

Magis

Formation for Mission

Stewardship
Simplicity
Sharing
Service

Official Publication of the Magis Deo Community

December 2018 Issue

Christmas Season

Always remember the reason for the season

Loving Like the Old & the New Adam

God encourages us to love even when it hurts

A God-Filled Second Marriage

A sanctuary of trust

Dear God

Feeling #blessed?
How to be thankful

God's Love Poured Out Into Our Hearts

Reinvigorating Magis Deo



About the Cover



In line with the Christmas season, Levenspeil R. Sangalang from Magis Youth decided to illustrate an image that mimics what seem to be the three visitors on their journey to baby Jesus' manger. Only that it is not; it's a modern revisioning of the iconic birth story. Replacing the kings are three people who are lost in their own ways — an old woman whose condition is pushing her to her wit's end, a wealthy man whose riches are his religion, and a poor lady whose faith is on the verge of shaking and breaking. But before all is lost, they remember the reason for the season: the birth of Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, illustrator Levenspeil paints this atmospheric imagery that equals to a symbol of reconciliation, one that encourages that *whenever we get lost in the dark, keep holding on to your faith and don't let go — for His light will find us, and He will be our guide.*

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January

13 Community Celebration

February

3 Community Celebration

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3 Community Celebration

8-10 Marriage Encounter Weekend

Light and Shadows



Photo by Rui Veiga

As we come to the last month of the year, we find ourselves caught in the frenzy of preparations for the holidays and joyful expectations of the season and the New Year. For adults, it can be quite stressful given the preparations for family get-togethers and reunions. For children, it is filled with excitement since they are recipients of the gifts adults have painstakingly chosen.

Amidst all these, there is the call for us to reflect on what 2018 has brought us, and to look into how the year's experiences changed us. For organizations, it is the usual review of what went well, what was done right, and what could be done better. The lights and shadows of the year.

If there was anything that stood out in the year-end review for Magis, it is the spirit of community that is very much alive. I remember early this year and late last year, there was this sense of fatigue among members as participation in the community celebration was dwindling. Yet the community did not give up. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our council leaders and shepherds held the light high up and continued to persevere and accompany everyone along the way. It was a year where we saw others volunteer to join ministries, to serve in their own way. It was likewise a year of giving others the space and support they need as they struggle with the challenges they face and their own disorienting dilemmas.

A joyful Christmas and a blessed 2019 to all!

Others preferred to stay with their BCGGs where they found spiritual nourishment in the small group meetings. And that was okay. Each of us find ourselves in the different phases of our own journey, and we are glad that the community is around to help us encounter God wherever we are in our lives.

We likewise identified a number of shadows. We are thankful that as we reviewed 2018, we see these dark pockets, acknowledge them and name them. In acknowledging and naming them, we can then start looking, perhaps with a different lens, and seek new ways of addressing them.

As the year draws to a close, let us look at how 2018 transformed us as a community and as an individual. What assumptions and beliefs do we need to challenge so that we can view our reality differently? How can we see all these with a different lens guided by our own encounter with Jesus?

Our experience of the past year is but a part of the learning continuum of our lives. And we now look at 2019 with joyful expectation. If there is anything that 2018 has shown, it is the presence of the Lord and His faithfulness to the promise that He will always be with us, looking after us. There is reason to be joyful not just for this season but for the entire year of 2019.

2018: God's Love Poured Out into Our Hearts

Thank you, Lord! We look back at 2018 with gratitude for the tremendous outpouring of graces for Magis Deo Community.

We started 2018 praying like Mary, our Mother, with love and hope. Mary looked back at the mixed memories of her pregnancy and the birth of her Son – a mixture of pain from what her neighbors were saying about her having a child before marriage, the discomfort before the delivery but all these overridden by the joy of safely delivering Jesus to the world at Christmas.

Quite similar to our Blessed Mother, we as a Community began 2018 with concerns on the medium-term sustainability of Magis Deo, given the declining ME graduates and diminishing participation in Community Celebrations and formation programs.

But now, in December 2018, we are joyful and triumphant at how we as a Community addressed these concerns, with God's inspiration and guidance.

God was gracious. Very much the God we know and love.

As one BCGG puts it in their reflection, 2018 provides the transition to the continuity of Magis Deo as a Community. And to some, 2018 is viewed as a turnaround year for Magis Deo!

We as a Community made it! With God's help. With the commitment and hard work of ministry heads and shepherds. And with the support of Magis members committed to the Magis mission.

We met our 2018 goal – to re-invigorate the Magis spirit.

We achieved our thrusts:

- ♥ Increased participation in Community Celebration, with 50% of BCGG members (from 30%) attending the ComCel with renewed interest and vigor.
- ♥ Increased ME recruits to 57 couples (from average of 40 couples in recent years), with 36 recruited by BCGGs; and with no ME Weekend cancellations.
- ♥ Active participation in Suyuan apostolate, with 19 Suyuans conducted (from only 5 to 8 in recent years) and sponsored by 18 out of 24 BCGGs.
- ♥ Increased participation in formation, with 75 members joining the two Annual Ignatian Retreats (from only 40 members in previous years) and 15 new BCGG members attending the Spiritual Deepening Retreat.

The challenge of sustaining the *Magis* continues...

Let us continue to beg the Lord for His grace of loving perseverance for helping us live the *Magis, the more*, always, wherever He may lead us...

Let our blessings, gladness, and gratitude in 2018 be our foothold to sustain what we have done and to do more in 2019!

**A meaningful Christmas to all,
Philip & Malu Panlilio
Chaircouple 2018**

Annual Ignatian Retreat
October 19-21, 2018



Christmas Season 2018

Chacho Angeles,
Thessalonians BCGG

Over the years, I was taught that advent is anticipating and preparing for the birth of Christ. One catch word is repentance, turning back from our ways that lead us away from God. I learned recently that we Christians may view this anticipation and preparation from several perspectives: the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, His coming into our hearts daily and His second coming in glory at the end of time. Another is the integrated, non-dual view of the Incarnation, the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension as the representation of our transformation from spirit to human and to spirit again, where God is always in us and with us. As Jesus was, so are we.

