

Magis

Formation for Mission

Stewardship
Simplicity
Sharing
Service

Official Publication of the
Magis Deo Community
December 2023 Issue

A Message from Our Spiritual Director

The coming year ushers us to a new challenge. A challenge we take as individuals, as families, as BCGGs, and a community in the Spirit.

Year End 2023 Message

...yes Magis Deo did survive 2023 and we made a hell of a show for it... and we now look forward to a new year, our hearts overflowing with community spirit

Our God's call to mission

We would like to highlight that our mission in Magis is to be a Shepherd, a Shepherd for others

Mirakulo BCGG and Our Hopes for 2024

We believe that our spiritual growth, individually and as a couple, are miracles towards our perseverance in cultivating our relationship with God, with our spouse

Magis TLC - A Blessing for Couples

A reachout to troubled couples and offering counseling for free! TLC! Total Listening Companions

TLC is Truly Life Changing

After sharing my pain with my TLC Counselor, my burden became lighter

Gratitude and Bandages

Rhea Gaddi, Prodigal 102 BCGG



Exploring the possible theme and cover design for the yearend issue of the newsletter, I reviewed last year's (2022) New Year's Eve messages in my social media feeds. "Gratitude" was one of the most popular words and themes that appeared. Even the images and emojis related to gratitude show images of a heart, hands in prayer, or people hugging. Feelings of gratitude can be expected as one reflects on the past year and looks at all experiences, both good and bad, with a grateful heart, perhaps because one remains to be loved by family and friends, to have a shelter or home, a job or financial security, or simply, to be alive.

When I typed "gratitude" in Google, one of the images that caught my attention was that of a person with hands placed over their heart, but with two versions – one where the person's face was smiling with open eyes; the other with eyes closed, but still smiling while looking up. A few weeks ago, my husband Jojo and I were taking a stroll and I asked him to do this gratitude pose. I asked him to put his hands on his chest, and he did. I forgot that his right hand was recently operated on and still had bandages when he did the gratitude pose. It was not the perfect shot I expected, but looking at the photo, a healthy hand and an injured hand placed together over a grateful heart was an unexpected and imperfectly perfect image.

It reminded me that gratitude is not only being thankful for the good and tangible things and events we received the past year, but also for the challenges, the brokenness, and the difficult times we experienced. These were moments when we could experience God's love on a deeper level. He continued to be with us, love us, and keep us whole. In her article Ignatian Gratitude: Encounter and Response, Rebecca Ruiz describes gratitude as a response to our encounter with God. She describes how St. Ignatius responded to God's generosity with radical gratitude, returning and offering everything he is to God.

Suscipe

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.

Article Reference: <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-gratitude-encounter-and-response/>

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A Message from Our Spiritual Director

My dear Magis Community,

We are about to end another year of grace. 2023 was most blessed for us as a community. We prayed together by reaching out to each other in the Spirit of Love; we also reached out to others in our humble service and outreach programs; we celebrated and enjoyed each other's physical presence after years of covid scare; and finally, we grew together as a community of faith, hope, and love. As the year ends, we cannot but be grateful. Gratitude is our response because everything we received was given as gifts. We were all receivers of graces and partakers of talents, treasures, and time. In all these Lord, thank you. For all our members who have shared what they have, thank you. And most of all, to our Shepherds in the Pastoral Council, maraming salamat. You have raised the bar of self-service and sharing so high that has been a source of great edification. Your self-offering is equally a challenge for us to do the same, and even More, MAGIS.

As we often say, every ending is a beginning. Indeed. As we say goodbye to 2023, we welcome 2024 with the same faith, hope, and charity. The coming year ushers us to a new challenge. A challenge we take as individuals, as families, as BCGGs, and a community in the Spirit. Our challenge is to live further our commitment to the 4 S's: Simplicity, Sharing, Service, and Stewardship. These are not simple words nor are they just slogans. Rather, they embody the gospel values of our Lord who has called us to greater, to Magis, to much more for God, a commitment we place ourselves into at every beginning of the year.



We face this new year with courage and faith, with hope and joy because we are familiar with the Spirit. We have with us couple power as well as spiritual power to discern, to walk our talk, to tread the path without fear or reservation. However, the gospel of Christ is never kept to us alone. Rather, they must be shared, spread, proclaimed by our very being and living. And this being is our challenge towards Shepherding, our living as caregivers. We are not to remain as faithful sheep, the flock of the Lord. Rather, we must be shepherds like the Good Shepherd himself. The fulfillment of our Christian vocation lies in us being shepherds, not merely sheep. Remember the apostles of Christ who were first called to follow the Shepherd? When Christ returned to his Father, they all became shepherds of Christian communities all over the world. Our lives are from sheep to shepherds, the vocation to which we are all called.

So, in the threshold of a new year, I promise you, my prayers. And I accompany you with my blessings. May the good Lord be your path, your guide, your light and inspiration as we continue to do More for God.

Year End 2023 Message

Winston Cruz, Chaircouple / Matthew BCGG

HERE WE ARE IN DECEMBER, and Mae and I find ourselves realizing we are on our final days of our 2023 Chaircouple term – and yet my mind is occupied by the shrill sounds of our recent Magis Night, with “Dancing Queen” still ringing in my ears. What a fitting celebratory end to our year of outreach, in the company of our Magis Deo community...

But haven't our ears been ringing all throughout the year? We launched the Reaching Out thrust as a way of moving the community forward – to go beyond ourselves, to go beyond the BCGG, to go beyond the community. We learned that outreach can happen in its simplest forms: breaking bread in ComCel with a new member or a visiting elder, or sharing experiences in a cross-BCGG interface (tree planting as interface activity – can you beat that?). But we have also seen how reaching out can be infectious and even more fulfilling as a group! We have seen more than 80% of our BCGGs engage in group outreach – a record 6 Suyuans with multiple BCGGs in support, Easter BCGG doing an outreach run in PGH for street children and hospital watchers, even the Choir coming together to support the ordination for Guanellian priests of the Servants of Charity. And officially as a community, we also show we can come together as one to lend a hand to those in need. Our multi-BCGG Grand Outreach to Bilibid's Lenten and Advent Recollection events, our Magis for donating to Leni's Angat Buhay (given during our 35th Year Anniversary event) ... why, even our Magis Youth joined the fun in their outreach event for the scholars of the PDLs (Persons Deprived of Liberty).



In March, I wrote about how outreach doesn't need a target number. We just want, in Fr. James' words, a conversion of consciousness – that we are here to go beyond ourselves and be more for others. To be ready to serve and to help. And I'm happy to say that Magis Deo responded with a bang that has kept my ears ringing for days! Our love offerings have reached record highs with our community saying YES! Our Golf Event generated funds that can be disbursed for our outreach activities beyond 2023! Thank you to the community, to each of our members, for affirming this call to reach out!

We of course have other missions that have as much importance as reaching out, and may I thank the ministries quickly:

Praxis – for guiding our BCGGs in engaging with community through our FORMICOM where majority of the BCGGs consistently meet most of our recommended BCGG goals,



Formation – for providing well-attended Tending the Sheep sessions (of course provided by our dear Spiritual Director, Fr. James), Prayer workshops and retreats,

Youth – for truly brilliant and well-organized youth events that had record high youth attendance; this ministry is notable for always delivering – and delivering with high impact (witness the Wellness event, the ComCel youth events and the outreach collaboration for the PDL scholars),

CSM – for being so reliable and innovative for our regular gatherings – they have standardized our ComCel operations for efficiency, brainstorm our monthly topics and are always on their game 24 hours of the day!



ME Ministry – for keeping our ME Weekends operating like clockwork, our Marriage Boosters always refreshing, and tending to the reunion journey for our incoming new members.

Finance – for a successful Golf event, housekeeping of our financials and office books.

