

Magis

Formation for Mission

Stewardship
Simplicity
Sharing
Service

Official Publication of the
Magis Deo Community
December 2022 Issue



Someday at Christmas

A song with a socio-political message of peace and equality and compassion

My Soul Magnifies the Lord

Live our lives in Magnificat – magnifying God every day through all circumstances of our lives

Magis 2022: Spiritually Strong and Vibrant Apostolic Community

A review of 2022 and our community programs and activities that supported our thrusts and direction

Pagninilay sa Nakaraang AIR

Reflections on the Annual Ignatian Retreat

ABOUT THE COVER



Belen is common and symbolic in Filipino homes during Christmas. *Belen* comes from *Bethlehem* where baby Jesus was born. The simplicity of the nativity of Jesus is beautifully re-told in the *belen*.

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SOMEDAY AT CHRISTMAS

Click on link for video:

<http://www.magisdeo.org/mdnl/ArohaChildrensChoir.mp4>

This song written in 1967 by Motown songwriters Ron Miller and Bryan Wells during the time of the Vietnam war, was one of the first Christmas songs with a socio-political message – peace and equality and compassion. Fifty-five years later, the music is still relevant, and still challenges us to ask the same questions:

What have we done for you, Lord?

What have we not done for you, Lord?

What else do you want us to do for you, Lord?

A Blessed and Hope filled Christmas for us all!!



SOMEDAY AT CHRISTMAS

By Ron Miller and Bryan Wells

Someday, there will be peace on earth
There will be no more tears someday.

Someday at Christmas men won't be boys
Playing with guns like kids play with toys.
One warm December our hearts will see
A world when men are free.

Someday at Christmas there'll be no wars
When we have learned what Christmas is for.
When we have found what life's really worth
And there will be peace on earth.

Someday all our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free.
Maybe not in time for you and for me
But someday at Christmas time.

Someday at Christmas we'll see a land
With no hungry children, no empty hand.
One happy morning people will share
A world where people care.

Someday at Christmas there'll be no tears
All men are reborn no men are fierce.
One shining moment my heart ran away
from the world we live in today.

Someday all of our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free.
Maybe not in time for you and for me
But someday at Christmas time.

Someday at Christmas men will not fail
Hate will be gone and love will prevail.
Someday a new world that we can only start
With hope in every heart.

Someday at Christmas there'll be no war
When we have learned what Christmas is for.
When we have found what life's really worth
And there will be peace on earth.

Someday all of our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free
Maybe not in time for you and for me.
But someday at Christmas time,
But someday at Christmas time,
There'll be peace on earth someday.

MAGIS 2022: SPIRITUALLY STRONG AND VIBRANT APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY

Cesar & Delsa Sangalang, Chaircouple

We're now almost at the end of another year which means that the term of your current Pastoral Council is also ending. But before that, allow us to share with you a quick review of how our year was, our community programs and activities that supported our thrusts and direction this year.

At the start of the year, we shared to you our direction of having a Spiritually Strong and Vibrant Apostolic Community, anchored on four thrusts: 1. Sustaining Spiritual Growth, 2. Active Involvement in Social and Moral Transformation, 3. More Inclusive Programs, and 4. Empowering Shepherds.



Hindi tayo nahirapang gawin ang Thrust 1 dahil talaga namang binusog tayo ng iba't-ibang formation talks, retreats, recollections, and prayer workshops ng ating Formation Ministry sa pangunguna nina Ted & Susan Concepcion kasama sina Malu & Philip Panlilio, Ricky & Trixie Sun, at syempre ang kanilang overseer na sina Cesar & Marivic Pareja.

Thrust #1: SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

FORMATION MINISTRY

- ✓ RETREATS
- ✓ PRAYER WORKSHOP
- ✓ MEMBERS' QUARTERLY FORMATION

Tending the Sheep Series

Encyclical on Fratelli Tutti

Christus Vivit

Embracing Jerusalem

Advent Recollection



The Tending the Sheep series continued to become our members' spiritual recharging station while the Holy week Triduum, Lenten recollection, and the recent Advent recollection gave members the much-needed time for quieting down and reflection.

In addition, our monthly community celebrations continue to reinforce and strengthen the spiritual, moral, and social aspect of our lives through relevant and timely topics on Love, Faith, Family, Synodality, Discernment, Transition, Freedom, Generosity, and Spiritual and Mental well-being.

Thrust #1: SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

CSM

✓ COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

Lenten Recollection

Community Celebrations

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

Thrust #1: SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

CSM

✓ COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

Virtual Community Celebration

Attending to our Spiritual & Mental Well-Being

The Virtue of Generosity

Advent Recollection

Maraming salamat sa ating napakasipag na CSM head, Ojay & Yang Reantas, at sa kanilang overseer, Ney & Pinky Rosas.

And yes, we also took care of the spiritual growth of our youth by providing them talks and activities that help develop not just their character, skills, and talents, but more importantly, their desire to serve the Lord and the community.

Thrust #1: SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

YOUTH MINISTRY

- ✓ ATTITUDE FOR GRATITUDE
- ✓ GROWTH MINDSET
- ✓ ART & MUSIC JAM

MAGIS DEO YOUTH MINISTRY

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Growth Mindset

Thrust #1: SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

ME MINISTRY

- ✓ ME WEEKENDS

ME Class 133

ME Class 134

For the first time since the pandemic hit us, we had our first M.E. Weekend last June 17-19 at the BLD Covenant House in Dasmariñas, Cavite. And just last week, we had another in the same venue. A total of 30 couples attended these two M.E. Weekends, and they now belong to ME Class 133 and ME Class 134.

We are grateful to the auxiliary class and BCGG, the theme couple and sharers, the ME class shepherds, and our ME Ministry headed by Benz & Vina Dimanalata, and lovingly supported by their overseer, Winston & Mae Cruz, Tita Josie Llamas, and Tita Mimi Santos.

Despite the threat of Covid, our Outreach Ministry found a way to conduct several Suyuan sessions, through the help of the sponsor BCGG and Suyuan facilitators.

Thrust #1: SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

OUTREACH MINISTRY

- ✓ LINGAP KABANALAN

Suyuan in Nativity of our Lady Parish, Olandes Marikina last Mar 20

Suyuan in National Shrine Saint Michael Arche Angel, San Miguel Manila last July 3

Note: Program also covers Thrust 2, 3 & 4.

Thrust #1: SUSTAINING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

PRAXIS MINISTRY

- ✓ BCGG MEETINGS

| BCGG Meetings | Ave # Pax per meeting | Ave % Attendance of all BCGGs | Ave # meetings Vs Target of 18 meets | % Frequency (out of 39 weeks) |
|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Average | 8 | 60% | 28 | 72% |

BCGGs with highest frequency of meets:

North: (Arch Gabriel 92%, Chronicles 90%, Mustard Seed 82%)
Central: (Transfiguration 95%, Sirach 82%)
South: (Cana 92%)

BCGGs with highest meeting attendance:

North: (Agnus Dei 91%)
Central: (Thessalonians 92%)
South: (Cana 83%)

In ensuring the active participation and awareness of our members, our Praxis ministry remained our guide and channel to reach out to our members. We thank Levy & Roxanne Espiritu and our sector heads, Jojo & Jane Aldeguez, Ferdie Joson, and Abby & Lilit Tumbocon.

Isang malaking hamon din sa ating community ang patuloy na pagkawasak at pagbaba ng moralidad nating mga Filipino. And so, we initiated various programs that could somehow help us in the long journey of social and moral transformation.

We begin with our youth, praying and hoping that our constant sharing and teaching will strengthen the foundation of their social and moral values. After all, they are the future leaders and prime movers of our country. We thank our Ministry Heads Mark & Karen Madrid, Bobet & Gina Manuel, Arlyn Tabilog, Sarah Gagatiga, Caloy & Charmaine Ang, and Youth Ministry overseer, Mark & Cathy Maulit.