I have never viewed advent in these ways, and I can only conclude that these refer to how I should be living my faith daily, second by second. Considering that I am an ordinary mortal concerned with a lot things, I still have to figure out a way to do this, starting when I wake up, during my working hours, and when I close my eyes to sleep at night. This I think, is the crux of my Christian living – His coming into my heart daily (or others say that He is already there, and it is up to me to dig up this hidden treasure).

I heard it said that this consciousness is something ordinary people will find difficult to do or acquire, is for the religious, is for saints, etc. At first I thought so too, but as I dug deeper, it really is “workable” or “doable.” I start with a short prayer time in the morning, giving thanks, reviewing how I did the previous day, keeping quiet, contemplating the gospel for the day, and deciding how to live my faith the rest of the day while taking the cue from all these. Aside from this initial prayer, there are several down times that I can take advantage of: while taking a bath and doing my morning rituals, driving to work and elsewhere, praying before meals, breaks during work, etc. I can be conscious of how I talk to and relate with my co-workers and family members and other people I encounter, facing challenges with a prayer, and closing the day also with a prayer. I am sure that there are other ways of doing this, but I owe it to myself to at least try at least one way. Thus, I don’t only pray, but I am living a prayerful life. I am always prepared for His coming, or for His in-dwelling in my heart. In so doing, I live advent every day of my life, and my Christmas comes every day. Maybe there is hope for joy and peace in my heart, and in the hearts of men.

PRAYERFULLNESS

Father,

Up in Mirador Hill in the days of my youth,
When I was ready to consign you to the
Dustbin of irrelevance, I spent some time
Drinking in the beauty of the mountains
Then green with many trees and plants.

I took pen and paper and drew an image
Of a gnarled pine tree nestled by the hillside
A few meters below me. With crooked lines
For the trunk and branches, short lines for
The pine needles, I drew a simple image.
I wrote beside it a short poem, metered and
Rhymed, as I used to in those days. Now lost,
That sheet of paper now makes me realize
I was then filled with love, unknowing and
Undeserving. I was united with You in the
Beauty of Your creation, with a heart that
Knows what my mind could not, in a few
Short minutes, an eternity of grace,
And of prayer.

After preparing for His coming, both the commemoration of His birth and His daily coming into my heart, and after clearing my heart as best I can with the clutter of my worldly life so that I can make room for the Savior to come, I will welcome Him into my heart with a simple YES! He came into the world with literally nothing, with poor, obscure but loving parents, and I welcome Him without pomp and glitter. My savior wants me to change my attitudes, mainly my selfishness and pride. He wants me to work in this world, use my talents and carry out His mission for me. And I give all of myself, with my pains, hurts as well as joys, warts and white hair, strengths and weaknesses, my mind, my body, my soul and my heart, to this babe in the manger. Then I am Christmas, as Pope Francis says.

The stories of the characters in the birth of Christ, His parents Joseph and Mary, and related ones that impact on the future ministry of Jesus, that of John the Baptizer and his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, are stories of faith and obedience to the will of God.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they experienced joy despite some difficulty in their respective situations. Now I see some differences between being joyful and being happy. I found that there is joy in the midst of difficulties, even crises. I found that even if I was not happy, there is an underlying comfort and joy that comes with my faith and trust in my God, and my love for His word. My love brings forth joy despite my pains and hurts. As a modern dirge sang: love is not a victory march, but a cold and broken Hallelujah. A hallelujah nonetheless.

MARY'S YES

Mother Mary,

When you said yes, Your will be done,
You might have said this with a big gulp,
Not knowing what will happen to you,
Considering your youth, considering that
You were already engaged to Joseph,
Knowing full well what can happen to you
When he learns that you are pregnant.
But your trust in God is just too strong,
To overcome your fears and anxieties.

I pray that I grow in such faith and trust,
That I too am able to overcome all the fears
That come my way, day-in and day-out.
Stay by me Mama Mary, cuddle my heart that
I may continue to live in love with Jesus,
Your son, my brother, my savior.

Jesus, our God, is not in the pompous royalty business. He was born in a stable, was almost killed by a jealous king, and became a refugee in Egypt when still a baby. He lived a simple life, relying on the goodness of friends, yet all the time teaching profound truths about life and performing amazing miracles in healing different kinds of disabilities and diseases. I am humbled. I am moved to think that this kind of humility should be the underlying approach to how I live my life and my faith.

How do I welcome my savior? A God who loves me so much that He became man, and gave His earthly life to save me? To prepare and do a proper welcome, I think I should first understand what He is saving me from. Will He save me from political oppressors, as the Jews expected of the Messiah? Will He save me from poverty? Will He give all that I desire, like wealth, power, influence? How can a child born in a stable,

with simple folks as parents, be a Messiah? What kind of a savior introduces a worldview that points me to heaven, a place that my soul would go to after I die? What about my life here on earth? Don't I deserve a good quality of life while living, complete with a good education, a good job or business, a nice home with all the modern conveniences, access to good health service, etc.?

Maybe Jesus is not telling me to be deprived of these worldly things. Maybe he is just telling me not to be attached to these worldly things as if their acquisition is the main purpose of life here on earth. These are all tools for me to use so that I may have a fulfilling life, because I cannot bring them with me when I die. If I have the talent, I have to use it for a higher purpose, and for me, this is that of living and spreading the Christmas message, which is: God loves me, and I must share with others this love, both divine and human.

And how can I do this in a fast paced world with high tech connectivity, processes and systems? How can I do this if success is the pinnacle of recognition? How can I do this in a world where religion is irrelevant and science and rationality are sought after? First, I am sure I cannot do this alone. I will need the support of people who are learning, as I am, to live this faith with humility and integrity. And I must look beyond myself, my ambitions, my hurts and pains, my pride, and use my talents to serve him, and the kind of people Jesus was associated with, the little ones. And I must pray very hard. Then probably I may receive the grace to glimpse the divine, as Peter, Andrew, James and John did when they left everything to follow Jesus.