There is one more goal that I am often asked about – growth! And here is one reason to cheer this holiday season – we are growing! 3 new BCGGs this year is probably something of a record. Welcome Luke, Mirakulo and Bartimeaus BCGGs.

And so, as my ears bring me back to that dance floor with new Luke BCGG member Weng Reyes belting "I Will Survive," I reflect and say...yes Magis Deo did survive 2023 and we made a hell of a show for it... and we now look forward to a new year, our hearts overflowing with community spirit... and ready once again to REACH OUT!

Our God's call to mission

Levy & Roxanne Espiritu, 2024 Chaircouple / Transfiguration BCGG

The journey of faith is a gift of a loving God who takes the first step and waits patiently, silently, almost shyly, for the human response.

– "Something to think and pray about," Sacred Space, October 2022

We all have been gifted with faith and an opportunity to enhance and deepen this personal relationship with God through Magis Deo. All it takes is for us to respond to God's call to mission and take it to the next level.

At an *Annual Ignatian Retreat* we were reminded to "embrace our Jerusalem," which means getting out of our comfort zones to get to the other side and accept Jesus' call to mission. This needed an interior conversion to take a leap of faith and accept God's mission for us.

We recently celebrated the 35th anniversary of Magis Deo; we are grateful and so blessed to have a community we can draw a lot of spiritual nourishment from. The Magis Deo community founded by the late Fr. Ruben Tanseco, SJ, has thrived over the years because of the selfless dedication and commitment of the Servant Leaders before us. We have been recipients of the graces from Magis Deo because there were many who shared their time, talents, and treasures in bringing Magis Deo to where it is now.

We have experienced how Magis Deo has reached out and given hope to troubled marriages and strengthened marital bonds. Through formation programs, particularly through the Marriage Booster programs introduced during the Covid period, Magis Deo brought Christ's love, hope, and joy to many homes.



Thus, it is just right and proper for us to do our share in sustaining the mission and vision of Magis Deo so others can continue to benefit from the graces our beloved community provides and shares with them. Witnessing our Servant Leaders' unwavering commitment to serve others and help spread God's gospel of love and hope motivates us to lead the community forward.

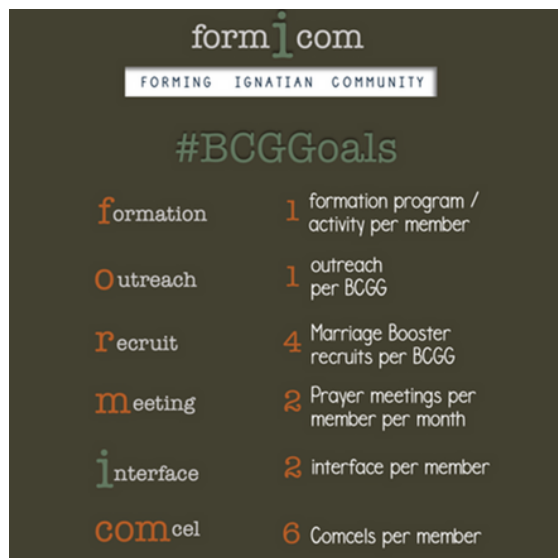
We started 2023 with Fr. James Gascon's message reminding us of Pope Francis' call for synodality, which means "*fraternal collaboration and discernment and journeying together as a couple... as a family... as a community... with the Lord. We do not sanctify ourselves first before we go out to others; rather in our own sanctification of others, we are sanctified ourselves.*"

Fr. Ruben Tanseco constantly reminded us to nourish and nurture our spirituality to transition from the head to the heart and to the feet. It is putting our prayers to action. In putting prayers to action, we are not just called to bear fruit, but to bear many fruits.

We become part of Magis Deo because of an innate desire for an intimate relationship with God. In Magis Deo, we are here to grow, to develop, to nourish, and to nurture our spirituality through prayers **and** action. We are here in Magis Deo to deepen our relationship with God, not only in the context of prayer, but to journey in faith with the larger community.

We are all called to action. We are called by the Lord to serve. Jesus calls us by name despite our limitations and imperfections and sends us to be shepherds to others just as our shepherds have accompanied us and handheld us in this faith journey.

Our participation and engagement with Magis Deo begin with our "praxis," the root of our formation. **FORMICOM**, an acronym for *Formation, Outreach, Recruitment, Meeting, Interface and Community Celebration*, is what we do to help attain our individual spiritual goals and partake in the further growth of this community.



formicom	
FORMING IGNATIANT COMMUNITY	
#BCGGGoals	
f	1 formation program / activity per member
O	1 outreach per BCGG
R	4 Marriage Booster recruits per BCGG
m	2 Prayer meetings per member per month
i	2 interface per member
com	6 Comcels per member

We started our Magis Deo journey and were introduced to marital spirituality. We chose to stay in Magis Deo because we search for ways to deepen our relationship with God as a couple. But the process does not stop there – we continue our journey so we can also be a couple for others. Our path is to shepherd couples for other couples who are similarly looking for a deeper purpose in their marital and family lives.

One of the key challenges of our community for 2024 is the implementation of a formation path for members to become shepherds and be shepherds for others. The challenge is how to be formed, to be transformed towards our mission.

For 2024, the thrust and theme of the community bring us back to our basic 4S's (Simplicity, Stewardship, Sharing, and Service) which equate to Shepherding, the fifth "S."

We would like to highlight that our mission in Magis is to be a Shepherd, a Shepherd for others. This is how we can be most effective. This is how we can make our lives meaningful and attain a stronger sense of purpose within the community, and personal growth and deeper spirituality.

When Jesus chose His disciples to carry out His mission, they were not equipped or qualified, or even educated. These disciples were motivated only by their desire to follow Christ in their quest for a higher sense of purpose in their lives.

So too is our reason to be in Magis Deo. What are we in Magis for? Why are we in Magis? Magis being more, how can we be "more" for God, as our name connotes? How can we be Magis?

Pope Francis has declared 2024 as the Year of Prayer. Let us ask the Lord to grant us the grace of mission, the grace to reach out and be of service to others. In our prayers and discernment, let us heed and accept the call of Jesus to empty ourselves, to die to ourselves, to go beyond ourselves and our needs in serving others.

Volunteering as a couple deepens their bond and connection, brings about the sharing meaningful experiences and working towards common goals, and strengthens couple's relationships through acts of kindness and compassion. Volunteering also provides a platform for us to be role models for our children, teaching them the importance of empathy, generosity, and community engagement.

“... we continue our journey so we can also be a couple for others.”

Ultimately, serving the community is a way to express gratitude for the blessings we have and to create a positive impact in the world. Together as couples, we can make a significant difference and inspire others to join us on this beautiful journey of giving and sharing Christ's love and peace.

Let us all journey together in Magis Deo as individuals, as couples, as families, as a community with the Lord in serving others.

The journey of faith is a gift of our loving God who takes the first step, waits patiently and silently for our response.

Let us allow God's grace to flow into us and respond to His call.

Let us BE FORMED. BE TRANSFORMED FOR GOD'S MISSION.



Couple Power by God

Presenting the 20 couple graduates of Magis Deo Marriage Encounter Class 137. They who heed the call and dedicated a weekend retreat for their better half and the Lord.

Maraming salamat to the following Servant Leaders:

Retreat Director: Fr. James Gascon, SJ

Team Couples: Noel & Gigi Resurreccion; Cesar & Marivic Pareja

Auxiliaries: ME Class 135 and John BCGG

Music: Claro Santos and Ethel Araullo, Magis Choir

In loving service,
Magis Deo ME Ministry



M.E. Class 137
Magis Deo Community
17-19 November 2023



**ME Class 137
Directory**

Magis Deo Marriage Encounter Weekend

BLD Covenant Retreat House, Dasmariñas, Cavite
November 17-19, 2023



Finally, the ME Class Directory is now digital!!! It is password-protected in compliance with the Data Privacy Law.

