

# Magis

*Formation for Mission*

*Stewardship*  
*Simplicity*  
*Sharing*  
*Service*

Official Publication of the  
Magis Deo Community  
March 2022 Issue

## Servant Leadership

We are called to discern deeply through the Holy Spirit to help us choose our next leader

## God is With Us

In His glory, we will find the light even in life's darkest moments

## 2022 Direction and Thrusts

Supporting our future ministry programs is a step towards a spiritually strong and vibrant apostolic community

## Pink and Green Plants

As nurturers, we feel strongly about giving our children and our Earth a healthier future

## God Alive During Love Life

Serving and giving with love has never sounded so sweet in Love Life's soulful second outing

# About the Cover



In the history of our country's election seasons, 2022's is probably the most divisive so far. We all have witnessed—and still are witnessing—that information dissemination is both a blessing and a curse: the nation being spoonfed with too much information that some couldn't differentiate the truth and the fabricated. As each Filipino have their own varying Presidential bets, social media is unceasingly loitered with either of the two: a show of support, or an array of arguments — both laid out to sway and convert family members, friends, or colleagues into joining their respective sides. Some are open to a change of mind, while others are chained to politicians' pasts, uniting in a self-proclaimed truth that would make history blush in disrespect. But the fight doesn't stop online, for it has also found its way on-ground, through jam-packed rallies and programs. Chillingly, it seems that nothing could stop Filipinos in setting their hearts ablaze, not even the heat of summer. You can see passion towering the tallest of buildings.

While the campaign season has been nothing short of eventful (the good and the bad) it is proven that love is always a better remedy than indifference. Amidst all the noise and the circus, we are still one unit who's been through it. We—especially the underprivileged and marginalized—are all victims of broken promises, of past mistakes and shortcomings, of innocent lives lost, of delusions, illusions and injustice. Whoever you choose, keep in mind that your leader isn't to be elected as a false god you'd forever worship. Should they do us wrong, we must hold them accountable. After all, they are only passing by, but they must also rise to the challenge of making a strong, positive, and lingering impact. Let us not forget our power as a democracy. Let us not further divide ourselves. We can always do better.

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# Servant Leadership: A Template for Choosing our President

## In Search of a Leadership Model

As an encountered couple, molded in Ignatian spirituality principles, we discern a crucial need to find the best set of criteria in choosing our seventeenth president of the Philippines. The choice is critical to our country, at an era of resurgence of conflicts in global geopolitics, which is constantly facing threats of nuclear war, in a world environment that is at constant risk of disasters and calamities. Our nation of 112 million people is facing serious problems of rising poverty, social injustice, endless dangers to national security, incursions into its territorial waters and islands, crimes, abuses of human rights, corruption, and social tensions; not to mention the lingering health crisis that exacerbates the sufferings of the poor and the powerless.

In choosing the next president, we need a genuine leader with Competence, Character, Compassion, Conscientiousness, and Courage. We have examined multiple models of leaderships, and we end up contemplating the leadership principles enunciated by the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 20:25, Jesus summoned his disciples and said: "You know that the rulers in this world are lording it over the people and the officials are flaunting their authority over the people under them. But you will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must become your servants, and whoever wants to be the first among you must serve as the slave of all. For even the son of man came into the world not to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for all."

## First, the Servant Leader is Competent, and Yet Compassionate

Based on our contemplation, the first quality of a leader is competence balanced with compassion. The Lord trained the disciples for three years, day in and day out. He was their teacher, mentor, coach, and counsellor. Jesus molded them to become leaders and he taught them how to detect and solve problems, how to build teams, and how to spread the good news even in dangerous places. In contemporary times, Arnold Glasgow said that a leader detects a problem before it escalates into a crisis and solves it immediately. General Colin Powell wrote that leadership is solving problems.

Stephen Covey is an advocate for leadership by example when he declared: "What you do has far greater impact than what you say." Thus, we need to choose one who has the highest level of competence given the massive problems our nation faces today.

Competence without compassion, however, may cause the leader to end up becoming a dictator. Thus, our choice should be compassionate, with no track record of manipulating or using people. As Jesus said that whatever we do to the least of His brethren, we do it unto Him, the Dalai Lama teaches: Leadership requires compassion. Without it, humanity cannot survive. No less than Albert Einstein wrote: The world needs compassionate leaders much more than it needs learned scientists, for the dignity, security, and happiness of humanity. Princess Diana said: The purpose of human life is to show compassion, and to have the will to serve and help others. Based on this template, we need to choose a leader of this mold.

## Second, the Servant Leader Has Integrity and Purity of Intentions

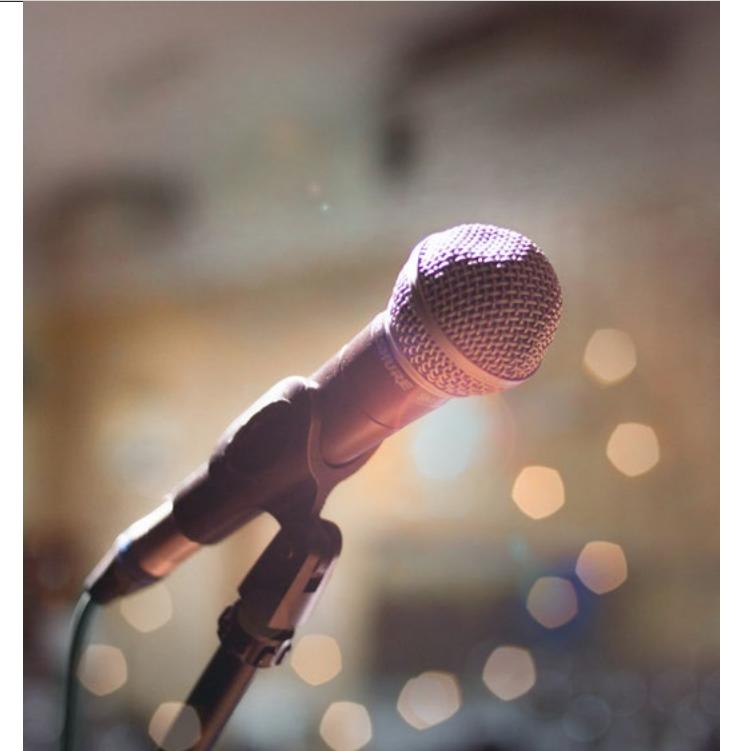
The Lord condemned the scribes and the Pharisees for their self-righteousness, and their notorious propensity for masquerading their corruption and wickedness with pretensions of holiness. He taught His disciples the importance of integrity and purity of heart. US president Dwight Eisenhower said: The supreme quality of leadership is integrity. Another US president, Thomas Jefferson, earlier instructed public officials: In matters of styles, you may swim with the current. But in matters of principles, stand like a rock. Today, it is extremely difficult to find a Filipino leader who possesses these qualities. Among the ten presidentialies, we are looking for one who is pure and untainted.

In Proverbs 21:3, it is written that righteous deeds and justice to fellowmen are more pleasing to the eyes of God than offering burnt sacrifices. In Colossians 3:12, "Since God chose you to be the holy one, clothe yourself with humility, gentleness, patience and pure intentions." Based on these parameters, our selected candidate's life and career should be seen from the prism of constant public scrutiny as impeccable and beyond reproach.

## Third, the Servant Leader Has Courage and Fortitude

In Hebrews 12:1-2, leaders among men are called to endure the cross and accept all persecutions. In contemporary times, General Douglas Macarthur taught: A true leader has the moral courage to make tough decisions, face the consequences and accept responsibility. Nelson Mandela said: Leaders take the frontlines when facing high risks and serious adversities. Leaders fade into the background in times of comforts, safety, and victory. These are precisely the qualities that the leader we will choose imbibes these qualities. John Maxwell also wrote: Leaders take more share of the blames and take less of the accolades. We should be choosing the one who is precisely of this caliber.

On fortitude, we take counsel from Isaiah 53:7, "For he was oppressed and he was afflicted, and yet, he kept his peace. Like a lamb that is led to his slaughter, and like a sheep in front of its shearers, he opened not his mouth." We need to choose a leader who has both these qualities of courage and fortitude. As Winston Churchill said: To a true leader, no success is final, and no failure is fatal. What matters most is the will to continue despite all odds. We are positive that our chosen one will stand like rock even if all others shall have already fallen.



## Finally, the Servant Leader is Inspired, Inspiring and Inspirational

In Matthew 5:14, it is written: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden." The leader must ignite in the hearts of people the spark to rally behind a cause. The leader must be a perfect example for emulation, an excellent behavior model. US president John Quincy Adams said: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, to do more, and to become more, then you are a leader." Bill Gates echoes that by saying: "Leaders are those who inspire others." Ken Blanchard also wrote: "The greatest leaders are those who unite people and mobilize them around a shared vision." Walter Lippman added: The final test of a leader is to leave behind a team with minds, hearts, and will carry on, no matter what. Finally, Bill Bradley counselled: Leadership is unlocking the other person's immense potentials to become great.

Our chosen leader should be able to motivate people to action, galvanize the idealism of the youth to be involved in nation-building, unite communities, and create advocacies for many worthy causes. This leader should help heal the nation from too much divisiveness and factionalism. This leader should be a person of dignity and decency, whose language and decorum inspires respect and even awe. This leader will speak before the international community of nations. Our head of state and head of government will need to address the United Nations. Thus, this person should inspire respect and admiration. He/she mirrors the image of the entire country and the whole world will be watching him/her.

## Conclusion: We Should Find a Servant Leader, a New Shepherd to God's People

We have had 16 presidents since 1899. General Emilio Aguinaldo was only 28 years old when he was elected by the controversial Tejeros Convention. The second was Manuel L. Quezon from 1935 to 1944. He was the one who declared: "I prefer a government run like hell by Filipinos than a government run like heaven by Americans." The third president was Jose P. Laurel who was not elected by the Filipinos but was installed by the Japanese. Sergio Osmeña, Sr. took over Quezon from 1944 to 1946 as the fourth president. The fifth was Manuel A. Roxas, from 1946 to 1948. He died in office and was replaced by Elpidio Quirino who was president from 1948 to 1953. Ramon Magsaysay, the most beloved, was the seventh chief executive. He died in a plane crash in Cebu in 1957. He was followed by the eighth president, Carlos P. Garcia, from 1957 to 1961. The ninth was Diosdado Macapagal from 1961 to 1965.

From 1965 to 1986, or for 21 years, the tenth president, Ferdinand E. Marcos, stayed in power by declaring Martial Law and changing the Philippine Constitution. He was ousted by the People Power Revolution. The eleventh head of state,



Corazon C. Aquino, led us from 1986 to 1992. The twelfth president, Fidel V. Ramos, was chief executive from 1992 to 1998, followed by Joseph Estrada from 1998 to 2000 as the thirteenth national leader. He did not finish his term and was replaced by Gloria M. Arroyo, the fourteenth president, from 2001 to 2010. The fifteenth president was Benigno S. Aquino III who led the country from 2010 to 2016. The sixteenth is the incumbent, Rodrigo R. Duterte from 2016 to 2022.