WHERE IS GOD

When will I realize that
God's mysterious ways work through
The great and the small,
The cataclysmic and the calm,
The extraordinary and the ordinary,
The babe in the manger?

Father, I ask You to help me
Peel away all those layers of
Disappointments, pain, abuse,
Accomplishments and wealth,
Honors and trophies, pride,
Greed, anxiety, and lack of trust,
Accumulated over the years;
Callouses covering my heart.
Make me see You in everyone
And everything, and as your
Child, open in my heart
A loving and sacred space for
Your joy and Your peace to fill.

PROSE AND POETRY

How has the past year been for me? There were successes, but there were failures. There were joys, but there were hurts and pains. There was destruction, but there was renewal. There was hatred, but there was also love. There was evil but there was good. There was death and grief... but there was life! Opposites and paradoxes abound in this world and in the whole universe, and such things confront me daily. But one thing I realized this year, especially before the Christmas holidays, was that there really is no need for such a dualistic way of thinking to guide me in living my life, and especially in living my faith. I think that life is not a black and white picture, nor is it light and darkness. It cannot be divided between good and bad. There is both in all of us. Life cannot be dammed like a river, it continues to flow. And it flows only in one direction, towards God, because He is the source of all life.

He gave me His joy and His peace, and with love in my heart, I can find meaning even in my pain and suffering, in all pain and suffering. I give myself to His service completely, or try to. This joy and peace will not eliminate the pain, suffering and evil in this world, but neither will these be obstacles to living a life filled with faith, hope and love. These may even bring me closer to recognizing God in all these. And with the windows of my heart thrown wide open, I welcome and take in as much as I can, and give to others as much as I can, this love that He showers on me. Though I fall, as I inevitably will, I shall rise again, as surely as the sun shall rise in the morning, so that I can try again, for there I find His Grace! On the macro level, we humans mistakenly think we can control everything, and try to do so. Even when we fail, there is Grace there too!

PRAYER FOR GRACE

Father,
You know how much comfort I need
To see me through my hurts and pains.
You know how much wisdom I need
That I may discern Your will for me.
You know how weak I am, prone to fail,
Your strength will carry me through.
You know how lonely I can become
In performing my mission in this world,
With Your compassion, I will never feel alone.
You know how badly I need Your grace,
That I may live and share Your love daily.
All these I humbly ask in the name of Jesus
Your Son, my Lord, that I may be
One with You throughout my life,

Jesus, our God, is not in the pompous royalty business. He had heard a very interesting sermon during the Mass last New Year's Day. One part, the longer part, was about Gratitude.

The priest suggested that we give thanks not only for the blessings we received the past year, but also for our enemies, our trials, our sins and unanswered prayers. He suggests that we journey inward, to look also at our weaknesses and sensitivities, and discover how God is touching and educating us on how to consider the whole of ourselves, not only our strengths, but also our weaknesses, as the basis for spiritual development and growth, and as the basis for fulfilling our mission here on earth. We are all 'a work in progress' and God reveals Himself to us always, through many ways, not only through a star. Some ways are obvious, some are not and we have to take extra effort to discern and discover.

We may come to realize that we need help, therapists, spiritual directors, or companions in our faith journey. We may come to realize how to relate the teachings of Jesus to our daily lives and how to live our faith as He teaches us, as the babe in the manger touched and changed the magi. We may also come to realize that God loves us as just the way we are, and grow in desire to share this love with others. We don't have to give expensive gifts like gold, frankincense and myrrh; God only expects us to give – and all those three are all in ourselves. And like the wise men, we change the course of our lives, and return to God through a different route.

AKING ALAY

Maligaya nating gunitain
Ang pagpapakilala ng Diyos
Sa tatlong pantas at mga hentil,
Na umalis sa kanilang kabuhayan
Upang hanapin ang hari at mesiyas,
Na pumuri at nagbigay galang
Sa munti mong anyo, sanggol
Na hamak, sa sabsaban nakaluklok.
Ang mga pantas ay binago ng sanggol,
At nawa'y makita at madama natin
Ang pagmamahal na Kanyang
Pinamalas, sa pamamagitan ng
Tao, bagay at mga pangyayari
Sa pang-araw-araw nating buhay.
At sana'y matamasa natin ang
Marivasang pamumuhay (ginto),
Kalusugan at kapayapaan (mira)
Mataimtim na ugnayan sa Diyos (insenso).
At gaya ng mga pantas, magbago ang
Landas na tinatahak ng ating buhay.

18 November 2018 Advent Recollection



Loving like the Old Adam and the New Adam

Susan Concepcion, Archangel Gabriel BCGG

We had our advent recollection last November 18, 2018 with Fr. Manol Montesclaros, SJ as our speaker. The gist of Fr. Manol's talk was loving as God loves. And how does God love? God's love for each and every one of us is a testament of how much we are worth to Him. In John 3:16, God tells us we are worth more than the life of His Son, "For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." And through His crucifixion, Jesus wants to convince us that we are precious to Him, more precious than His own life. From John 15:13 "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends."

Because we are made in God's own image and likeness [Genesis 1:26], it is part of our core identity to love as God loves. In explaining what it means to love as God loves, Fr. Manol compared the love of the Old Adam and the New Adam. Below is a summary of his comparison.