And as we speak of leaders, this year's presidential and national election was a battle not just between candidates and politicians, but perhaps between truth and lies or fake news. Hence, the "Magis Deo Companions for Leni" was organized, and they have participated actively in the campaign not just for the candidate but for truth and good governance. While the "Magis Deo Companions for Leni" did not officially represent the political stand of Magis Deo community, its members and volunteers believe this is our way of working for the social and moral transformation of our nation.



The Magis Newsletter has become the voice of the community and it will continue to be our cloud of insights and reflections.

We launched LINGAP this year in fulfillment of our thrust of being More Inclusive.



Our Lingap Karunungan aims to expand its financial assistance to deserving but financially challenged students. Through the Yuson Fund, Love Live 2 proceeds, and benefactor members, we have 21 new beneficiaries receiving 5,000 pesos allowance per semester. This number is on top of the Olandes scholars, sponsored by some members. Once these students finish their studies, we look forward to helping them find jobs or sources of income through our Lingap Kabuhayan. Our Suyuan, Buhay-Espiritwal ng Mag-asawa, and Kasalang Bayan remain our priority programs towards Lingap Kabanalan. And with the increasing threat of climate change and other environmental hazards, we help protect our environment through our Lingap Kalikasan programs. We started this with an exposure trip to Green Antz Builders last October 1, a joint project of Outreach and Youth Ministries. We thank our Outreach Ministry, headed by Rico & Terry Lim, with the guidance of Mennen & Elyn Aracid.

Thrust #2 ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL & MORAL TRANSFORMATION

OUTREACH MINISTRY

LINGAP KARUNUNGAN

of beneficiaries: 21
Magis Deo allocation: 17 students
Karunungan sponsorship: 4 students

THANK YOU!

2 c/o Ted & Susan Concepcion (Archangel Gabriel BCGG)
1 c/o Edwin & Jocelyn Gumila (Easter BCGG)
1 c/o Raul & Honey Dimayuga (Easter BCGG)

Thrust #2 ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL & MORAL TRANSFORMATION

OUTREACH MINISTRY

LINGAP KABANALAN

Sponsoring 6 Clandestine couples for the Kavalang Bayan last Sept 17 at the Nativity of the Holy Infant Jesus Church in Marikina

Thrust #2 ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL & MORAL TRANSFORMATION

YOUTH & OUTREACH MINISTRY

LINGAP KALUKASAN

Brush along your own KALUKASAN and KALUKASAN KAYO

Going more inclusive and reaching out to others were best exemplified by our youth who continue to bring their friends and family to the Magis activities, CSM's Love Live concert – a fundraising entertainment event to support the Magis Cares and Lingap Karunungan programs, and ME Ministry's Marriage Boosters that benefit couples who are not yet members of Magis Deo.

Thrust #3 MORE INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS

YOUTH MINISTRY

✓ COMMUNITY CELEBRATION (sponsorship)
✓ TALKS & ZOOM ACTIVITIES

Thrust #3 MORE INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS

CSM

✓ LOVE LIVE CONCERT

#Searching for new talents/performers!
LOVE LIVE 2!
MAGIS DEO CSM
FEB 18, 2023 (SUNDAY)
Contact Pinky Kean for more information.

✓ Magis Cares Program As needed Magis Members

Thrust #3 MORE INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS

ME MINISTRY

✓ ME WEEKEND
✓ PRAYER WORKSHOPS for MBNL

MBNL: Shepherds conducted staggered Prayer Workshops (1 session/prayer method)
Completed: Jan to March 2022

Marriage Boosters 2022
The shortest answer prayer for marriage
Join the Marriage Boosters 2022
Completed: Jan 2 to Feb 14

While we all love to reach out to others, we did not forget to reach in and made Kumustahan, shared stories, and prayed together with our fellow Magis members through our Intersectoral Interface meetings. And this year, we expanded it by having 2 sets of Interface groupings.

Thrust #3 MORE INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS

PRAXIS MINISTRY

✓ INTERSECTORAL INTERFACE

| INTERSECTORAL INTERFACE | Meetings | Total #pax attendance | % Attendance (Actual/Total Members) | # Interface Groups |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Interface Grouping 1 | Meeting 1 (Feb-Apr) | 184 | 54% | 8 |
| | Meeting 2 (May-July) | 135 | 39% | 6 |
| Interface Grouping 2 | Meeting 1 (Aug-Sept) | 181 | 53% | 8 |
| | Meeting 2 (Oct-Nov) | 138 | 40% | 8 |

We acknowledge the important role of our BCGG and ME Class shepherds, thus we included in our thrusts their empowerment. The Accompanying the Shepherds Series was a good start to continuously enhance the skills of current and future shepherds. We want to empower them more and so we look forward to more mentoring programs next year for our shepherds and BCGG heads. Our Youth also had their own program aligned with this thrust.



While we are still in a pandemic and the economy is still weak, we are glad to inform you that our financial status remains healthy and sound, and we thank all of you for your generosity. Rest assured that our finances are well-taken care through the care and guidance of our Finance Ministry head, Jun & Vivian Ahhyong, with the support of Lilit & Abby Tumbocon.

In closing, we especially thank our brilliant, inspiring, and talented priest presiders and speakers, led by our beloved spiritual director, Fr James Gascon (a big round of applause please for our inspiring and very hard-working Fr. James), Fr. Allan Abuan, Fr. Ro Atilano, Fr. Eric Escandor, Fr. Oliver Dy, Fr. Vic Baltazar, Fr. Jun-G Bargayo, Fr. Jom Manzano, Fr. Jordan Orbe, Fr. Willy Samson, and Fr. Ian Gabinete. Without them, we would not have been able to execute our programs and thrusts this year. Maraming salamat po sa inyong lahat.



Of course, we thank all our Ministry Heads and their members for their hard work this year, made especially challenging because our programs are a combination of online and face-to-face. Maraming maraming salamat sa inyong lahat!





So, this is it! On behalf of the 2022 Pastoral Council, we express our heartfelt gratitude to all of you. Thank you for your love, support, and prayers. Maligayang Pasko at Masaganang Bagong Taon!

And to our 2023 Pastoral Council members, congratulations and welcome!



POETRY

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Chacho Angeles, Thessalonians BCGG

Loving Jesus,

I know that I cannot fully comprehend the mind and heart of omnipotence, the ultimate, the source of all being, like You becoming man in the humblest of circumstances, to show us Your love by being one with us, feeling our pain, suffering with us, showing us that this is life, though is only a part of it, and the greater and more important part of which, is the love, the sharing, the giving, and the caring that we show for others, for ourselves and the whole of creation.

You showed us that You are always one with us, in us and will always watch out for us, showing us that despite the hardships, there is joy and peace, and we just open our hearts to recognize and realize this, with the help of Your grace, and with the openness of our hearts.

May this simple family from Bethlehem and Nazareth, fill me with inspiration, with humility, with the strength and the grace to discern your will for me.

And may my spirit rejoice despite the pain and suffering the pandemic and typhoons leave in their wakes, for hidden in them are Your mercies and blessings.

Amen.



MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER MINISTRY

ME CLASS I34

Benz & Vina Dimanalata, Francis BCGG

16 couples graduated ME Class 134.
13 out of 16 registered via social media. Couples came from NCR, Calabarzon, and one even flew from Davao after attending the October Marriage Booster session.



Magis Choir led the Harana and sang in the Sunday Holy Mass.

MARRIAGE ENCOUNTER MINISTRY

M.E. Ministry and Matthew BCGG served as auxiliaries.

Couple sharers were Noel & Gigi Resurreccion and Ian & Elaine Serranilla



Noel & Gigi Resurreccion



Fr. James Gascon, SJ directed the M.E. Weekend. Here with Ian & Elaine Serranilla



Prayers with Fr James before start of the night.



Claro Santos and Ethel Araullo serenaded the class.



ME Class 134 First Reunion on Dec. 12, 2022 with Class Shepherd Couple Jojo & Jane Aldeguer

A NEW WAY OF SEEING

FR. JAMES GASCON, SJ, DISCUSSED FRATELLI TUTTI AT THE TENDING THE SHEEP SERIES ON NOVEMBER 5, 2022.