Given the tremendous challenges poised not just by external and global problems but by internal issues caused by worsening poverty, social and economic gaps dividing the people and causing many tremors and threats, we need a leader who has competence, character, care, compassion, conscientiousness, and commitment to the rule of law. The high levels of qualities required by the template of Servant Leadership can help Filipino voters in deciding who is the best among the ten hopefuls. As Christians, as Catholics, and as encountered couples trying our best to live our lives based on the principles and tenets of Ignatian spirituality, we are called to discern, and to reflect deeply and ask the Holy Spirit to give us the wisdom to choose the one who is most pleasing to the eyes of the Lord.

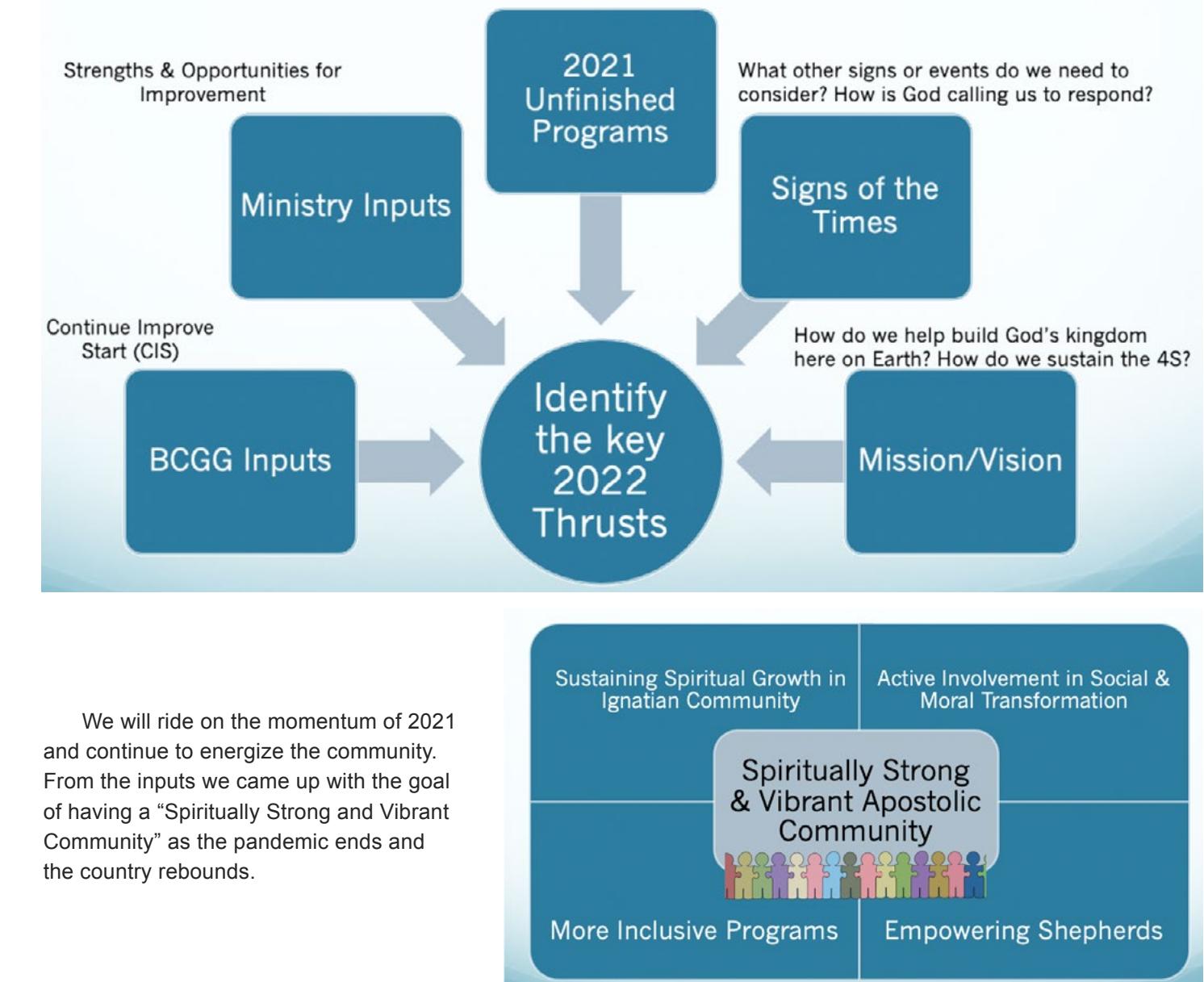


## 2022 DIRECTION and THRUSTS

Cesar and Delsa Sangalang, Chaircouple / Samaritans BCGG

**In setting our direction and thrusts for 2022, we gathered inputs from various sources:**

1. From the BCGGs – We asked 2 questions: (a) Anong programa sa 2021 ang gustong ituloy? (b) Anong programa ang gustong makita sa 2022?
2. From the Ministries – Incoming and outgoing ministry heads and overseers met to discuss 2021 performance, their strengths, their lights and shadows, their desolation and consolation, and the areas for improvement.
3. From the outgoing chaircouple, Vina and Benz. We also considered the results of the 2020 survey, previous directions, and unfinished programs.
4. And then of course, we considered the signs of the times; and
5. Magis Deo's mission and vision.



We will ride on the momentum of 2021 and continue to energize the community. From the inputs we came up with the goal of having a "Spiritually Strong and Vibrant Community" as the pandemic ends and the country rebounds.

**Our 2022 direction is geared on four thrusts:**

1. Sustaining Spiritual Growth in Ignatian Community. In the past years, the community launched programs for deepening members' spirituality. We will sustain this spiritual growth by continuing formation programs that include AIR, SDR, Prayer Workshops, and Quarterly Formations. The other ministries like Praxis, CSM, ME, Outreach, and Youth will continue and initiate innovative programs to support this thrust.

2. More Inclusive Programs. We will be more active in sharing God's graces by reaching out more to the people and communities outside Magis Deo. We did this before through programs and activities: Marriage Boosters, Community Celebrations, talks and seminars for the Youth, and fundraising programs like the Love Live Concert. This year we encourage our members to be more active in inviting participants to our various programs.

3. Active Involvement in Social and Moral Transformation. In our current situation, we believe our moral values as a nation have been impacted. Thus, the community has to take an active role in uplifting and transforming the social and moral aspect of our society by engaging in socio-political activities, not just in the coming national elections. Our Youth have been highly



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## #BCGGoals

<b>Formation</b>	1 formation program / activity per member
<b>Outreach</b>	1 outreach per BCGG
<b>Recruit</b>	4 Marriage Booster recruits per BCGG
<b>Meeting</b>	2 Prayer meetings per member per month
<b>Interface</b>	2 interface per member
<b>com cel</b>	6 Comcels per member

active in conducting talks and seminars to educate and encourage participation and involvement. We will continue to bring topics that will address this thrust during our community celebrations. Outreach will continue its bayanihan calamity response, and we will conceptualize and initiate programs to uplift and transform the social and moral aspect of our society.

4. Empowering Shepherds. Shepherds have a significant role in the spiritual growth of members hence we need to equip and strengthen them through constant training and skills development, and so that they are better prepared to handle other roles and responsibilities. Formation has already laid out some programs for this, as have the Outreach and Youth Ministries.

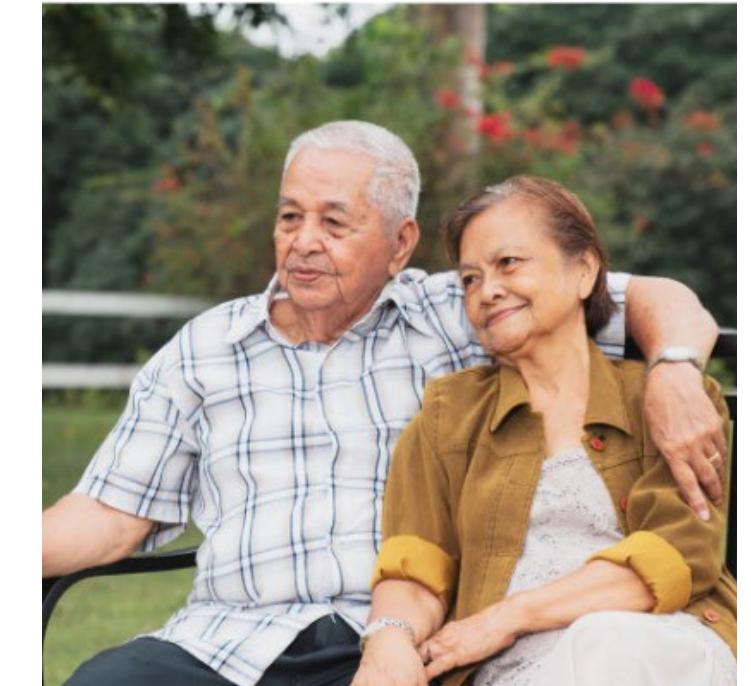
We ask your active participation in, and support for various ministry programs so we can achieve our direction to become a spiritually strong and vibrant apostolic community.

For our BCGG Goals, we will maintain our Formicom targets. The Praxis Ministry will monitor periodically each Sector and each BCGG.

## February 2022 Community Celebration

### A Love Letter to Grandparents and the Elderly

Winston Cruz, Matthew BCGG



**A**t our February ComCel our beloved Fr. Allan Abuan introduced the topic "*Love in Sickness and in Health*." But rather than discuss the evolution of love between spouses as they grow old, Fr. Allan chose to direct our attention to those who went through the journey of aging and who may now have become overlooked individuals in our lives: our grandparents and the elderly in our families and communities.

Pope Francis established last year the very first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, a henceforth annual celebration every fourth Sunday of July, coinciding with the feast of St. Joachim and St. Anne, the grandparents of Jesus. Is it not proper that a world day be celebrated for the unsung everyday heroes who laid the path for those who come after them?

Fr. Allan highlighted how the elderly face modern challenges and disconnects with the youth of today. Thus, this World Day celebration is a call for caring and for connections. And deservedly so, as the elderly still play an important mission for today's generation. Fr. Allan highlighted their role in the Transmission of Faith to the younger ones, and how grandparents take up the parental role of caring and nurturing in the home while parents are busy with urgent worldly matters.

We see examples of the elderly taking on the mission outside the family and into their communities. Fr. Allan related how Pope Francis, before being elected to his current position, was an Argentine Archbishop who was already planning his retirement as he celebrated his 75th birthday. God had other

plans for him, so now Pope Francis continues to carry out his mission as head of the Catholic Church. We also see this phenomenon too in Magis Deo. We have many members in their senior years, continuing to answer God's call to mission, well past their retirement.