Areas for Comparison	Old Adam	New Adam
Identity	<i>Adam, the first man in Genesis</i>	<i>Jesus Christ, Son of God</i>
Both were put to "sleep," so their beloved spouse could be brought to life. [In the Bible, sleep is a euphemism for death.]	Deep involuntary sleep. God's decision to put him to deep sleep.	Voluntary sleep by death on the cross. "Father," he said, 'if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine.' [Luke 22:42]
Spouse	Eve	Church
Manner in which the spouse was brought to life.	God put him into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs. From that rib, God created woman. [Genesis 2:21-22]	Jesus died on the cross. The soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear and out poured blood and water [John 19:34]. Blood symbolizes the Eucharist and the water, Baptism.
Symbol of Death	Serpent	Cross
Love Test – How far can he love? Can he offer himself and his life for his beloved spouse?	Garden of Eden God asks the old Adam why he ate the apple.	Garden of Gethsemane Jesus agonizes over the crucifixion.
Response to the test	The old Adam stands behind Eve and uses her as a shield to protect himself from the threat of death.	Jesus carrying the cross proclaims that for God we are worth more than the life of His Son. Jesus' crucifixion proves He loves us to the point of death.
Test Result	Failure to love The Old Adam commits the First Sin, which is the failure to love as God loves and a betrayal of his core identity.	Victory of love Jesus fulfills the will of His Father which is to love even if he has to suffer and die.
Consequences	Death Closes the Gates of Heaven	Eternal Life Reverses the failure of the Old Adam and opens the Gates of Heaven

Loving like the Old Adam is failure to love as God loves and a betrayal of our core identity. It leads to death. Loving like Jesus, the New Adam, is to love even if it hurts. It leads to Eternal Life. And Eternal Life is to know God and know how much He loves us. If we live grounded on God's love, we have eternal life. "For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Morning Thoughts Over Donuts & Coffee

Sonny Maroon, ME Class 129

God bless you my friends!

Some people think that when their time comes to do an accounting with the Great Master, He's going to say: "Show me your trophies."

And they in turn will proudly present all their glorious achievements in their lifetime before they kicked the proverbial bucket.

I think differently.

I would rather believe that come the day of accounting, He's probably going to say: "Show me your scars."

And the fortunate ones will quietly muster a smile, and show Him each battle scar earned fighting the good fight; scars that show how valiantly one stood up in the middle of the maelstrom defending what is right and just and good; scars that show how hard life tried to break them but they did not yield; scars that sometimes show they lost, but went down fighting.

Scars tell better stories than trophies.

Trophies only tell of winning.

Scars tell of our struggles and how we beat life's challenges, even at the times we failed.

Wear your scars with pride my friends.

They tell of our indomitable spirit.

We were born for the struggle.

It is what makes us better people.

Lets get it on!

P. S. You've got God in your corner. No worries

Dishonest electorate makes dishonest candidates or vice-versa?

Josephus Jimenez, Cana BCGG



Photo by Philippine Primer

This is a proverbial chicken-and-egg dilemma. Do crooked politicians cause the electorate to become crooked? Or, is it the electorate which is crooked first, who would necessarily and expectedly give birth to a crooked officialdom? If and when we ask traditional politicians why they are allocating millions in funds to buy votes, they would answer that vote-buying would be the only peaceful way to win an electoral contest in the Philippines, because they look at the people as corrupt and see them also as wanting to be corrupted. The whole system stinks, whoever is the chicken and whoever is the egg becomes irrelevant.

On the other hand, the voters would retort that they would not be in a situation where they have to sell their votes if there were no buyers. They believe, and perhaps rightly so, that these dirty politicians only remember them during election season. And so, the voters might as well opt for a few hundreds or few thousands of pesos in exchange for their votes. Then the politicians would no longer have the obligation to serve the people because they have already paid them. This is the kind of social cancer that Rizal wrote about more than a century ago in his immortal "Noli Me Tangere" and "El Filibusterismo." Until now the cancer continues to make the people suffer, and every election is just a stage to further exacerbate the malignant cells of corruptions and misdeeds perpetrated and perpetuated by both the voters and those who are voted upon.

We have a morally sick human society that is too driven by money and other material things. This fixation on material possessions especially in a situation of extreme poverty and endemic social injustice cannot just be blamed on the

people's lack of strong moral fiber. This is largely pushed by the struggle to survive. Five hundred pesos paid by a politician to a voter could already buy more than ten kilos of rice. The people do not think of good manners and right values when their stomachs are aching due to hunger. We do not seek to justify the acts of receiving money from candidates, but if this money can buy medicine for a sick child or food for a starving, homeless family, who are we to condemn them?

The burden of guilt and crisis of conscience should be heavier on the part of the politicians who are buying votes. For to whom much has been given, definitely, much should be expected. These rich, influential, and socially and economically strong trapos should be the ones to get most of the blame for the corruption in our electoral system. They are the ones guilty of the "Hello Garci" kind of unduly twisting of the arms of the Commission on Elections, by pesos or by power pressure. They are the ones capable of manipulating the Smartmatic counting machines. Not the poor voters. Well, they too are not with clean hands. But the heavier guilt is in the side of the stronger party. The fault is more on the chicken and less on the egg.

It is useless to debate on who started to corrupt whom, the voter or the dirty politician. The better thing to do is to start thinking about how to dismantle all mechanisms of electoral corruption. If it takes another century, and another Rizal, we should all be ready to be shot in Luneta again, if only to save this nation from the social cancer that ails it and makes the people suffer for too long and so much.

A God-Filled Second Marriage Ceremony

Happy Pascual, ME Class 126



Marriage. How can a single, simple word have such a heavy meaning. It is easy to get married, propose (hopefully, the girl will say "yes"), save, plan, and say your "I do's," but keeping the marriage happy is an entirely different thing.

For me, marriage doesn't start on the day after the wedding... it starts when you and your husband experience your first hurdle. Whether it's a simple argument on who will wash the dishes to something heavier like dealing with a financial problem or the clashing of two wills.

When I was single, I would solve problems on my own – especially since I was fairly independent. Now that I'm married, I can't just take matters into my own hands – even when it is easier that way. Now my decision and actions must also be in favor of my husband because that is what being married means. You should strive to think and act together as one even if most times, you don't.

Compromise – you don't have to win all of the arguments or petty misunderstandings. Sometimes not saying anything is better than blurting out what's on your mind just to prove a point.

Support and comfort – it's hard to support and comfort when deep inside you believe he is doing the wrong thing, when you know he will fail. Let him fail, let him learn from his failures so you can see him be a better man by learning from his mistakes. But be there to comfort him when he is down and out, make him feel that you will never leave his side no matter what.