Marlyn Angeles, Thessalonians BCGG

Fratelli Tutti is the third encyclical Pope Francis issued since the start of his papacy. Published about when Covid 19 broke out, this letter encourages us how to look at our relationship with each other.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is the foundation of the teachings espoused in this encyclical. Like most of us, I am very familiar with this parable as it tells us WHO my neighbor is. I, however, gained a new perspective on the parable when Father Gascon noted that how we look at ourselves frames the way we look at others.

The parable is a story of how the characters see themselves through their response to others. The Levite and the priest saw themselves as different from others and value themselves so much more than others.

"They did not heed their internal summons to act as neighbors; they were concerned with their duties, social status, and professional position within the society." (101. Fratelli Tutti) They saw the victim as a distraction that would delay them from their daily task. And so, they chose to look the other way and avoid witnessing the victim's condition and being bothered to stop and help.

The Samaritan, on the other hand, is used to being seen as an outcast by the general Jewish population. As he passed the victim, he stopped and looked and saw the victim with his heart, for he knew what it felt to be ignored, to be set aside and treated as if one did not exist. He saw the victim as a man deserving of help from him, worthy of his time.

In Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis seeks to inspire us into a new way of seeing ourselves and others in fraternity and social relationships as brothers and sisters that will not remain at the level of words.

HOW WE SEE OTHERS TODAY

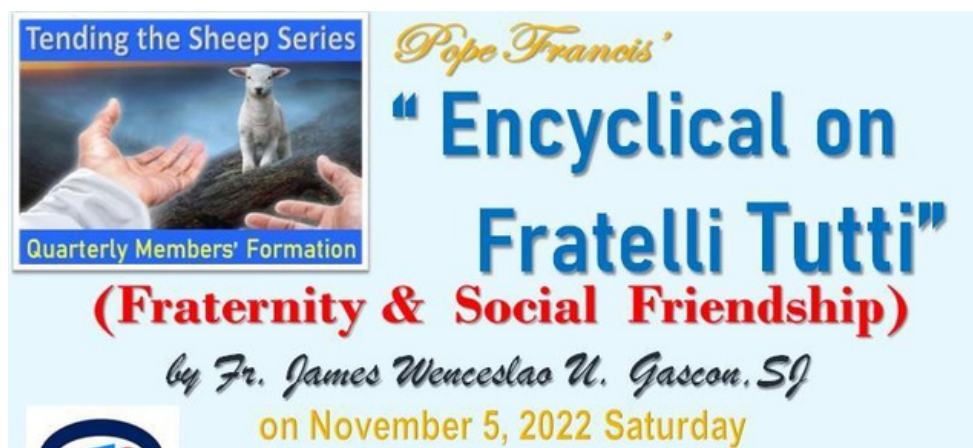
There are two predominant ways of seeing others today brought about by the emergence of a "throw-away culture" and the premium put on productive outputs and the rapid development of technology. One way is seeing the other from the perspective of utility and productivity. How useful is this person to me, to society, to the community? We easily discard the less valuable (e.g., the poor or disabled) or less productive (e.g., the elderly).

The other way is seeing the other as a foe or threat because of fear and mistrust, ancestral fears that technology has failed to eliminate.

As a result, we see walls built in the hearts of men to preserve the self and those within and among them, and barriers on land to prevent encounters with other cultures and peoples. Such walls result in a "US vs. THEM" mentality leading to growing indifference and aggression towards others. We have seen the "emergence and growth of social groups clinging to an identity that separates them from others." (102. Fratelli Tutti). Much of the suffering we see in the world today stems from such ways of seeing. We see this in our own lives. We have heard of how Filipinos and other Asians have been mugged and attacked in the United States. We have witnessed the marginalization of the poor, the indigenous peoples, and the immigrants. Organizations and religions had their ways of evolving into exclusive communities that are exclusive of those not professing the same views.

Considering all this, I ask myself: How do I see the other? Due to the pressure for results, it is easy to focus on what I do and its outcome, and in the process, I see my identity as my status, work, and position.





WHAT FRATELLI TUTTI RECOMMENDS:

How, then, should we re-imagine and see others?

Turn from Looking to Gazing:

From seeing only with our eyes, we need to perceive the way God sees us, with His heart. We need to look longer, see beyond what the senses pick up and feel what our heart tells us.

Redefine our Christian Identity:

We must transform how we perceive ourselves as Christians and view others as brothers and sisters. A number have raised their reservations about being overly concerned with fraternity, which weakens the call to evangelization. Too much fraternity puts our faith on equal footing with other religions. Yet Pope Francis calls for respect, encounter, and dialogue. He argues for a sense of identity that we can summarize as "differentiation without separation" or "differentiation with openness."

While our sense of boundaries is essential to establish our identity, it need not be at the cost of separating ourselves from others. To do this, we will need a firm grounding on who we are as Christians.

The essential question then is – "How am I a neighbor to others?" and NOT "Who is my neighbor?" When we change our question, we change our focus. And when we change our focus, we open ourselves to other or better possibilities of being and loving.

As Christians our core identity and center stems from a firm belief that Christ shed his Blood for each of us and that no one is beyond the scope of His Universal love. (80. Fratelli Tutti)., Christ calls us to love

likewise and extend that loving even if we cross boundaries without compromising or weakening our beliefs. We do this by opening our hearts to encounters with others based on respect and a love capable of welcoming differences, where "priority given to the dignity of every human being over his or her ideas, opinions, practices and even sins." (191. Fratelli Tutti).

MY CHALLENGE TODAY

The challenge then for me is to be mindful of who I am as a Christian in every encounter I have with another, to open my mind, my heart to our differences, and to engage in a dialogue that helps me see and honor the dignity of the other. This means taking a pause when tempted to look the other way, holding back on my judgments, listening attentively to understand, and seeing beyond what is shown. Given how our views have been formed by the way we were raised and the culture of our communities, it would be difficult but not impossible.



PAGNINILAY SA NAKARAANG AIR

Neneng Claros, St. Peter BCGG



Pagkatapos ng seryosong pag tataya at pagsisikap sa nakaraang pang-panguluhang eleksyon, para sa pagbabago na inaasam namin sa ating bayan, matindi rin ang kabiguan na hinarap naming mag-asawa noong nakaraang eleksyon bagama't meron na rin kaming hinala na mangyayari nga ito hindi lamang dahil sa tindi ng kahirapan na aming nasaksihan sa mga komunidad na aming hinamon, namag-asa ako. Hindi madali ang kumilos para sa pangarap na pagbabago lalo pa at kasalukuyan ng pandemya. Tumaas ang antas ng aming pag-asa dahil mataas din ang bilang ng mga tumutugon sa aming krusada lalo na sa sektor ng kabataan.

Subali't kung gaano kataas ang aking naipon na pag-asa ay ganoon din kalalim ang inabot kong lungkot at pagkabigo na nagbunsod sa akin upang mag-isip na umalis na dito sa probinsiya, total naman kailangan na ng mga apo ko ng mas may kalidad na edukasyon, o kaya ay ayusin ko na ang petisyon sa akin ng panganay kong anak at doon na manirahan sa Amerika. Ang totoo'y napakahirap manirahan dito sa lugar na aming tinitirhan ngayon dahil napakalaking porsiyento ng bilang ng mahihirap, at saan ka man bumaling ay puro kahirapan ang makikita mo. At sa mga ganitong lugar karaniwan na ang mataas na korapsyon na ipinagwawalang-bahala na lang ng tao dahil nakasanayan at tinanggap na nila ang ganitong kalalagayan.

Hinahanap ko ang sagot ng Panginoon kaya kahit naka-attend na ako ng AIR ay sumali ulit ako, baka dito ako katagpuin ng Panginoon. At dito ko napagtanto na kaya pala dinala niya kami dito ay upang matuklasan ang aking Jerusalem. Ipinakita Niya na hindi natatapos sa pagkakampanya ang misyon na inilaan Niya hindi lang para sa akin kung hindi para sa buong pamilya ko.