Fr. Allan talked about the joy of growing old, whether alone or in the company of loved ones. The Magis Deo Community is truly blessed to be surrounded by them – our mentors and our friends, our inspiration, our conscience, our disciplinarians, our teachers. We look to them with gratitude, respect, and love. And speaking for the slightly younger generation in the community, we too are reminded to prepare ourselves to carry on this mission of transmitting faith for the generations to come.

Here are the ten things Fr. Allan shared with us in caring for and keeping connected with our elderly:

1. Help them communicate with modern tools.
2. Set up regular chats.
3. Keep them stocked up on needed medication.
4. Create/set up practical online accounts on their behalf.
5. Drop off care packages.
6. Carry out acts of kindness.
7. Listen to them.
8. Get creative (in terms of connecting with them).
9. Keep them stress-free.
10. Keep them in your prayers.

# How do we appreciate Synodality?

Mennen and Elyn Aracid, Easter BCGG



Last March 6 the Magis Deo Community invited Fr. Oliver Dy, SJ, to be the mass presider and keynote speaker. He gave a talk on **Synodality as a Path of Social Transformation**.

## Etymology

Synod comes from the Greek *Syn* and *Odos* (meaning “with” and “path”) and refers to a way of living or working together.

Synodality is “the specific *Modus Vivendi et Operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” (*Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 3).

It is a way of living and operating in the church. It means listening, participating, and being in communion with each other.

## What does it mean for us as members of the Church?

**First, the local, regional, and universal church should talk and speak to one another.**

A lot of consultation happens at all levels to arrive at results. The findings of the consultations are brought to an assembly.

**Second, we are invited to be both a TEACHING church and a LISTENING church.**

Who is the TEACHING Church? These are the learned

in the church: the pope, bishops, and priests, for example, represent the TEACHING church. The LISTENING church represents the Laity.

The typical relationship tended to be one way. The teachers taught, and the listeners listened.

## Now the call is for everyone to listen to all members of the church.

The Church hierarchy is also being called in a special way to listen. Admittedly, it is challenging to create a culture that listens. We tend to defend our stand especially if the other person holds a different opinion.

Listening moves the discourse forward. It makes us understand the context, experiences, and feelings that others have about issues and concerns we have different opinions about.

## Third, each voice is important. Consulting everyone in the community is important.

Everyone in the church, regardless of status, must contribute his voice and must be listened to. Why is this important? The Holy Spirit may be speaking through this voice. All these voices enrich our discernment process.

We are used to being told what to do and this can make discernment more challenging. When we consult everyone, each individual feels that he is involved and his opinions matter. This involvement engages the person to participate further in the community. But this can be a long and tedious process that is worth doing.

Fourth, Discernment teaches us to be indifferent to our agenda and biases in favor of the movement, inspiration, and will of the Holy Spirit.

We are called to not just discern by ourselves but discern with others as well (co-discernment). In our church, there is room for plurality. Out of our agreements and differences in opinion, a direction emerges.

Fifth, we need to decide.

While discernment encompasses the whole process of making a decision, deciding is a particular act.

Discerning reflects on the different choices available and honoring God’s will. Decision-making carries out the best options. We trust that the Holy Spirit will guide us and choose what is good and true.

Some questions to think about:

It is good to reflect on the questions Fr. Ody shared with the community:

- How can I create a culture of Synodality across my different intimate relationships (church, family, work)?
- What are my key positive and negative experiences about being listened to and not being listened to by others?
- How can I create safe spaces that encourage others to express their thoughts and sentiments?
- How do I integrate a more consultative and participative type of leadership into my existing vision and operationalization of governance?

Our answers to the reflection questions:

**a. How do I create a culture of Synodality in my intimate relationships?** We can create more opportunities where we suspend our preconceptions and judgments when we listen to colleagues, family members, and other people in our community. We sometimes treat each conversation as a problem-solving opportunity where we need to dispense a solution. But not all conversations are of that nature. We can form a better appreciation of the situation or the problem by even allowing ourselves to entertain a thought without necessarily agreeing with it. Openness works.

**b. What are my (our) key positive and negative experiences about listening?** A sample negative experience: when our thoughts and ideas are considered inferior or lacking in weight. Hence, we feel dismissed and misunderstood.



A sample positive experience: when the other person stays with us no matter how difficult the topic or the conversation, we feel valued and loved.

**c. How can I create safe spaces for others?** Listening has an emotional component. Other people might just need to vent and be heard, rather than have their problems solved for them. It is also good to meet where people may be. Some want advice and solutions for their problems; others might just need a listening ear. We can be sensitive to both needs and support others appropriately.

**d. How do I create a more consultative type of leadership?** To set aside time to listen to others about issues that concern them. They will feel more involved and have a stake in the decision-making process.

Oftentimes, the other person is equipped to think through his own problems. A listening partner assures him that he is not alone when he faces them.

## In closing: A similar Emmaus Experience.

We liken Synodality to the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus joins Cleopas and his companion. He walks with them and explains the scriptures to them. The biblical passage ends with a meal in which they finally RECOGNIZE HIM in the breaking of the bread.

Synodality is about walking together in a shared search for Christ in scripture, prayer, and common life.

**Jesus will always bring us back to the TRUTH of the situation.** When we invite Jesus to abide with us, in our homes, and our lives, he reveals Himself to us. He will meet us and open our eyes in our journey to our personal Emmaus, no matter how difficult our challenges, no matter how dire the situation.

# God ALIVE during Love Live!

Ojay & Yang Reantaso, CSM / Samaritans BCGG

**R**eflecting on the success of Love Live 2 Concert, we deeply felt and saw God's presence in every person involved and in every situation. We know that where there is LOVE, there is GOD. Love was overflowing from the planning stages until even after the event proper.

Love is about sharing and giving – whether this be treasure, time, ideas, or talent. Love is also about being together with a family or community where people care for one another and share a common goal.

In Magis Deo, it's doing MORE for GOD. We experienced this before, during, and after Love Live 2. Since this was a fundraising concert, everybody was aware that the money raised was for the varied meaningful projects of Magis Deo. Almost all we sent solicitation letters to shared their blessings by donating. Almost all we invited to sing said YES. Even if they were busy, shy, not professional singers, or napilitan lang or nagpapapilit pa (hehehehe), they were willing to share their time and talent, thereby honoring and giving more for God. Even the very busy Gacias couple could only say YES to the opportunity to serve the Lord and the community by being our emcees again. Their hosting made the program very engaging with their sharp wit and charm.

So many helped from the planning stage, and with so much love and support: Ney & Pinky Rosas, Cesar & Delsa Sangalang, Jojo & Jane Aldeguer, Ting Yupangco, Ria San Jose



and of course, all the sponsors/donors, ticket holders, and the so many who made pledges during the show. When you serve and give with LOVE, God is definitely there with the server and the giver.

Lastly, we saw God's presence and guidance throughout the journey. Why? Because producing an event like Love Live 2 takes a lot of time, effort, and skills (sales, marketing, follow-up, creativity, editing, lay-outing, singing na rin hahaha). With our very busy schedule as parents and entrepreneurs, only by God's grace were we able to spearhead this event. It was not smooth sailing all the time because there are always challenges in any meaningful project, but we enjoyed every step of the way. This only proves again that when God asks us to do something to honor and glorify Him, He equips, guides, and stays with us to make sure we succeed with Him in His plan. All we need to do is just to say Yes first to His invitation, and trust that He will be with us and will provide everything we need to fulfill His purpose through us.

## Love Live 2 – A Fulfilling Experience

Angel Bumanglag, Magis YSA



**P**erforming in the Love Live 2 Concert was a great experience. It has been a year since I performed in a concert, and being able to sing with the Magis Youth was very refreshing.

I met new people who shared the same passion for music; this for me was a great experience. Love Live 2 was a great opportunity and venue for Magis Deo to showcase members' talents. Not only that, through Love Live 2, funds were raised for the projects of the Magis Deo community.

I'd be honored to be given the chance to perform again at the next Love Live concert.



## When Love Live is Lovelier the Second Time Around

Zarah Gagatiga, Emmanuel BCGG



### Let me begin by telling you a story.

In 2021, the Prietos invited our BCGG to be auxiliaries at the Family Encounter Weekend. Back then, we were known as Mt. Olivet BCGG. Present as couple auxiliaries were the Macalalads and the Antonios. The four of us – Domeng, Nico (otherwise known as Val), Zoe, and me – were tasked to assist particularly in the Music Ministry. This Family Encounter Weekend was very meaningful to me for many reasons. One of them is that our children, Nico and Zoe, took part in the singing of praise and worship songs, and the love songs Tito Eli carefully chose for opening the ten sessions of the two-day Family Encounter Weekend. Domeng and I did not expect our children to be a part of what we were doing in Magis Deo. One of God's many surprises. A given grace which we accept gratefully.

To this day I remember this image of Fr. Ruben Tanseco talking to Nico, his right hand hovering over Nico's head in blessing. Later I learned that Fr. Ruben told him how well he sings and that it is a gift from God. This is a core memory I keep. It has helped us guide our children when they make choices, and in charting and creating the roads they take in life. For the past twenty-two years, the Magis Deo Community has been our companion in our married life, and in our journey as parents.

So, when the Reantasos invited us to sing again for Love Live 2 a week after our days of isolation were over, we said yes despite my fear and our limitations. It was one of those leaps of faith. If last year's Love Life opened us unto many graces, this year's run overwhelmed me with so much more.

Love Live 2 is lovelier the second time around because it invited me to take courage by singing to an audience, albeit online.

Love Live 2 is lovelier the second time around because we were able to express our gratitude to the community in the manner and in the language we know best.

Love Live 2 is lovelier the second time around because Domeng and I witnessed how Nico and Zoe have developed their confidence in communicating and working with the couple leaders of Magis Deo, particularly the CSM team.

Love Live 2 is lovelier the second time around because our Magis Youth sang with their friends and family; with their loved ones, pets included, cheering them on.

Love Live 2 is lovelier the second time around because it was bread and fish multiplying continuously!

The pandemic is far from over. It has damaged and disturbed many aspects of our lives. But the human spirit endures. And in Magis Deo, we remain companions in this journey of love and joy.

## My Faith Experience

### Annual Ignatian Retreat – Week II: Who is Jesus?

Trixie Sun, Matthew BCGG



**P**articipating in the Annual Ignatian Retreat, Week 2 of the Spiritual Exercises, was for me a most appropriate way of preparing to celebrate the birth of our Lord. It was a very graced weekend retreat, and I came away from it spiritually refreshed and renewed, revitalized and reenergized.

#### Review and Repetition

I realized the value of review and repetition when we were asked to review our experience of the Annual Ignatian Retreat on Week 1 of the Spiritual Exercises.

I found refreshing and reinvigorating re-reading my conversations with the Trinity and Mama Mary, repeating my contemplations, deepening my experience of God's love.

What were most significant for me?

- That God loves me and finds delight in my being!
- That Jesus is forming me in the image and likeness of His Mother!
- That Abba's big dream for me is to be a spiritual companion to others.