Auxiliaries to Nov 17 to 19 ME Weekend are ME Class 135, John BCGG and ME Ministry



ME Class 137 Reunion 1 with Shepherds Boy & Merlie Cruz, John & Claire Cambas of James BCGG



Welcoming Three New BCGGs

We grow our community through the ME Ministry. We warmly welcome three ME classes commissioned as BCGGs.

Thank you Lord for bringing us these couples, and fueling the hearts of the shepherds with love, persistence, and more love.
Magis!





From Marriage Booster to BCGG: A Marriage Journey

Weng Reyes, Luke BCGG

Our journey through the Marriage Booster during the challenging times of the pandemic left an indelible mark on our relationship, instilling in us a profound sense of inspiration and strength. The impact of the experience was transformative, as Emerson and I not only navigated the uncertainties of the time but also felt a deep connection to the blessings and guidance from God within the Magis Deo Community.

In the face of the pandemic's trials, the importance of couple power in sustaining our marriage became abundantly clear. It was during this period that we found solace and support in the virtual embrace of every Marriage Booster session, recognizing the significance of shared faith in overcoming challenges. Our journey and commitment deepened when we formed a small group in the Marriage Booster Next Level (Simplicity) with Levy & Roxanne Espiritu and Mon & Ting Yupangco as our shepherds. The guidance provided by our dedicated shepherds during regular Zoom prayer meetings served as a constant reminder of the spiritual foundation in our marriage.

Taking our commitment a step further, we participated in the Marriage Encounter Weekend, an experience that not only bolstered our connection as a couple but also fueled our desire to serve the Lord in humble and meaningful ways. This weekend retreat became a pivotal point in our marital journey, strengthening our bond and deepening our understanding of the role faith plays in our shared purpose.



Being a part of this community has become a source of immense pride for us. The formation of our Basic Christian Growth Group (BCGG), Luke, stands as a testament to the close-knit familial bonds that have developed among the members who initially connected through the Marriage Booster. As if an extension of our own family, we continue to learn and grow together, guided by the wisdom imparted by our shepherds Winston & Mae Cruz and co-shepherds Mon & Ting Yupangco.

The passion and sincerity of our shepherds are evident in their commitment to ensure we are not only guided but also bonded by God's love through the principles of Magis Deo – Stewardship, Simplicity, Sharing, and Service. Each prayer meeting of our Luke BCGG has become a spiritual booster, infusing us with excitement and anticipation to feel the divine presence and love as we connect with one another and with God.

REFLECTIONS

Our journey with the Magis Deo community has not only strengthened our marriage but also enriched our lives with the enduring values of faith, love, and service. We look forward to the continued growth and blessings that this community brings to our shared spiritual and marital path.



REFLECTIONS

Mirakulo BCGG and Our Hopes for 2024

Embracing New Beginnings with the Magis Deo Community

Kish Abante, Mirakulo BCGG

Our Basic Christian Growth Group (BCGG) name, Mirakulo, which is spelled with the letter "k" to preserve its Tagalog essence, was embraced by our group for three meanings. The first is the word's literal meaning – miracle. Each of us believes that our spiritual growth, individually and as a couple, are miracles towards our perseverance in cultivating our relationship with God, with our spouse, as a BCGG, and as Magis Deo Community. Second, the progress in our spiritual journey can be likened to Jesus' Passion – the bearing of our own crosses, our spiritual deaths, and now the miracle of Christian resurrection in the form of our ongoing miraculous transformations. Third, what a gift it is that the last day of our ME Weekend, the 27th of November 2022, is the feast of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Our BCGG name Mirakulo confirms that we are all walking and living miracles journeying together, embraced by Jesus Christ and the Blessed Mother's love and mercy.

Having been commissioned as a BCGG, we look forward to the next years with high hopes.

OJ and Kish Abante

"We are hopeful for a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and the Catholic tradition in the coming year. Our Mirakulo family has helped ignite the spirit within us that is thirsting for God. Now officially a BCGG and part of the bigger Magis Deo Community, we hope that God's love for us will be repaid in our own loving ways through participation in Magis Deo activities that serve those in most need. We have also signed up with the Community Services Ministry which will enable us to give more of ourselves in honoring and glorifying the Lord."

Troy and Pam Almario

"We hope that our BCGG will become active in promoting Magis Deo's 4S core values even in our simplest and smallest ways. We also look forward to our BCGG becoming one of the leaders in Magis Deo's Outreach and Community Service activities. As a couple, we are excited to do community activities that will further strengthen our spirituality."

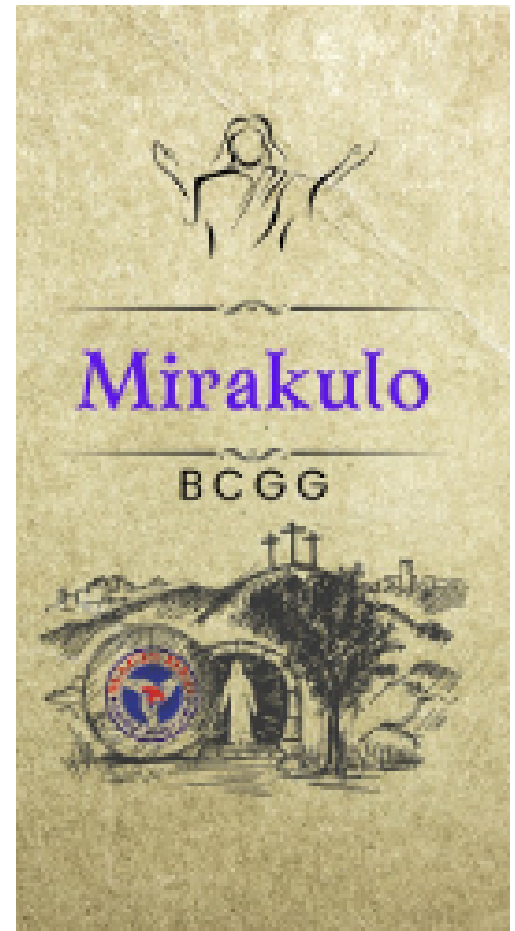
Rey and Jovy Aquino

"As we stand at the threshold of a new year, the anticipation and excitement within the Magis Deo Community are palpable. The journey ahead in 2024 promises a plethora of new blessings, opportunities, and beginnings that we are eager to embrace together.

One of the most exciting prospects for the year ahead is the deepening of our spirituality. We are committed to dedicating more time to nurture our spiritual growth collectively. This shared journey will not only strengthen our individual connections but also weave a stronger tapestry within our Magis Deo Community.

Moreover, our enthusiasm is soaring for the upcoming collaboration with the outreach programs. This signifies our community's expansion in reaching out to those in need, extending our support and care beyond our boundaries. The joy of giving back will undoubtedly enrich our lives and deepen our sense of purpose.

Another remarkable highlight for us is the Suyuan initiative. We are immensely passionate about contributing our time and talents to this noble cause. We eagerly look forward to being actively involved, aiming to make a positive impact by serving as Pre-judicial Marriage Counselors, offering knowledge and support where needed.



REFLECTIONS

Reflecting on the transformative journey of Mirakulo BCGG, it is undeniable that the blessings and miracles experienced by the members have been awe-inspiring. The unwavering support and guidance from shepherds Jojo & Jane Aldeguer have been instrumental in shaping our lives positively. Their home radiates blessings, and their influence continues to inspire us all.

Mirakulo BCGG is a beacon of hope and miracles in our Magis Deo Community, symbolizing the profound transformations and blessings that have enriched our lives.

With hearts brimming with hope, excitement, and a shared vision, we embark on our 2024 journey with our Mirakulo family. Together we will continue to foster a community where miracles abound and where each member contributes to a greater cause.