Ang misyon namin ay hindi lamang upang makita ang kahirapan at ang kawalan na ng pag-asa ng mga tao lalo na ang mga nasa sektor D at E, kung hindi higit pang magsikap at magsikhay upang dalhin at imulat sa mga taong minsan ay hinipo namin ang buhay, na ang pagmamahal at habag ng Panginoong Hesus, ang karunungan at kalayaan na Kanyang ibinigay sa bawa't isa sa atin, mahirap man o mayaman, edukado o walang pinag-aralan, ay para sa lahat. At ang mabuti at magandang balitang ito na naipunla ng Magis Deo sa aming mag-asawa ay ang Pag-ibig at habag ng Diyos sa Tao, at ito ay ihahatid namin sa kanila hanggang sa dumating ang panahon na hindi na matitinag ng anumang uri ng kislap ng ginto o karahasan, maging ito ay takot sa dahas sanhi ng gutom o kamatayan. Ang panahon na kaya na nilang pumili ng mga pinuno gamit ang karunungan at kalayaan sa pagpili ng tama o mali dahil natuklasan na nila na nananahan ang Espiritu ng Diyos sa bawa't isa sa atin.

Nawa'y makapag-ambag ito sa pagliligtas na patuloy na ginagawa ng Diyos sa tao.



NANDIYAN NA YAN (PAGNINILAY SA TULA NI FR. WILLY SAMSON, SJJ)

Gigi Resurreccion, John BCGG

Buntong hininga
Yan ang tugon ko
Sa katagang "Nandiyan Na Yan" na naririnig ko
Pauli ulit itong kinakatwiran ng isip ko
Tanggapin na lang ang palad na inihain sa iyo

Kabiguan, Pagkakasakit
Kahirapan, Pag-tataksil
Kamatayan, Pagdurusa
Kawalan ng Pag-Asa, Pagsapit ng Pangamba

Nandiyan Na Yan
hudyat ng pagtanggap
Sa mga bagay bagay na di na kayang ipaliwanag
Nandiyan Na Yan
pilit ibinubulong
Upang ang kalooban ay lumuwag
at pag-asa ay umusbong

Di ba't nakapagtataka
Buhay ay may hangganan, alam nating lahat ito
Subalit kung manirahan tayo
Para bang walang plano na paghandaan ito

Kaibigan, Pamilya, Kayamanan, Negosyo, Trabaho,
Politika, Koreanovela at iba pa
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Viber at marami
pang iba
Laman ng araw araw nating pag-aabala
Mga bagay bagay na sa atin ay nakapagpapasaya



Ngunit sa araw na di inaasahan
Dumarating ang dagok
Di natin napaghandaan
Tila ba ang mundo ay tumigil bigla
Kulang ang kataga upang mabigyan ng salita
Sa nararamdaman ng matanggap ang balita
Nandiyan Na Yan
Katagang maririnig
sang pag-gising na may iba pang daigdig

Nandiyan na yan
kataga na sa kalooban ay nagbibigay tatag
Sapilitang pag tanggap sa bagay na mahirap
maipaliwanag
Nandiyan na yan – tao'y wala nang magagawa
Kundi isuko ang kalooban sa Diyos na nay awa

Nandiyan na yan
bulong mo sa sarili
Diyos na naka masid ito naman ang sinasabi
Oo nga at Nandiyan na yan subalit di ba at nandito ako?
Sino ba ang mas makapangyarihan? Yan ang tanong ko
I-alay mo sa aking paanan lahat ng hinaing mo
Nandiyan na yan subalit nandito ako
Pagkalinga, Pagdamay, Pagpapa galing, Pagmamahal
Nandiyan na yang lahat sa tabi mo
Mula ng mabuo ka sa sinapupunan ng ina mo
Huwag mong isumpa ang naging kapalaran mo
Magdiwang, magsaya, magtiwala, maging mapayapa
Sapaka't Nandiyan na yan subalit nandito ako.

RESETTING OUR BUTTON AFTER THE AIR

Ali & Wheng Reyes, Francis BCGG



Attending this year's Annual Ignatian retreat was like pressing the reset button for us as a couple, wherein we must shut down everything and stop; then start to review our

spiritual journey with God, check our path and vocations, find meaning and connection.

First, we lifted to God all our fears, anxieties, frustrations, selfish desires, sinfulness, and pains, and let God speak and guide us through the bible readings. We asked God to give us courage, confidence, renewed hope, selflessness, and the spirit of repentance.

On the Point 1 topics (Isaiah 30:20-21), what strikes us is the passage "When you would turn to the left or to the right, a voice shall sound in your ears: This is the way; walk in it." God assured us that when we listen and surrender everything to him, He will never leave us and will always lead us the right path.

I must confess that we worry and think of so many things, especially the welfare of our family, (daily expenses, kids' tuition fees, health, career, etc.). Reflecting on Isaiah 30 really lessened our worries and made us positive in life. We need to start seeking and knowing where our Jerusalem is and recognizing where God wants us to be. And being in the Magis Deo Community is a good example of where God wants us to be.

VENTURING INTO THE DEEP AFTER THE AIR

Anne Naldo, Samaritans BCGG

Despite the many distractions both around me and within me, I am grateful to be able to quiet down and dispose myself to Fr. Willy Samson's online retreat entitled "Embracing Jerusalem".

Having attended face-to-face AIR in the past, doing it online required much more willpower and discipline to get into the retreat rhythm.

The moment Fr. Willy said the words "Tell me Lord what you want me to do for you" in his first session, I began to focus and settle in. It was as if I knew why I was in this retreat.

I have been a stay-at-home mom for the past 25 years. I set aside my career goals to devote all my time to taking care of my family, giving my all, and doing my best to make my husband Lito, and three children have more comfortable and happy lives. But my kids are all grown up now and all of them are starting their own paths in life. Lito and I are beginning to be empty-nesters, and now I find myself with a lot of free time.

In our second session entitled "Let us cross to the other side," I began to dialogue with God, and it seems He is inviting me to venture into new plans and seek new purpose in my life. Nowadays, my usual day is spent attending online masses, doing a little gardening, doing some household chores, and then spending the rest of my day bingeing on Netflix and YouTube. This has been my daily routine, my comfort zone, and my safe place. But I am bothered by feelings that I am wasting my precious time, talents, and treasures for I know I can be more useful and be of service to others. But I am not brave enough to get out of my comfort zone, and in finding something fruitful to do that will help other people beyond those in my safe circle.

So, my prayer is: Lord, You have nudged me into awareness through this AIR. As I discern your message to me, challenge me to go out into the unfamiliar, beyond my world, and to venture into the deep with You leading me. Although I may not be ready yet, although I am unsure, and it is not clear where You are leading me, I know that I am willing because You are with me. Now, I devote my time, talents, and treasures to You my God! Amen.



EMBRACING MY JERUSALEM: MY CROSSOVER

Nette Wong, Chronicles BCGG

Grateful and thankful for this opportunity to be part of this year's AIR. It was a weekend of realization, enlightenment, learning, and moment of solitude to know God better and deepen my personal relationship with Him.

In response to how I embrace my own Jerusalem, my crossover from divine to humanity is a mixture of comfort zone to discomfort zone and sensitivity to insensitivity.

I was struck by what Fr. Willy said about "fear," the "giant" that hinders me from facing my Jerusalem. I'm afraid to leave my comfort zone because of the changes it entails. I feel weak to face the pains, the hurts, and sufferings as I journey on my road to conversion. Indeed, "pinakamahirap kalaban ang sarili," even if I feel it would be for the betterment of the majority. I feel confused and anxious when faced with unfamiliar challenges. I become insensitive to the needs of others believing that self-love is more important to protect myself from harm, abuse, and rejection. There were times I made decisions for the betterment of my loved ones but ended up frustrated when the other party was not cooperative to make amendments



to solve the problem. During those times, I stopped thinking. I spent more time in solitude and beg God for guidance, enlightenment, and courage. I ask God to strengthen my faith in Him and lead me to the right path. I lift everything to Him knowing and believing that He will never forsake me.