The most essential thing I discovered about myself was my sinfulness and how I have passed on my patterns of sinfulness to my children. That was a very sobering realization.

#### Contemplations on Jesus' Beginnings

Having found very fruitful reviewing and reflecting on my previous retreat, I re-read my journal from the 19th Annotation Retreat. As I re-read my notes, I immediately entered the scenes of the Annunciation to Mary, the Visitation to Elizabeth, the Nativity of Jesus, the Annunciation to the Shepherds and the Hidden Life of the Holy Family. Each contemplation gained more depth and became more detailed, gifting me with a deeper intimacy with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. In each contemplation I was constantly conversing with all three of them. I learned much about faith and trust from Mary, righteousness and obedience from Joseph. I also saw how Jesus was formed into the man He grew up to be, in the family and community He belonged.

#### The Meditation on the Two Standards

The Meditation on the Two Standards was a study in contrasts. The worldly king's call was to power, prestige, possessions and pleasure, to self-centeredness and self-sufficiency. On the other hand, the call of Christ the King was to stewardship, simplicity, sharing and service; other centeredness; humility and submission to the Father's Will. A most difficult call. Counter-cultural.

In meditating on the call of the worldly king, I realized that I unwittingly imbibed its values and world view when I was growing up. While I was drawn to the call of Christ the King, I realized it would require a complete paradigm shift, a conversion to His way of being loving and life-giving, humble, and obedient. His Call was an invitation to holy indifference, to desiring the opposite of everything we had learned to desire – poverty instead of wealth, rejection instead of honor, humility instead of pride.

#### Rules for Discernment of Spirits

The Angel of Light is my constant tempter. It tempts me with what seem like good and noble intentions – starting a new outreach project for example. But slowly, insidiously, without my noticing it, desires for acknowledgement and affirmation creep into my heart, confusing and confounding me. At times I am able to identify the culprit at once. At other times I fail, and find my pure intentions subverted by worldly desires.



I also struggle to keep focused on what are most important. The noise of urgency, like water drip-dropping on a stone, relentlessly distracts me from what matter most. I would include endless chitter-chatter in my chat groups, my mobile phone incessantly pinging as messages come in, the monkeys in my mind.

#### Graces Received

At the end of this retreat on the 2nd Week of the Spiritual Exercises, I received the following graces: the desire to allow Jesus to form me in the image and likeness of His Mother, His first and perfect disciple; and the desire to become a spiritual companion to others.

In the light of these graces, I made a commitment to get to know Mary intimately so that I could imitate her ways: *fiat, conservabat, stabat*. I also made a commitment to further studies and training in spiritual direction and psychospiritual counseling.

## Who is Jesus?

**Annual Ignatian Retreat,  
December 17 - 19, 2021**

Yoling Sevilla, John BCGG



**I**n this AIR, Fr. James U. Gascon, SJ, guided us forty-two retreatants through the 2nd week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. These revolve around Christ's Incarnation – Jesus Christ taking on the human form together with His divine nature. This was a very apt theme for the Advent season.

One of the songs played during this retreat even echoes the desire in our hearts and the grace we begged for in the 2nd Week:

*See thee more clearly  
Love thee more dearly  
Follow thee more nearly  
Day by day*

In prayerful silence, we were made to pray and discern on the Call of the King – Christ's calling in our lives – and to contemplate on how we may graft our life stories to His.

Using contemplation as a prayer method helped us enter the world of Jesus as a human and appreciate more the birth of Jesus and His hidden life and love Him in a personal way. Meditating on Jesus' public ministry moved us to follow Him more closely.

We learned more about discernment as the hallmark of St. Ignatius' teaching. We were reminded that the choices we make should lead us to forging a closer relationship with Christ.

We were asked to be made aware of our blessings because in so doing, we also get to know Jesus more intimately and yearn to follow Him even more.

Finally, when we choose Jesus, we are blessed with the grace of peace because we have the reassurance that we will never be alone.

## Make it Grand!

Mark Madrid, John BCGG

**L**ast week I had the opportunity to attend the AIR online retreat. Sadly, I wasn't able to pay attention: first, because of the many distractions at home; second, I was nursing a fever. I wasn't able to reflect deeply on the readings and lessons Fr. Gascon imparted to the participants. One thing did come to mind on the last day though, and that was "How was I able to prepare myself for Christmas?" Or specifically, "Have I done enough to prepare for Christ's birth?"

When I was a child, my Lola Quezon (we called our paternal grandparents that because they lived in Quezon City) gave us an idea on how to prepare for Christmas. She said, "Prepare a nativity scene at your altar. Beside it put a basket full of straw. For every good deed done by each member of the family, place one straw on the crib where the Baby Jesus will lay. The purpose is to do as many good deeds as you can and therefore place many pieces of straw on the crib so that when the Baby Jesus is born, the bed will be as soft as you can make it."

I remember this very clearly. My mom took apart an old straw hat and put the straw strands in a basket. And for every



perceived good deed, my siblings and I would put strands one by one. I thought to myself, surely, some good deeds might be worth more than just one single piece of straw. Christmas eve was near, and the bed was looking quite thin. Clearly, we needed practice.

I remember that image during Christmas time. Have I done enough to prepare for Baby Jesus' coming? We all have our struggles especially during these challenging times. But in the midst of these struggles lie opportunities to do good. Each is worth the proverbial straw that you can offer to Christ. Sometimes it is easier to ignore these opportunities and hope that another person would take the slack. Easier said than done, but we must all strive to help, contribute, support, feed, and console those who are in need.

Now, at least in my head, I can always try to be aware and identify opportunities to do good throughout the year. Every good deed is worth a single straw. So, when we celebrate Christmas at the end of every year, we can make baby Jesus' crib... grand!

### Accompanying the Shepherds Series

## Feedback Giving: The Foundation of Living Authentic and Mature Relational & Community Life

A report on the talk of Fr. James U. Gascon, SJ

Yoling Sevilla, John BCGG

### Accompanying the Shepherds

## Feedback Giving: Growing in Community life



on January 29, 2022  
via Zoom from 2:00pm - 4:00pm

by Fr. James Wenceslao U. Gascon, SJ



**E**ighty Magis Deo Community members from 20 BCGGs attended the talk of Fr. James Gascon, SJ, on "Feedback Giving." This event, the 11th of the 13-part Accompanying the Shepherds Series, was held on January 29, 2022.

At the end of the talk, the attendees went to breakout rooms to share their experiences on feedback giving and receiving: what were helpful, and what were not.

Following is a summary of Fr. James' inputs.

### The Importance of Feedback Giving

In a Christian community like the Magis Deo Community, feedback giving is important in fostering a healthy community life. Its ultimate purpose is the growth of each member as a human person by raising his/her level of awareness, leading him/her to self-understanding and self-acceptance. This is particularly important within the Basic Christian Growth Group (BCGG) setting.

Why the need for feedback? While one is aware of his/her own intentions, he/she may not be aware of the impression one creates, nor the impact of this behavior on the other members of the community.

Furthermore, studies and experiments show that the exchange of feedback is valuable in building effective working and living relationships, particularly in communities that foster the psychological and spiritual growth of each member.

### Elements of Good Feedback

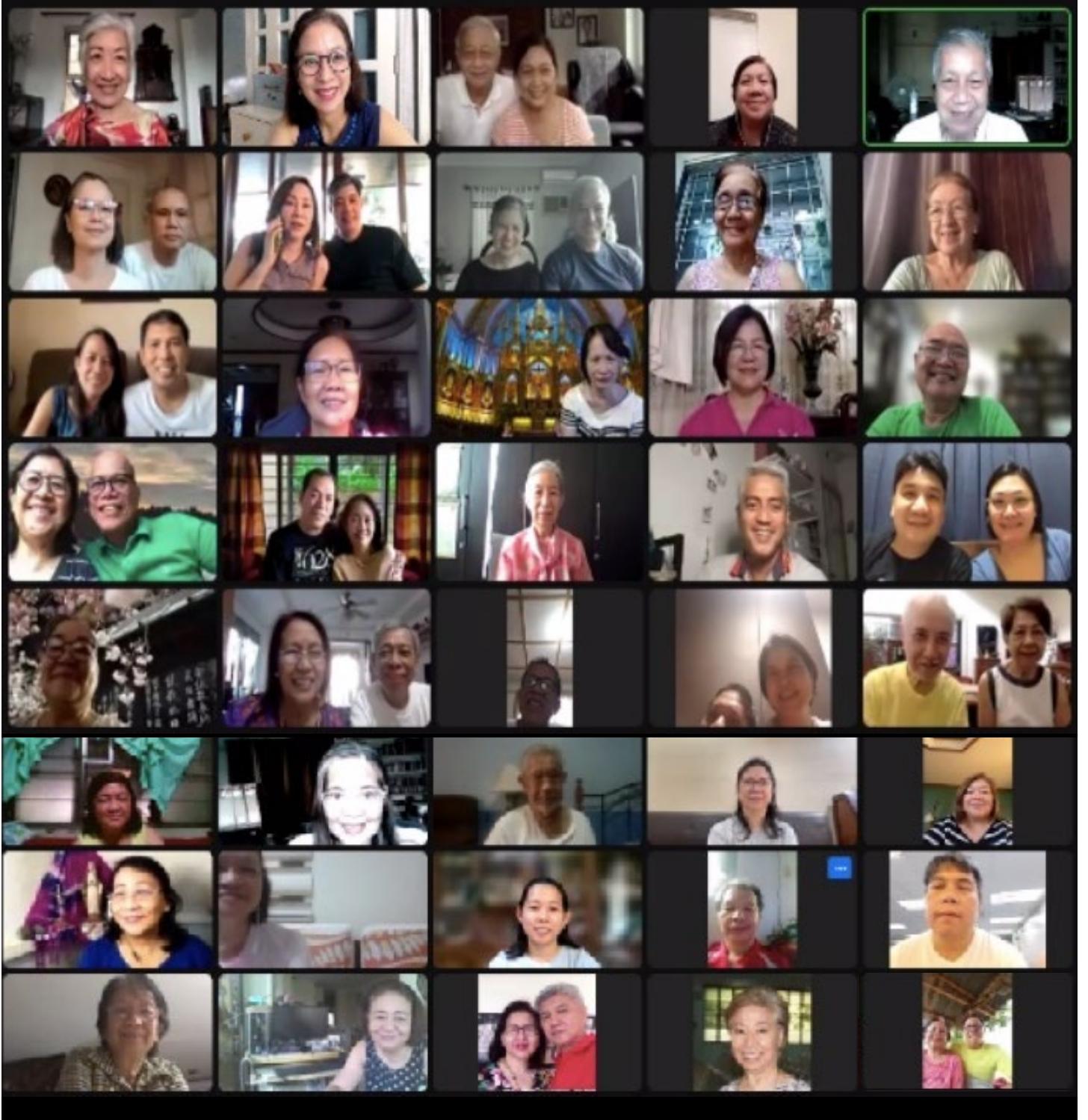
Good feedback is for the benefit of the recipient. It is helpful feedback that the recipient is ready to accept and will be able to act on it. It is important that feedback is given only when a foundation of trust exists between the giver and recipient.

