme song.

Towards the end of the suyuan activity, I was asked to share on the topic of death. Specifically, I was to answer the question intended for the suyuan participants: "Ano ang magagandang katangian ang hahanap-hanapin mo sa iyong kabiayak kung siya ay mawawala na sa iyo." Edith and I would always share our deepest feelings on this question whenever we would facilitate a suyuan seminar. This time I would have to express my feelings not in response to a "what if" but an answer to a reality. What made it more difficult was that this was the first suyuan

seminar I attended since Edith passed away twenty months ago. Again, God has His ways... after I shared, people approached me and said, "Thank you."

At the end of the suyuan, everybody expressed their gratefulness and appreciation to everyone involved in the seminar. All said, "Thank you Lord." In expressing my gratitude, I felt nostalgic... but with a grateful heart. Maraming salamat, Panginoon!

Malabon

Leo Soliman, Corinthians BCGG

While a number of faithful followers were soaking themselves celebrating the feast of St. John the Baptist last June 24, 2018, Corinthians BCGG and the Outreach Ministry were busy conducting a Suyuan session at Malabon City Hall. Eleven (11) couples from city hall staff roster answered the call and were morally supported by Mayor LenLen Oreta and his loving wife Chef Melissa Sison-Oreta.

The lively facilitation of team couple Randy and Cecil Rivera revved up the seminar by their initial 2 topics that immediately got the cooperation of the group.

After lunch, the mood simmered down as team couple Chacho and Marilyn Angeles touched on the topic of Kamatayan. In the interaction session, the stark reality of losing a loved one melted the hearts and opened the gates of tears of the participants. The prospect of losing one's mate is just too much to bear. The message was clear: "Love your partner now and forever," for you'll never know when his/her time will come.

The patented renewal of vows and red roses never disappoint. A holy mass capped the event.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to:

Mayor LenLen Oreta and Chef Melissa Sison-Oreta

Corinthians auxiliaries Jun and Mila Sison, Ruby Pizarro, George and Beng Pascual, Apin Llamas, Bernie Isip, Regie and Daisy de Guzman, Ciel and Manette Yap, yours truly and Roland Tiongan

who came with his children Anton, Kissa, and twins Marco and Rico.

Outreach Ministry members Boy and Merlie Cruz.

The City Hall staff who ensured that the seminar ran smoothly from start to finish.

And to our loving Father, Son and Holy Spirit who guided us through a very successful and blessed Suyuan.

To God be the glory.

Mandaluyong

Roxanne Espiritu, Transfiguration BCGG

Transfiguration BCGG, serving as auxiliaries, were early last Sunday, July 29, 2018 at the Datem Center in Sheridan, Mandaluyong, the venue of the Suyuan for the store personnel and crew.

One could feel the anticipation of the 11 participant couples as they filled out the registration forms. Some brought their infant children and toddlers; the auxiliaries anticipated this and willingly acted as "yayas" the whole day.

Randy and Cecil Rivera of Song of Ruth BCGG were the couple facilitators, and conducted the sessions adeptly and seamlessly.

During the dialogue sessions the couples were earnestly talking and communicating, understanding each other fully for the first time, rediscovering their love, and appreciating the reasons why they are together.

At the last module the topic was "death." The couples were encouraged to talk about this very real eventuality. It was so touching listening to them declare their love for one another, what they will miss if the other goes ahead, how they would be hard put coping without their spouse/ partner. Some auxiliaries shed a tear as they witnessed and listened to the participants' declarations.

After the Suyuan the couples expressed how blessed they felt, that their bond as spouses and partners grew stronger. As to the auxiliaries, they felt privileged and blessed to have had the opportunity to serve at the Suyuan.

On enduring and miracles

Rey Mella, Cana BCGG

“ There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” — Albert Einstein

During a rather stressful week full of challenges in my work, my schedule and my wife's health situation, I suddenly found myself surprisingly blessed with a series of miracles almost every day for an entire week.

First, I spent an entire day – in what was supposed to be a busy work week for me – with my wife in Asian Hospital and two important appointments with her cardiologist and oncologist on a Tuesday.