Lastly... don't be afraid to fight and argue because they form and mold what kind of a marriage you will have – just don't try to "mold" yourselves every day. The ups and the downs, the tears and the laughter, the kissing and making up – all that are part of marriage. All we do to resolve our differences strengthen the bond between husband and wife,

just like fire strengthens steel.

My husband and I have been married civilly for 15 years. Every time we have an opportunity to attend a church wedding, the question always crosses my mind: "When will I have mine?" When you have kids and bills to pay, the last thing you would prioritize is to have another wedding.

But the Lord moves in mysterious ways. He used the powers of persuasion of our marriage encounter group and the unwavering support of our families to make the church wedding I dreamed of a reality.

Still, the pre-wedding preparations proved to be stressful – even if we knew it was going to be a super simple church affair, with only our immediate family and our wedding encounter group present. There were times when my husband and I felt so beaten up, we would look at each other and just smile.

I was happy and blessed that our children got to witness our wedding because I knew it was such a rare thing. Instead of staring at pictures in dusty wedding albums, they were there. They stood as our Coin and Ring Bearers.

For that reason and for the support of those closest and dearest to us, our church wedding was simple yet very memorable. Our marriage encounter group, no matter how busy they all were, found the time to drive all the way to Batangas where we held the ceremony. Our families stood as wedding coordinators and took care of everything – from flowers to cake, photos to videos, thank you tokens to hosting the event. It was all a family effort. Just seeing all of these people not just attending your party but helping, contributing, and exerting every effort to make the church wedding happen is just an amazing and overwhelming feeling.

ME WEEKEND

Dear God,

How can I ever thank you enough for turning your eyes upon me and hearing my prayer in my time of need? You heard the longing of my heart and breathed life into a dying marriage.

As I placed my troubles at your feet and asked you to take over, you took all my burdens and gave me peace of mind and heart. Like a child wounded at play, I ran to you and you soothed my pain.

You my Lord are indeed faithful. You have kept your promise to hear me when I call. You gave me and my wife light to lead us from our dark and troubled path. We will follow where you lead oh Lord.

Teach us not to forget that this light is not ours... that light is supposed to be shared. Use us as instruments of your goodness. As the moon reflects the sun's brilliance, let us reflect your light on others who have also lost their way.

Teach us to cherish each other and to truly be each other's friend and ally. Let us not forget that we are two souls bound by love as one. Make us shining examples to our children and our friends. Let them feel your presence through us.

Thank you Lord. Please keep showering your blessings on the people behind Magis Deo and the Marriage Encounter. Bless each and every couple and take over their lives and marriages so that you can show them the path to true happiness. This I ask, in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Dear God,

It was indeed a fulfilling weekend. Thank you. The bed was a bit too hard and the blanket could have been bigger and warmer, but I'll keep a mental note to self in the future. The airon was a lovely touch, so thanks so much for that. I'll keep all of these in mind. Just in case you send me back.

Truly I learned so much about myself. Some of the things I learned are rudimentary but truly what epiphanies!

1. I never realized I was so blessed over the years. Particularly with my marriage to Cynthia (Bash). Remind me not to look at the grass over the other side of the fence.
2. I should keep my words in check until I am more calm, and yes, maybe to write them first. I remember once my mentor told me this: Be careful of your thoughts, your thoughts turn into words. Be careful of your words, your words turn into actions. Be careful of your actions, your actions turn into habits. Be careful of your habits, your habits determine your character. And your character determines your destiny.

Sonny & Sheila Maroon

ME Class 129



ME WEEKEND

3. And more so, dear God, and what I learned about US as a couple-- a) We can conquer all trials as long as we do the work together - all three of us. That's not me, myself and I. It's me, Cynthia and God. b) Dialogue - actually should probably be said as TRIALOGUE, 3 persons in the conversation. There you go God, I invented a new word. Thank you God for that flesh of brilliance! And how would we share this ME experience as a couple? No promises. God, but I have only one answer to that: YES DEAR!

It's been an hour and a privilege to be here right now, at this very moment, God. To be of service to you would be and hopefully, our next conversation.

Love always, Poy

P.S. I don't intend to strangle Jojo Aldequer anymore. I will give him big hugs instead.

Kel & Mitz Sumalinog

ME Class 129



Dear God,

I am truly grateful and I praise You for this opportunity You gave me and Kel. I have been so tired for the past few months and have been desiring to take a short break either with Kel or with our family. You have answered my prayer through Your angels Aileen Jamlig and Tita Marilyn as they have invited us to be part of the Marriage Encounter. Thank You for making Kel come with me for us to deepen our relationship as husband and wife.

We may be in a good situation now, but still, I thank You for reminding and teaching us how we can still make improvements and nourish our married life. I was telling Kel that the Marriage Encounter is not just for troubled couples; it's for every couple out there regardless of their current situation.

Thank You Lord for this opportunity because I got to spend super quality time with Kel with no distractions. Kel even joked we might have our 3rd baby after this.

Being offline actually helped and it's not too bad to disconnect from the outside world for a short time. This allowed us to commune better with each other and reflect on the topics for the past 3 days. This also allowed us to meet new people who have touched us, one way or another. Thank You for using Fr. Gascon, the couple sharers and the auxies as Your instruments to encourage, teach and enlighten us. Thank You for Your guidance and forgiveness. Please continue to be the anchor of our lives. Amen.

