

Magis

Formation for Mission

Stewardship
Simplicity
Sharing
Service

Official Publication of the
Magis Deo Community
June 2022 Issue



Journey, Pilgrimage, Loss, Transition

Words we use in trying to understand our
human experiences as we move through life

Personal Discernment Process Results

Learn the outcome of BCGGs communal discernment

Magis Lingap

A wholistic approach in reaching
out to families and communities

Freedom of Choice

One of the greatest gifts God has
blessed us with is the gift of
freedom

ABOUT THE COVER



The Sardine Run is a phenomenon seen in Moalboal, Cebu, where large numbers of sardines swim about in groups big enough to block out the light from the sun. They make their way from the deep into the shallows to feed on planktons (sugbo.ph).

As we transition from the darkness of the pandemic, from loss and seemingly negative changes, we move *together* in spirit, as one Magis Deo, like the Sardine Run. We maneuver through our present situation, guided by our formation and convictions. We continue our journey, we hope, we pray, we live.

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Editorial Board

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2/F RMT CeFam Bldg., ADMU Campus, Q.C.

Editor-in-Chief
Rufo Dacanay

Council Chaircouple
Cesar & Delsa Sangalang

Photographers
Anchit Chua Chiacio
Manuel Naldo

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Ojay & Yang Reantaso
Ney & Pinky Rosas

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Levenspeil Sangalang

Spiritual Director
Fr. James Gascon, SJ

JOURNEY, PILGRIMAGE, LOSS, TRANSITION

Journey, pilgrimage, loss, transition. These are some of the words we use in trying to understand our human experiences as we move through life from one stage to another, from infancy to adulthood, or from one place to another, whether physical or spiritual. The movement is constant, we never stay in one place. We either move forward or backward, as Pope Francis said.

Joyce Rupp writes in her book *Praying Our Goodbyes*, "... we are pilgrims whose homeland is not here, we journey, search, travel, discover, live with mystery, doubt, and wonder. We see dreams come true; we see hopes alive. We see dreams dashed; we see hopes die. We start over again – with people, work, prayer, our whole life, all the days of our life. It is the way of the human spirit. Journey has become a quite common word in the vocabulary of many people. It implies that we are going somewhere, that we are on the road traveling to a particular destination... Journey is also used in reference to the traveling that we do on the inside of ourselves, where there is a greater vastness and unfamiliarity than the physical continent far away from us...."

We can all relate to this. The journeys and the transitions we may encounter along the way are very much part of our human existence. As Joyce Rupp puts it, it is a series of "Hello, Goodbye, Hello" as we move from one phase of our life to another, or even from one significant experience to another.

No one is spared, whether one is young, middle aged, or a senior citizen. Each one of us is a pilgrim, traveling down paths others may have taken before, but each experience is uniquely ours.

A graduating college student is jubilant that all those years of studying are finally over. He is fortunate to land a Management Trainee position in a major company in the time of Covid when companies are retrenching. But on the eve of his first day of work, he begins to realize that he is leaving the secure world of the academe that he knew so well and is now entering the corporate world where he has to learn all over again, this time with less certainty and confidence, and among people who have high expectations. It is a scary prospect and not for the faint-hearted. Hello, Goodbye, Hello.

What about a middle-aged married couple who have achieved a certain comfort in their lifestyle according to Magis Deo values? Their children are doing well in school and their business is thriving. It seems they can't ask for anything more. Then Taal volcano erupts and Covid strikes. Their once prosperous business which is their main source of livelihood is now in shambles. What kind of future will they have? How will they rebuild their business? Hello, Goodbye, Hello.

Perhaps the hardest hit are couples in their senior years, especially when one spouse gets sick with a debilitating illness like a stroke or heart attack or a major accident that injures the spine and renders the spouse paralyzed from the neck down. Such an event is life-changing to say the least, for both spouses. For the spouse who is sick, he/she has to accept her condition and hopefully find peace with it, becoming a better person than she was before. For the spouse who may be the primary caregiver or even if not, that spouse has to be ready to meet the demands of the sick spouse 24/7. Hello, Goodbye, Hello.

One unsettling experience that might be common to all is the transition from the strict lockdown to less stringent protocols where people now venture to go out – do the grocery, have medical check-ups, meet up with friends, have family meals together at home or in a restaurant, or go to mass face-to-face. We can again do the things we used to do before the pandemic. There is a sense of relief, of gratitude for having survived the past two years, and a deeper appreciation for the persons we have become. On the other hand, there are also feelings of lack of readiness, the perennial fear of getting Covid, and now the anxiety over rising gasoline prices and its impact on our lives. Hello, Goodbye, Hello.

However, the return to normalcy is unstoppable. Schools and their students are gearing up for face-to-face classes. Offices have mandated a hybrid of work-from-home and reporting to office at least twice a week. Magis Deo initiated the live community celebration this month with a respectable attendance. It also held its first face-to-face M. E. Weekend since the lockdown. Perhaps the live BCGG meetings are not far behind!?! Hello, Goodbye, Hello.

We are also seeing the “end” of the Duterte administration and watching the initial actions and appointments of the incoming administration, while the most hotly contested elections in Philippine history is slowly fading into the background. Depending on whom we supported in that election, we are either jubilant or deeply saddened by the results. Our reactions range from believing that our nation will be great again, to hoping for the best with Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., or deeply depressed and disappointed over the loss of VP Leni Robredo, to ignoring the incoming administration, to waiting to move into action in synch with VP Leni’s Angat Buhay Foundation, or instead of waiting, keep the momentum of doing good before and during the Kakampink campaign by reaching out and improving the lives of the marginalized.

What about you? What are your experiences of hello, goodbye, hello? How do these make you feel? How do you cope?

What helps us survive the many ups and downs of life, the never-ending hellos, goodbyes, and hellos, to “see dreams come true, see hopes alive, then see dreams dashed, see hopes die and then start over again”? How are we able to leave the security of familiar places and venture into the unknown? How do we deal with the pain of losing something or someone that we have grown accustomed to or deeply treasured? How do we move beyond the bitter disappointment of failure or dashed hopes? How do we adapt to our diminished freedom and capabilities? How do we continue to function when we feel overwhelmed and are tempted to despair? What gives us the energy to try all over again?

There is of course the emotional support of our family, friends, wise mentors, spiritual directors, and the Magis Deo Community, its programs and teachings, especially our BCGG. We also attend to our physical wellness by exercising regularly, eating, and sleeping well.

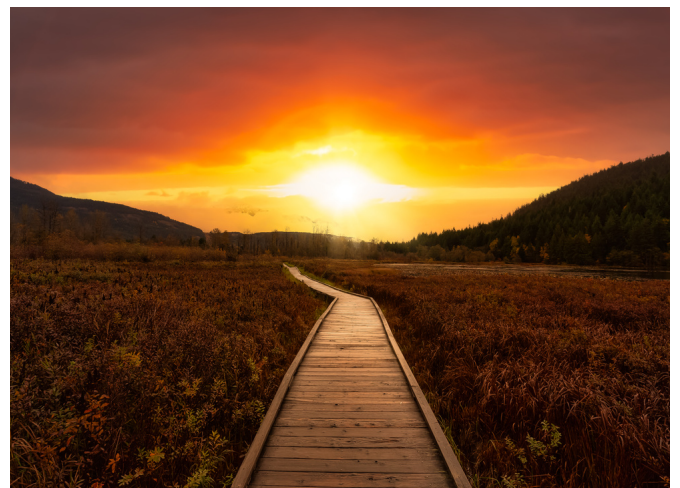
We spend time in prayer, armed with our journal and Sacred Space. We also make it a point to attend online mass regularly. In our individual prayer time and at mass we are moved by a word, line, or phrase, and sometimes we do not know why, or how it relates to our life. Perhaps this is God’s way of communicating with us, to invite us to a deeper relationship with Him or to heal our relationship with ourselves and others, or to challenge us to face what is difficult to see around us. These are moments

when we recapture our deep faith in God who is always caring for us even if that faith is constantly tested and we cannot seem to feel that love sometimes.

Aside from God’s loving presence, Jesus Christ concretely shows us the way through his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Joyce Rupp writes that “Jesus risen is a proclamation of ‘hello.’ He is a witness to us that when goodbyes do come that we can grow through them. We can be changed, transformed. ...Jesus risen proclaims: ‘Stay close to the Father when you suffer from goodbyes. Lean on this love and believe in his power to sustain you and to raise you from your dark and lonely places... We must look upon our goodbyes from the direction of hello. We must stand strong in the resurrection, believing that there is something beyond... pain and hurt and heartache. Here is where our strength and hope lie. This is the power of the resurrection at work in us...”