On Wednesday, when it was raining hard, I met with a very successful businessman. But what was really exciting about this long-scheduled and anticipated meet-up was the fact that this person is very spiritual. While I usually don't have problems walking, even when it is raining, it is difficult when the roads are flooded. I braved the rains and the flooded roads and walked to this gentleman's office. I was not disappointed. What was supposed to be a one-hour conversation turned into a two-hour faith sharing. God blessed me on that day.

“ I am realistic – I expect miracles.”
– Wayne W. Dyer

The following day, I was in an insurance industry event, something I dreaded attending and was never really excited about. Aside from it being a formal business-attire event – something I am not always comfortable with – the weather continued to be uncooperative. I trusted my manager and attended anyway.

I was pleasantly surprised by the guest of honor: Fr. Rocky Evangelista of Tuloy Foundation. He spoke about and presented the beginnings and the accomplishments of the foundation. It was a gift! I've always wanted to know more about Tuloy Foundation and what it does. God seemingly directly answered my questions.

For a long time now, my wife and I have not recruited anyone to the ME Weekend. I took a chance at a couple with whom I transact business and shared

about the marriage encounter, even as I responded to the wife's sharing of their marital challenges. While I prayed for them to decide to attend as the ME Weekend was soon approaching, I felt uncertain because the husband was very busy and had many commitments.

On Friday, the wife texted me and confirmed that they made it to the retreat house! Truly a miracle!

A Miracle!

A minister is stopped for speeding. The state trooper smells alcohol in his breath, sees an empty wine bottle on the floor, and asks, “Sir, have you been drinking?”

The minister replies, “Just water.”

The trooper asks, “Then why do I smell wine?”

The minister looks down at the bottle and exclaims, “Good Lord. He's done it again!”

Taking care of a cancer patient, or any sick person for that matter, is always difficult and challenging. My friends and prayer companions realize this. So, after asking about my wife's condition, the follow-up question is always about how I am. And, my answer is always “I am okay.”

While I believe family members who are caregivers to their loved ones also “suffer,” some more than others, they can never be in a worse situation than the patient. I.e., caregivers can never suffer more than the patient. Of course.

The coach of my favorite NBA team, the San Antonio Spurs, puts things in a simple, direct, and profound way.

Talking to reporters for the first time after he left the team during its first-round series against Golden State, following the death of his wife Erin, coach Greg Popovich was asked how he felt entering this season after enduring so much in the offseason.



“When you say that we have endured... this is basketball,” he said. “Enduring is pretty much a misnomer. Playing a child's game and getting paid for it... enduring, just look at the TV and look at what is going on in the world. There are billions of people enduring. We are not enduring anything.”

Life Sentence

A criminal with a long record of transgressions was on trial for his latest crime. The jury found him guilty on 33 counts and the judge sentenced him to 189 years. Realizing that, even with time off for good behavior, he would be over a hundred when he would be released, the prisoner burst into tears.

Noting this display of remorse, the judge reconsidered. He said, “I didn't mean to be so severe. Thinking it over, I can see that I've imposed an extremely harsh sentence. So you don't have to serve the whole time.” The prisoner beamed with new found hope until the judge leaned toward him and said, “Just do as much as you can.”

The Pirate and Bird Droppings

A pirate had a wooden leg, a hook on one arm, and a patch over one eye. Asked how these happened, he replied that a whale bit off his leg, a crocodile chewed off his hand, and a bird dropping hit him in the eye. The other guy replied that he understood the wooden leg since the original was bitten off by a whale, and the hook was there to replace the hand the crocodile had chewed off... but a patch over the eye because of a bird dropping... that he didn't understand. The pirate said that when the bird dropping hit him in the eye, that was the first day he had had his hook.

Don't pray for lighter burdens, but for stronger backs. — Buddha

Going back to music

Leslie Gatchalian, Psalm 98 BCGG

There is scientific proof to what St. Augustine said: **Singing is twice praying.** Saying prayers makes use of the left side of the brain; while incorporating notes and rhythm into the prayers and singing them entails the use of the right side of the brain. This means both sides of the brain are at work when we sing.

God gave each of us a unique voice. In the choir, one is exposed to a collection of many unique voices with varying frequencies, timbre and tones. Brain imaging shows that singing in duet stimulates more brain spots than singing solo. Hence singing with a bigger group stimulates even more brain areas, with more cumulative effects and benefits.