God's message to me is to keep my faith burning, to entrust to Him all my worries, my fears, my frustrations, and all my tribulations. God invites me to be more patient, more understanding and more loving. He wants me to focus my energy only on Him whenever I feel troubled, uncertain, weary, and helpless, for He remains faithful to His promise to help me carry my cross.

Thank you, Lord for the opportunity to reconnect with you, to know You better, to hear You, to feel your presence, to follow You, and for giving me unlimited second chances and make you the center of my life.

SPIRITUAL DEEPENING RETREAT: A REFLECTION

Lesley Espiritu-Villanueva, MBNL Class

I was skeptical to join at first. How could I attend a "Spiritual Deepening Retreat" when I am already buried deep in my work, motherhood, and household chores? It seemed impossible to slow my mind down to reflect, as the "mental load" I experience day-in and day-out never ceases.

My husband convinced me to join. I wanted to tell him, "Easy for you to say; you do not have the burden of a woman's mental load." But I did not, as it would defeat the purpose of the retreat which is to have a deeper spiritual longing for God's presence "as an individual, as a couple, and as a community." And so, we confirmed our attendance.

What made me even more skeptical was the format – it was to be held online instead of face-to-face. How were we supposed to concentrate on the talk if we were surrounded by so many distractions? Noise from the traffic outside, constant whining and crying of our children, and many other excuses to zone out. As a mother, my greatest strength, and my weakness, is my ability to multi-task. I can juggle several tasks at the same time – kailangan eh, or else I will never get anything accomplished. But this also means I take for granted the details around me. What Fr. James said at the beginning of the retreat hit me like a brick: "Wala kayong panahon para huminga, pansinin ang paligid at ang mundong ating ginagalawan." Precious moments pass me by because I am too busy to relish these moments. Dinadaan ko lang. So, with guilt and curiosity propelling me, I settled into the next 48 hours of the SDR.

These are my main takeaways from the retreat:

1. **AWARENESS.** "Stop and smell the flowers," is a way of telling us to slow down, relax, and learn to appreciate the world around us. I learned that to truly appreciate God's message, one needs to be aware of one's surroundings. One of Father James' 5 P's is "Presence of God." Be AWARE of it and acknowledge it.



2. **OPPORTUNITY IS USELESS WITHOUT PREPARATION.** This retreat is an opportunity, a blessing. But you will not be able to take full hold of it if your heart, mind, and soul are not prepared. I was surprised to realize I still needed to practice how to pray properly, even after years of studying in a Catholic school. I had my own "style" of praying, but there is always room for improvement, even with faith.

3. **GOD IS MORE THAN A PARENT; HE IS OUR FRIEND.** It is rare and unique to be friends with your parents. Especially with our generation, we were brought up to revere our parents, to respect them as authorities, and to love them unconditionally. To be friends with someone requires a certain level of comfort to be yourself. With our parents, it is not always easy to bring out our true selves – it's possible, but often not ideal due to preconceived expectations from each other. We revere and respect God as our Father, and at the same time, He is also someone we can show our true selves to – He sees who we are and who we can be.

Once my AWARENESS was turned on, and I PREPARED myself for prayer, I slowly discovered the kind of relationship I have with God. Fr. James kept us on our toes with questions that helped us reflect and discern. How does God love me? Who is God for me? This was the key to a successful processing of thoughts and prayers.

I started with skepticism and a lot of noise in my head, but I ended the weekend with a realization that calmed my whole self – in everything I see, hear, and do, DWELLS GOD. If there is awareness of His love and presence, the external and internal noise will fade away, and He will make Himself heard.

From Fr. Arnel's beautiful poem:

Behind our restless search for greater meaning
And answers to our deepest questioning
Beneath relentless faith, boundless hope,
surrendering love.
...DWELLS GOD.

CHRISTMAS GIFT-GIVING FOR OLANDES SUYUAN

Philip & Malu Panlilio, Mustard Seed BCGG



The annual Magis Christmas gift-giving remains and continues to share Magis Deo's generous spirit with Olandes Suyuan even during the pandemic. Although there was no Christmas party since 2020 due to the pandemic, Magis Deo sustained its Christmas gift-giving in 2020, 2021, and now 2022.

Magis Deo brought Christmas cheer to Suyuan graduates from Olandes, Marikina last 10 December 2022. Eighty families received Christmas bags containing two bath towels, spaghetti set, luncheon meat, corned beef, vienna sausage, cookies, cheese, and rice. Suyuan leaders received glass pitchers as additional gift. Couples who actively participated in the parish formation activities got blankets as additional gift. They were all happy and thankful to Magis Deo.

Magis Deo outreach funding for the Christmas gift-giving was augmented by donations from Mustard Seed BCGG, Chronicles BCGG, and Rafa & Cynthia Rodriguez from ME 129. God bless your generosity.



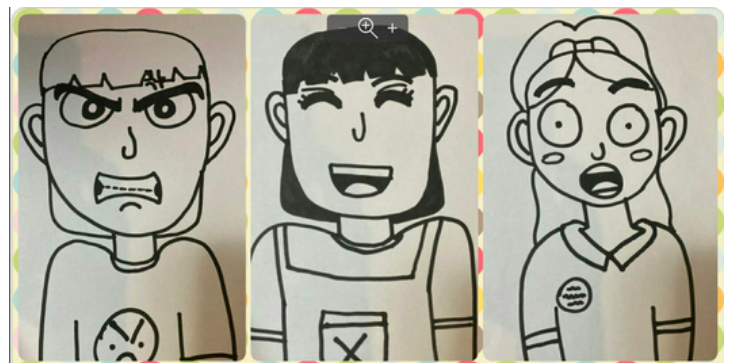


EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Karen Madrid, John BCGG
Arlyn Tabilog, James, Brother of John BCGG



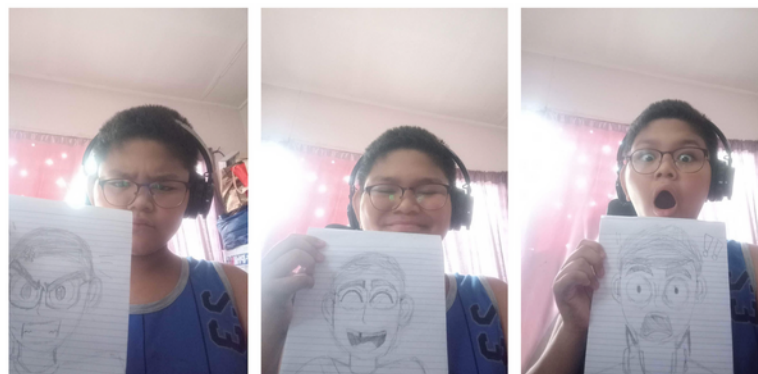
Yhana, daughter of Duke & Vie Remogat of Chronicles BCGG. She was so happy in doing the different facial expressions with the Magis Deo kids. Her favorite drawing was a happy face. After that she kept on sketching on her drawing pad.



Fatima, daughter of Ronald & Joan Ong, Prodigal 102 BCGG



Ethan, son of Michael & Maricar Cerrero, ME 130



Mucho: "It was so much fun drawing with Teacher Precious and new friends." Mucho (friend of Magis), son of Darren & Pia Rada,



Nacho, son of Ian & Elaine Serranilla, Matthew BCGG



MAGIS DEO CARES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Mennen & Elyn Aracid, Overseers: Outreach Ministry / Easter BCGG

Lingap Kalikasan is one of the four focus areas of the Outreach Ministry this year. The other three are Lingap Karunungan, Lingap Kabuhayan, and Lingap Kabanalan.

Lingap Kalikasan is an initiative to raise environmental awareness and address the growing concern about pollution, climate change, and our natural resources.

Together with the Magis Deo Youth Ministry, the Outreach Ministry organized an exposure trip to the Green Antz Builders in Plaridel, Bulacan on October 1, 2022.



Green Antz (GA) is a circular economy and innovation group that aims to minimize the amount of waste generated, increase the amount of materials we reuse, reduce and recycle, and build engaged communities for us and future generations. It accomplishes these by upscaling the various waste streams into construction materials, infrastructure, and agricultural solutions. GA processes almost all types of plastic, as well as organic, inorganic, construction, industrial, and other types of wastes. They have developed over 20 types of proprietary solutions, which include bricks, pavers, pre-casts, plastic-infused roads, and many more.