Reflecting on our experiences, we learn to expect a new beginning after each goodbye, hopefully transformed by each experience, assured that whatever happens, God will be with us. As we regain our strength and renew our hope, we continue the journey. Being members of Magis Deo, our journey will always be in the context of living and working in God’s Kingdom. In the Kingdom of God, we take responsibility for each other, including those outside our circle; we need to cooperate in Christ’s mission no matter how little we have; it is in the giving that “our five loaves and two fish” gets multiplied. (Fr. Cis Alvarez, SJ’s homily on Corpus Christi).

We therefore pray for courage, wisdom, and strength to be able to continue the journey in God’s Kingdom.



PERSONAL DISCERNMENT PROCESS RESULTS

Cesar & Delsa Sangalang, Chaircouple

In the light of the many events happening in our country and in the world, our spiritual director Fr. James Gascon, SJ, encouraged the community members to undergo a communal discernment process. He gave us a guide on how the discernment process will be conducted. Around 70% of the BCGGs were able to participate; the results are summarized below.

As expected, positive and negative thoughts and feelings were shared. Some said they are happy, grateful, and hopeful. On the other hand, some expressed their anxiety, fear, and sadness.

The events and realities that affect most members in their personal present situation include Family/ Relationships, Politics (differences in views, support for candidates), Transition to old normal (affecting business and work challenges), Personal relationship with God, Health/ Sickness/ Death (due to Covid and other diseases).

On the other hand, the events and realities in our country that affect most members include: Elections and the possible adverse results, Ukraine-Russian war (threat/escalation of world war), Economic and financial problems (poverty; country's debt), and Degrading values (proliferation and people's acceptance of lies, rudeness, and dishonor).

Most members shared that the following scales must be removed from our eyes: Fears (of future, of uncertainty, of being irrelevant, of losing hope for the future, of not doing the right thing), Worries and anxieties, Complacency, and Pride.

The response of our members on what have been done, currently doing, and ought to do for the Lord was noted to be interchangeable and is summarized as follows: Pray and have a closer relationship with God, Keep the faith, Share more/ Pay it forward/ Become a Good Samaritan, Stand up for truth and good governance, Active service in Magis Deo, and Respond to God's call (need to be more sensitive to His call).

God's call for us as an individual includes: Pray and listen to God (Consistent and devoting more time to prayer; Deepening of spirituality), Help others (Serving and giving without counting the cost; be generous), Love the unlovable (be more understanding, sincere, patient, not judgmental), Trust in God's will/Stay in faith (especially on things out of control), and Share time, talent and treasure.

As a community, our members felt that God's call for us are: Call to mission (practice the 4 S's; to give back and pay it forward, sharing talents, skills and resources), Recruit/invite more couples to Magis, Support various activities of the different Magis Deo

Ministries, Make a stand to support/endorse the candidate closest to our values and character, and Call to action (Have more programs for the marginalized).

If we link God's call for us as a community to our directions/thrusts this year, it seems that we are not far from what our members are discerning. We pray that the Lord will continue to guide our community to live out and embody our mission and vision in Magis Deo according to His will.



MY RECOLLECTION

Trixie Sun, Matthew BCGG / Formation Ministry



During the April Community Celebration, Fr. Vic Baltazar, SJ, gave a Lenten recollection with the theme "Exploring some meanings of the Cross for us." He posed the following reflection questions:

- What kind of cross are you being asked to embrace in your Christian life now?
- Is your cross more in the Conversion dynamic (dying to self), Commitment dynamic (closer imitation of Christ), Communion dynamic (joining in Christ in self-sacrificing love and service)?
- Did you sense God reaching out to you in prayer? What invitation is God communicating to you?

Fr. Vic mentioned that the journey in our Christian life is not strictly linear, and that although we may experience all three dynamics, there must be one dynamic that resonates with us more than the others. I pondered the transformation, if any, that has taken place within me since my spiritual journey with Magis Deo began, up to this time of writing (June 8), paying particular attention to how I may have changed about how I feel about and treat people.

Owing to the number of roles I play, the dynamic that predominates depends on the situation I am in and the people I am interacting with. I am aware that how I behave and the degree to which I allow myself to "grieve" as a result of self-denial and an attempt to transcend inordinate attachments are influenced by personal biases and past experiences. In situations concerning my family and the people I care about, or even involving people I hardly know but who choose to entrust themselves to me, I know the Communion dynamic is predominant.

Every day, there is a deliberate effort on my part to push both the Conversion and Commitment dynamics to the forefront because I encounter and interact with people I do not know, or with people I do know but whose beliefs and values differ from mine. I am sometimes guilty of forming impressions of others based on these differences and, consequently, hesitate to mingle with them. During such times, I remind myself that I am building a relationship with Christ and should therefore behave like Christ. I don't always

COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

succeed especially when I get overwhelmed by work and my actions become reflexive, or when I allow myself to wallow in hopelessness and despair (as when I spend too much time contemplating the possible travails of our country under this new administration). I will readily admit, albeit with some embarrassment, that I have entertained the thought of refusing to extend help to relatives and acquaintances who voted for the other team in case they reach out to me for help (I know this example will be irrelevant in the future, but it is the most appropriate I can think of at the moment to exemplify how I can be so unlike Christ). I know this is not what Jesus wants me to do so should this happen; I will have to deliberately get into the Conversion dynamic and progress from there. It will be a struggle but with Christ, I know it will be a Cross I will be able to bear.

After Fr. Vic's talk I commented that I found what he said thought-provoking and internally disturbing because I felt a sense of urgency in making my story a part of God's story and that

through His grace, I will be transformed into His vessel through which His love would radiate as I offer service and love to everyone I meet. This sense of urgency comes from knowing that we have a finite existence on earth and its unpredictability does not guarantee that we will be around tomorrow.

I do not love the way Jesus loves, a realization in the Commitment dynamic, but this will not deter me from continually building a relationship with Him, allowing myself to be buoyed up and empowered by His love, my sins cleansed as I lay my soul bare in His light. I will keep my gaze on Him as I go about my life, contemplate Him until I become like Him, as much as is humanly possible.

God is calling me to fulfill what I aspire to achieve before my life is over – to carry the Cross of Communion, to enter into His Paschal Mystery and become God's presence in the world so that "no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

BEYOND THE MAY 2022 ELECTIONS

Ferdie Joson, Sirach BCGG / Praxis Ministry

The facts and data presented in the talk of Fr. Ro Atilano, SJ, are a preview of things to come. And indeed, the shifting values and personal preferences were clearly reflected in the results of the recent elections.

Faced with such realities, I still hope and wish the best for our country. I continue serving our community, and make them feel everyone is part of the society we all live in.

The task to make a better world is challenging. Collectively this can be accomplished if we all work together for the common good.

May that Holy Disturbance be the flame in my heart as I continue to dream and work for a better world. A testimony in the practice of my faith as I journey to know Him more.



PENTECOST: BOTH GIFT AND MISSION

Mark & Cathy Maulit, Prodigal 102 / Pastoral Council Overseers of the Youth Ministry

A month after the national and local elections, a week before the 124th anniversary of Philippine Independence, and on World Environment Day, the Magis Deo Community celebrated the Solemnity of the Pentecost in its first face-to-face Community Celebration since the pandemic. The Youth Ministry sponsored the gathering by inviting the guest speaker and mass celebrant, and providing the emcees, mass commentator, readers, offerors and collectors. The youth choir also sang the communion song during the mass. As usual, the Community Services Ministry provided background support and the Magis Deo Chorale sang most of the mass songs.

Much like Jerusalem during the first Pentecost, it was a convergence of people from various walks of life with an assortment of reasons for coming and a multitude of concerns weighing on their minds. Like the disciples just before the Holy Spirit descended on them, the community was most of all trying to make the best sense of recent events and hence the theme "Discerning the Stirrings of the Holy Spirit as a Nation" seemed to fit.