Changes and improvements in timbre and voice range are noted 4 to 5 years from joining a choir. No wonder the Magis Deo Chorale continues to be better. An “aging” choir may become less of an occurrence: studies also show improvement across all ages. Improvements are likewise noted in those undergoing therapy including the hearing impaired. Even “imagined” singing can improve brain functions, and people who can’t speak or hear are helped by music.

Singing in the choir presents challenges: blending, voicing parts and movements or choreography entail use of cognitive powers. Aside from these wonderful brain benefits, there are other bonuses on the side: physical, emotional, psychological and sociological advantages. Every time we speak, our vocal cords, larynx, lungs, abdominal muscles and ribcage have to work. And behind all of this, the neurological network is busy synchronizing them. Actual singing activates the frontal lobe. The brain has to memorize. The heart has to give good

circulation to all organs involved. Blood is oxygenated better with the thoracic excursions and lung expansions when one makes projections and belts out. And this cycle - brain feeding and singing continues.



Group singing has been found to lower stress levels. The pleasures and the emotions of singing in a choir have been documented as well – the level of cortisol, a stress hormone, went down 40 minutes into choir singing! Then comes the increase in the happy hormone or dopamine boost. Oxytocin, the substance that elevates during personal intimate moments, was also noted to increase during choir singing. Now we know why the 5 singles in the Magis Deo Chorale stay! And with these good hormones, the immune system is boosted.

The bible is filled with Psalms – befitting prayers to God. Praying them via song is indeed praying twice; and singing them in a choir is praying in repeated overflowing volumes.

Never fret about old age. Brain plasticity shows neuronal development later in life. The capacity of the brain to learn like plastic is the primer in melodic intonation therapy. Those who suffer damage on the left side of the brain (which controls words, lyrics) and can’t speak, are taught to sing their thoughts or what they want to say. Interestingly, since



the right side is in charge of melody and rhythm, those with left side brain injury can sing even if they cannot speak. By singing the words they are able to speak out. The arcuate nerve fibers connecting both sides of the brain become thicker with singing, waking up the damaged left side. This neuroplasticity enables the brain to develop, whatever the age. It helps keep Alzheimer’s at bay. Memorizing lyrics, knowing when to pause, and keeping in harmony with the group keeps the brain working. Remember how hard it is sometimes to forget the last song you heard (last song syndrome)?

Caloric expenditure when singing is about 6 calories per minute; singing for two hours translates to expending the calories from half a burger. And standing while singing results in higher calorie loss.

Music can be a balm for the soul. A mother’s singing can be heard in the womb and the fetus can actually feel the mother’s emotions. We are geared even before birth to hear and appreciate music, correlating it with the feelings of our mothers.

With these scientific revelations on the benefits of singing, with knowing that people who are deaf or unable to speak can appreciate music and are helped by it, and with our brain sensors heightened, it is beyond imagination how our emotions and feelings will be when we hear the Choir of Angels!

Oh! What Glory to God singing and music can be!

Reflections on the AIR: Discernment, continued from page 17

4. Desolations as source of Consolations: “In His time, our greatest pains and sorrows can be our greatest consolations.” The pains and sorrows we experience are our experiences of the Paschal mystery of our Lord: His dying and rising from the dead. A tree cannot bear much fruit if it does not go through pruning. And so must we. And it is this pruning that can be the source of our own consolations. The pain I went through in life made it possible for me to understand the pain of the brave women I coached. It helped me know in my heart their fears and doubts, and where they were coming from. It was this felt understanding that made it possible for me to coach them, connect to them, and accompany them and gain their trust. Reviewing these four aspects, I saw how the Lord was forming me, molding me, and preparing me to be his instrument of mercy for others. I saw the integrity of my experiences, not in isolation of each other. And most of all, I saw where I could use what I have – the talents given me – to help others. The consolation of the past three weeks, and my silent time with the Lord this weekend clarified to me where the Lord wanted me to serve.