We extend our gratitude to the Magis Deo Community, in particular to Fr. James Gascon, for opening the door to our spiritual development and continually inspiring us with his words."



Kevin and Meg Chia

"We are excited about deepening our spiritual growth as a couple because we have been closer to God since we started. We enjoy the company and camaraderie of the community and look forward to doing more and giving back to those in need, be it just our company, our time, or our efforts."

Joseph and Nhilet Garcia

"We are excited to grow in our spiritual journey with our Mirakulo family. We also look forward to serving and contributing to Magis Deo's mission and activities, especially in the Praxis Ministry. We would like to assist in their services, and meet and work with new friends who will inspire us to be better versions of ourselves."

As one of the newbie BCGGs, we are here to learn, inspire, and become what Magis Deo stands for all of us. That is, to do more for God.

Tending the Sheep Series with Fr. James U. Gascon, SJ: Sexual Ethics

Reported by Yoling Sevilla, Bartimaeus BCGG

The third of the four-part series on *Moral Theology*, Fr. James' talk on "*The Moral Guidelines for Care of the Human Body and Relating with Others*" was based on Catholic Teachings on Bio-Sexual Ethics. The talk was conducted on 23 September 2023 with the participation of 93 members from 20 BCGGs and 8 persons from Marriage Booster/ME Classes.

Sexuality Defined

A proper understanding of sexuality is required before we can talk about ethical standards.

Sexuality is "a force (an impulse) within the organism which aspires to a totalizing, fusional and pleasurable union" (Martinez, 2006).

Furthermore, sexuality is our capacity to relate with self, others (including God) and the environment. As rational, biological, and spiritual human beings, we are called to relate with ourselves and others with the totality of our beings.

Relating with Ourselves and Others

We are created in the image and likeness of God.

Since this is the case, the call to holiness or goodness demands that we protect the integrity of our beings.

The Church believes that human life starts at the moment of fertilization. The call is to protect life from the moment of conception.



Points to Consider

1. Masturbation

A case in point is that of masturbation which the Church teaches is gravely wrong and sinful. Why so? Masturbation is self-pleasuring, and its focus is primarily the body. When masturbating one relates with oneself as a disintegrated self. The invitation in sexual relations is to reach out to others when seeking totalizing, fusional and pleasurable union.

2. Artificial Contraception

In the papal encyclical "*Humanae Vitae*" ("Of Human Life"), Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the Church's traditional teachings on contraception and other methods of birth control.

The encyclical reaffirmed that the purpose of marriage is to propagate the species, hence married couples are not to prevent conception.

While traditionally the purpose of sex in marriage was for procreation, in more recent times the Church recognizes both the unitive and not just the procreative function of sexual relations in marriage. Furthermore, the Church also recognizes the couple's call to responsible

parenthood, to consider their capability to provide quality of life for their children.

For responsible parenthood, the Church promotes natural family planning. It disapproves of artificial contraception because these either prevent fertilization or implantation, and in the latter case act as abortifacients.

3. Assisted Reproductive Technology (ARTs)

Since infertility/sterility contradict the gift of creation, efforts to overcome these are praiseworthy particularly since the demand for fertility treatment comes from biological, sociological, economical, and psychological factors.

However, the right to life from the point of conception must be considered, particularly in the approach taken towards excess zygotes (fertilized egg cells).

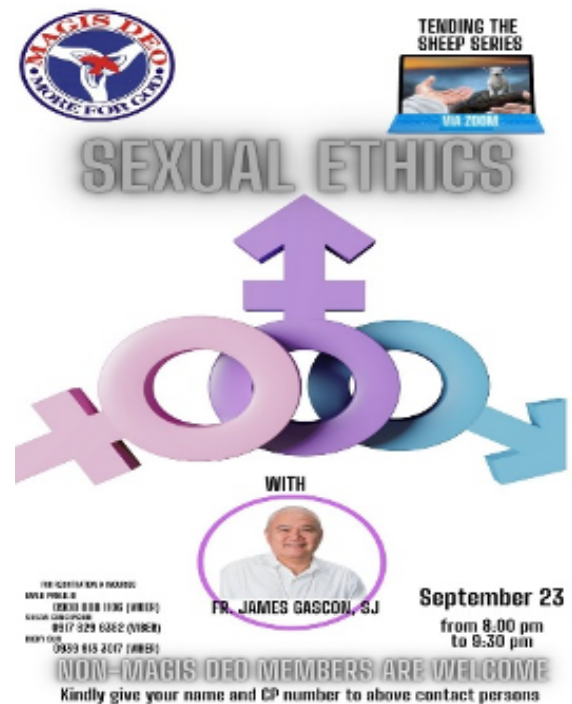
The Church promotes adoption as an alternative to ARTs.

4. Abortion

The Church teaches that to submit to and assist in an abortion is a mortal sin and can be cause for excommunication (culpability must be evaluated).

5. Same Sex "Marriage"

As defined in the Church, marriage is a union between a man and a woman. This definition is based on natural law. Hence, the Church holds that while there can be a civil union between persons of the same sex, these are not considered marriages. These fail the test of the procreative function of marital unions.