Fr. Eric Escandor, SJ, the guest speaker and mass celebrant, was more than up to the task of helping the community do just as the theme suggested. One the first points he made was that Pentecost is not a personal affair for the sole benefit of the one receiving the Holy Spirit. It corresponds with the harvest season wherein the gifts are meant to be shared with everyone, making Pentecost both a privilege and a mission. It contrasts with the story of the Tower of Babel and rather than causing confusion and separation, it brings people together through a clarity and an understanding of shared values and hopes.



Making a connection with Ignatian "incarnational" spirituality, Fr. Eric explained that the mission of Pentecost is to make Christ present in the world through us because the Holy Spirit enables us to participate in God's work in the here and now. That work primarily consists of the promotion of justice, fully recognizing the dignity of all created beings as God's image and therefore not mere instruments to be exploited for the profit of a few. It is a radical message whose seed was planted more than two thousand years ago that needs to take root in everyone's heart before it can truly bear the fruit that it is meant to bear.

What does all of this mean in my case? It means I need to stop making excuses, blaming socio-political realities not being conducive for the pursuit of justice. Change has already happened. The enabling environment already exists. The Holy Spirit has already come to make me a christ with a small "c." All I need to do now is to take advantage of the grace, go far beyond mere advocacy and take concrete action to deliver the fruits of that change.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

JUNE 5, 2022 FACE-TO-FACE



JUNE 5, 2022 FACE-TO-FACE



MAGIS LINGAP

Mennen & Elyn Aracid, Easter BCGG / Pastoral Council Overseer of the Outreach Ministry

Magis Deo, a Latin phrase which means **More for God**, is a community committed to a life of stewardship, simplicity, sharing, and service.

In line with this year's Pastoral Council goal of a **spiritually strong and vibrant apostolic community**, the Outreach Ministry is launching the **Magis LINGAP** program.

Magis, the Ignatian value of striving for the better or striving for excellence, embodies a spirit of giving and providing service to those in need, and standing with the poor and marginalized. While "LINGAP" is a Filipino term which means protective care, favor, and attention.

We combined these two words and came up with a wholistic approach in reaching out to families and communities.

- Lingap KARUNUNGAN – scholarship
- Lingap KABUHAYAN – livelihood and capacity building
- Lingap KABANALAN – spirituality
- Lingap KALIKASAN – care for the environment, support during calamities

We currently have 10 college scholars from our adopted community in Olandes, Marikina. They are receiving P5,000.00 per semester from Magis member donors. The Joey Yuson Scholarship Foundation (JYSF) will be integrated into the **Lingap KARUNUNGAN** program.

On top of the educational assistance for college or university, we are now opening opportunities for those who would like to take vocational/technical (voctec) courses. The scholars would be able to finish studies faster and be able to work sooner. We would also be able to support more scholars if they take short courses instead of a 4-year degree course.



From Lingap KARUNUNGAN, we can help our adopted family towards our **Lingap KABUHAYAN** program by helping them find jobs after they complete their course. We can also introduce other sources of livelihood and give seminars and workshops on practical skills like financial management and basic accounting.

Our Suyuan and Buhay Espiritual ng Mag-asawa (BEM) will be part of the Lingap KABANALAN program. We want to help couples/parents in our adopted communities to have strong spirituality and marital relationships to be able to give the proper guidance, love, and support to their families.

Lingap KALIKASAN may include cleanup drive, tree planting, urban gardening, seminars to support our environment, and extending help during calamities.



Call for Scholar applicants

The search is on for our Lingap KARUNUNGAN scholars. Applicant for scholarship should preferably be a child of our Suyuan participants and be recommended by a BCGG. Participants of Suyuan, Magis members or their family may also apply. Only one member per family can qualify for the program. An applicant may take any course offered by TESDA, any voctec school, private or public college or university. However, priority will be given to courses that have high employability based on the market needs.

The final decision on admission is done by the Pastoral Council upon the recommendation of the Lingap Karunungan Committee and Outreach Ministry.

The committee makes the recommendation based on the following:

- Academic assessment – the potential and capability of the grantee to pursue his/her studies (30%)
 - proof of highest educational attainment (diploma, school card, etc.)
 - certification of completing the entrance requirements of TESDA/voctec schools or passing the qualifying / entrance test of any college or university
- Assessment of financial need (30%)
 - family income of not more than P300,000.00 a year
 - family information (members living at home, age, education, occupation, etc.)
- Character/Values assessment (40%)
 - Exhibits the values of Stewardship, Simplicity, Sharing, and Service
 - Testimonials/Character reference

APPLY NOW



Call for Donors and Hiring Partners

A typical voctec course is about P10,000 per student. Aside from the tuition, the usual challenge of students are the materials/supplies/laboratory equipment, uniform, and allowance for food and transportation.

We are calling on generous individuals and BCGGs who could support our Lingap KARUNUNGAN scholars by donating any amount either one-time, monthly, quarterly, or annually.

Aside from financial assistance, you or your company may also support the Lingap Karunungan program by hiring our graduates or allowing them to join your internship program as part of our Lingap KABUHAYAN program. In the end, our wish is for them to be gainfully employed without spending so many years in school.

Family beneficiaries are encouraged to attend our activities for couples and the youth and be part of the Magis Deo community.

We will be sending your respective BCGGs a packet that contains the specifics of the program. This would include the forms needed to start the application process for your beneficiaries and the instructions for sending your donations.

We look forward to your support!



FIRST FACE-TO-FACE SUYUAN AFTER COVID PANDEMIC

Philip & Malu Panlilio, Mustard Seed BCGG / Formation Ministry



Olandes Suyuan Class 2022

On 20 March 2022, after a long wait, the first face-to-face Suyuan seminar was held for Olandes Suyuan Community in Marikina since the onset of the Covid pandemic in 2020. Twelve (12) couples participated in the seminar with hope of joining the Kasalan Bayan later in the year.



Faithful to their apostolic mission, Randy & Cecil Rivera, Song of Ruth BCGG, bravely accepted to serve as facilitators of the seminar. Mustard Seed BCGG, together with Olandes Suyuan graduates, were glad to serve as Suyuan auxiliaries with Outreach Ministry Head Rico & Terry Lim. The Suyuan seminar was blessed with the presence of Fr. James Gascon, SJ, Magis Spiritual Director, and Fr. Christopher Gonzales, parish priest of the Nativity of Our Lady Parish.



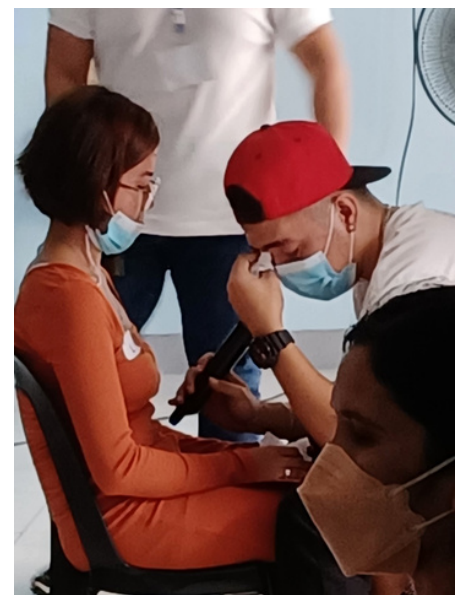
Facilitators Randy & Cecil Rivera with Mustard Seed BCGG Auxies and Outreach Ministry Head Rico & Terry Lim



Couple Participants



Reconciliation of Couple Participants



Sorry ... Sorry



Lovey-dovey



Suyuan



Kids of Suyuan Participants



Olandes Suyuan Auxies



Mustard Seed Auxies

OUTREACH

To date, three reunions were held as follow-up deepening sessions on 27 March, 10 and 24 April, and fourth reunion on 15 May. Chronicles BCGG lovingly led the reunions with generous provision of merienda. Regular prayer meetings will follow, paired with preparation for the Kasalan Bayan. Thanks be to God!



Reunion 1
Led by Dong & Gin Galang and
Rady & Vivian Flores



Reunion 2
Led by Jojo & Jane Aldeguez



Reunion 3
Led by Ney & Pinky Rosas

TENDING THE SHEEP SERIES QUARTERLY MEMBERS' FORMATION PROGRAM

A REPORT ON THE TALK ON AMORIS LAETITIA BY FR. JAMES WENCESLAO U. GASCON, SJ



Yoling Sevilla, John BCGG

For the first topic in the Magis Deo Community's Tending the Sheep Series, Fr. James Gaston, SJ, chose to discuss *Amoris Laetitia*, a post-synodal apostolic exhortation on love in the family.