August Birthday Celebrants

2	Andy Mangahas	St. Peter
3	Noli Siquian	ME Class 117
3	Robie Tibayan	ME Class 122
5	Ronald Ong	Prodigal 102
5	Rommel Villafuerte	ME Class 121
7	Will Gonzales	ME Class 121
7	Jes Gumila	Easter
7	Trixie Sun	Matthew
8	Boy Cruz	James, Brother of John
9	Nilo Sta. Maria	Magnificat
10	Terry Abella	Mustard Seed
10	Larnz Briones	Francis
11	Susan Concepcion	Archangel Gabriel
12	Yence Buenaventura	ME Class 127
13	Lito Gonzales	James, Brother of John
13	Dange Tupas	ME Class 121
14	San Pua	ME Class 114
15	Freida Berwite	ME Class 116
15	Zarah Gagatiga	Mt. Olivet
15	Pinky Rosas	Chronicles
16	Clyde Abapo	Francis
16	Jay Belga	Mustard Seed
16	Joey Eustaquio III	Genesis of David
17	Josie Llamas	Genesis of David
18	Chacho Angeles III	Thessalonians
18	Maan Masungsong	Francis
19	Harry Chua	Sirach
20	Marcia Balderas	Archangel Gabriel
21	Fred Buenaventura	Sirach
21	Ariel Masungsong	Francis
21	Cesar Pareja	Prodigal 102
21	Joey Vargas	Easter
22	Alan Santos	ME Class 121
23	Rolly Beltran	Genesis of David

September Birthday Celebrants

2	Jaear Briones	Francis
2	Shari Ylagan	ME Class 119
6	She Dela Cruz	ME Class 122
6	Ricky Perez	Tala
7	Marivic Canoso	Magnificat
7	Regie De Guzman	Corinthians
7	Cat Geslani	James, Brother of John
8	Marlon Aricheta	ME Class 127
8	Henry Cruz	Psalm 46-Samaritans
9	Zar Gascon	Francis
10	Glo Boren	Agnus Dei
11	Emil Bergonia	ME Class 122
11	Mark Maulit	ME Class 119
11	Jun Sison	Corinthians
12	Leslie Gatchalian	Psalm 98
14	Rodel Acosta	Song of Ruth
14	Janice De Guzman	ME Class 121
14	Melissa Gonzales	ME Class 121
14	Joy Uy-Tioco	Sirach
15	Vikki Brillantes	Cana
15	Jim Fallorina	ME Class 117
17	Rufo Dacanay	Song of Ruth
17	Mia Peliño	ME Class 127
18	Beng Pascual	Corinthians
19	Mina De Castro	Mt. Olivet
19	Nan Palete	Prodigal 102
19	Myr Serranilla	Mustard Seed
20	Jojo Aldeguer	Mustard Seed

23	Jay Ng Sy	Agnus Dei
23	Peaches Plaza	Easter
23	Joy Romano	ME Class 122
25	Anthony Cadiz	ME Class 127
25	Malou Caramat	Francis
25	Malou Ronquillo	James, Brother of John
25	Linda Santos	Agnus Dei
26	Din Nuyle	ME Class 122
26	Betchay Villafuerte	ME Class 121
27	Rosie Pineda	St. Peter
27	Nani Wycoco	ME Class 120
28	Agnes Tumaneng	Psalm 46-Samaritans
29	Danny Collado	Song of Ruth
29	Merl Cruz	James, Brother of John
29	Norma Espiritu	ME Class 120
29	Noy Nuyle	ME Class 122
30	Alex Caramat	Francis
30	Leila Leccio	Transfiguration

27	Tippi Reyes	Archangel Gabriel
27	Claro Santos	Agnus Dei
28	Boboy Serrano	Genesis of David
28	Icy Alcudia	ME Class 123
30	Bebot Hurna	Mustard Seed
31	Rey Mella	Cana
31	Mimi Santos	Samaritans

August Wedding Anniversaries

8	Ramie+ & Mimi Santos	Psalm 46-Samaritans
10	Rudy & Lyn Ebardo	Francis
14	Joey & Portia Eustaquio III	Genesis of David
24	Mars & Norma Espiritu	ME Class 120
31	Zar & Luz Gascon	Francis
31	Floyd & Mina Tamera	Mustard Seed
24	Celso & Siony Martinez	Magnificat

Psalm 46-Samaritans

Francis

Genesis of David

ME Class 120

Francis

Mustard Seed

Magnificat

21	Susan Exconde	ME Class 116
22	Mean De Guzman	Chronicles
22	Vie Remogat	ME Class 119
22	Vic Romano	ME Class 122
23	Lino Magulod	ME Class 119
24	Jen Montaner	ME Class 127
25	Jojo De Castro	Mt. Olivet
25	Del Domingo	Song of Ruth
25	Fort Orboc	ME Class 121
25	Ian Serranilla	Matthew
26	Chie Llamas	Corinthians
26	Lucy Mella	Cana
29	Cecil Rivera	Song of Ruth