KAPIT-BISIG para sa KALIKASAN at KABUHAYAN!

The Outreach Ministry and the Youth Ministry joined hands to raise awareness on how to change pollution into an eco-friendly solution. Fifteen Magis Deo members and 9 members of the Youth Ministry went on an exposure trip to the Green Antz Builders (Plastic Recycling and Eco Hub) in Plaridel, Bulacan on October 1, 2022.

They visited the PLASTIC RECYCLING PLANT where plastic waste materials are segregated, cleaned, and shredded to be reused as construction materials, and infrastructure and agricultural solutions to support a Circular Economy.



In the Green Antz Eco Hub, the shredded laminates are mixed with cement, sand, additives, water, and gravel to produce eco bricks, eco pavers, and other products that optimize the life cycle of plastics.



OUTREACH MINISTRY



For the final activity, the participants were given an opportunity to express their creativity by producing an artwork using recycled materials.



The Outreach Ministry and the Youth Ministry would like to thank everyone who joined and participated in our Exposure Trip.

Special thanks to Paul Puthenpurekal (Easter BCGG) and his team at Green Antz Builders for making this event possible; to Leony & Mia Parada (Mustard Seed BCGG) for organizing our breakfast and lunch and allowing us to use their place for the meals and art activity; and to Master Artist Gilbert Calderon Angeles for sharing his expertise in arts, and for inspiring people to reuse, recycle, and do something creative with single-use plastics.



MAGIS DEO FAMILY DAY 2022

Ojay & Yang Reantaso, CSM Head / Samaritans BCGG

After virtually celebrating Family Day and CHRISTmas for two consecutive years because of the pandemic, it was about time to experience it with our Magis companions F2F: Face to Face, Family to Family. Held last Sunday, December 4 at the Acropolis Clubhouse in Quezon City, more than 150 members, including the Magis Youth, graced this special occasion.



We started with the Holy Eucharist where our dear Spiritual Director, Fr. James Gascon, reminded us that we are all called to be a prophet – someone who testifies not for himself but for who he stands for, someone who witnesses not by words but by doing what we are supposed to do, and someone who does not focus on himself but on other people's attention to the Messiah.

The celebration's highlights were the Pastoral Council turnover, Christmas carols by the Magis Chorale, dance and song numbers by the Magis Youth, a raffle draw where everyone won a prize, games, and exciting prizes!

But what most dominated the event that filled the venue's atmosphere were the laughter, warm embraces and a multitude of stories shared with each other.

Thank you to all who made this event so memorable and meaningful. Until our next Family Day!



FAMILY DAY!



MAY WE ALL HAVE A JOYOUS CHRISTMAS AND A BLESSED NEW YEAR!

Chacho Angeles, Thessalonians BCGG

FAITH

Faith comes as a mystery, when spoken as the *Credo* of religion, those principles hidden from my mind's logic and usual training, which I just have to accept. Yet lately has come enlightenment with very basic simplicity that is grounded in daily personal living. I believe that the car will start and smoothly operate since I have it maintained regularly; I trust I will not meet an accident since traffic rules are laid down and I follow them, believing that others will follow them too; I use appliances as a matter of course, and I use these properly, believing that they will operate as designed; I believe there will be daily provision of utilities: communications, water, electricity so long as I pay my bills; I believe that relationships with others will be as I maintain them, trusting in their good will; I believe the sun will rise every morning and set in the evening, that there will hot weather, then rains, then cool weather, at regular times as designed in the firmaments; a faith in the designs from the heavens, that includes the cycles of sadness and joy, pain and comfort, anxiety and peace, and most of all, in the divine love and care intertwined in all these. Helpfully I now realize that I can grow to know what faith is, that it makes living my daily life easier since there is regularity and consistency, and makes me focus on some other more complicated and important things such as how to make my relationships with God and with others more loving. I believe in the Father almighty, the designer and creator of all there is, who planned Christmas and Easter as the beginning and end of our salvation; in life and death; and, after living as Jesus teaches, in the eternity that comes in His loving embrace.



DARKNESS AND LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS

There is darkness...

In the infinitesimal nothingness of the beginning, that exploded and burst outward, and brought forth new worlds;
In the soft, warm and fluid darkness of the womb that nurtures, prepares and brings forth new life;
In the humid and rich darkness of the soil wherein seeds germinate and grow;
In the rolling and turbulent dark clouds of typhoons, spinning at tremendous speeds, saturated with water, destroying and drowning all in its path;
In the inner recesses of our bodies, the Covid virus thrive, grow, devastating their hosts, causing suffering or death;
In the depths of hearts that are shut in by the darkness of selfishness, greed, hatred and prejudice.

But there is light...

In the numerous galaxies and stars that shine in all their glory as they light up the dark nothingness;
In the brightness of the smile and glowing face of This new born little bundle of joy;
In the verdant brightness of the plants and the trees that sprout up from tiny seeds, and the vibrant colors of the blossoms that brighten the land;
In the sun that shines after the dark clouds move past;
In the miracle of the vaccines and medicines developed to help our bodies fight the virus;
In the kindness of people who daily help and serve, who go out of their way to provide relief to those afflicted by the pandemic and natural disasters, the emergency and medical frontliners, the local, police officials maintaining peace and order, and those who live quiet, simple, loving lives in the spirit of community, that by their example, those who are lost may find their way to God.

There is light, there is darkness, coming together, or one after the other.

As the light of Bethlehem's Star, God's grace, the Holy Spirit guided the wise men and brought hope of salvation, the light of God's love shines brightest and overpowers the darkness, gives us wisdom and courage, and illumines our path that leads us to God and life eternal with Him.



MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD

Carlos Pizarro, Corinthians BCGG

The Advent season makes us look forward to the events leading to the birth of Jesus the Savior of all mankind. It is a time of preparation as we enter a time in the Christian calendar when we focus our faith on him who is the main reason for the season.

When Mary heard the message of the angel Gabriel that she has found favor with God, would get pregnant, and bear in her womb the Son of God, she got very confused, fearful even. She was betrothed to Joseph, and to be found pregnant before their wedding would be a great shame for her. But having been assured that this is part of God's plan, she humbly accepted and said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38, ESV). Soon after, she visited her cousin Elizabeth who also miraculously conceived 6 months earlier. Elizabeth exclaimed at how fortunate she was to be visited by the mother of her Lord, and that Mary is so blessed for believing that what the Lord said to her would be fulfilled. In response, Mary burst into a song of praise that we have come to know as the Magnificat. We find this recorded in Luke 1:46-55.

And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me
blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their
hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever



We probably are familiar with the word Magnificat. It is the Greek equivalent of the word "magnify" in the phrase "My soul magnifies the Lord." Mary praises, extols, and glorifies the Lord for who he is to her. We can see that Mary's focus is not on herself even though she knows that she is indeed a favored one. She also knows that her being favored was out of God's goodness and mercy, and not for anything else she has done. She turns focus away from herself and instead magnifies the Lord who is the great one. Her spirit within her exudes joy because the Savior that she is carrying is her savior.

Mary then enumerates the wonderful attributes of God. Her song declares that God never ignores those who are of the humble state, those who have a lower status in life. We can say that Mary was not particularly important. The town she grew up in, Nazareth, did not exactly have a good reputation. We can remember the incident when Philip wanted Nathaniel to meet Jesus, Nathaniel asked, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

Yet God chose a simple woman who comes from an obscure place to be his instrument to carry forth his will. What is significant is Mary's humility in submitting herself as God's servant and knowing that her worth lies in him alone. Mary acknowledges that she will be called blessed by people throughout generations and this is primarily true because God extends his favor to her. She owes all to the holy and mighty God who made possible her miraculous virgin conception.

Though God is holy and powerful, he is also full of mercy. He understands the failings and limitations of people, and he extends his great compassion and understanding to those who fear him throughout generations. To fear is to stand in awe and respect for God's holiness. We are recipients of God's generous mercy and compassion.