This was a most appropriate topic for the first talk since our community's mission is the pastoral care of and formation of married couples and their families. A total of 93 members from 22 out of 25 BCGGs participated.

In nine chapters it discusses

1. The Family in the Bible
2. The Family in Today's World
3. The Family in Church Teaching
4. Love in Marriage
 - Love between husband and wife
5. Love Made Fruitful
 - The love of a Mother and Father
 - Love for parents, of brothers and sisters, for the elderly
6. Pastoral Care of Families
7. Educating Children
8. Accompanying, Discerning, Integrating Weakness
9. Family Spirituality



As an opener in his exhortation, the Pope declares:

"The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church." (AL 1)



Families are places where God and His love are present and at work:

"The love of parents is the means by which God our Father shows His own love." (AL 170)

"The Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes." (AL 315)

"All of us should be able to say, thanks to the experience of our life in the family, 'We come to believe in the love God has for us.'" (AL 290)

All families need to be helped to grow in love:

"No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love." (AL 325)

"I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfill their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way." (AL 57)

"We cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love." (AL 89)

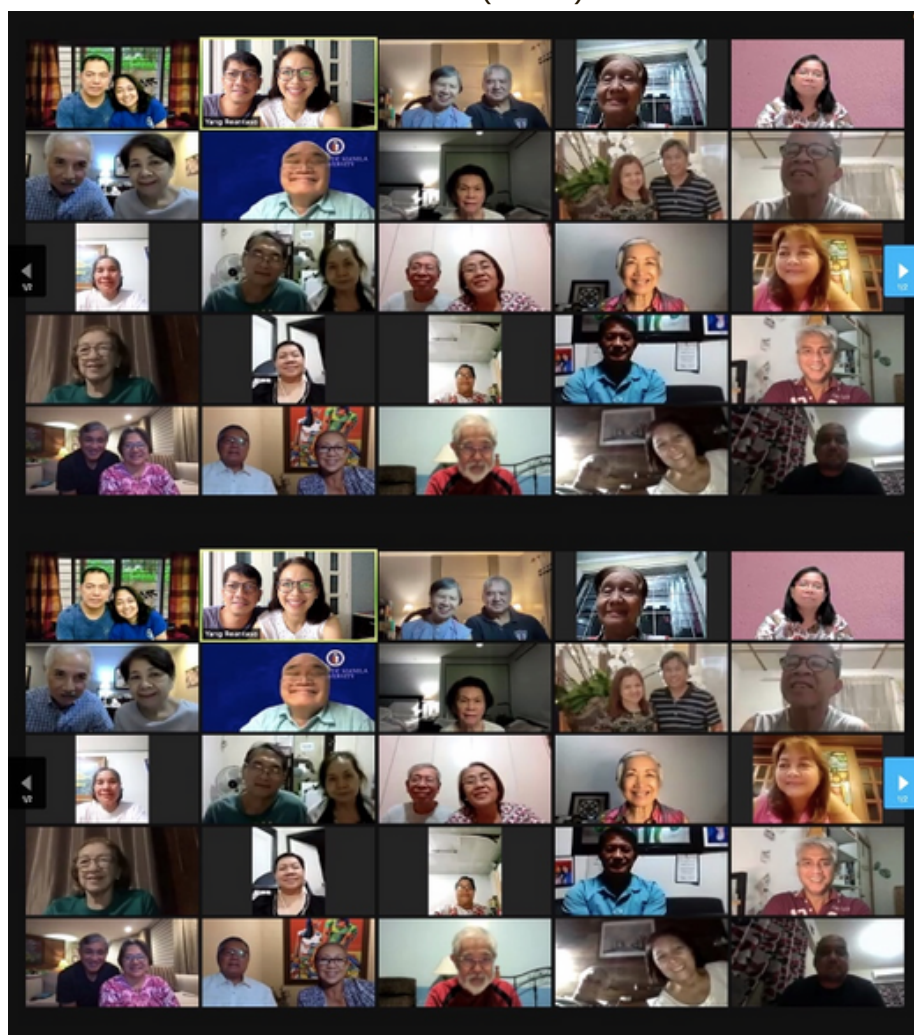
Families in difficulty and persons in imperfect relationships should be treated and helped with love and mercy:

"The Church must accompany with attention and care, the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled love." (AL 291)

"Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, 'always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.' "
(AL 308)

To end the teaching on Amoris Laetitia, Fr. James quoted 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, highlighting a few lines:

"Love is patient,
love is kind;
love is not jealous or boastful,
it is not arrogant or rude.
Love does not insist on its own way,
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrong,
but rejoices in the right.
Love bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.
Amen.



Reflection Questions:

In my family or community,
1. "Love is not rude." Do I speak with respect, courtesy, gentleness, encouragement – or am I harsh, thoughtless, critical?

2. "Love is not resentful." Do I try to understand others – or do I tend to look for more faults and bad intentions?

3. "Love bears all things." Do I know when and how to be silent about the weaknesses of others – or do I speak too much about others' faults?

4. "Love believes all things." Do I know how to trust – or am I always trying to control, monitor, dominate others?

5. "Love hopes all things." Do I still know how to hope for change or some good in others or during a difficult situation – or do I become completely negative about them?

TENDING THE SHEEP SERIES QUARTERLY MEMBERS' FORMATION PROGRAM

THE CHURCH AS A TEACHING COMMUNITY: A TALK BY FR. JAMES WENCESLAO U. GASCON, SJ



QUARTERLY MEMBERS' FORMATION PROGRAM
MAGIS DEO COMMUNITY
REV. FR. JAMES WENCESLAO U. GASCON, SJ
MAGIS SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

*The Church as a Teaching
Community*

Yoling Sevilla, John BCGG

The Magis Deo Community was off to a running start on March 26, 2022 with the first in a series of quarterly formation programs whose objective is to discuss "Catechetical Issues" relevant to our life as a Catholic Christian Community formed in Ignatian Spirituality. This formed the first part of the talk as an overview and context before discussions on the Pope's encyclicals and Church teach-ins.

In Fr. James' own words, this formation series will require both learning and unlearning as we become more informed about what the Church really teaches.

Why does the Church teach?

It teaches because its primary mission is evangelization, to proclaim the Gospel to all the world. The sources of its teaching are Scripture (both the Old and New Testaments) and Tradition, the deposit of faith as held and practiced by the Church as the People of God.

The Church also teaches because man has both Will and Intellect, and the Will must be educated since its decisions are based on understanding and information, and not on the lesser faculties of the Intellect. The Will is the highest level of the Soul. It is where consent to something is given.



The Intellect on the other hand, is that faculty of the Soul which allows us to discern between the lesser functions of the Soul namely instincts, emotions, feelings, and appetites.

Who regulates what the Church teaches?

The Magisterium: the teaching authority of the Church exercised by the Pope and the Bishops. Its purpose is to preserve the deposit of faith as handed down from Christ to His Church and ensure that it is a living faith, open to the deepening of understanding of revealed doctrines.

The Ordinary Magisterium of the Pope and the Bishops, in communion with him, teach the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice and the beatitude to hope for. Some examples would be the social teaching of the Catholic Church on the right to life and the rights of workers to a living wage.

What comprise the Ordinary Magisterium?

1. The Catechism of the Catholic Church
2. Apostolic Letters and Papal Encyclicals
3. The Body of Social Teaching
4. Pastoral Letters from an Individual Bishop

Can a Catholic be dismissive of the Ordinary Magisterium?

No. The Catholic Church is not a democracy. She is hierarchical in teaching and authority.

Not all that the Magisterium teaches are of equal importance, demanding different responses. There is a hierarchy of truths as well as of positions.

Hierarchy of Positions

The Pope, who is the Bishop of Rome, has the highest position.

As the Pope, he is the head of the Catholic Church. As the Bishop of Rome, he is the head of the Roman Diocese, Italy.

Hierarchy of Truths

1. Dogma: a truth which has been revealed by God which has been definitively taught by the Church as such and which calls for an irrevocable response of faith and excludes the contradictory position as heretical.

2. Definitive Doctrine: a truth which is not divinely revealed but which is necessary for the safeguarding and explanation of Revelation and which is therefore taught as definitive by the Magisterium.

3. Authoritative, Non-Definitive Doctrine: a teaching of the Magisterium connected to faith and morals which is non-definitive either because the Church is not ready to declare the teaching as divinely revealed, or because the Church cannot teach the doctrine as divinely revealed. However, these doctrines are authoritatively proposed by the Magisterium.