ME Class 116

Chronicles

ME Class 119

ME Class 122

ME Class 119

ME Class 127

Mt. Olivet

Song of Ruth

ME Class 121

Matthew

Corinthians

Cana

Song of Ruth

8	Noel & Dina Valdes	Archangel Gabriel
8	Art & Neds Vargas	Easter
18	Jojo & Mina De Castro	Mt. Olivet
18	Joe & Myr Serranilla	Mustard Seed
20	Eloy & Tess Del Rosario	St. Peter
20	JC & Chinkee San Juan	Song of Ruth
22	Val & Glo Bisquera	Agnus Dei
22	Peping & Celia Echivaria	Exodus
29	Apin & Chie Llamas	Corinthians
29	Sandy & Susan Tuaño	ME Class 18

Archangel Gabriel

Easter

Mt. Olivet

Mustard Seed

St. Peter

Song of Ruth

Agnus Dei

Exodus

Corinthians

ME Class 18

Serving as a family in a community has always been a welcome experience for us. This gives us an opportunity to collectively connect with God; it is also a chance for our family to form friendships with people who open up their lives to God, to experience transformation, to gain new insights, and to grow together into God's plan for us.

Our journey as a servant family began out of the necessity to bring our children (Kimber and Kim) wherever we go as there is no one else to look after them since we transferred from Olongapo to Las Piñas in June 2010. This situation must have been of divine design, that both kids are so manageable and well-behaved, and that our social life involved activities they could be part of.

The Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals (BCBP) – Olongapo and Las Piñas chapters – have been our home court from the time we became members in 2007. So much joy was brought to our family when we participated in the Family Weekend Encounter of the BCBP in 2011. Thereafter to this day, we serve annually in the Family Weekend Encounter.

Though we grow stronger through what God does to our family, there still are times of uncertainty and questioning in between. But He provides us with answers. During a recent incertitude which could have torn our family apart, God through the Gacias couple, called us to the Magis Deo Community's Marriage Encounter Weekend (ME Class 126). God made it possible for us to attend and complete the weekend, with Kimber and Kim with us (though staying in another room). It was surely His way of letting us know and making us understand that when things fall apart, He is actually letting them fall into place, that He never abandons the work of His hands.



God allowed us to go through a MESS so we could understand His MESSAGE. And He brought us to the TEST to restore us from our brokenness, and prepare and equip our family in the fulfillment of His will – to be a living TESTIMONY of His love to draw others to Him. He chose ordinary people like us and our children as His ambassadors; He used the circumstances in our lives and work situation to carry out our ministry, which is to serve people and proclaim God's kingdom.

Fast forward to July 20 to 22, 2018, the ME Weekend for ME Class 128. The rain was pouring hard, but it did not dampen our spirits. Among the many called, six couples from ME Classes 125 and 126 (with Tito Tony and Tita Bambi Narciso as shepherds) served as auxies (DREAM TEAM) at the ME Weekend. Giving us a hand were Albert & Pam, Winston & Mae, and Domeng & Zarah. It was another opportunity for our family and the DREAM TEAM to get our act together and provide the needs of the ME Weekend participants.

As Tita Josie Llamas put it – "It was a rainy weekend, but I believe the rain was an outpouring of blessings for the MEW. God sent us 17 couples. Although it was raining outside, the sun shone in the premises of St. James Retreat House through the faces of the Angeles family, Lipanas, Dimayugas, Gagtos, Pascuals and Mirandas. Also Albert and Pam, Winston and Mae, Domeng and Zarah, all serving selflessly under the guidance of Tony and Bambi. Christ's presence was very palpable and His Spirit was overflowing with Love!"

Taking the Moment to be the Light

Ma. Carolyn Angeles, ME Class 126

God always blesses us with what we need, and at every opportunity we can be a blessing too to others. This gives us an opportunity to collectively connect with God; it is also a chance for our family to form friendships with people who open up their lives to God, to experience transformation, to gain new insights, and to grow together into God's plan for us. Six couples from ME Classes 125 and 126, with Tony and Bambi Narciso as shepherds, were fortunate to be able to give back at the ME Weekend of Class 128.