Feedback must focus on specific situations and behaviors observed by the giver at a particular place, date, and time. The giver must describe the impact the observed behavior or experience had on him/her (i.e., the giver). Both the giver and recipient are responsible for seeking clarification to ensure understanding.

### Characteristics of Effective Feedback

- Its purpose is to help the recipient grow in self-awareness leading to self-understanding and self-acceptance.
- It is well-timed and within the context of a relationship built on trust.
- It is focused on modifiable behavior, not on a permanent trait.
- It shares information, not advice; information that is specific, descriptive rather than judgmental.
- It shares a direct experience of the situation and its impact on the giver.
- It highlights both positive and negative aspects of the situation or experience.
- The recipient clearly understands the feedback given and is aware of its purpose.

## FORMATION



Accompanying the Shepherds Series

## Feedback Giving: Growing in Community Life

January 9, 2022

## FORMATION

## Boundaries: Setting the Limits to My Role as Shepherd

Marlyn Angeles, Thessalonians BCGG

Based on the 12 February 2022 talk

of Fr. James Gascon, SJ, at

Accompanying the Shepherds Formation Series

**A** shepherd serves and supports the lambs while honoring and promoting the integrity of everyone in the group, including himself.

Many construe this as making oneself always available for anyone needing help or advice in the name of service. Yet are we serving the other in doing so?

One of the concerns faced by shepherds is the issue of how much time and care we should give to our lambs. And what will that entail for us?

When we talk of giving, we must likewise talk of boundaries. For it is boundaries that guide us to our limits.

The talk of Father James on the above topic was very enlightening. Sixty-six members from 21 BCGGs attended the session. Shared below are the critical points of his session.

### Why are boundaries important?

Boundaries bring order to our lives. We gain a clearer sense of ourselves and our relationship with others.

Boundaries empower us to determine how others will treat us. "With clear boundaries, we can and will protect ourselves from ignorance, thoughtlessness, and meanness." People will not respect and take seriously those who allow others to violate their boundaries continually. How can others respect us if we show little respect for ourselves?

When I was young, my parents told us not to call anyone after 9 pm unless it was an emergency. My parents then were teaching me to honor the boundaries of time of others, and 9 pm was the cut-off for a decent call. Phone calls likewise had to end at 10 pm.

Our boundaries provide us with our identity, integrity, safety, and order. It is our primary responsibility to protect and maintain them.

Disrespected boundaries cause anxiety, anger, and distrust. Thus, we must define and regulate our borders for others to know and respect. And when we are in a relationship, we need to empower the other to hold their boundaries.



### Just what are boundaries?

Boundaries are essential in any relationship and interaction. They delineate two or more distinct realities based on values or importance to the persons involved. They define who we are, our limits – how far we will allow things to go. Once someone breaches this limit, then one has broken our integrity.

### KINDS OF BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are both tangible and intangible or invisible. Tangible limits are easier to recognize because we can see or touch them with our senses. Examples are fences, walls, our skin. Invisible boundaries are experienced and known by what we allow or do not allow others to do to us. Our beliefs, values, preferences, and likes help us form these boundaries. If we overextend our borders, we risk losing our own identity.

We must be mindful of four kinds of boundaries: emotional, spiritual, sexual, and physical.

1. Emotional Boundaries are a set of feelings and emotions that are distinctly ours. Even spouses have unique and distinct feelings and emotions. A person violates this boundary through psychological or emotional abuse using emotions to criticize, embarrass, shame, blame, or manipulate another.

2. Spiritual Boundaries refer to knowing that we only know the right spiritual path for ourselves. A violation of this boundary is bigotry. Imposing one's own belief on others violates their borders.

3. Sexual Boundaries tell us what appropriate and safe sexual behavior is based on our comfort. Some are comfortable with being touched, while others are not. What is acceptable can be cultural and may at times need legislation. What is important to note is this all goes back to our values.

4. Relational Boundaries define the limits of appropriate interaction with others based on our roles. We cannot usurp the role of others. For example, a mother must behave like a mother to her children. She has to assert her authority where and when needed.

## FORMATION

"Boundaries are the invisible dividing line between what you will and will not accept, tolerate, believe and do." Through time, boundaries may change. They need not be rigid. We can regulate them according to our comfort and health, and appropriateness. Each of us is responsible for defining, controlling, and maintaining them. As shepherds, we should clarify and sustain these boundaries and ensure their safety within our BCGG.

### MOST FREQUENTLY VIOLATED HUMAN RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARIES

The most frequently violated essential elements of Human Relationship Boundaries are Time, Space, and Person.

**Time:** The fact is, we can only do things one at a time without affecting the quality of our work. Before the advent of electricity and later technology, the natural rhythm of doing things was precise: we work during the day and rest at night. Technology has blurred these lines making it possible to work through the night like in BPOs, adversely affecting health. We exhaust ourselves working late at night and sometimes lose our rhythm for prayer, work, and helping others.

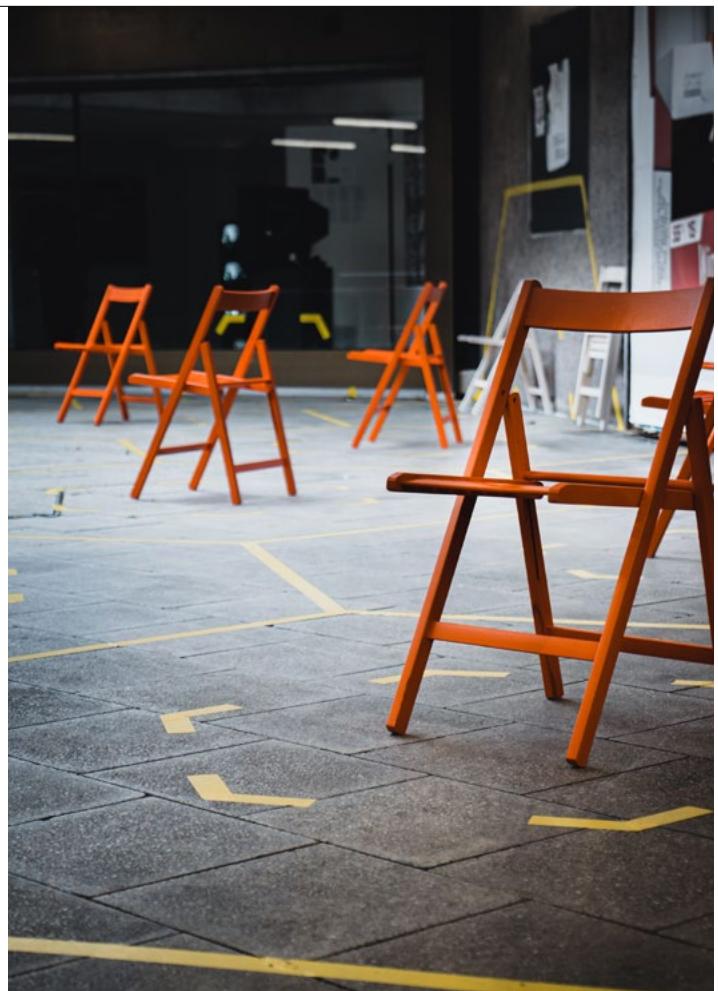
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us, "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity in heaven." As shepherds, we must define and regulate our time availability to our lambs and not be available 24 by 7. Fuzzy time boundaries can bring potential conflict into our relationships with one another and with ourselves. When a shepherd wants to talk to a lamb, time makes a significant difference. Talking with a lamb in the morning, daytime, or late at night could make a big difference to our lamb and us and our spouse.

**Place or Space:** Places are part of who we are. We define ourselves in terms of the spaces we take: personal, common, and sacred. We label these boundaries as "appropriate places," giving us comfort and safety.

There is an appropriate place for any human activity. Boundaries in home spaces can easily be blurred when we allow others into our private rooms. Thus, we meet our guests in our living rooms and do not let them enter our personal or sacred spaces. We even regulate our actions in sacred spaces like our prayer area or the church.

Shepherds must ensure that BCGG meetings are held in appropriate areas for prayer and are respectful of their hosts' space boundaries. When shepherds talk privately with their lambs, they should do so in a proper space that respects their boundaries.

The appropriateness of the place is also related to who we are. A priest or religious found touring the red-light district



late at night could be violating his boundary. The same may also be true for two single friends meeting in a motel for a private conversation.

**Person:** Here, we look into how close we are to another person, physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual. Culture usually influences this boundary.

When do we involve ourselves in another's concern? As a general rule, we do not rush to give advice or even comment on stories shared with us. We listen and wait.

We must also be aware that the feelings of others can easily influence people who lack emotional boundaries and get them hooked on their stories. Thus, when sharing, we need not share everything happening within us. We need to be more discerning on what is appropriate to share. It would be helpful to ask ourselves, "What are some of the things we can share about ourselves without losing our identity and integrity?"

Because we are unique, our sole responsibility is to define our boundaries and regulate them. No one else can determine this for us. Boundaries separate us from the other and hold the psychological distance from each other. People with no such limits feel and behave as if they are close to us even at the first meeting, which can be disconcerting. They presume much to the point that they might even borrow money from us that soon.

## FORMATION



Our relationship with each other should mimic the Venn diagram such that the shared spaces of two overlapping circles represent what we can commonly share, and the areas outside it are private to us. And this is true even with our spouses. This way, we can keep our self and integrity distinct and safe.

The boundaries we have appropriated to these three elements – Time, Place, and Person – determine the experiences we choose or avoid and define our unique identity.

### BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS IN CARING RELATIONSHIPS

In shepherding, people often associate boundaries with issues of power. Where power differential exists, such as leadership, the person in authority must keep edges intact. Persons in vulnerable positions are prone to violation of boundaries due to less power and resources.

Intrusive Boundary Violations include physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

**Physical** hurt our bodies and are dangerous to our safety and physical survival. Examples are hitting, slapping, pinching, unwanted tickling, unwanted touching, cutting, rape, stabbing, murder.

**Emotional** involves using emotions to manipulate or control the behavior of others. Examples are guilt trap (posing as martyrs and victims), anger, helplessness, tears, blaming, and attacking, when we make assumptions about how other people feel and believe and act on it as we have imagined.

**Mental** intrusion attempts to enforce our ideas on others without regard for the integrity and value of their thinking.

Examples of such thinking are when we imagine the truth as the truth that should be obvious to others as it is to us, when we believe that what and how we think is better than others, when we tell others what to do unless they ask us to do (best to give feedback only when solicited), and when we use discounting statements like you are stupid, wrong, misguided, etc.