In summary,

Level of Church Teaching	Subject of Teaching (taught by whom)	Modality of Teaching (how it is taught)	Response
Dogma			
Defined Dogma	Pope ex cathedra or Ecumenical Council	Infallible (Extraordinary Magisterium)	Faith
Undefined Dogma	College of Bishops Dispersed but in communion	Infallible (Ordinary and Universal Magisterium)	Faith
Definitive Doctrine	Pope ex cathedra or Ecumenical Council	Infallible	Firm Acceptance
Authoritative, Non-Definitive Doctrine	1. Local Bishops 2. Groupings of Bishops (e.g., CBCP) 3. College of Bishops 4. Pope	Authoritative (Ordinary Magisterium)	Religious submission of will and intellect

A Short Reflection

What struck me most in this talk on the Church as a teaching community is the statement that: "The Catholic Church is not a democracy. She is hierarchical in teaching and authority." This demands submission of one's will and intellect to the teachings of the Magisterium if one were to truly be a practicing Catholic.

Further reflection on the Hierarchy of Truths and the response demanded of each type of truth emphasized the necessity of the gifts of Faith and Obedience. Without these gifts, the call to respond in faith and religious submission of will and intellect would not only be difficult but would be impossible.

HOLY WEEK TRIDUUM RETREAT

(Weeks 3 & 4 of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius)

12-17 April 2022

Philip & Malu Panlilio, Mustard Seed BCGG / Formation Ministry



Magis Deo conducted its first Holy Week Triduum Retreat on 12-17 April 2022 with Fr. James Gascon, SJ, Spiritual Director, via Zoom. 60 retreatants joined the online retreat, with 51 Magis members from 12 BCGGs while the remaining 9 retreatants represented family and friends. The Triduum Retreat covered Weeks 3 and 4 of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

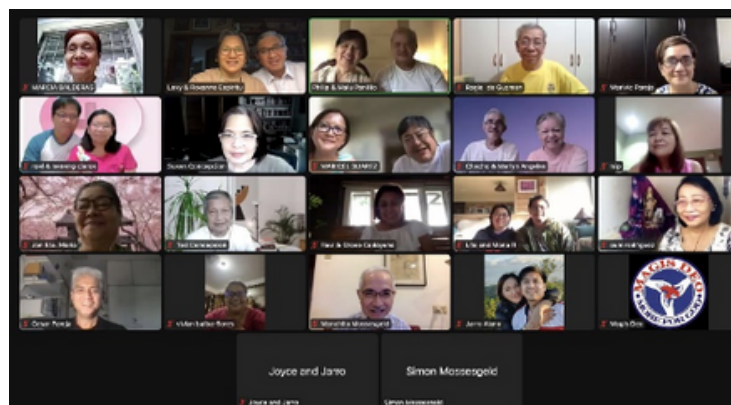
Fr. James disposed the retreatants on Holy Wednesday for a "home" retreat and treating everything we do as part of prayer. On Holy Thursday, he led the retreatants through the Lenten narratives, the retreatants' own sacred story and contemplation of the washing of the feet and the agony in the garden. The Last Supper is a gathering and communion. Holy Thursday is a story of connection, care, and conviction.

Retreatants prayed on the Paschal mystery as a source of healing on Good Friday; with a virtual Stations of the Cross with deep reflections of the Way of the Cross on one's life. Good Friday is a story of confidence: choices, consequences, and compassion. Good Friday is about having to let ourselves sink into the incomprehensibility of God, that is, by trusting even when we don't understand, by loving even when we are hated, and by forgiving even when we are being hurt.

On Black Saturday, retreatants waited in silence as we reflected on the body of Jesus inside the tomb, in total darkness, in peaceful stillness! "His cross stands empty in a world grown silent through hours of anguish and dread; in stillness the world awaits the resurrection while Christ goes down to wake the dead!"

Easter Vigil is the greatest liturgy of the Church. We anticipate the appearance of Jesus after his resurrection. We renew our baptismal promises after we look back, by listening to our story of salvation. Holy Saturday is a story of a call: a challenge; a commitment; a companionship.

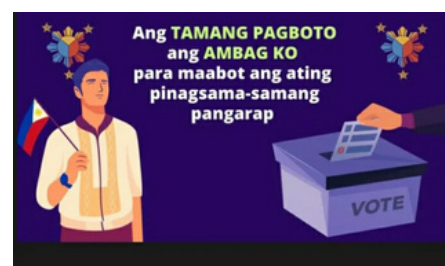
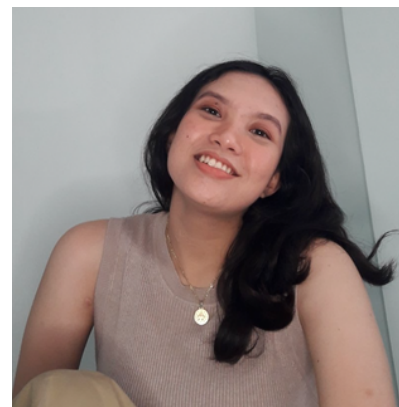
Retreatants celebrated Easter Sunday with contemplation of the appearance of Jesus to Mary and Ignatius' contemplation to attain love. Sacred experience of the beautiful love of the Lord for each one of us and our mission to love and serve Him in return. We offer ourselves, our gifts, our talents – everything – back to God, asking God to do whatever God likes with us. "Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me" (234). (I always end up singing the St. Louis Jesuits' version of "Take, Lord, Receive"!)



VOTERS EDUCATION FOR THE YSA

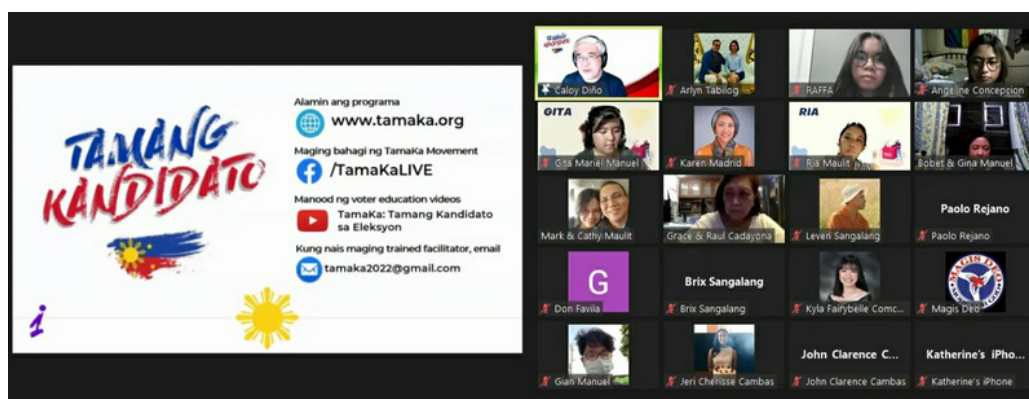
Jeri Cambas- YSA

Daughter of John and Claire Cambas of James BCGG



Going into the talk by Kuya Caloy, I already knew the candidates I was going to vote for president and vice president. The senatorial candidates were the ones I had yet to study and research on at the time. I was glad that through the talk I was able to have my choices validated and the reasons behind them strengthened. I also liked the videos presented in the talk and the questions that were raised thus there was more interaction between the audience and speaker. These kept us engaged throughout the talk.

One thing I really liked was the site given to us where we could get more information about the different candidates, and further learn whether their values and principles align with ours. I found myself visiting this site and sharing them with my family and relatives. It truly helped me make decisions concerning this year's national elections. I hope that Magis could hold more talks or seminars as these would really help us youth nowadays.



UNBOXING THE GIFT OF GRATITUDE

Zarah Gagatiga, Emmanuel BCGG / Youth Teens Lead Coordinator



Yesterday I had a wonderful time talking about gratitude and its many gifts to teens and young adults of Magis Deo Youth. There were 20 participants with ages ranging from 13 to 25 years. I had the pleasure of sharing with them the Examen as a source of gifts where gratitude can be reaped. Happiness, hope, acceptance, and self-awareness are its by-products. We ended the session with gratitude journaling and recommended activities to extend the fruits from our reflection, sharing and taking insights.

Allow me to share these activities and insights with you so that you may continue them at home with your child. Or, in my case, since my kids are young adults, strike a conversation with them over dinner or during family bonding time.