Reflection

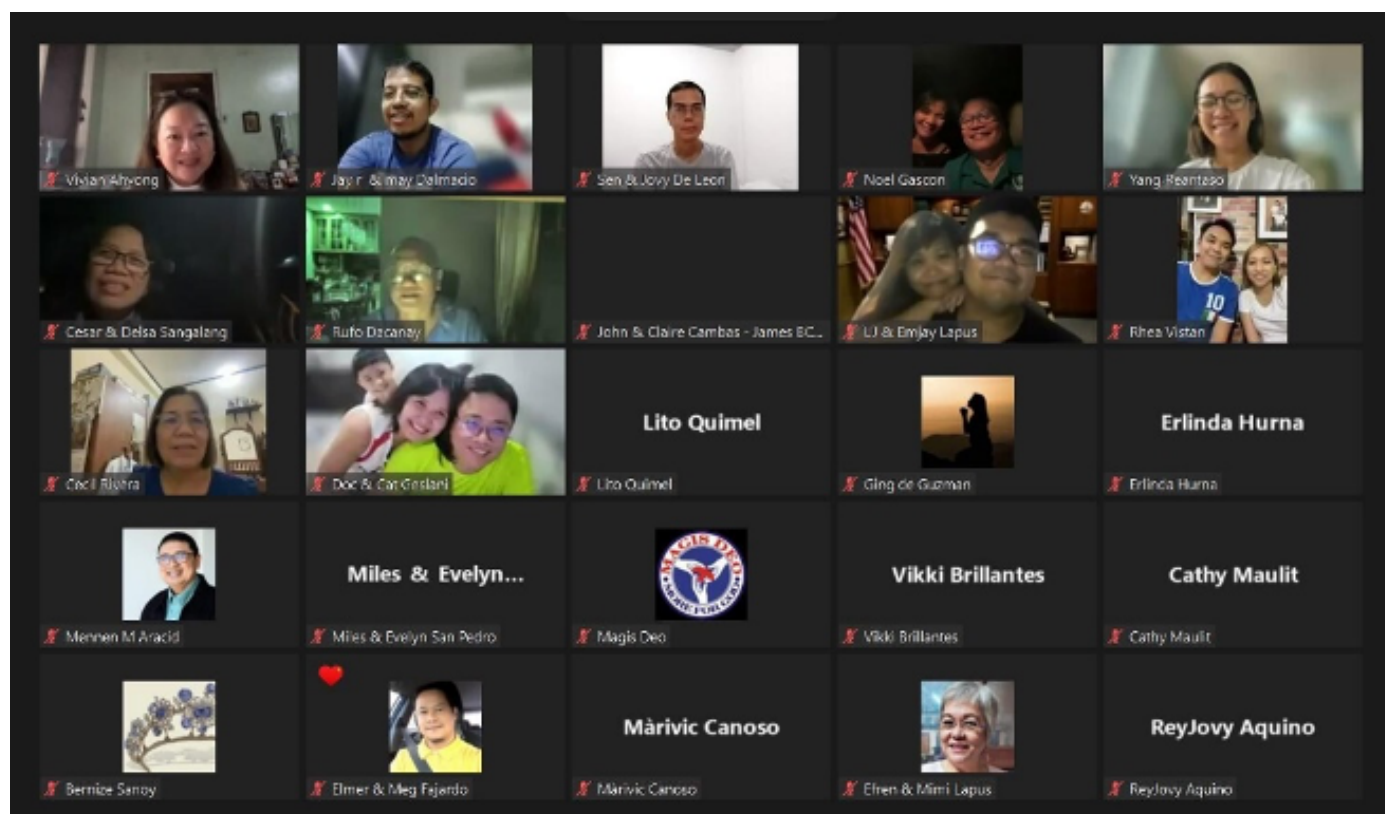
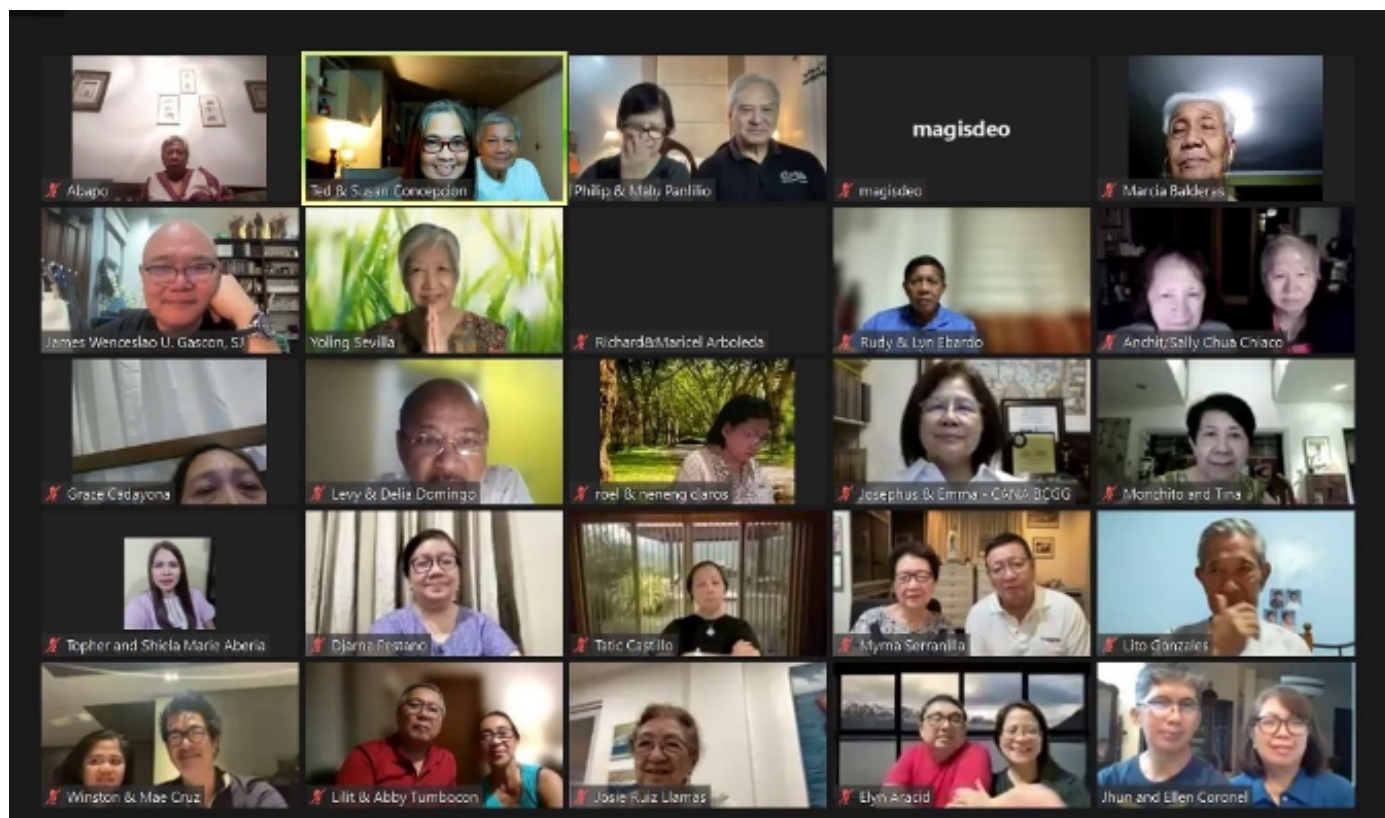
The call to holiness, to goodness is a very demanding call.

To begin with, it demands that we understand the principles behind the teachings of the Church namely: the integrity of the human person; the procreative and unitive purpose of marriage; that life begins at the moment of conception/fertilization.

Having understood these, it behooves us to accept and embrace these principles as our own. Only then will we be able to put into practice the teachings of the Church.

A counterforce are the views and beliefs prevalent in our world today, particularly the call to respect the civil rights of others.

The Church gives guidelines for our moral behavior – the choice to follow these guidelines is one that we are called to discern with the application of well-formed consciences.



Bringing Christmas Cheer to Olandes Suyuan

Philip & Malu Panlilio, Mustard Seed BCGG

Magis Deo brought Christmas cheer to Suyuan graduates from Olandes, Marikina last 17 December 2023. Seventy families gathered, broke bread together, and had fun with parlor games and group dance presentations.

The families received Christmas bags containing thermos, spaghetti set, luncheon meat, corned beef, cheese, and coffee. Crucifixes were given to Suyuan leaders as token of appreciation. Couples who actively participated in the parish formation activities got cheese spread as additional gift. Rice and household items were raffled off. Cash prizes were awarded to group dance presentations and parlor games. Leony & Mia Parada and Floyd & Mina Tamera from Mustard Seed BCGG served as hosts and judges. Olandes Suyuan families 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. Grateful for your generosity! Glory to God!







Chacho Angeles, Matthew BCGG



When I was young, there was great anticipation for the coming of Christmas day because on that day, cousins in our extended family would visit uncles, aunts, and grandparents, greet them Merry Christmas, and we would receive gifts or some money from the oldies. And the food was special and delicious. I can remember a fixture in our menu for the Christmas festivities which start at midnight of the 25th – Queso de Bola (Edam cheese) and Chinese ham, with pan de sal, not loaf bread. When I had a family of my own, my wife and I were the ones at the giving end of the festivities.

It was only a little over 20 years ago that I started learning or realizing that Christmas is not just a holiday, but an important holy day for my faith, and that there is a deeper meaning to it. This is the day that God fulfills His promise of salvation by sending His son. The humble and difficult circumstances of His birth – in a manger, visited by shepherds and foreign wise men, running from Herod into exile in Egypt – are nevertheless proclaimed by the angels singing in joy for God-made-man.

But the Jews were expecting a savior in the mold of David, a soldier and a conqueror. For me, however, Jesus the Redeemer is our savior from sin and the death that it brings, Who will bring us back to God, to our divine nature, to our rightful place as children of the Father. He will do this through His teachings on loving God and our neighbors, and through the example of His life, from His humble birth to His passion, death, and resurrection. This also shows the link between the Incarnation and the Resurrection with God being born as a man, His incarnation, to His victory over the death that sin brings, His resurrection. And both embody His redemptive work. These two mysteries of our Christian faith bring joy, a deep kind of joy that is heartfelt and anchored deep in our souls. For me, what is important is that this joy shapes my heart so that I may, hopefully, receive the grace that will enable me to live the teachings of Jesus daily, in all the relationships I have with other people and the whole of creation, in my thoughts, words, deeds, and in the desires of my heart. And make my heart sing with the angels joyful and thankful praises to the Lord.