**Spiritual** intrusion happens when one person or group condemns the belief, acting as the only one authorized to represent God (bigotry). Other examples include grandiose attempts to speak for God, implying that anyone who thinks and experiences God differently is misguided or evil. In all these, the intent is to control others, preventing others from questioning and freely exploring their own spiritual experiences and paths.

Let us be aware that as shepherds, we may cross boundaries and leadership in these ways:

- Touch
- Sexualized behavior
- Power roles
- How we help in the guise of "panghihimasok." The person we are helping must know we are indeed helping and not just being nosy and intrusive.

So as shepherds, we must be careful with our touch, sexualized behavior, words, and actions.

### OUR COMMUNITY AS A SOURCE AND SUPPORT

As we seek to maintain and respect our boundaries and those of others, we can look to our Magis Deo Community as our source of support and accountability. Our community has a deep bench of leaders and shepherds willing to coach or mentor upcoming shepherds and members who could be part of our support system. To benefit from this, we need to be open and humble in accepting feedback that will help us avoid blurring boundaries.

Our prayer, especially the EXAMEN, will also help us regulate our borders. As we review the day and open our hearts to the Lord's grace, we pray that we see how we can maintain those boundaries to keep our integrity intact.

## Be the Light

Delsa Sangalang, Samaritans BCGG



**I found God through my father the past few weeks that my parents have been living with us.** My mother isn't her usual active self anymore. She cannot stand for long periods. She is painfully slow in sitting down, standing up, and even walking. She gets irritable at times because of her condition. Wala atang ibang bukang-bibig ang Nanay ko ngayon sa Tatay ko kundi "Dan, pakikuha nito... paki-abot nyan... paki-akyat uli..." It's a far cry from the Mama I used to know. Si Mama na lagi naming tinatawag at iniwanan ng mga bata pag meron kaming trips abroad. Si Mama na nag-aasikaso ng lahat sa amin dati.

But through it all, with Mama's physical limitations now, my father has stepped up and has been patiently doing all the paki's. Dahil nasa taas ang kwarto nila dito, akyat-baba si Papa pag may nakakalimutan si Mama. He massages Mama at night. Pinagtimpla sa umaga at pinaghahanda ng tinapay kung meron. Umaalalay lagi kung kinakailangan. And Papa cooks for the two of them daw sa Cebu. At kahit gising na siya at tulog pa si Mama, nasisilip ko minsan na nandun din lang nakaupo si Papa malapit kay Mama at nagce-cellphone, waiting for her to wake up.

Nakakatuwa silang tignan nung nasa Nasugbu kami last week. Naglalakad sila sa umaga papunta sa beach. Tapos dahil natutumba si Mama pag mag-isa lang sa dagat, andun lang si Papa sa tabi niya para may hahawakan si Mama. Nung isang umaga, dahil low tide, nakaupo lang sila sa dagat at isa-isa silang nagsabuyan ng tubig dagat para mabasa ang

ulo nila. Tapos nagkakaigi lang sa tabi ng dagat pagkatapos. At kahit magkasama sila lagi, hindi sila nauubusan ng pinagusapan at kwento. And sometimes they're just beside each other, in silence, contented with each other's presence. And to think they've been married for almost 48 years now. Sana ganun din kami ni Cesar pagtanda namin. We're just halfway through my parents' years together and I hope when we grow older too, we'll have that patience, love, understanding, and care for each other, just like what I saw with Papa. He was there when Mama went through her ordeal with cancer and heart problem. Papa kept their heads above water during those difficult days. And I think those dark periods in Mama's life made him realize also how precious she is to him. And he's constantly showing her that.

And I think God is trying to show me that whenever Cesar or I experience days when we'd be a bit dark, or flat or lackluster, we try to be the light for each other. We lift each other up and keep us together, afloat. Equally important is to reflect each other's light back into the world. God reminds me to give significance to the people who give me light, that I shouldn't take for granted the love and support I get from others.

Lord, please guide and lead me. May your light shine through me and within me so that I become a light to others too. May I always extend a love that wants the best for others. And may your love bless everyone around me and keep us always safe. Amen.

## Finding God in Coffee

Sonny Maroon, Samaritans BCGG



### This week I found God in a cup of coffee.

**T**his week I found God in a cup of coffee. My best friend John gifted us with a coffee brewing machine with its own bean grinder. When he visited last Saturday night, he wanted to try it out, so I served coffee.

I don't usually take coffee at night as it keeps me awake... inevitably, that was what happened.

That night, I could barely sleep. I would wake up every 5 minutes and each time I would think about things that worried me. Perhaps my mind was in hyper drive due to the caffeine. I kept thinking of unfinished construction issues, Meralco meters that remain uninstalled due to city permit requirements... plus several other things I needed to address. My being a little O.C. did not help either. I wanted everything I worried about to be done and over with... immediately. But I knew worrying was an exercise in futility. Wala naman ako magagawa... gabi na. Everything had to wait till the next day. Even then, di ko alam kung maaayos lahat. Everything has its own timeline. Everything had prerequisites not dependent on me and my preferences. It's out of my control. I felt helpless.

In the rare times I could not sleep in the past, I realize God might be calling. Siguro, kaya di ako makatulog kasi may dapat pa kaming pag-usapan ni Lord. And so, I use the time to pray and just listen, and try to feel His presence until I fall asleep.

And so, I prayed. I asked God to let me feel His presence. To make the heaviness in my heart go away.

When I opened my eyes, the terrace was so bright I could see light shining towards our room. Ang liwanag! It was the middle of the night... perhaps 2 am... so I found it weird to be bright outside. I stepped out to the terrace, and there I saw the full moon in all its splendor. I stood there, marveling at the beauty and stillness of the moonlit night.

What are you telling me Lord? – I prayed.

Nothing. I got nothing. So, I just stood there admiring the moon, thinking it might be God's way of reminding me of His presence. After a few minutes, I decided to go back to bed.

As I lay down, one word came to me in my mind: "enough."

Enough? What are you telling me, Lord?

Initially, I did not know what that meant. It was just my own voice in my head.

I encountered the thought "enough" throughout the day and thought long and hard about it. Then I remembered the story of the Israelites.

As they crossed the desert for 40 years, God provided them with manna. Every day, for 40 years, except on the Sabbath. God's only instruction was that they only gather manna enough for the day. The only time they could take more is on the day before Sabbath so they can rest on the Sabbath and not have to work.

Any manna taken more than what was enough for the day, other than for the Sabbath, immediately rotted away with maggots the next morning.

And so, I slowly began to see, to connect, what God is telling me:

*Enough.*

We are given enough strength, courage, and graces for the day. What is given me today is enough to get me through the day. Maybe He is telling me to stop worrying about tomorrow because the strength given me today is not enough to face tomorrow's challenges.

The strength, courage, and graces I will need tomorrow will be given to me tomorrow.

Oo nga naman. It then became clear to me... Pilit kong binubuhat yung isang sakong bigas, eh isang kilo lang naman ang kailangan ko ngayon para sa buong araw.

Pwede naman akong bumalik kay Lord bukas para humingi ulit ng kailangan ko... Pero di niya ibibigay yung isang buong sako... for it might make me arrogant and think I no longer need the Lord.



That night, I fell asleep with a smile on my face.

Finally, I was content with ENOUGH for the day.

I also realized: Kaya pala mas magaan ang problema pag binalikan the next day because God replenishes our strength enough to face the new day ahead.

Enough... no more, no less. God will give us enough.

I honestly believe that.

And so, my prayer for today is:

May the Good Lord of the universe give all of us, all I love, all my friends, all whose lives intertwine with mine, all of you... enough Strength, enough Courage, enough Graces, to get us through the day's trials, knowing that tomorrow, He will again provide us with enough to meet our needs.

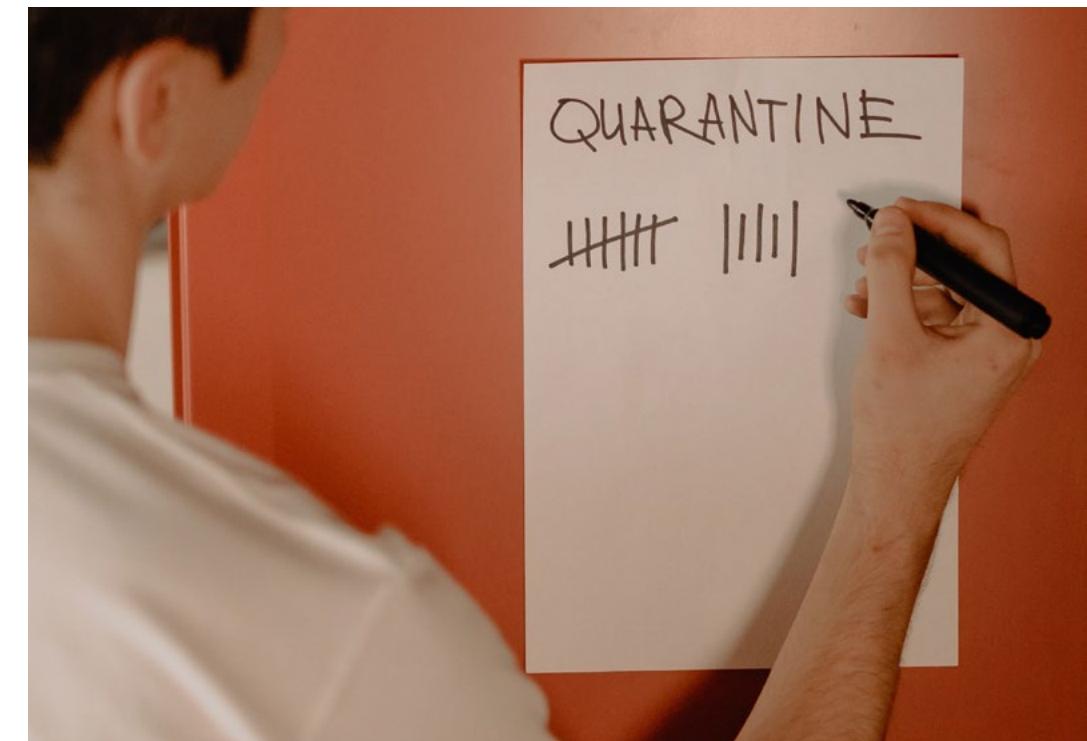
May all of us be content with enough.

God will always be there for us tomorrow.

Amen.

## God is with Us

MJ and Rhea Vistan, James, Brother of John BCGG



**W**ho would have thought that after surviving the pandemic and being Covid-free for the past two years, our family would welcome 2022 with shocking news?

Last January 1 we received a call from our LGU that made our typical relaxed and fun Saturday afternoon very worrisome. We learned that my spouse, Rhea, tested positive for Covid-19.

We were very anxious and puzzled because she was in perfect health condition when she had an RT-PCR test. She had the test because our one-year-old son had a mild fever on New Year's Eve, and we just wanted to check that it was not Covid-related. Now, our fear of contracting the virus suddenly became reality.