1. We were able to make a playlist of hit songs of the year of their birth. This is the link:
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/IFOmPcBDTHfohTdJ6aitB4?si=faebc07391ce4707>

Listen to the songs yourself and go back to memory lane. Relive moments of joy, glory and challenges that define the age or your generation. This may also lead you to reflect on what was then to what is now. Who are we back when we were starting out as young parents and, over the years what have we become? I hope that whatever your discoveries are, it will lead you to your desired grace. Talk to your kids about this. They have no idea of the year or the first five years of their lives. This would make for relevant story time where in you can nurture family history and enrich the personal story of your child.

Such activities at home contribute to the strengthening of family ties and the building of identity. On the other hand, if they do not initiate, let them be. These things take time. There are other creative ways to forge family ties and open channels of communication.

2. We were tired. Many of them were wrapping up the final requirements and exams in school. The recently concluded PH elections was stressful besides. I consider it a blessing to have 20 young people in the session last May 15, 2022. Somehow, having someone to share one's burdens, worries, relief, and joys was cathartic. Listening to them express themselves made me think of rest and productivity. As a genXer, I worked hard and partied harder. How are the young people of today managing their time and work/study life balance? Aha. A fascinating topic to explore for another talk or session!

3. We used the Examen as framework for reflection and prayer, recognizing gratitude as an energy and a way of seeing or perceiving its many gifts. Here is the link to the PowerPoint deck I used in the session – <https://lovealibarian.blogspot.com/2022/05/unboxing-gifts-of-gratitude.html>

4. Have a look at the resources I put together. Feel free to do a follow through especially, the activity on gratitude journaling. We value the fruits of our reflections. Taking action on them is just as important.

I was the facilitator of the online workshop on gratitude with teens and young people of the Magis Deo Youth Ministry, talked about being thankful, and introduced the Examen. I was the one graced with hope and the brilliance of youth. Let this not be wasted. Never take this for granted.

They have so much to say. They make a lot of sense. We need to listen to them. Really, really listen. In the end, it was I who gained and learned so much.



THE ADOPTION OPTION

John & Glo Boren, Agnus Dei BCGG

My wife Glo and I got involved with adoption more than 30 years ago when, after more than 10 years of childlessness, praying, visiting medical specialists, and discerning, God led us to the proper adoption authorities through a pregnant 14-year-old girl trying to find someone to abort her unwanted child. Once we had accomplished the requirements, it wasn't long before we had a cute little baby girl. She was not the child of the girl we helped. I think her child was placed in the Inter-Country Adoption program. We were fortunate to have been able to submit our adoption petition to a court, just a few days before the new Family Code took effect in August of 1988, that prohibited foreigners from adopting locally. Our daughter Michaela is now 34 years old, married and living in the U.S., and pursuing a career in green buildings. We are so proud that she grew up knowing she was adopted, and that she has become an adoption advocate.

We were also fortunate that a group of new adoptive parents like ourselves, who knew nothing about raising an adopted child, were strongly encouraged by the heads of child-caring/child-placing agencies and upper-level social workers from the DSWD, to form a support group that gave us a feeling of being part of a larger family, of not having to worry about letting our guard down when we are together, and the feeling that “hindi kami nag-iisa.”

Through the DSWD our group presented suggestions on how adoption and alternative child care in the Philippines could be improved through new laws and policies. Although it has taken 25 years, we see many of our suggestions now bearing fruit.



I won't go into too much detail about adoption law, because the topic of adoption may not be of interest to everyone in Magis Deo, but I would like to point out that two laws have recently been passed specifically about adoption and alternative child care, and give some of the highlights of the new laws.

RA 11642, titled the **Domestic Administrative Adoption and Child Care Act** was passed by Congress in September 2021 and signed by President Duterte on January 6, 2022. From the title, local adoption in the Philippines can now be **finalized by an administrative procedure**. Adoptive parents no longer need to hire a lawyer nor wait for an extended period for their petition for adoption to be decided on by a judge.

The law will simplify and shorten the adoption process, and reduce the expenses and uncertainties involved – all these our group of adoptive parents has been campaigning for since the early 1990's. **RA 11642** also consolidates the government agencies involved in alternative child care and adoption such as the Inter-Country Adoption Board (ICAB) and DSWD, into a one-stop, quasi-judicial agency on alternative child care and adoption called the **National Authority for Child Care (NACC)** attached to the DSWD. The new law states that foreigners

who have lived as permanent residents in the Philippines for at least 5 years, may adopt locally. I am still trying to clarify this. It might be limited to citizens of countries that have special diplomatic relationship with the Philippines.

The law instructs the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), in coordination with ICAB and DSWD, to formulate a cohesive organizational structure with corresponding plantilla to fulfill the functions and divisions of the NACC down to the regional level. The implementing rules and regulations (IRR) are soon to be released. We hope that, especially at the grassroots level, the process of getting abandoned and neglected children into the child care system and eventually adopted, will be expedited.

We thank Senator Risa Hontiveros, Senator Grace Poe and Senator Ramon Revilla for their efforts in crafting and campaigning for this law in Congress.

The second law, principally authored by Senator Grace Poe, is **RA 11767** titled **The Foundling Recognition and Protection Act**. It ensures that an abandoned child found in the Philippines or in a Philippine embassy, consulate, or territories abroad, is presumed to be a natural born Filipino citizen, regardless of the status or circumstances of birth. Under this law, “a foundling is accorded the rights and protections at the moment of birth equivalent to those belonging to citizens whose citizenship does not need perfection or any further act.”



Many of us may remember that during the 2016 presidential campaign, Senator Poe’s status as a natural-born Filipino citizen was questioned because aside from being adopted, she was also a foundling. As such, it was claimed that there was no legal proof that her parents were natural-born Filipinos because they were unknown; therefore, she could not be considered a natural-born Filipino. According to Senator Poe, “Foundlings are subjected to undue scrutiny for something that is completely outside of their control.”

From my experience as a volunteer member of the Regional Matching Committee for NCR for several years, I remember how the cases of foundling children seemed to be almost hopeless if they didn’t get adopted. They were usually older than surrendered children – often because of the time spent trying to locate their biological parents or relatives, or because they were “informally” adopted (pa-alaga) or they had been placed in orphanages that were not actively trying to find adoptive families for them.

On their foundling certificate their names were usually “Baby Boy” or “Baby Girl” or the location where they were found. But the law did not allow them to be issued a Certificate of Live Birth (CLB) unless they were adopted. Without a CLB, they couldn’t get into the bureaucratic system of the government. It was difficult for them to get an SSS number, a driver’s license, a passport and maybe even to marry, under civil or religious law. This is why RA 11767 is of great benefit to foundlings. It ensures they become a part of the system.

This article should also serve as a reminder to the public the importance of reporting and turning over a foundling or abandoned child to the proper authorities such as a barangay captain or a DSWD social worker, as soon as possible. If anyone is offered a child for adoption by a friend or stranger, or knows about someone trying to sell a child, please don’t get involved unless it is to make sure the child is transferred to the government’s care. Sometimes people think the offer of a child is a

sign from God. It may be a sign from God, but only to raise your awareness about adoption. Adoption is not an informal process. There are rules and procedures that must be followed, for the protection of the child. Please note that signing a piece of paper in front of a barangay official is not the legal way to relinquish parental authority over a child. It must be done through the NACC or its affiliated child-caring agencies like the DSWD, or NGOs like Kaisahang Buhay Foundation or NORFIL Foundation.

Under RA 11642 there are strict penalties for simulating a birth certificate. This happens when a person or couple registers a child at the Civil Registry under their name, even though the mother did not give birth to the child. Also, persons involved in aiding or abetting the simulation of a birth, such as doctors, nurses, midwives, hospital personnel, government employees or a child trafficker, can be imprisoned for up to 10 years, fined, and/or have their license to practice revoked.

Unfortunately, birth certificate simulation has been a very common form of informal adoption in the past because many births occur outside of a hospital hence the birth is not properly recorded. Much of it is a result of poverty, the shame from publicly relinquishing a child, or because of illegitimacy.