The Angeles couple, Keith and Kaye, with children Kimber and Kim, fondly called the 4-in-1 K, served as the "Printing Press Family" of the group. The Lipanas, Doc Rex and Doc Raden, together with Albert and Pam Narciso, kept the Conference Room up and running the whole weekend. Raul and Honey Dimayuga ensured everyone's physical nourishment and provided the energy and inspiration to the action songs. The Pascual couple, Ronnie and Happy, were so happy to serve that no amount of rain could stop them from attending to and supplying offsite requirements. The Mirandas, Roel and Leah, doubled as lead for the piety group and as documentarians of the three-day affair. And who could forget the 'LITUR-G' couple, Ernie and Sylvia Gagto?

They were the fillers of the gaps and acted wherever help was needed. These couples and servant family, nicknamed the 'Dream Team' of the Narcisos, made a difference and answered God's call, and were abundant blessings to the 16 couples who attended the ME Weekend.

Getting Closer

Darwin & France Bicomong, ME Class 128



It was raining heavily in the afternoon of July 20 when we went to Tagaytay City for the Marriage Encounter Weekend. Darwin and I had no idea of what would happen in the next two days.

Several months before this weekend, we both had been running like crazy attending to the demands of our jobs and children, while swinging between our homes in San Pablo City and Canlubang, Laguna. I am also constantly worrying about my mother who is now in her gray years and is often alone at home in Ilocos. There were several nights when Darwin and I were so tired we slept on each other without talking, and sometimes in separate rooms. Our four kids are 12 to 18 years old, but I still love cuddling with them especially with our youngest son, and most of the time I would fall asleep before I could even return to our room. With that setup, we were looking forward to a brief getaway for just the two of us.

The ME Weekend came as a perfect opportunity although midway to Tagaytay, we almost backed off and checked in somewhere else when Darwin found out that our friends, Cesar and Delsa Sangalang, wouldn't be there. He said it would be difficult to be mingling with people we had not met before. I explained that I already committed and I thought we should proceed. "Bahala na, baka mas nakakahiya na di tayo tumuloy kasi counted na tayo. Darating naman daw sila sa closing ceremony," I told him.

"It is not an accident that you are here, there is a reason why you are here." Those were the words of Fr. James Gascon, SJ, the Spiritual Director, at the opening of the ME Weekend. True enough. The two-day experience opened our hearts and mind to the more important aspects of our married life.

Darwin and I thought we were doing well with jobs that enable us to send the kids to school and buy the things we need. The ME Weekend made us aware of ourselves as a couple, our responsibility to the community we live in, and the utmost need to have God in our midst. We have realized the essential role of open communication for our relationship to grow. We have acknowledged our angst and past mistakes that hinder our progress as a power couple; we learned to forgive and accept each other as we are. More importantly, Darwin and I felt we're getting closer again, just like 25 years ago when we were block mates in college.

As years go by in a relationship, we unintentionally build walls to shield us from pains, unmet expectations, and everyday problems. With the ME Weekend, the walls have been broken, and here we are with open arms and hearts to take each other no matter what, as we promised in the renewal of vows.

In the first reunion last July 29, in the introduction Darwin said, "I am Darwin, and this is my wife France. Ako nga pala yung gumawa ng thesis niya." Our fellow ME 128 couples laughed. They remembered the one and only one group sharing we had during our two-day stay at the St. James Retreat House. I am sure that just like the other 16 couples, Darwin and I will always remember that weekend and everything that happened there especially between the two of us, and with God as witness. Thank you, Magis Deo Community. Thank you to our friends, Delsa and Cesar, for inviting us. To God be the glory!

Heeding God's Call

Lito & Tes Adia, ME Class 128



Truly, God works in mysterious ways and if it is according to God's plan, Thy will be done.

When Tes and I accepted the invitation of our friends Keith and Kaye Angeles to attend Magis Deo's Marriage Encounter Weekend in Tagaytay, we went with excitement and curiosity, as we had no exact idea of the flow of the weekend's program. We looked forward to being together, enjoying the cool weather, gaining new experiences as a couple, and meeting other married couples too.

We believe it is not by accident that we attended MEW 128. Through Divine Guidance and intervention, we were blessed and called to this memorable experience for married couples; we renewed our wedding vows and were reminded to always have God in the center of our marriage, our relationship. What an awesome and amazing experience it was indeed, with the full service of the auxiliaries and the warm welcome and support of the Magis Deo community.