Your child,
Mitz

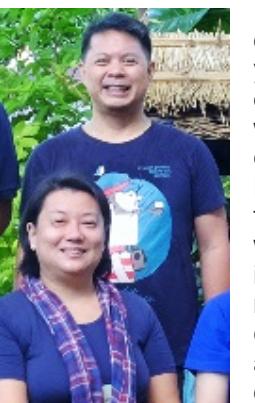


ME 129: Fr. James Wenceslao U. Gascon S.J., Josie Llamas, Cesar & Marivic Pareja, Edwin & Jess Gumila, Noel & Yayette Ventigan, Ted & Susan Concepcion, Domeng & Zarah Gagatiga, Topher & Shiela Aberia, Jerry & Nora Angelo, Robert & Nora Atencio, Miguel & Paula Barretto, Randy & Agnes Claudio, Patrick & Dani Concepcion, James & Lyza Fabronero, Rady & Vivian Flores, Sonny & Sheila Maroon, Jolo & Ish Mateo, Ramon & Gerly Mauricio, Chris & Angie Popatco, NJ & Vem Sancho, Rafa & Cynthia Rodriguez, Paul & Judith Sablan, Awynn & Sheryl Santos, Benny & Josie Serrano, Kel & Mitz Sumalinog, June & Elaine Tentativa, Viven & Gayle Valdez



ME 127 (left to right): Anthony & Mylene Cadiz, Fil & Lanie Cipriano, MJ & Rhea Vistan, David & Marilyn Ordoñez, Lito & Mona Ramos, Noel & Yayette Ventigan, Fr. James Gascon S.J., Josie Llamas, Mimi Santos, Brye & Leann Sangalang, Don & Yence Buenaventura, Domeng & Zarah Gagatiga, JC & April Sales

ME Weekend Reflections



Mona and I have been organizing retreats for the past 15 years in another community. From our personal experiences, no two weekends are the same, even in experiencing His divine presence. During the ME 129 weekend, we felt God's presence in everyone who worked behind the scenes, in the different committees — recruitment, secretariat, logistics, conference, liturgy/music, food; and from our Shepherds. We had our own roles and responsibilities to ensure a smooth flow and the success of the weekend. Amidst the different personalities, talents, and skills, we were able to work harmoniously. Despite being tired and sleepless, we never failed to enjoy each other's company and have fun the whole time. Through God's guiding hands, we were inspired to continue our journey as couples, as part of ME 127 and Magis Deo, to work together for His greater glory. May the Lord be pleased with us His servants. As I reflect on my ME 129 experience, I recall Christ's washing of His apostles' feet.

— **Lito & Mona Ramos**

"God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." Hebrews 6:10

The experience of being the sponsoring class for ME 129 is an affirmation of our growing and deepening love for the Lord. We all had our own concerns and responsibilities that we had to leave behind to make way for our serving at the ME Weekend. This gave us the grace of joy and a sense of fulfillment as the fruit of our service. Service became a pleasure as we selflessly offered what we could to ensure that things went as planned. There were mistakes made but nobody raised a finger to highlight the errors; rather, these were the opportunities to help make things right. Working together as a team allowed us to deepen our friendships (which later on brought about feelings of separation anxiety from each other!). Everybody became part of our family. We were gifted with a certain "high" that cannot be explained. It was only in our hearts that we knew the meaning of the gift of joy in serving others. We got a taste of heaven as we felt the closeness, love and concern for each other. We learned how to go beyond ourselves and be available for others. Recalling the ME Weekend experience gives me a certain high that elicits an automatic smile in my heart. Grateful for the gift of friendships that became family, I offer to the Lord the gift of myself as an instrument of His blessing to others.

— **Marilyn Ordoñez**

"You should wash one another's feet," He told them. "I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:1-17)

This example we witnessed with our fellow ME 127 class servants who sponsored ME 129 Weekend. They were harassed, sweaty, hungry but totally committed to the success of the weekend. They were especially committed to the couple participants whom we served and prayed for during the entire grace-filled weekend. It was a teaching weekend for ME 127 who, as reflected in our shiny, smiling faces, imbibed what the apostles learned from Christ who washed their feet. We learned the meaning of JOY. This is an acronym that describes the necessary hierarchy of love:

J - Jesus first

O - Others second

Y - Yourself third

All of us, in our small way, learned to love like Christ as willing servants in the ME 129 Weekend. The overwhelming consensus is nothing but gratitude. *Ad majorem Dei Gloriam* (All for the Greater Glory of God).

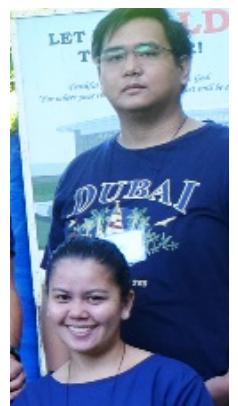
— **David Ordoñez**

Being able to serve and to share our God-given talents at the recent Magis Deo ME Weekend for Class 129 is truly a humbling and a one-of-a-kind experience. We feel blessed and grateful that as a couple we had great teamwork and at the same time bonded together while doing our secretariat tasks. We remember how God works and put everything in harmony as we ended the weekend with a bang! And of course, it is always inspiring to see many couples invest their time and treasure to make their marriages stronger through the ME Weekend. It reminded us how lucky we were to have had this kind of experience at the early stage of our married life. We hope to see many more couples become closer to God and to do "more for God".

— **MJ & Rhea Vistan**



ME Weekend Reflections



Thankful for serving at the Weekend for ME Class 129, we had a lot of mixed emotions and an unforgettable experience. Every moment was very important for us, and of course we were excited for the reactions and sharings of ME Class 129. Prayers helped us fulfill our tasks. For us, serving others is serving God. We looking forward to serving at another ME weekend.

– JC & April Sales

The responsibility of the Conference Room was assigned to us during our ME Weekend sponsorship. Being exposed to shows and presentations made us confident about the role. However, even though we thought we prepared enough, small hiccups here and there made the role challenging.

But with God's grace and power, we believe we were able to share with the participants the grace that we experienced from our own ME Weekend. Plus, the bonus commendations from Fr. James and our own ME Class made our serving more fulfilling.

– Brye & Leanne Sanggalang



Tree Planting and Farm Tour

Thank you to the 26 Magis Deo Youth nature and animal lovers! Thank you to the 20 Titos and Titas!