In informal adoption through simulation, there is a tendency towards secrecy. Parents always think, "We have a birth certificate. That's enough. There's no reason for our child to think he or she is adopted." There are even some lawyers who think this way. They feel they are saving their child from the stigma of being adopted and from a lot of headaches while growing up. But always remember the first cultural rule we were taught as Peace Corps Volunteers when we arrived in the Philippines: There are NO secrets in the Philippines. Parents living with this secret worry constantly that someone, intentionally or unintentionally, will reveal to the child what they've been hiding for years. Even families who

adopt legally have a difficult time telling their child about their adoption. Many keep postponing "the TALK" until the secret eventually is revealed by someone else because they fear their child will react negatively and not love them anymore, or worse, run away from home.

The new law even has a provision requiring adoptive parents to prepare their adopted child and start telling them about their adoption background, before they turn 7 years old! Telling is not a one-time process. It is done step-by-step, with more background information added as the child's ability to understand or curiosity increases.

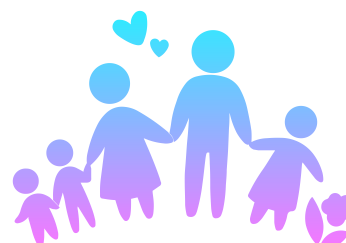
Recently, on June 9 - 10, 2022, the NACC held an Adoption and Alternative Child Care Week celebration that they called "Discovering the New Law and Celebrating Legal Adoption." The proceedings, which included talks by adoption personnel about the new law, adoptive parents and adult adoptees, are available for viewing on Facebook at the following address:

<https://www.facebook.com/nacc.gov.ph/videos/798327881106031/>

If you are interested in adoption and alternative child care, you may watch this. The recording quality is not professional and sometimes the sound is not very clear, but the talks by adoptive parents and adult adoptees are inspiring.

RA11642 can be viewed at:
<https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2022/01jan/20220106-RA-11642-RRD.pdf>

RA11767 can be viewed at:
<https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2022/05may/20220506-RA-11767-RRD.pdf>



IN GOD'S TIME

Sonny Maroon, Samaritans BCGG

I found God this week in the events that transpired during our elections. Watching the unfortunate turn of events, it seems we lost our chance at experiencing good governance for the next six years.

Some friends I know made many sacrifices but in the end, it seems all for naught. The worst case scenario still happened. After 2000 years, people are still choosing Barabbas.

Old questions began to fill my mind again...
Why do bad things happen to good people?
Is God an active participant in our misfortune?
Why does He allow these things to happen?

Nowadays, it is very easy to lose hope.

I prayed and I prayed... and somehow the thought came to me...

I thought of the Hebrews/Israelites; the Chosen People...

"The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the people on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession." (Deuteronomy 7:6)

According to the book of Genesis, Hebrews were slaves of Egypt for more than 400 years. 400 years they waited for help...

When Moses finally freed them from the Pharaoh, they spent 40 years wandering the wilderness to get from Egypt to Canaan (now modern-day Israel)... They wandered 40 years in the wilderness for an 8,482 km journey which would take only 212 days if they walked 8 hours a day at an average of 5 kms per hour. In those 40 years God provided quail and manna for their food... but they suffered. He allowed them to suffer

I can imagine what they were thinking...
Are we really getting saved?
I had a better life being a slave!
Why are we wandering lost in the wilderness?
Will I ever live to see the promised land of Milk and Honey?

In fact, a lot of them complained all the time and rebelled every so often. There was even a time God punished them with fire at Taberah, consuming some of the rebellious people until Moses interceded. (Numbers 11: 1-3)

Imagining wandering for 40 years.
It would take a saint not to complain.
Then I realized... God has His own timeline.
Nothing is ever instant.
Why it took 40 years, I do not know. Maybe He was preparing people, changing them through the journey, setting the stage, cleansing hearts...
In those 40 years, He gave them the 10 commandments... commandments that up to now rule our lives.
Perhaps He was testing them; checking if they will choose to be true to their covenant.
Moses even died along the way... It was Joshua who led them to reach Canaan.
When they finally got there, after suffering for 40 years, they had to fight bloody battles against the Canaanites and the Philistines who occupied the area...



REFLECTIONS

Imagine the hardships they went through...

And yet God calls them His Chosen People;
Gods treasured possession... His favorite among
all nations...

Now, here we are far from being His favorite. Six
years under a thug and now another possible 6
years under the family of those who once upon
a time robbed us blind and bound Filipinos in
chains of poverty.

For a short while during the elections, we had a
glimmer of hope to be led by one we saw was
decent and capable. Alas, it was not to be.

Many of us are now asking...
How do I deal with this?
Does God not want us to have good
governance?
Or is it part and parcel of a grand plan that I fail
to appreciate?

In my 50 years of existence, I have seen and
proven that everything falls in its proper place in
God's good time.

With what is happening lately, I sometimes
doubt if there is anything good that will come

from the recent events. It seems impossible that
this is only a small part of the Grand Plan. Then I
remember a lesson I learned growing up.

"The only thing you can control in life is how you
respond to it."

Will I lose hope? Or will I leave it all up to God
and see where He leads us?

I refuse to lose hope.

I refuse to accept that there is no goodness left
in what is happening now. I will not complain nor
rebel like the Israelites.
I continue to hope. I continue to pray that some
good will come out of this.

Maybe not instantly... but as sure as the sun
shines tomorrow, GOOD will come. It is just a
matter of time... and God's timing.

As I end my sharing, let me leave you with the
thoughts found scrawled in a cellar wall where
Jews hid in Cologne, Germany during World War
II to escape Hitler's gas chambers:

"I believe in the sun even when it isn't shining.
I believe in love even when I do not feel it.
I believe in God even when He is silent."



A YEAR OF HOPE WALKING FROM CHAOS TO GRACE

Gigi Resurreccion, John BCGG

Yesterday, the verdict: you are in remission. It wasn't too long ago that I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Fear, anxiety, suffering overwhelmed me. Yet, Grace overcame my great tribulation. I heard myself saying: "Cancer was a blessing" with those who heard it almost unbelieving. Yet it is.



Psalm 23:6 says: "SURELY only goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This came true in my life. The outpouring of love, blessings, prayers and support from family and

friends came like a welcome storm of grace. I did not have to wait to die before I knew how people thought of me or how much they love me. I was able to bask in the messages and actions of love while I was still alive. There were days I heard HIS voice clearly: I am here. Do not fear. Isn't that Grace coming alive?

And so, this year I dedicated myself to do something that will matter. I went beyond my comfort zone. I walked, rather ran, for a cause. I used my voice to bring the news of hope. I was in a hurry. I may not have time, but I can use whatever time I have to serve, guide, and love.



Did I fail? Absolutely not. With every strength I have, I battled for truth. I was instrumental in opening hearts and minds. I gained the friendship, generosity, and support of like-minded individuals who went above and



beyond the call of duty. This is the thing about love and selflessness. It multiplies. It brings hope that never dies.

Then three days ago, the battery of tests and labs began. With each test, my humanity surfaced: fearful, anxious, uncertain. I am quite sure I will feel this way each time; and God's divinity will meet me at all times: comfort, healing, grace.

So it has been a year. The suffering seemed distant, but it is always too real. I cannot and will never fully understand how blessed I am if I do not look back on this walk to Calvary. I bask in the goodness of the Lord because I know how He has saved me. I pray that we too as a nation will be saved. I do not know how and yet I trust. He who chose the foolish things of this world to confound the wise will choose the weak to shame those who are mighty. We are never defeated. It is, after all, a year of hope.



MAGIS DEO YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE EARTH AND SALT OF THE WORLD

Rico Lim, Easter BCGG / Outreach Ministry

Jesus used familiar objects to teach spiritual truths. He commanded His followers to be the "salt of the earth and light of the world."

During the time of Jesus, salt was a very precious commodity. It was used mainly as a food preservative in the absence of refrigeration.

Salt was so precious then that it was even paid as salary to Roman soldiers.

Back then, there was also no electricity and people were dependent on candles and lamps to see in pitch darkness.



Yet even a little light helped to guide people living in darkness to move towards the light. Before joining Magis Deo my faith as a Catholic was shallow and I did not know the meaning of being a true Catholic. All that changed as I joined and grew with Magis Deo. I have a deeper understanding of the faith and the love of Jesus.



Jesus commanded us not to be light in the church, but more to be light in our homes and our community. In our many years with Magis Deo, we hope someday, somehow, we have been the salt and the light for our community and especially for our extended family – Easter BCGG.

As Christ's followers we all should be in physical contact with others and visible to our family and sheep to be effective "salt and light." We must show our love for God by showing others how to live with Jesus in our heart and soul. Doing more for God... that is the true spirit of being a Magis Deo.