Mary also highlights how God intervenes in the affairs of men by confusing the thoughts and the evil plans of the proud. These are those who put their trust in themselves and their intelligence. Having no fear of God, they take advantage of those who are weak. God, however, stands as the defender of the humble. He holds ultimate power and authority over rulers and kings. He can easily strip the arrogant rulers of their powers.

Mary's song magnifies God as the one who will satisfy the longings of those who hunger for righteousness and justice to prevail. We must remember that the Jews were under the rule of the Roman Empire during this time. Jews have been longing for the coming of the Messiah to establish his kingdom on earth and vanquish the occupying forces. More importantly, God intends to fill us with good things which means experiencing his good intentions for us, and his blessings of life that come from our relationship with the Savior. Indeed, God promised Abraham that all nations will be blessed through his offspring. This prophesied offspring is no other than Jesus himself. This Savior will deliver the nations from being captives of sin and evil, hence saving us, so we experience the abundant and genuine life that only he can offer. That's the whole point of the song and Mary understood that God did it all.

What then was required of Mary when God chose her? Only that she believes, that she trusts that God is faithful and trustworthy. Her conviction to say, "be it done to me according to your word" and "I am the Lord's servant," is borne out of total trust that God knows what he is doing in and through her even if she doesn't. Her total obedience comes out of that trust.



Here is something for us to consider in this time and age more than two thousand years after Mary exclaimed her Magnificat: this God of Mary, this Savior of Mary, is also our God and our Savior today. As this God became so real to Mary, revealing himself to her in such a personal and unmistakable way, so can he be so real and personal to us today too. Mary's example of living her life in faith is something we all can learn from. And like her, we can all live our lives in complete surrender to God.

Mary burst into joyful praise of God. So should we too by magnifying who God is in our personal lives, in our community celebrations and worship. She lived her life in complete trust in God as her Savior. So should we live our lives too. She made it clear that our salvation is purely through the initiative and act of the Almighty God in Jesus Christ. So should our words and actions point others to God also.

In the final analysis, we must live our lives in Magnificat – magnifying God, every day through all circumstances of our lives, whether we understand it or not. We truly magnify our Lord Jesus Christ when we live in full trust and faith in him. That's all he asks of us. That's all we can ask from him for he is the one who enables us to have and live in that faith. When we do that, we can be more than confident that God will surely glorify and magnify himself in and through all of us. Thank God for who he is, and for who we are in him!

WHAT WILL CHRISTMAS OF 2022 BE LIKE?

Ruby Pizarro, Corinthians BCGG

For more than 4 months now, I have been agonizing over the medical condition of my sister. She has a very aggressive type of cancer. This is a recurrence from 2 years ago. She is married to a good man, and they have a 20-year-old daughter. They enjoy a happy and comfortable family life. And just like that, everything changed.

I have been spending time with her at the hospital, taking care of their needs and doing my best to make things easy for them. Our entire family is rallying for her. There is an abundant supply of love and support. But it has been very difficult. I am always anxious and on edge. We receive bad news upon bad news. We experience a roller coaster of emotions from gratitude to small bits of good news to despair over devastating news. Roadblocks come up that derail the next level of treatment. Not to mention the exorbitant hospital and doctors' fees. I can only utter, "O, my loving and all-powerful God, have mercy!"

Prayer is now my consolation. I have been talking to God every waking hour, even at 2 AM when I can't go back to sleep after a trip to the bathroom. I believe in the power of prayer. I have been asking friends, relatives, and random people that God sends my way to pray for my sister. God delights in hearing from His children. It is not wrong to ask God for anything... who else can we turn to when we feel helpless and hopeless? I have been reading healing prayers and taking them to heart, saying them aloud and making them my own. I gained insights while reading and praying.

Praying makes our relationship with God more intimate. I pray to God as if I were talking to my Father. Praying for another refines us. According to James 5:16, "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (ESV). As the intercessor, I have to purify myself to be able to have the confidence to ask for God's favor. I have cut my old ways that are not pleasing to God. It is my prayer that my sister will be healed. But I learned that healing is not just physical. Even if the sick person does not get well, healing of the soul is more important. Every day I pray to God to spare my sister. Even Jesus asked for God's intervention. He said, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." (Matt 26:39). Accepting God's will that is not aligned with what I am praying for is difficult. There are days when I am overcome with anxiety, then I pray for peace. There are days when I feel unable to pray and I just keep saying this encouragement that I came across on Facebook: "Keep praying. Don't quit. Miracles happen every day so never stop believing. God can change things very quickly in your life."

I don't question God about what is happening to my sister. I am not even angry. But I have come to the point where I told God

"nagtatampo na ako" for letting her suffer so much. Seeing her propped on the hospital bed sometimes in pain, crying and not looking like her old self, makes me very emotional. I started to dread each visit because I don't know what awaits me. One moment she's up, the next, down. I die a thousand deaths whenever my phone rings. More often than not, I hear bad news on the other end of the line.

I attended the recent AIR to escape from the situation for a while, to recharge and spend "me" time with God. Little did I know that I was jumping into the frying pan. I was forced to face my Jerusalem, to embrace it and start the journey of crossing over. For me, it was a very personal and meaningful retreat. But at the end of the last day, my answer was, "I am not yet ready, Lord. Help me."

What will Christmas of 2022 be like? Our last family Christmas gathering in 2019 was spent in my sister's house. We enjoyed the food, games, prizes, and our togetherness as a family. My sister and her husband are very generous. When they are not home, they send money to me to shop for our Christmas gifts. We look forward to their coming home for vacation especially at Christmas time. We remember the blessings that are now side by side with suffering. Being a follower of Jesus Christ does not guarantee us a life exempt from suffering. We just have to trust in God's purpose in the grand scheme of things. So, I am wondering... what will Christmas be like this year? Will it be festive or somber? Will it be with my sister being seriously ill or miraculously healed by God's grace? Only God knows.

"...I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise – in God I trust..." (Psalm 56:3). I believe that faith in our Lord will see us through. Our hope is anchored in our loving God. As my brother-in-law said, "Itekep tayo lawas so pananisia tayod Dios." (Always put our faith in God. – Pangasinan)



TALENTS, C/O STEWARDSHIP

Boy dela Peña, Exodus BCGG

Genetics shape who we are, but more significantly, by what we experience in our family. We will soon celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, and we can draw inspiration from them. From the little written in Scripture, we see that the Holy Family, aside from obeying God's wishes and words, lived following certain fundamentals of life: hard and honest work, simple living within means, and love and respect for each other.

My family has been a blessing. It is where I learned much of what and how it is to be a good son, brother, father, neighbor, co-worker, and citizen without too many words, but from what I saw by their example. I guess government employees at that time – my father worked as a public servant, a postmaster – were close to poverty line income, so we learned how to live within our means. We were, however, fortunate to earn better grades in school than our classmates, and among us siblings, we knew we had to make good use of our talents not only for our good but also for the good of others.

I started schooling early, so I finished early. After earning my BS in Chemical Engineering at 19, I thought I should do what my batch-mates were doing – applying for the best-paying job. In the late 60s, maybe even now, the best-paying jobs were with the oil companies, so I followed that track. But something was telling me that it was probably not the best way to use what I learned, what talents I have.

God has a way of pointing to us what His plans are for us. And we learn this through prayer – prayer for discernment – to make the best decisions for ourselves. Graduating from college was the point in my life when I had to do an honest self-assessment. I then felt I would be happier by serving others. One must know what they value most. Among choices like becoming rich and powerful or popular, there is also that choice of feeling fulfilled that you have contributed by serving others.

So at 23, I took a different track. My Alma Mater invited me to teach while finishing my Master's Degree. That is how I discerned where I could best use my talents and skills and at the same time feel



happy and fulfilled. I taught at the University of the Philippines (UP) College of Engineering for 43 years. Between those years, I was seconded as a public servant to the Department of Science and Technology.

I saw the hand of God in all these. I have never applied for a job after my first employment in an oil company. They would call for me, thereafter, and when I knew there was a purpose for me, I went. God uses people as conduits to tell us what He plans for us. Call it faith or trust.