Isang Maluwalhati at Pinagpalang Pasko sa Ating Lahat!

*Mapagmahal na Ama,
Taos puso po kaming
Nagpapasalamat
Sa paggunita namin sa
Pagbiyaya Ninyo samin
Ng Inyong pagmamahal
Noong nilikha Nyo kami
Sa Inyong hugis at anyo,
At ibinahagi Ninyo
Ang inyong hininga
At buhay sa putik
Na aming pinagmulan.*

*At sa muli Nyong pagbigay
Ng Inyong pagmamahal
Noong pinadala Nyo sa amin
Ang Inyong anak na si Hesus,
Upang kami'y iligtas
Mula sa kapahamakan ng
Aming mapagka makasarili,
Mapagka makamundo, at
Sa aming kawalan ng respeto
Sa pagkatao ng mga kasama
Namin sa buhay*



*Sa aming paggunita
Ng Kanyang pagsilang
Sa isang hamaḱ na sabsaban
Na kasama mga hayop,
Ay ipinamalas Ninyo
Ang Inyong pakikisa
Sa aming pagkatao
At kahirapan.*

*Nawa'y matugunan namin
Ang pagmamahal Mong ito,
Di lang ngayong Pasko,
Kundi sa lahat ng araw
Ng aming buhay sa mundo.*

*Hiling lang po namin na
Huwag Nyo kaming pabayaang,
At sana'y ipagpatuloy
Ang Inyong pag aaruga't pag aalaga
Sa amin na Inyo ring
Marurupok na anak,*

*May kasamang galak at tuwa,
Hiling po namin lahat na ito
Sa ngalan ng Inyong anak na si
Hesus.
Amen.*

Maligayang Pasko sa ating lahat!

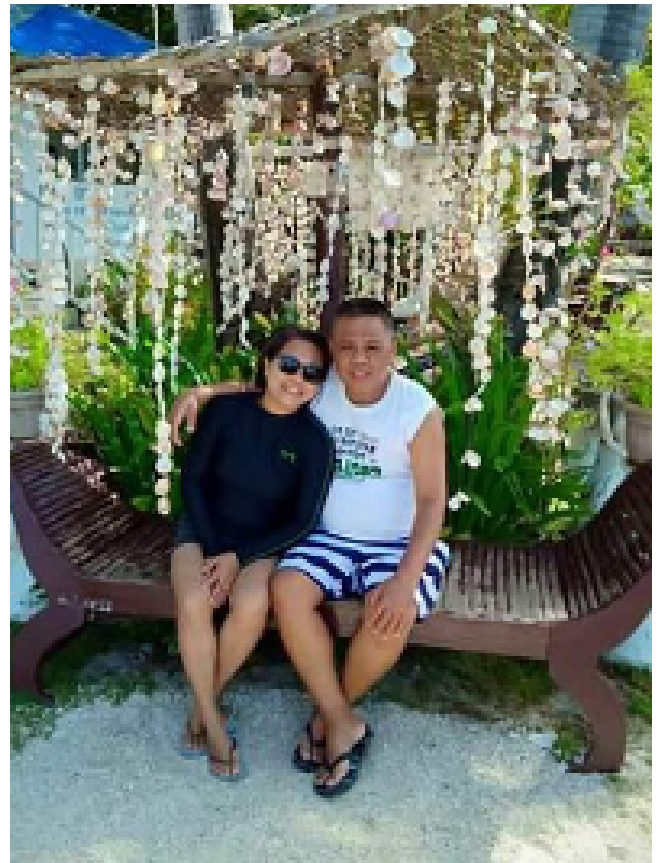
My Suyuan Reflection

Salvacion Olave, Attendee

When Suyuan was introduced to our Antipolo parish group, I was a bit hesitant to attend. It sounded sweet to my ears, but for me the word "Suyuan" was more on courtship for young people. As a member of the Family Life Apostolate (FLA) Team, I considered the activity a part of my obligation to attend and have a first-hand experience of Suyuan that I need to give a more personal touch when I conduct Pre-Cana seminars in the parish.

I conditioned myself that this activity would truly make a difference in my perspective on giving advice to couples about to get married, and my relationship with my husband Arman.

God did not waste my time sitting with other couples the whole day of Saturday. He made me see that couples should always be transparent. If couples are happy, they should verbalize and show it, and also when they are hurt by little or big things. Communicating your feelings will free both of you from piling up resentment or anger that may someday burst and bring you to a big fight. On the other hand, telling one another what you like/love about your partner can simply make you smile and feel affirmed that you are doing great in your relationship.



Furthermore, listening to others' experiences in their journey as a married couple made me appreciate my husband even better and tell myself "I am one lucky wife." It was an insightful Saturday for me and my husband. To the Suyuan Team, you are doing a great job making couples realize the state of their marriage.

Thank you and God bless.



REFLECTIONS

Activity: Suyuan

Venue: Parish of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Antipolo City

Date: October 22, 2023

Conducted by: Song of Ruth BCGG

Facilitators/Sharers: Randy & Cecil Rivera



Praying Twice with the Magis Choir

Winston Cruz, Matthew BCGG

It was St. Augustine who famously said, "The One Who Sings Prays Twice!" I have always been one who does not shy away from a challenge to sing in front of an audience. From my career days in IT, I would even have a willing throng of almost a thousand young people rocking to my impression of David Bowie (it might have helped that they all reported to me ☹️). But why was I purposely postponing accepting the invitation to join the Magis Choir? Was it the perception that I would need to dedicate several sessions a month doing serious practice sessions with the more elderly of the community? Was it the burdensome responsibility of showing up at all ComCels and ME Weekends, always ready to sing out the correct tone and pitch in tune with a group?

It was right after the big 35th Anniversary Event, when I requested the Magis Choir to do a harana for our elders, that I felt the Spirit push me to say "yes." That, and the fact that I wanted to make amends for stopping their heavily practiced repertoire due to the sudden chaos at the picture taking session with Leni 😊. But it

was during the first practice sessions, in a simple loft room on the second floor of a parish church on Boni Avenue, that I discovered the beating heart of the Magis Choir. I admired the dedication and sincere sense of duty of each choir member in preparing for our community's masses and events. It was Teacher Rannie who first evaluated my vocalization and assigned me to the baritone section. Tita Malou Apo became an informal mentor, guiding my way into the choir's practices. Everyone welcomed me warmly, and I quickly saw that this was not a serious, discipline-driven group but a truly warm family that knows how to have fun and sees singing not only as a service but also as an enjoyable and fulfilling act of worship. At this point, I did not yet include Mae who was very shy of singing.

Time came when I offered my residence to host the practice sessions. As we welcomed the choir into our home, Mae had no choice but join our sessions (she was assigned to the Soprano section, no less 😊). And so preparing



for our ME Weekend session, we started the first few verses of "Sa 'Yo Lamang." I don't know why – was it the acoustics of my dining room? – but with all four vocal sections properly positioned in the room (Baritones and Sopranos on the right, Altos and Tenors on the left), the harmony of the deep chorus line of this song – accentuated by the heavenly Soprano voices of Tita Malou, Tita Remy, Mae and Dra. Leslie – created what Teacher Rannie mentioned was a goal of proper chorale singing: a resonance that was high-hitting, penetrating the skin and the soul. It was very enjoyable – in fact, I was smiling all throughout while the group concentrated on their lyrics clearbooks. As a fan of music, I must say it was a high for me – and I wanted more. The chorale way of singing, the harmony you can only get by singing in a group, is something new to me, who is more used to the style of rock band lead vocalist.