TRANSITION

Bogs & Grace Catangay, Tala BCGG

In life the only thing constant is change. Change is something we cannot ignore or avoid whether we like the change or not. We face change every day; there are minor changes starting from the unexpected change of season, changes in schedule, to the unacceptable change of our hair color. Then there are major changes like losing a loved one, losing a job, or a break-up.

One major change that affected not only me but the whole world is the change due to Covid – the fear of the virus forced us not to go out and stay home, sometimes we quarantine, where we totally rely on our neighbor to help us.

Change can be positive to some but not to all. Some experience fear, anxiety, depression. However, for me Covid is a welcome change, now I dream of and actually work without the usual travel, the heavy traffic, the heat, etc. Covid allowed me to have more “Me” and “Family” time.

With the easing of alert levels, we now return to the usual work schedules. I am happy and blessed that while most of my colleagues are back to their full work schedules, I am one of the few who were given a hybrid schedule where we work only 3 days a week. I have the chance to gradually return to normal work schedule. When the time comes that I am asked to work 5 days a week, I must once again embrace the change, knowing that change is a permanent fixture of life.



Another major change I may not like is the result of the elections, especially the newly elected senators. I am hoping that most of us learned from the past, I am wishing that many realize we need officials with good moral character, honest, and with integrity. I fear for what is to come, I fear for my children and their children, for they are the ones who will suffer from the debts, from the greed of the elected who continue to monopolize the highest seats in government. For me this is Dynasty at its worst; but the majority have spoken, and sadly this is how democracy works.

Still, I wish for the best to come. I really hope na Mali Ako and Tama Sila... to the 15 million Kudos! To the 35 million (I hope this is the right number) I am looking forward to the Golden Era. We all hope for the best.



FREEDOM OF CHOICE

By Jun & Vivian Ah Yong and Members of St. Peter BCGG

Galatians 5:13 says: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

One of the greatest gifts God has blessed us with is the gift of freedom. Freedom allows us to choose our actions. Freedom of choice is our ability to discern between two things and to choose one over the other.

Yet, because we enjoy freedom, it does not mean we can do whatever we want with it. There is a consequence and a corresponding effect or reaction to every action we take. We are fully responsible for all our actions. By giving us the freedom to choose between loving Him or not, God risks losing those of us who have weak faith in Him. For God, the greatest love comes from a heart that is willing. In the same vein, God sent His only Son to save us from sin, as a consequence of our freedom, knowing fully well that Jesus may have to suffer and die for us just to show what love truly means.

In the recently concluded national elections, choices were made. Majority of our compatriots voted one candidate in favor of the others. Many are happy their candidate won, others are unhappy, saddened, and demoralized. Whatever it is, the Filipino people have spoken. Only time will tell if the choice was a good one or not. For now, it would be in our best interest to set aside differences, to come and work together, and pray that our national leaders who were voted into office will be able to, by the grace of God, uphold their promise to unite and bring greatness to our people and our country. Hope springs eternal. Let us not give up nor despair. We are proud to be Filipinos and there is no other country we can truly call home other than the Philippines. Let us rise above partisanship and politics and focus on



helping our brothers and sisters in need – the poor in the peripheries, the underprivileged, the oppressed, and the street children, to name a few.

I distinctly remember the words of Fr. Dave Concepcion, parish priest of Sta. Maria Goretti, that struck a chord deep in my heart. He said, "If someone is good to you, be good to them. However, if someone is not good to you, continue to be good to them because that's who you are." ... "As Christians, let us continue to be better persons today than yesterday."

Many of us openly supported and campaigned for Leni in one of the most contentiously fought elections in our country's history. In our hearts, we truly believed that she is the best and most worthy candidate. But this was not to be. Her failed bid has deeply hurt many. But was it really a failure? Weren't our hearts burning and our passions aflame when we stood for our cherished Christian values and principles? Didn't we do our best and fight a good and valiant fight? Perhaps, but was 6 months of hard work enough?



It beckons us to go into deeper reflection, soul searching, and discernment on what transpired and what it means for us, for our community, for our brother Filipinos, and for the nation. What is God telling us? What should we do or not do? How can we do better? Where do we go from here? How can we channel our energy, vibrance, and passion beyond the elections? We certainly need to heal. We need a bit of time to pull ourselves together. The answers may not come immediately, but by God's love and compassion, He will help us move forward and be enlightened. God is our strength, our healer, and our redeemer. He loves us so much despite and in spite of our sins that He sent His only son to save us from eternal damnation. Even if God was rejected, He never gave up on us. We should never give up on our love for our country and even those who voted for the incoming national leaders.

Over 60% of the voters come from the poorest and most vulnerable in society. Is there something we in Magis Deo can do to alleviate poverty as an extended outreach ministry beyond, for example, Suyuan?

To alleviate the plight of the poor is to improve their livelihood; with better sources of living come better health conditions and better education (i.e., an enlightened electorate). Perhaps we can make a commitment, right here, right now, to do something more for God by loving our less fortunate brothers and sisters and doing more – educating and teaching the poor and out of school youth, for example.

One of our members, Ate Sar, said, “Sino man ang nanunungkulan, gagawin ko pa din ang aking tungkulin bilang isang mabuting mamamayan sa isip, sa salita, at sa gawa. Susuporta ako sa anumang proyekto ng Magis Deo para sa under-privileged. Simulan natin sa ating mga kasama sa patnubay ng Espiritu Santo.”

Finally, an author once said, “Even in the toughest of times... don't give up hope. It may look dark, but you will find the sun standing behind even the darkest of clouds. Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us not stop doing good for God never gave up on us.



WHAT IF...

Mennen M. Aracid, Easter BCGG / Pastoral Council Overseer of the Outreach Ministry

Reflection from Gospel Reading: Mt 5:27-32.

If your body causes you to sin, cut it off. Take it out.

Today's readings are rather harsh. Perhaps at the time this was written, amputation was the norm of the day. If someone sinned and broke the law, the law would permit government to cut off a body part as punishment for transgressing rules. That was perhaps the economical thing to do instead of watching over that person and preventing him from repeating or committing another time.

The scriptures did not say someone else should cut off that part that causes us to sin, WE should be the one to cut it off. Scary thought.

I lingered on that passage and a thought crossed my mind: what if our body parts fell off every time we sinned? No need to cut them off, they just fell whenever we sinned against God. How many would walk the streets with a complete body? How many of my body parts would fall off? Would that thought make us sin less? Would we be happier and freer if we followed God's rules?

In one of the groups, I read about physical punishment, one commented that if limbs were the standard, we would only have 3 tries to get things right; 5 tries at most: 2 hands, 2 legs, and our necks.

He said, so that we have more tries, why not go for joints instead? It's a dark thing to say, but he might have a point there. We need a lot of chances. If we only had 3 or 5 chances, we might run out of limbs.



Applying my contemplation of the falling limbs and body parts, I read through my social media feed. Here are some of the instances where we might be at threat of losing our limbs:

- No parking
- Beating the red light
- Bawal umihi dito
- Bawal magtapon ng basura dito
- No entry
- One way
- No overtaking on yellow lanes
- Speed limit on SLEX: 80 kph
- I run over the guard, I don't show up, and take responsibility for my actions
- Car driver uses the bus lane where he is not allowed to ply. He gets flagged down. But instead of accepting his mistake, he does not surrender his license and argues with the traffic officer.
- Feel free to add your own to this list.

Rules? They're there. But how is it that we end up challenging or breaking them?

The Lord is generous about the things we can do.

Everything we can do, except for 10 commandments.

Even during the Garden of Eden, He told us we can eat anything. Except the fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When He asked Adam, Adam blamed Eve. Instead of protecting Eve, nilaglag siya ni Adan.

It was difficult for Adam to admit his wrongdoing, even when he was before his Maker.

That's pretty much like me justifying and evading responsibility when I do not think through the consequences of my actions. That was when I throw God out of the window.

But guess what? The Lord loves us. He never gives up on us. That's probably why we are gifted with mornings. God renews his promises just like daybreak. If we fall short, the Lord does not let us down. We let ourselves down. We let go and choose to not follow his Laws. That is what sin does.

When we fall short, we are offered another chance.

We cannot conquer sin alone. But with stronger resolve and God in our hearts, we are renewed to new life. Because His nature is in us, we will eventually learn our lesson and get things right.