I was called to be a public servant other than an engineering teacher through the Department of Science and Technology, later upgraded as a full Cabinet department known as DOST. I served the government intermittently because I was only on secondment from the University of the Philippines: for two years under President Ferdinand Marcos, two years under President Cory Aquino, ten years under President Gloria Arroyo, and four years under President Benigno Aquino III. I retired from government service when I reached 65 in 2014.

In 2016, when Rodrigo Duterte became President, my name was suggested by a friend, who I worked for during our early UP days, to be appointed as Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology. Again, I had to discern what God's plan was. I consulted my family. My wife told me not to accept any more government work. But my children said to take it if I thought I had the ability. Again, the Lord clearly showed his path for me.



The HUMILITY needed by servant leaders is reflected in

Luke 14:11 – “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

and

Matthew 23: 11-12 – “the greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

I have to use whatever talents I receive in the service of others. I adopted the tagline “Science for the People” when I accepted the job as Secretary. It means we need to use science and technology to pursue inclusive and sustainable development – reduce inequality in all areas at all levels, among regions, provinces, municipalities, communities, and families. The DOST programs and resources had to be carefully redirected and allocated to achieve our objective of serving the people. It was not difficult to get the support of people within our organization.

Interestingly, the management philosophy we followed is consistent with teachings from Scripture.

Proper work and management delegation is inspired by

Mark 6:7 – “He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.”

We learn participative decision-making in

Matthew 18:19 – “Truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my father in heaven.”

Like the lessons learned from family, we can best know the essential things to remember and practice in a government agency or organization through the examples shown by servant leaders.

It is relevant to mention that there are many good and able people in our midst who could be exemplary servant leaders in the public sector. However, many of them tend to shy away from that call. I pray that they will choose to share their talents and kindness in serving the public. I know that it entails a lot of sacrifices, but it is also both rewarding and gratifying.



DO YOU LOVE ME?

Nina Vinluan, Matthew BCGG

"Do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Jn 21:15

During contemplation I answered, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you." But do I really understand what it means to love Jesus? I am truly thankful that I was given a chance to show my love to God.

Last January 25, 2022, we lay to rest our aunt Priscila de los Santos, Tita Pising, or Champi. She was born April 8, 1929 and lived a full life to the very ripe age of 92 years. She passed away on January 17, 2022.

Tita Pising is the 6th of 11 children of our grandparents, Eleuterio and Rosario de los Santos. She is the older sister of my mother, who also stays with us. Being single, together with some of her siblings Tita Pising helped her parents and other siblings financially, sent some of my cousins to school, and took care of some of her grandnieces and grandnephews when they were babies.

Tita Pising did not live a perfect life; she hurt very deeply some relatives with choices she made. I hope and pray my relatives have forgiven her; definitely God has forgiven her.

Do you know why I feel God has forgiven her? Because God brought Tita Pising to our family. When we took her 10 years ago to live with us, she was sickly, had lost a lot of weight and did not have any appetite. I thought at the age of 82, she would last just a few months, but she lived for another 10 years, and she never got sick while she was living with us. She only had her usual cough that she never complained about. When we hear her cough and ask her, "May ubo ka ba, Champi? She will answer "Wala."



Family photo taken Christmas 2021.



She was just here at home, watching her favorite TV programs – laughing out loud and shouting "KAHON!" while munching away her snacks. Oh yes, she loves to eat snacks: biscuits, peanuts, and her favorite, Otap. We would see her at night opening the cabinets to look for snacks, so we always keep her snacks handy.



Just like she was at home, God took her very quietly, very peacefully, very quickly. Up to January 16, at 92 years, she was doing well – eating on her own, taking a bath on her own. Her caregiver would just prepare her clothes and chair in the bathroom and check on her.



Last photo of Champi taken Dec. 25, 2021

God loved Tita Pising so much that she died with her family beside her, in her bedroom, and not alone in a hospital as some experienced during the pandemic.

God loved me so much that Tita Pising tested negative for Covid. I would have felt so guilty if she had died of Covid as I would have been sure I gave her the virus since I tested Covid positive last Jan. 10.

In my prayer I always say, "I love You, Lord Jesus." Now God gave me the opportunity to show my love for Him when we brought Tita Pising to our family. Each of us showed our love for Tita Pising through the simple acts of holding her hand while she walked, giving her favorite Otap and snacks, and making her feel safe until the day she passed away. It took a village to take care of her – my husband Mon, my sons Jet, Jao, Jigs and Jom, my siblings, brothers-in-law, nephews, and nieces.

But most of all, thank You, Lord, for giving us the opportunity to show our love for You by taking care of Tita Pising, your daughter, your beloved.

Lito Naldo, Samaritans BCGG

As I reflect on the season of Advent, I asked God what His message is to me.

Christmas to me is about homecomings and in most of these homecomings, there is the renewal of relationships. Thus, I heard God telling me, "Advent is a time of reflecting on your relationships with others, especially the most intimate relationships you have with your wife Anne, and your children Miggy, Michelle, and Manuel. How can you make these relationships better this Christmas and in the coming new year?"

Advent 2021

Advent last year was tough for us as a family, particularly when Anne and Michelle had to fly to Los Angeles early in November. Around that time too Miggy moved out of our house to live with his girlfriend Geby. It was the first time during the pandemic that the five of us were separated from each other. Advent season last year was such a lonely one for me.

Fortunately, a couple of weeks before Christmas, Manuel and I eventually flew to L.A. to join Anne and Michelle. Although I was so stressed dealing with the strict travel protocols at that time, I was looking forward to a happy reunion with Anne and Michelle. I was, however, greeted by the most stressful environment of all: the low temperature in Southern California at that time of the year. My comfort zone is 23 to 25 degrees Celsius... imagine how I felt upon arriving in L.A. when the temperature was 8 degrees Celsius. It was no fun for me, and the excitement and joy of seeing my loved ones again quickly turned into physical pain and distress.

We stayed with Anne's sister Tess, who was so gracious and generous to us. But no matter how Tess and her family made their home as comfortable for us as possible, I was never comfortable as I could not adapt to the low temperature, and I felt uneasy staying at someone else's house. I am not used to having other people living with me 24/7, especially coming from the lockdowns when I, Anne and our kids were just at our home in Dumaguete for more than a year. I really felt safe and secure staying at our own home during the pandemic. Thus, amidst all this stress, I could not connect and bond with Anne, Michelle, and Manuel during our stay in L.A. I was not able to prepare myself and my intimate relationships in time for Christmas last year.



Advent 2022

This year, however, is much better. First, we are back at our humble home in Dumaguete, and I am back teaching face-to-face classes at Silliman University. I am back at my comfortable temperature, my own familiar and comfortable house, and I am back on campus, where I feel productive and useful. In school, I can nurture fruitful relationships with my colleagues and students. This Advent, I could hear God say to me, "Cherish the relationships you have at your workplace... these relationships help fulfill My work of providing genuine Christian education to young people."

Second, our son Miggy has already returned to our home in Dumaguete. Although he brought Geby with him, I still welcome his return. His presence at home is always an opportunity for bonding and reconnecting with each other. We may disagree on many things, but each time we talk, eat, or watch TV together, I am thankful and grateful. This Advent I could hear God say to me, "Your relationship with each of your children is a gift that can easily be taken away by circumstances beyond your control. No matter your differences with your children, give them mercy and love, the way I gave you My mercy and love when I gave you My one and only Son on Christmas Day."

Third, Anne and I can now move freely to visit friends and relatives, unlike last year. We are now able to enjoy the fellowship of people who have been away from us for more than two years. This Advent, I could hear God say to me, "Your relationships with friends and relatives are as precious as your life, which I have preserved during the pandemic. Showing kindness and goodness to every living creature you meet each day is the only way you can give thanks to Me for keeping you alive and well, when so many have died and have suffered these past two years. The relationships you keep well is your gift to Me this coming Christmas."

Thank you, Lord... may You find the relationships I keep a worthy gift. Amen.