All of us in the household including Rhea's parents (both senior citizens) started having flu-like symptoms. We therefore underwent 10 to 14 days of home quarantine. During this period, even though we were isolated from our community

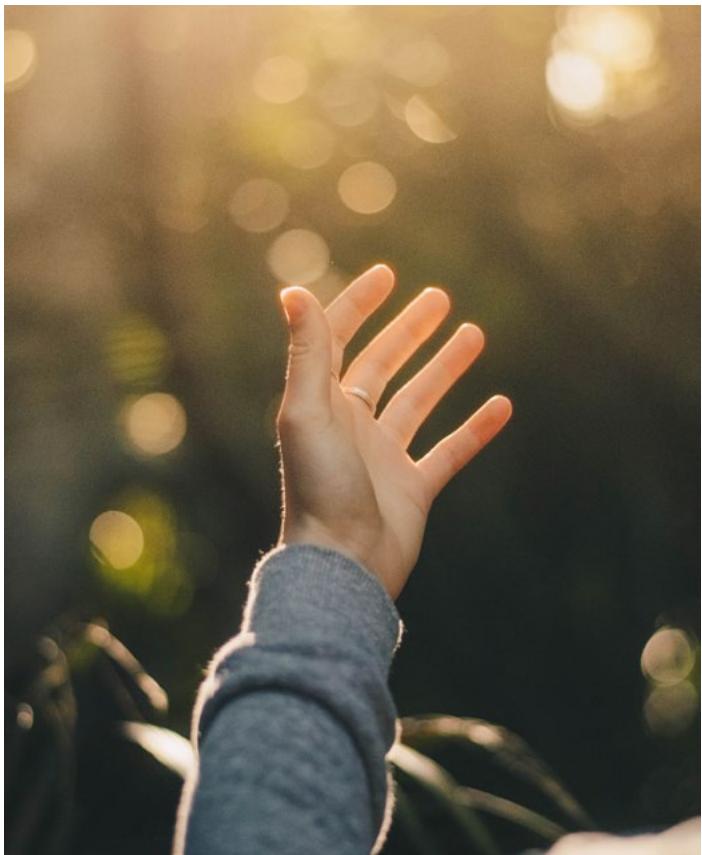
and had limited mobility, we became closer to each other, and, more so, to God. We felt that He never abandoned us, and all our worries vanished through the power of prayer. Our families, friends, our BCGG, and the whole Magis Deo community were behind us and served as our prayer warriors in our battle with Covid.

As days passed, we felt better and most of our symptoms had gone. Our son also regained his health and his usual playfulness. These developments gave us so much relief and peace of mind as we went through the latter part of our home quarantine. Fast forward to today, we are now living normal lives, working from home, and doing our best to be great parents to our son Liam.

We know God had a purpose in letting those things happen to us. It was not to forsake or punish us, but to make us seek His glory and to be more faithful to Him as we experienced one of the darkest moments of our lives. Indeed, we were healed not by what we did, but by God's mercy and amazing grace.

## Praying for Others

Leila Leccio, Transfiguration BCGG



*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. – Ephesians 6:18*

**W**hen I was 10, a lady in her late 30s asked me to help her pray that she meets the man of her life and have her own family and children. Despite our big age gap, she preferred to have me as her prayer partner, and every time we saw each other in a weekly prayer meeting in our place, I knew what to pray for her. Indeed, it was an answered prayer – I witnessed how happy she was on her wedding day. They were blessed with a son, and now she is enjoying life with her grandchildren.

At a young age, praying for other people was an easy task for me. I would wish others well, make prayer requests, or simply pray for others' wellness and happiness. But as I matured and became involved in several ministries, I considered praying for others a ministry, a gift and a blessing, an opportunity to share God's love. Praying for others is not merely a task but an act of love for God and for others.

Praying for others is prayer in action. It is sometimes challenging to go out of my comfort zone, to reach out to the

one I am praying for. Often, I need to fast, abstain, or make an offering to the Lord when I feel others' needs and struggles in life, even as I too have my own. In the end, it is very rewarding, comforting, and consoling to be one in prayer with others, and be part of and share in their experiences. When I pray for our sick brothers and sisters, I feel God's healing touch and embrace. He is the Greatest Healer who deeply loves every one of us.

It is very uplifting when prayers for people who are strangers to me are granted. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I put attention to details. Before praying for them I strive to know more about their struggles, and later, get updates on them.

As reflect on my prayers for others, all are answered perfectly according to one's faith in God. Having the faith of a child 42 years ago, believing in God's kindness and mercy, I am just an instrument to bring our brothers and sisters to the Lord and inspire them to have a more intimate relationship with Him.

Praying for others is very rewarding because it is in praying that I enjoy God's endless love and the beauty of His creation.

## The BEATITUDES in my today life

Cat Geslani, James, Brother of John BCGG



I learned about the beatitudes in my early elementary days. My understanding of the beatitudes became deeper as I matured and experienced life's challenges. It is comforting to know that these "beautiful attitudes" assure us that whatever we go through, especially the difficult ones, are temporary. The goodness and mercy of the Lord will see us through whatever pain, affliction, and suffering. God's grace is unconditional, and the beatitudes are His bold statement that we, His children, will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:1-12.*

Each line starts with the word "blessed." How clever these messages are to start with that word. Ironic that something

difficult can be branded as a blessing. I often associate the word blessed with gratefulness. When I go through tough times, I believe it is a gift to spot the blessing in each situation. Finding the "diamond in the rough" is an exercise of being mindful and grateful for the many things that come our way, big or small.

January was particularly challenging for us. My husband, children, parents, nephews, sister, and brother-in-law all got infected by the infamous Covid-19. A lot of fretting challenges came our way during those times. But more importantly, the blessings of the Lord came gushing too, flowing like a refreshing stream of water that washed away all the minor and petty things, and bringing to us realizations that we are loved by God through our families, friends, colleagues, and our Magis Deo Community.

Another beatitude line that struck me recently is "having a poor spirit." I often feel spiritual dryness and less confident that I am loved. I feel sinful, small, and overwhelmed. However, there are realizations too that these feelings often lead me to cling and beg for God's mercy; and help me to be honest and humble in accepting things about myself. "Having a poor spirit" keeps me grounded, and not boast and brag, and not think of myself above others. It helps me to be open and teachable knowing that in the end, God's mercy will see me through, and that His plans for me always prevail.

# Pink and Green Plants

Elaine Serranilla, Matthew BCGG

**L**ike many, I was elated when Vice President Leni Robredo announced her bid for president in the 2022 elections. Our family, including our children, were excited to campaign for her, and for Sen. Leila de Lima, who is seeking re-election. Sen. De Lima is the first cousin of my father-in-law Jose Serranilla, and aunt of my husband, Ian. This is not just politics for us, this is deeply personal. Since 2017 we and our children hear mass with Tita Leila every Sunday in Camp Crame. The struggle for us started then. VP Leni's candidacy gave us a renewed sense of hope and desire for a better Philippines.

However, I work for an international organization and we are bound by the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct of international civil servants. Particularly, while we may vote and belong to political parties, we must exercise discretion at all times in our personal political activities and may not participate in fundraising or other campaign activities, including social media postings. So there I was, bummed! I even had to email our HR Manager for clarifications, given my connection to Sen. de Lima and my proposed support for VP Leni and her party.

I told myself I could not just sit and do nothing. We feel strongly about giving our children, and their future children, a better and safer future. I gazed outside and saw my plants. (During the pandemic, I became a plantita!) This gave me a great idea – I will feature one of my “pink and green” plants to represent VP Leni and Sen. Kiko’s colors! I decided to post every (KakamPink) Wednesday until the elections, with a special hashtag #PlantsforMentalHealth. Ika nga, kapag gusto, maraming paraan, kung ayaw, maraming dahilan!

Sharing with you some of my Instagram and Facebook posts:

(Disclaimer: I am not a botanist nor phytologist; I am just an amateur plant enthusiast. I recently learned to appreciate God’s gift of beauty in nature. Thanks to Google, I am learning so much about plants. Thanks to FB Live Selling, I learned the value of “murayta” and “budget meal” plants.)

## 20 October 2021 (my first post)

I have decided to feature one of my plants with pink and green colors each week for #PlantsforMentalHealth.

After yesterday’s celebration, I wish to showcase my ice cream aglaonema. It has splashes of pink on its dark green leaves with a slightly pink underleaf.



## 3 November 2021

Today's plant is one of the most sought after syngoniums – Strawberry Ice Syngonium. It has slightly rounded dark green leaves with pink and white variegations. Looking forward to that day when it will have a half-moon or full moon variegation. I'll keep you posted!

I once read that this is considered the “Rolls-Royce” of the Syngonium family (good thing I got this at a really good bargain, less than P100, from a seller friend).



## 10 November 2021

Today's plant is Celosia, or “flamingo feathers.” It comes in a variety of colors: yellow, orange, violet, gold, red, and our favorite, pink!

You can see it has a large pink flower cluster on top of green leaves.



## 17 November 2021

Today's plant is Calathea Ornata, also called pinstripe. It has pink stripes on its large green leaves. Calatheas are prayer plants so their leaves fold up at night.

At first I was hesitant to take care of calatheas as I heard they are quite difficult to maintain, even needing distilled water! But I found a perfect spot for them under our santol tree, and I use rainwater diligently.



## 24 November 2021

Today's plant is Green Spider Caladium. I find this unique as it has a bright pink base in between dark green borders and veins! While mine is still juvenile, you can already see its exotic beauty!



## 1 December 2021

Today's plant is Avocado Aglaonema.

It has a bright pink stripe running right down the center of deep, green, large, and glossy oval leaves.



## REFLECTIONS

### 8 December 2021

Today's plant is Happiness Aglaonema, to share our feelings of happiness and gratefulness for my mom's birthday today.

It has a bright pink color running down the middle of its light green, slightly pointed leaf.



### 15 December 2021

Today's plant is Pink Margarita or Pink Pass Syngonium.

Juvenile leaves are simple and arrowhead in shape with a pink midrib. Mature leaves turn into beautiful pink-variegated elliptically-shaped leaflets.

It's only Wednesday but I think I need a margarita (or two) already.



### 22 December 2021

With Christmas only a few days away, today's plant is Christmas (some call it Holiday) Syngonium.

This plant has vibrant arrow-shaped pink-green leaves that have splashes of darker pink variegation in mature leaves.

Looking forward to celebrating a "merrier" Christmas with Ian, Sophia, and Nacho, culminating this year's remarkable journey, and creating more incredible memories together!



### 29 December 2021

Today's plant is Red Maranta Calathea.

This prayer plant has beautifully designed broad green leaves with pink-colored stripes or veins, dark green splotches, and red or white markings -- all at the same time!

Asking for prayers right now as Ian has been at the Emergency Room since 9 am. He got constipated and had spasms yesterday. They are still running some tests.