Joaquin Aldeguer, Janais Aldeguer, Joia Aldeguer, Juanjo Aldeguer, Jaime De Larrazabal, Joaquin De Larrazabal, Samantha Fajardo, Lorrenz Fajardo, Isay Galang, Pablo Galang, Aeisha Gascon, Aira Gascon, Gita Manuel, Gian Manuel, Ria Maulit, Raffa Maulit, Paul Ong, Fatima Ong, Paco Reyes, Anton Reyes, Jhuztine Sales, Jerick Sales, Athena Sales, Kaye Sangalang, Rianna San Gabriel and Denise Ran



Magis Youth Outreach: Tree Planting and Farm Tour

Adventure Farm, Timberland Heights, San Mateo, Rizal

October 27, 2018



Layout by Chelle Red (Chronicles/Youth Ministry). Photos courtesy of Ronald Ong.

God Loves You. You are Special.

Kay Ellise C. Angeles, Magis Youth



I recently came from a retreat before attending the ComCel retreat for the youth and indeed, God was with us that time.

The youth attendees had a wide range of ages, but we were all able to relate with the teachings of our spiritual director. The session started with a prayer, a prayer that made us imagine God being with us in that very room; we all felt the Holy Spirit.

Our spiritual director taught us many things, but the one that really made a mark in my heart was a song he presented. It was a song about being special, being unique, being someone that God loves no matter what. God is our creator, He made us in His own image and likeness. All the opinions we have about ourselves, and other people, don't matter. What truly matters is what God says about us because that is what's true. He is the only one who truly knows us, who truly cares for us, who truly accepts us for who and what we are, and loves us no matter what.

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Living in the Now

Zarah C. Gagatiga, Emmanuel BCGG



Photo by ThePreachersWord

Of the many things I learned in my years of being active in Magis Deo, it is the acknowledgment that God is present in my life. Thanks to the teachings during Community Celebrations and the offerings of recollections and Ignatian Retreats by Magis Deo, what seemed to be an abstract and surreal is made real by praying the Examen every day, journaling, reflection and attendance of prayer workshops. These formation activities have deepened my relationship with God. What gives me comfort and grace in prayer is always the discovery of living in the now with God beside me.

This recognition of God as my constant companion, caring and forgiving, humorous and kind, eases my worries. I worried a lot back in the day. But with this newfound image and relationship with Him, I learned to worry less. I learned to pray on my worries.

And amazingly, God replies in more ways than one. A call or private message (PM) from dear friends who read one of my cryptic social media posts. Good news from the eldest in college who lives away. The sun shining in the morning after days of heavy rain. The tree frog that rests languidly on a branch of our avocado tree. The butterflies that circle the white flowers growing in our front yard. Even the sun setting and spraying the sky colors of pink and indigo is God's way of saying, *rest now Zarah, for tomorrow, we battle on together.*

Once, my boss had the kindness and humility to make me an espresso during "hell" week in school. She knows coffee would calm me down. God was there at that moment when she handed me the cup of hot espresso. It was God telling me to chill and that the line dividing supervisor and subordinate is a man-made law. At the end of all the deadlines and deliverables, we are all hard working people who need a break. I see God in my daughter who takes candid pictures of me when I am in a pensive mood. I am assured. There is someone who will constantly keep an eye out for me. When BCGG prayer companions patiently listen to my reflections and recurring struggles, God is there listening too. Even in the spats and quarrels I have with my husband, petty or serious some may be, God is there shaking, disturbing and awakening us.

At times when I feel He is far away, too distant to be reached and felt, or missing in the little and simple events of daily life, I go back to this memory I have of God as a warm energy embracing me. This happened in a silent retreat I had with the help of a lay formator from the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at San Jose Seminary. That was a powerful experience!

This was five years ago and the feeling remains clear in my mind. This I know. God is here. God is in the now.

Recollection #10: "Emmanuel: Nasa Atin Ang Diyos"

Yoling Sevilla, Magis 28, John BCGG

Twenty-six joined the recollection from "laya" as residents refer to visitors from the free society – 18 from Magis Deo, and 8 non-Magis Deo friends. 8 were first-timers; 20 were repeat visitors. 14 of the repeat visitors were from Magis Deo.

"Ang pangalan niya'y Emmanuel, Emmanuel – Nasa atin ang Diyos!!! God is with us, God is within us.

In being invited to share my experience of God's abiding presence in my life, I was encouraged and enabled to review my relationship with Emmanuel, to savor and relish the blessing of being accompanied by God "sa hirap at ginhawa."

"Inulan ako ng grasya." Not only did I experience being "in the flow"; I also received an abundance of love and affirmation from the inmates, particularly the College Guild members with whom I have become friends, and for whom I feel much affection.

Emmanuel I told me "Iba talaga kayo. Normal lang kayo makibagay. Tinatratu niyo kaming normal (na tao)." Both he and Emmanuel II invited me to eat lunch with them.

Emmanuel II said "Ako pala ang panganay niyong anak na lalaki" when I told them I had sons aged 37, 35 and 22. He told me he was orphaned at a young age and has been in Bilibid 26 years. He was imprisoned at 16 and is now 42. He looks forward to being released soon and promised to visit me when he regains his freedom.

One guild member who gifted me with a plant last year, said he isn't into sharing but since I was facilitating and had invited him to share, he would share with the group. Wow! What a gift and grace!

All of them found Emmanuel in Bilibid where they found peace in discovering / rediscovering Jesus and being accompanied by Him in their long struggle to reformation. "Mabuti nang nasa Muntinlupa, kaysa sa ilalim ng lupa." Many of them were gang members, some were warlords, whose ka-tropa are already six feet under the ground. They are not

only alive but are flourishing in the oasis that they found in the Jesuit Prison Ministry (they attend Mass every day) and in the Perpetual Help Delta Extension School where they are able to finish their schooling ("Biruin niyo, dito ko naipagpatuloy ang aking pag-aarial, dito ako nagtapos! Apat kaming ga-graduate ngayong taon!).

Each one said they experience Emmanuel in their fellow inmates who have become their companions in the long struggle to reformation and freedom (naghahanda kaming makabalik sa malayang lipunan).