So, when I sing now in ComCels and in ME Weekends, I do it not only with a sense of service, but with the joy of singing, and most certainly with the joy and pride of singing with this warm group of souls that comprise the Magis Deo Choir. Our recent outreach activity, supporting the ordination of the Guanellian priests of the Servants of Charity, again showed me the selfless hearts of the Choir as they poured their hearts and soul to the music that is always so important to our Catholic events.

One wish that the Choir has is for more members to discover the joy of singing for the Lord. They know they will not be able to carry this torch forever. The practice sessions are not very demanding – two 2-hour sessions a month at most. Whether you are an experienced singer or someone who wants to learn, here is your opportunity to pray twice, thrice, and more! COME LET US SING!



LINGAP: A Reflection on Social Ethics

Cesar Sangalang, Samaritans BCGG

This year's fourth and last topic of the Tending the Sheep Series was "Social Ethics: Relating with Each Other in a Human Community." At his 25 November talk, Fr. James Gascon, SJ, emphasized the Life and Dignity of the human person:

- ***The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society.***
- ***This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.***
- ***We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.***

Fr. James also expressed the Call to the Family, Community, and Participation:

- ***The person is not only sacred but also social.***
- ***How we organize our society in economics and politics, in law and policy, directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.***
- ***Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined.***
- ***We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable people.***

As I reflect on these powerful words, I feel fulfilled responding to the call to promote and help build a responsible society, a society that



cares for the people and prioritizes their common good and well-being. Growing up in a province with limited sources of livelihood, I realized at a young age the difficulties in earning a living; sadly, some even took advantage of others' weaknesses. I learned the value of hard work and perseverance, the importance of education, my faith in God, and the relevance of my dealings and relations with other people. Despite life's difficulties and challenges, I am very grateful the Lord made me a responsible and caring person, not just for my family, but also for the community. One of the most memorable projects, or should I say, my legacy in my college organization UP Banahaw, was the re-structuring of the organization's mission to focus on (1) Lingap Kalusugan, (2) Lingap Karunungan, and (3) Lingap Kalikasan. With the help of alumni physicians and volunteers, we conducted medical and dental missions in poor communities, mainly in Quezon and Laguna. We conducted seminars and symposiums on protecting the environment, including proper waste segregation and disposal. We reached out to high school students, guiding them in choosing their college courses and the corresponding careers they could pursue with the degrees they attain. These are just some of UP Banahaw's activities that continue to date, which have been extended and expanded to mission areas beyond Quezon province.

REFLECTIONS

Last year, exactly 30 years since I initiated the Lingap program in UP Banahaw, I had the opportunity to propose the same Lingap program to Magis Deo's Outreach Ministry. Thankfully, the Pastoral Council of Magis Deo accepted and adopted the program; we even added another "K" – Lingap Kabanalan. With more people and resources, the Lingap program of Magis Deo has reached more communities and continues to aid in education and health, especially during the pandemic. Magis Deo is also at the forefront of social and political change and transformation as it continues to participate in uplifting the moral and ethical values of the Filipino people. There are also various initiatives towards environmental protection and preservation. Last, Magis Deo continues its main mission of enriching the relationships of couples, of parents and their children, and uplifting the spirituality of the individuals. I am grateful that my wife Delsa

and I were given the chance to lead the community in 2022, and we commit to continue serving the Lord through the Lingap programs of the community.

As I look forward to the new year, many thoughts and ideas cross my mind on how I can further deepen my relationship with others, and how I can contribute more to caring for the environment and society. I lift up to Him all my intentions and I pray that He may always guide and lead me in this mission. As Fr. James invited us during his talk, we are all called to become stewards of God's creation. **"Care for the earth is a requirement of the Catholic faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation."**

REFLECTIONS

What is Christmas?

Leslie Gatchalian, Corinthians BCGG

Ruby Pizarro (dentist), Beng Pascual (nurse) and I (md), of Corinthians BCGG, Central Sector, took the challenge to second lead with Trixie Sun (md) at the December 2 Magis Night. No, this was not a not a medical mission but a dance showdown among the North, South, and Central Sectors.

I have no idea why I accepted the challenge as I was still nursing a sore knee. Perhaps because I was putting up our Christmas tree at home and the phone call/request from Tito Jun Sison caught me in a jolly mood; saying yes to his request to participate came easy.



Going over the six-minute dance video from Trixie knocked me off my feet as I am not good at memorizing meticulously counted steps. That time too, my knee was complaining with the twists and turns involved.

REFLECTIONS

After a week, practicing the dance steps turned out to be beneficial. I had earlier been afraid to move my knees even during rehab. Starting with baby steps, I found myself going with the beat, and in the process getting my joints oiled.

The horrendous traffic going to the Magis Night venue did not quash our excitement and high spirits. Thanks to Arnel & Bernie Isip – they ensured my attendance by bringing me to the Villamor Golf Clubhouse – I did not miss this delightful event.

Fr. James Gascon celebrated Holy Mass while the Magis Deo Chorale provided liturgical music. The choir also sang Christmas songs at the opening of the program.



The dancers from the different BCGGs of the Central Sector did not practice together and only got together to perform during Magis Night itself. Surprisingly, we all understood what our leader Trixie wanted us to perform. She made it easy for us, breaking down the steps broken to sections and subsections like an anatomy, coupled with mirror and flipped images of the dance as if looking through a surgical scope! With her persistence we learned all the steps, and she boosted our confidence.

On Magis Night we danced offstage and onstage; we clapped, yelled, and rooted for our BCGG and our Central Sector. Everyone joined the lively, interactive, and well thought of games and contests, with dozens of prizes from many generous donors.



So, did we enjoy the night? It was a great night and we stayed till midnight. Jun Sison even took to the stage and floored everyone with his dance steps complete with heart/hand signs.

We enjoyed the night, mingled with the rest of the community in this time of merriment. The work involved in organizing and holding the Magis Night must have been intense. Kudos to Winston and Mae Cruz and to the organizers and committees of the successful Magis Night!

So, did we win? No, we did not, but we were far from feeling sad – we were extremely happy for those who won and even found ourselves onstage with them to celebrate their winning!

The South Sector won the dance competition. They were in their 60's outfits, swaying to a medley of hit songs. They sported a variety of bell bottom pants, miniskirts, and matching printed pant suits. Gigi Resurreccion danced in her multi-colored pant suit and transported us to flower power days. The dance medley also featured men in dapper suits reminiscent of the era.



REFLECTIONS

It was a close call for Central which, with Luke BCGG donning afro wigs and Bohemian get ups of the 70's, garnered second place.

The North Sector in their colorful metallic 80's costumes bagged third place.



It rained prizes that Magis Night. The committee decided to award the Xiaomi Watch donated by Rico and Terry Lim to Ronnie Bello, musical director of Magis Deo Chorale, even if he had already left for an urgent call. Donations of cash prizes continued to pour in even during the raffle itself. Amidst shrieks and laughter, Leony & Mia Parada won the much awaited 55-inch TV.



We did not bring home the bacon, but we brought home much more. We went home filled with smiles, laughter, and happiness in our hearts, plus some extra yummy biko! It is said that sticky rice is an auspicious symbol of standing as one and staying together. This biko is topped with an extra sweet layer of latik, if you know what kind of sweetness that entails.

So, what is Christmas? It is taking up the challenge to give, to augment the shortcoming or needs of another, in the process discovering that this brings about our own happiness as well.

Christmas is a time when love and actions of love become tangible. It is a time to celebrate the birth of Christ, our Savior who gave us the greatest love and taught us how to love. Merry Christmas to one and all.