## REFLECTIONS

### 5 January 2022

Today's plant is Thai Beauty Caladium.

When young, the leaves are green then they slowly turn pink with green and white veins. Once mature, it produces a great display of bright pink foliage and unusual veining in each leaf which makes it a striking plant.

With more than 10,000 new Covid positive cases today, we need to breathe and see the beauty in life. Take extra precautions and practice health protocols. Be safe and healthy everyone!



### 12 January 2021

Today's plant is Pink Dalmatian Aglaonema.

A low-light loving plant features wide, dark green leaves beautifully spotted (just like its canine counterpart) and speckled in soft pink.

Aglaonemas are included in NASA's list of air purifying plants. They are proven to remove benzene and formaldehyde toxins present in home environments. With more than 30,000 new positive cases today, I hope this will help reduce irritant side-effects to humans. Praying for everyone's safety and good health always...



### 19 January 2022

Today's plant is Calathea Stromanthe Triostar.

Native to South American rainforests, this prayer plant has green elongated leaves beautifully splashed with cream and pink variegation and purple undersides.

Exactly a year ago, Ian was diagnosed with colon cancer. We were both devastated that day after hearing this from his doctor. But God is so good and He has healed Ian. Continuously praying for a long and healthy life for Ian...



### 26 January 2022

Today's plant is Pink Schott Syngonium. It may also be called Pink Leaf or Raspberry Syngonium.

It has a gorgeous pink foliage, with leaves turning slightly green with age.

Coincidentally, Ian and I got our Pfizer booster s(c)hot(t) today hehe



## REFLECTIONS

### 2 February 2022

Today's plant is Pink Nerve Fittonia. It also goes by other common names like mosaic or silver net leaf.

Nerve plants have beautiful, deep-green leaves with vein patterns, in this case, in our favorite pink! But it also can come in red, white, purple, green, and variegated.

Exactly a year ago, Ian underwent his first surgery – sigmoidectomy and colostomy. They took out a fist-sized tumor in his sigmoid colon. It was so big that it was resting on top of his bladder! Imagine how nervous I was, waiting for almost 8 hours alone in his room! I think I prayed the rosary almost 10 times!

“But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,” declares the Lord” – Jeremiah 30:17.



### 16 February 2022

Today's plant is Pink Valentine Aglaonema. It is referred as anyamanee or unyanamee for its Thai variety.

This plant will steal your heart with its beautiful variegated green foliage with pink and green speckles. Mine is still juvenile (picture 1) that is why it is predominantly green. But when it matures (CTTO, picture 2), its leaves become mostly pink to whitish with green margins.



## REFLECTIONS

### 9 February 2022

Today's plant is Etta Rose Aglaonema.

If you love pink plants, then this plant is for you! It has green edges and spots with hues of reddish pink in its leaves.

Perfect combo with the most trending hashtag (since yesterday) #KulayRosasAngBukas.



### 23 February 2022

Today's plant is Lance Whorton Caladium.

It has wide, slightly ruffled leaves with pink blotches, dark green central veins, white spots, and medium green edges.

I also have its cousin, Carolyn Whorton Caladium, but it is currently in “ICU” as caladiums tend to go on dormancy during colder seasons. Hopefully I will be able to feature it in my “Pink-and-Green-Plants” to show its beautiful pink foliage!



### 2 March 2022

Today's plant is Chocolate Soldier (Flame Violet) Episcia.

This member of the African Violet has faint green-chocolate brown leaves with blush-pink veins and occasional red or orange blooms.

As we celebrate the start of the Lenten Season today with Ash Wednesday, let us offer prayers for the hundreds of lives lost, soldiers and civilians alike, for both Ukraine and Russia.



### 9 March 2022

Today's plant is Dracaena Bhaskar.

We are familiar with dracaenas as it is one of the common houseplants. They have woody stems and drooping branches. But this particular dracaena has yellow and green variegations with pink margins.

Fun fact: the dracaena plant is a distant cousin of the asparagus.



# Attitude of Gratitude

Magis Deo Youth Ministry Kids' Workshop,  
February 12, 2022

Charmaine L. Ang, Tala BCGG



**A**s a parent, the powerful lesson I learned from the Attitude of Gratitude workshop of the Magis Deo Youth Ministry is that a thankful heart can be nurtured and practiced in an age-appropriate way. The earlier we teach and preach this at home, the better it will be for our children.

One of the deepest desires we have for our children is for them to grow up not just successful in their chosen life path, but also to be resilient when the going gets tough. As a mom, I would choose the latter. I know no one is immune to God's testing. That much is certain. And when that time comes, I want the children to be equipped to stand the beating and remain faithful to God. I can only prepare them for what is ahead and not shield them from life's realities.

I agree with Tita Karen's presentation about all the benefits and whys of developing an attitude of gratitude while our children are young. And that we can practice gratitude with them at home in our daily lives.

Research shows that thankful people are usually more optimistic. They are also less depressed and stressed. So, when we teach our children to appreciate what they have and what others do for them, we help them become happier, healthier adults. I believe this will also help them build a stronger relationship with God no matter what the tide.

*"Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for."* — Zig Ziglar

**“**I learned that you must not just say thank you when you get something or anything. You must do something to make people happy in return. You make it a habit to remember what your parents tell you to do. I look forward to attending other classes or sessions like this in the future.”

— Ma. Francine Antoinette O. Aberia, 10 years old

Today we will learn together...

WHAT IS GRATITUDE?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE GRATEFUL?

HOW TO EXERCISE YOUR ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE?



## Reflections on the YSA Kumustahan

The February 20 Kumustahan was very fun and engaging. The young adults participated actively and were very vocal, responding through chats or turning on their microphones or posting emojis on their screens during the icebreakers, and sharing their experiences at the breakout rooms. The reflection question was light and easy to answer. Hopefully on the next Kumustahan the youth members will tackle have other topics on family, friendships, and love. Overall, everyone was engaged (siguro nahiya lang ang iba in some games, but the majority naman responded well). The Kumustahan was very successful.

— **Angeline Bumanglag,**  
Niece of Paul & Marnette Puthenpurekal,  
Easter BCGG



A fun-filled event with games, sharing, and creating a safe space to bond. All these were done at the Young Single Adults (YSA) Kumustahan last February 20, 2022. Conducted through Zoom, the young adults were able to get together for the afternoon to share their favorite items, guess the latest trends, and share what life has been like since the pandemic. This event turned into a short breather for students who have been dealing with so much stress during their time in college.

The pandemic has caused us to become so focused on ourselves that we forget there are other people who can relate to our struggles and people we can open to. This activity helped students take a step back and breathe again while having an engaging conversation with others. It was a comforting experience, and given the chance, the YSA community will be holding more."

— **Angeline Concepcion,**  
Daughter of Ted & Susan Concepcion,  
Archangel Gabriel BCGG

## Lights On! Lights Out!

Chacho Angeles, Thessalonians BCGG

**D**uring high school and junior college, I lived in a seminary where mornings are cool, especially during the “ber” months. The air is crisp, the sky is clear, and we can see the stars at night.

### Lights On!



We would wake up at 5:00 in the morning, dress up, and go to church for morning prayers and mass. We would walk the dark corridors with eyes half open and, like zombies, enter our brightly lit chapel to be blessed. After mass, we were off to the refectory for breakfast. We used to get coffee or tea from huge pots or kettles which two or three boys could handle properly.

*Oh, what a cold, cold morning!  
Yet I'm warm as a despot,  
With my friends around huddling  
The common warmth, the teapot.*

After breakfast, we had some free time to do personal things before plunging into our schoolwork. During this period, I would spend a little time going around the gardens that the priests planted all around the building. There were sunflowers, poinsettias, bougainvilleas, roses, and other flowers. There were aratiles trees in the garden areas, and bananas and papayas in the orchard area.

*Upon a red petal, a drop of dew,  
Unshaken, the breeze of the morn it blew,  
But continued to cling to the blossoming hue,  
And mirrored a softness so frail it knew.*

From time to time, and depending on the season, there were explosions of colors... yellows of the sunflowers; the red, white, and yellow bougainvilleas; the red and green poinsettias; the red, yellow, and white roses. It was a magical place!

*Beauty is not the flower alone  
In its swaying bed of green.  
But together it is, with stone  
And soil, and all that is unseen.*

But magical as the place may seem, there are a lot of things happening to its inhabitants every second of the day. We were in our teens, and as expected, our hormones were running wild. We were learning good things, relevant and useful things, and character-building things. But we were also learning all the things that we should not be learning. And the result is mighty confusion.

*The sun fiercely stares  
Bears Caesarean nightmares  
To the mind torn by  
The self, the lie,  
And the cosmos of soot,  
The porter of truth.*

*Sightless suspicion,  
Cruel frustration  
Beget the heir – sea  
Of deadly uncertainty –  
Beating the ego  
Without let and forego.  
The flower floats by,  
Carrying a pie  
Of beauty and lust,  
Doomed to be rust  
At the cosmos' spear  
In the bowels of fear.*

## PROSE AND POETRY

And then again, some of us called it exuberant fun! Aside from the usual "horrid" things like pornography, there was some gambling (betting our banana desserts) and some drinking bouts, smoking sessions, and midnight snacks! The first four activities were prohibited, and the last is allowed only in the refectory at designated merienda and mealtimes. We were not allowed to keep food in the dormitory, classrooms, and study hall.

We were also experiencing a liberal dose of schizophrenia and self-doubt when trying to do good, then breaking the rules, and having fun in the process.

*Life is a Flower*

*Full in all's eyes; yet petals*

*Don't see what they are!*

And we met delightful members of the opposite sex from other schools through officially sanctioned joint school activities, through the teachers who teach in our school part-time and in other schools, and through friends. There were lots of letter writing going on, and puppy romance proved to be very distracting.

*Through myself, you, and me,*

*Struggle as I vainly grapple*

*With this problem to untangle,*

*Before me, you I see.*

*In this silence, all I hear,*

*Wise yet blind, some fingers leafing*

*Piles of myriad letters floating,*

*Tightly knit, your voice comes near.*

In junior college, while we were still interned, we were allowed to have extra-curricular activities outside the seminary. We were more exposed to the outside world, and some of us were introduced to community development work and to the new politics of the time, student activism. I was one of those who got hooked, looking at it as a form of service to God's people, the Filipinos.

*Open the windows, the breeze will tingle,  
Backs of your hearings, hair of your limbs.  
Break down your walls and let yourself mingle  
With the ground ants and those of so dim,  
And thrilling you'll be humanity's spine.*

We spent very quiet evenings. We studied, and we prayed before going to bed. We did a lot of thinking with our praying. We thought about ourselves, about our lives, and about our futures. And through the deaths of people we knew, we saw and felt our mortality.

*Long line, long line, where are you going?  
You've passed this point, now that,  
Then escapes to eternity unswerving.  
And not a line, is life that bends,  
Which passed this point, then that,  
Then ends.*

### Lights Out!