Other guild members who were in my sharing group articulated how I had touched their lives, and, not only they, but quite a number of other inmates, rushed to make "mano po" when we arrived and as I was preparing to leave (that's why I almost got left behind!), calling me "Mommy" or "Mother." It was touching and heartbreakingly at the same time. They all asked me when I would be back. "Sa Easter!" I said.

I don't know what force drove me to embrace the young man who articulated how lonely Christmas felt to them ("Ni hindi namin mayakap ang mga mahal namin sa buhay") in that "makabagbag-damdamin" skit. Then he made hagulog!!! That was definitely heartbreakingly. I almost broke down myself.

And that guild member who invited me to dance! When I confronted him later and asked why he did not forewarn me and let me practice with them, he said, with a really naughty glint in his eye "Para surprise!" (They do this every time, I should really be prepared for it by now.)

My heart and soul were overflowing. I felt loved and accepted by them, and feel privileged that they feel loved and accepted by me just as they are.

As you can imagine, I am weeping as I write this, and continue to savor my "Emmanuel" experience. I was blessed abundantly – siksik, liglig, umaapaw!!!



Yoling Sevilla has been participating in the Magis Prison Ministry as a sharer for five seasons now since Advent of 2015. Over the last five seasons, she has become friends with many of the inmates, particularly the members of the College Guild who perform excellently choreographed song numbers backed up by their own band, their way of thanking Magis Deo for visiting and spending time with them. One, surnamed Capistrano, considers himself her nephew. Many call her "Mommy" or "Mother."

Needless to say, she has grown quite fond of several of them.

OUTREACH

The SAF providing security in the camp were very strict this time. No electronic gadgets. Wallet content limited to P2K. For the first time, no wristwatches. Ladies were asked to take off their shoes for inspection. Strict but professional!

Since Easter, 2018, no camera. The above pictures were taken by an inmate in the College Guild using a first-generation digital camera.

KALINGA (Kain, Ligo Ng Ayos) — Matthew BCGG
St. Arnold Janssen Kalinga Center, Sta Cruz, Manila / December 2, 2018



The Arnold Janssen Kalinga Center is a center that seeks to serve the poorest of the poor, homeless and marginalized by recreating their self image through self-care basics like a hot meal, shower, clothing, and community prayer.

OUTREACH**My Examen on the Suyuan**

Caloy Ang, Tala BCGG

I have a confession to make for this article: I am a Suyuan rookie. Though I attended a Suyuan two years ago, I was not able to attend early and was only there to mostly assist in the small things to do. Thus, I was not able to immerse myself in the prayers and talks.

Our Suyuan experience last October 21 though was something else. Joey, our shepherd, summed it up nicely in his sharing – from the minute you enter the venue, you could feel God's presence. For me, the feeling was like the ME experiences we had. The presence and leadership of Cana BCGG helped a lot which also allowed us from Tala BCGG to listen more and absorb more.

No matter how many times I attend MEs and Suyuans, I probably would feel the same. In my heart, I have a certain excitement and, to be honest, some dread. What will I uncover today? Rather, what will God uncover for me today?

For Tina of Cana, she found a lot of things to be thankful for: the chance to serve in the Suyuan again, the 19 couples (out of the 35 confirmed) who chose to attend the Suyuan among the many activities that morning, and for Team Couples Chacho & Marilyn Angeles and Rudy & Lynn Ebaro whose presentations were lively and inspirational.

And like Tina, we all share our gratefulness for the Holy Infant Jesus Parish Commission on Family Life who made all the arrangements and provided the food. All we needed to do was to be present and bring roses and candles. The opportunity to work with the participants and be touched by their sharings and openness was also a balm for our spirits.

God Loves You. You are Special... continued from page 19

No matter how many times we fail Him or toss Him aside, He never gives up on us; He is always ready to be there for us with open arms. That is how loving and forgiving our Lord is. We must always find the time to be with the Lord.

Ask the Lord for guidance, for help in anything you're going through, for forgiveness and most of all, give thanks. You must always thank the Lord for everything, for without Him, none of it would be possible. Thank the Lord also even when we aren't okay, because it's through these not okay moments that we realize God molds us more into the person He wants us to be. You just have to trust Him in His plan for you.

God is with us all the time, every time. Go to Him and don't be afraid to be real towards Him. He is there to listen to you, be there for you, and help you carry your cross. He won't let you go through things He knows you can't handle. Trust in Him and always pray, have faith and keep going! These are the things I was able to reflect upon during this retreat for the youth. Thank you Lord for this opportunity.

All through the day, I felt the light and shadows within myself, as I listened to the talks of the Team Couples and the sharings. There were sharings about doubts and shortcomings; but in the end what really shone through was wonder at the strength of Love. There was a couple 18 years together, not married, but strong together! A wife who waited while her husband served a prison sentence, with her remaining loyal and true. In the end, one verse from the Bible stood out for me – "And the greatest of these is Love." It's as if one understands more the grandeur and promise of what that verse meant when one listens to others' love experiences.

As we wrapped up the day, handing roses to the men who in turn will give these to their partners as a surprise, one guy said to me "Partner, pilian mo ako ng maganda-ganda," pointing to the bucket of rose buds we were handing out. I did my best, choosing the rose I myself would pick to give to my wife, Charm. That moment, among many others, allowed us to share the participants' happiness, and form a bond with them.

Tina also shares that God was truly working that day... in our presence and team work, in the very active HIJP leaders, in the commitment and service of the team couples, in the participants' desire to deepen their relationship with each other and with God, in the generosity of everyone concerned.

Cana, Tala and everyone who served that day look forward to the reunions of this Suyuan group, for the Holy Spirit to be with us as a group again. For me, that Suyuan was a truly wonderful experience. I pray that the Grace we felt that day stays with all who participated in it.

Magis Deo Family Day

December 2, 2018 - DATEM Corporate Office, Mandaluyong City



Joia Aldeguer, 2nd Place



Eunice & Eula Araullo, 1st Place



Brix, Kaye & Leven Sangalang, 3rd Place



Rev. Fr. Bernardo Carpio,
Presiding Priest



The Judges



2019-2020 Pastoral Council Members