Magis TLC - A Blessing for Couples

Winston Cruz, Matthew BCGG

As the social media manager of our Marriage Encounter Weekend Philippines Facebook Page, I have had to read and respond to the many inquiries that our Facebook posts generate. This frequently occurs when we publish a Marriage Booster seminar or a Marriage Encounter Weekend poster to solicit registrants to our events. It is during these times when I get a real perspective of just how much troubled marriages are out there. I must say that based on what I see, there definitely is a marriage crisis happening in our nation.

"Can you help us?"

"Save our marriage!"

"I don't understand my spouse."

"We don't talk to each other."

I realize during these FB Chats that many troubled or lonely spouses have NO ONE to talk to. They engage with me in conversation – though I am careful to go beyond listening as I am not trained as a counselor. Sometimes they even address me as "Father"! Some seek counseling, and my standard response is to refer them to our sister organization, CeFam



(Center for Family Ministries). However, I have started to hear that the scheduling of their sessions has also started to back up by months! Not to mention that counseling can be expensive.

While thinking about other ways of reaching out as a community, Mae came up with the idea that perhaps our community members who do counseling would like to do a reachout to troubled couples and offer counseling for free! We immediately approached Fr. James with this idea – and Fr. James loved it. He proposed though that what we would be offering is a listening ear – which is really a type of counseling practice as well: Sometimes, all that these individuals need is a listener. And so, Fr. James proposed to oversee this program and even came up with the program name. As he knew that these troubled couples needed Tender Loving Care, why not name it Magis TLC! Total Listening Companions!

Seven counselors signed up – and we are so grateful for their selfless outreach efforts. Since our program launch in June, more than 60 couples have availed of the free counseling sessions. Some of the registrants have gone on to attend our Marriage Encounter Weekend as well.

Need a listening ear?

MAGIS DEO MEMBERS can now avail of
FREE MARRIAGE COUNSELING
thru the
MAGIS TLC* PROGRAM
** Total Listening Companions*



supervised by
Fr. James









Sessions will be conducted via Zoom.
 We can also accommodate individual or non-marital cases.
 Register your application via the Google Form link below or chat with us
 via Magis TLC FB Messenger account, and we will get back to you.



Reach In. Reach Out. Enrich



SPECIAL PROJECT

Looking now at our Facebook Page, it is with pride that I see how we can be many things to troubled couples. Need an online seminar? We offer Marriage Boosters in the comfort of your home – for free. Need a retreat and invest in your relationship? We have the Marriage Encounter Weekend three times a year. Need some counseling, but were always intimidated – or just need to talk to someone? We have free counseling through our Magis TLC Program.

Our mission of helping couples continues.



Feeling *alone* in your marriage?
Looking for *guidance* as a couple?
Need a *listening* ear?

Avail of
FREE MARRIAGE COUNSELING
thru the
MAGIS TLC* PROGRAM
* Total Listening Companions

Sessions will be conducted via Zoom.

Register your application via the Google Form link below or chat with us via FB Messenger, and we will get back to you.

 Magis Deo is a community of Christian families formed in Ignatian Spirituality, committed to a life of stewardship, simplicity, sharing, and service.

REFLECTIONS

TLC is Truly Life Changing

A Wounded Healer

My life-changing experience started when I asked Mae Cruz if she knew anyone offering family counseling. Mae offered Magis Deo's TLC free counseling program, and the rest is history.

I have four children aged 21 (*PWD*), 20, 18 (only girl), and 16. And I'm having so much fun taking care of them (*you know I'm kidding, right?*). They're all smart and sometimes I don't know if I should be proud or regret this as their cleverness would at times get on my nerves 😊. But I must say I am very blessed to have them. Though they drain every ounce of energy and patience in me, they have been my source of strength, my happiness, and my reason to continue despite everything.

So why did I decide to have family counseling? I just had a huge fight with my daughter. It was the nth time she failed to come home at the agreed time. I even reminded all my kids a week before that their bad habit of saying "FYI, I'm at my classmates house..." should stop and they must first properly ask permission. In this instance my daughter wasn't answering her

phone, and this made me furious but also worried. After my 14th call, she finally answered and said she fell asleep at her classmate's house and was already on her way home. When she arrived, it was as if nothing happened, and I didn't even get an apology from her. I confronted her and gave her the "*nag-aalala ako*" talk and asked why she disrespects me. My daughter then started insinuating I always sided with her eldest brother, that he was my favorite, and that I didn't care about her. Some of her words were hurtful; I was enraged and slapped her. I told her favoritism was not and will never be in my vocabulary; that she shouldn't envy her eldest brother and instead, understand and love him more. I made her realize it was her brother who should envy his siblings as he does not have any *tropa* – he can't go out anytime he wants; he can't get a job that fits his skills. I had to tell her my painful past so she'd know I would do everything to protect my family – *especially her*. I then realized I was talking too much, that the spotlight was no longer on her. Since she didn't want to say anything and I was already trembling, I asked her to go to her room. That

night I cried my heart out. I relived the pain and suffering from my past. I kept asking Papa Jesus why it had to happen. I've tried so hard to be there for my family but why is it not enough?

The next day I apologized to my daughter because *"feelings are neither right nor wrong."* I should not have slapped her and should've listened more. I hugged her but deep inside, I needed that hug more. She didn't react at all and said she was not ready to talk. I was relieved when my husband told me our daughter opened up to him. That's when I realized it was probably the right time to undergo family counseling.

A week later, Winston Cruz was able to book a session with a TLC Counselor. My first session was filled with tears as I had to share my painful past – a past that involved parental abuse during my childhood. My childhood journey ended with me spending my teen years in a convent in Cebu isolated, away from relatives and friends, unable to speak the local dialect. I eventually returned to Manila, still to an imperfect family life with my mother. But having met my first boyfriend and future husband, I could at least now start a new journey.

It was not going to be any rosier... not long after, infidelity became a new issue. I became desperate and wanted to die. Was my childhood suffering not enough?

My husband and I tried to work things out, but things just became messier. I was ready to call it quits when a friend invited us to join a Marriage Encounter Weekend (not Magis Deo's but a different community's). This helped, but only for a short time. Thank God we were introduced to Magis Deo much later through the Marriage Boosters, MBNL (Marriage Booster Next Level), and eventually, Magis Deo's ME Weekend.

After sharing my pain with my TLC Counselor, my burden became lighter. I really wanted to hug my counselor (virtual hug since it was online ☹️). That session was like, *"sinumbong ko silang lahat kay Mama Mary."* My TLC Counselor just listened and made short comments but the impact on me was huge. I really felt Mama Mary's presence in our TLC session. Then came the second session which was

an eye-opener. I learned how lack of communication can create failed relationships in families, even going back up the family tree. I told my Counselor I had long forgiven the people who hurt me, but she made me realize I forgot one important thing: I also needed to forgive myself. I needed to forgive myself for thinking I was stupid; that I was a disgrace, a failure. I needed to forgive myself for allowing myself to be betrayed by a lot of people. She said I should be proud of myself for being a strong woman, for being resilient, for not losing faith, for being a wounded healer.

Let me share some things I learned in this journey called life: While it is true that the people who hurt you cannot heal you, they can still help. It is also true that it is hard to pour from an empty cup, but why worry? Papa Jesus and Mama Mary are there to fill the emptiness – we just need to call on them. Last, it is true that life is unfair... that the world may be cruel... but so what? This should not stop us from loving, giving, and forgiving.

My takeaways on my TLC experience:

I may never know why people I trust, love, and give everything to, may be the same people who will hurt me; I will continue to love and pray for them anyway.

We may never forget the pain, but acceptance and forgiveness will help us heal. "Huwag dalhin ang trabaho sa bahay" does not only mean we should not let our family feel the stress from work; it also means we should not treat our family like subordinates or employees.

For 2+ decades I thought I was ok. It only took 2+ hours for me to realize that this was just a facade. Thanks to an angel sent from above – my TLC Counselor, and the Magis Deo Community – I can say I am more than ok.