With the talks and learnings facilitated by Fr. James Gascon and the inspiring, touching sharings of presenting couples Jojo & Jane Aldeguer and Ian & Elaine Serranilla, we were reminded of our roles as husband and wife, learned and appreciated communicating with each other through love letters and reading them twice – one for the mind and one for the heart – and Couple Dialogues to clarify issues and concerns with a positive attitude. Furthermore, through individual reflection on the topics discussed, we learned from past mistakes and shortcomings; we learned the importance of communication, listening with empathy, and improving our relationship with God.

As we continue our journey as a married couple and a God's faithful servants, Tes and I pray that God sends forth His spirit to guide us to the right path through our words and deeds; to live a life of truth, honesty, compassion, understanding, service and love; to be responsible and loving parents to our children; and to be a blessing to others under God's continuous provision, protection and guidance.

God's presence in the July 2018 ME Weekend

Rex and Den Lipana, ME Class 125



"One for the mind and one for the soul."

My husband volunteered us to be the couple in charge of the conference room during the July 20-22, 2018 ME Weekend. He wanted to hit two birds with one stone: as auxies at this weekend and as listeners to the spiritual director and couple sharers, to improve our marriage. As the saying goes, "One for the mind and one for the soul," the second time went straight to our hearts and brought more clarity and understanding of what we learned at our own MEW held exactly a year ago.

Listening to couples sharing their struggles and how they overcame them, showed that we too can make it through the challenges we face, now and in the future. God must have known we needed to be there for us to understand not only how to better love our spouse and God, but to understand who we are in the community. We heard God crying in need among the couples and their evident struggles; we saw His inspiring hand in the couple sharers, Fr. James, our co-auxies, our shepherds, Tito Tony and Tita Bambi Narciso, Tita Josie Llamas, other couples from the Magis Deo community who came to help. If they can sacrifice themselves for others, why can't we? We came to serve as auxies but we left with the love of God for others.

Realizations in the ME Weekend

Vince & Vivian Satuito, ME Class 128

Going to this Marriage Encounter made us realize a lot of important things and made us review the way we communicate with one another. There are so many challenges in our marriage right now, and, as we learned, the ME is not the actual solution... to resolve concerns, continuous dialogue must be done with less of judgment and more of getting to know how the other feels.

The ME made me realize many things I thought I already knew. Surprisingly there is a lot more I need to learn for us to truly understand each other, to be closer to God. Now we know that much of what we used to say to one another came with so much judgment that we forgot how these made us feel toward each other. The ME enabled us to speak with an open mind and heart, connecting us more with God who strengthens us.



Reflections on ME Weekend

Resty & Anna Tongol, Transfiguration BCGG



On our birth month we were given an opportunity to give more of ourselves for the community, and to serve God. We were blessed to have the chance to give back for His multitude of favors to us.

Our usually tight schedules miraculously opened up to coincide with the July ComCel, our interface with Sirach BCGG, the ME Weekend Harana, and the Suyuan.

The Harana brought back good memories. It transported us back in time when we rediscovered each other 11 years ago. We have always been grateful for that ME Weekend, for the opportunity to look deeply into each other's feelings – hope, fear, joy, frustration – and our relationship with God. That weekend has become a vital part of the foundation of our marriage. There still are days when we struggle, but with the Lord's love and mercy and the continuous guidance of our Transfiguration BCGG, we are able to manage. Our marriage and family remains steadfast and strong today.

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Left to Right: Alcanar couple, Punzalan couple, Mactal couple, Salenga Couple, Romero couple, Adia couple, Chia couple, Ian & Elaine Serranilla, Tony & Bambi Narciso, Fr. James Gascon, Josie Llamas, De Castro couple, Samilin couple, Barretto couple, Bicomong couple, Tuyogon couple, Quiamco couple, Bugayong couple, Satuito couple, Guevarra couple and Rivas couple



Left to Right: Ernie Gagto, Tony Narciso, Happy Pascual, Sylvia Gagto, Kaye & Keith Angeles, Honey & Raul Dimayuga, Josie Llamas, Fr. James Gascon, Elaine & Ian Serranilla, Leah Miranda, Raden & Rex Lipana