

Magis

Formation for Mission

Stewardship

Simplicity

Sharing

Service

Official Publication of the Magis Deo Community

October 2020 Issue

To Die Is to Live

Be a disciple of Christ in responding to God's call of love

His Spirit Lives

Remember our *lolo* figure, who was true to his Jesuit values

First Online AIR Came in Twos

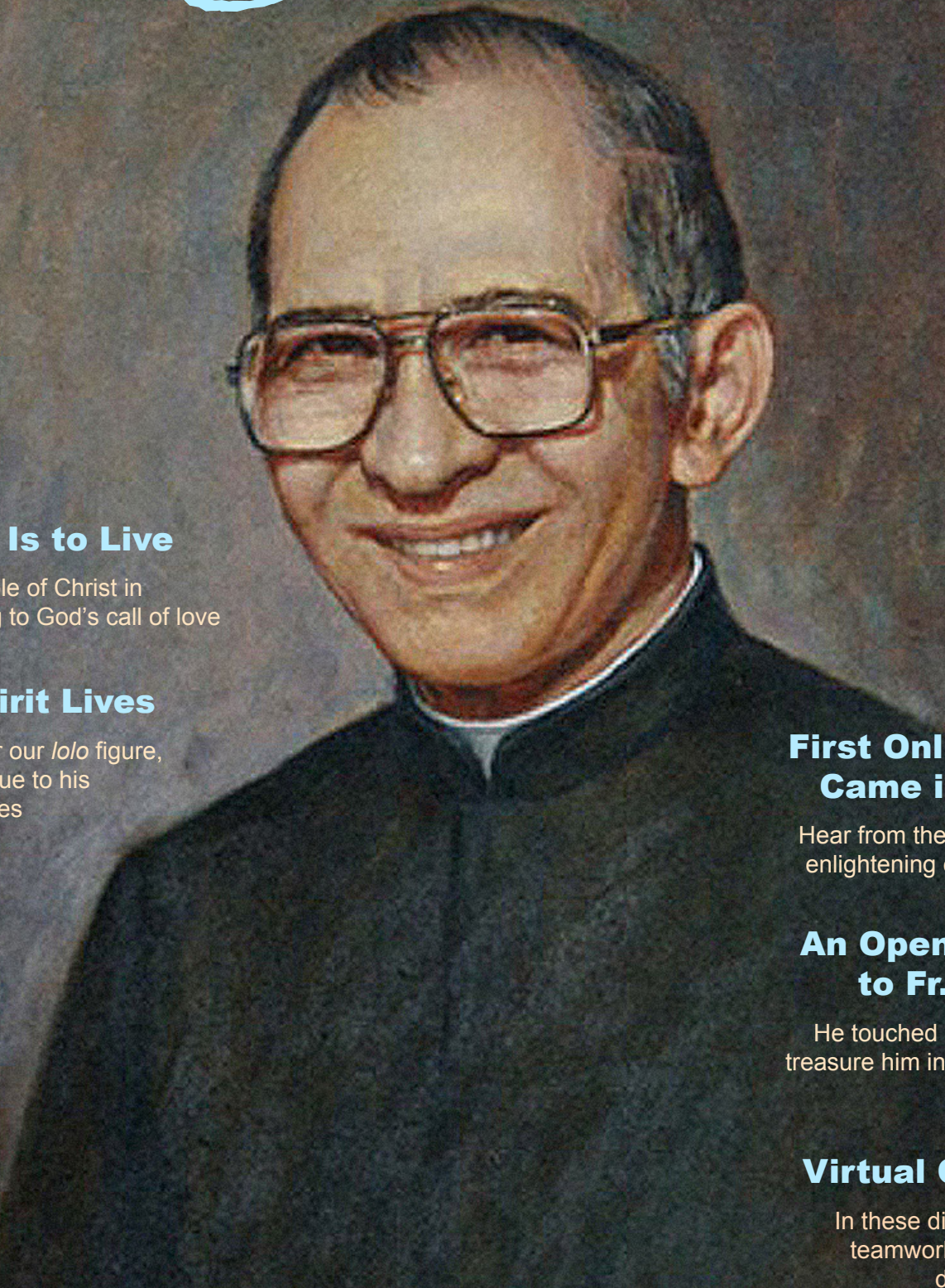
Hear from the retreatants' enlightening experiences

An Open Letter to Fr. Ruben

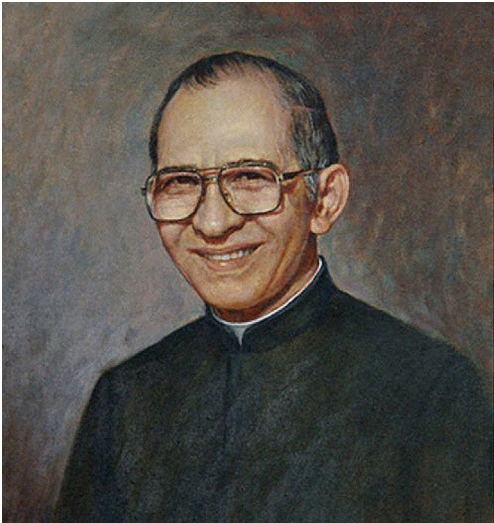
He touched our lives, so treasure him in your hearts

Virtual College

In these difficult times, teamwork makes the dreams work



About the Cover



Fr. Ruben Marfori Tanseco was born on Nov. 23, 1931 in Los Baños, Laguna. He is the eldest child of Generoso Tanseco of Bulacan, Bulacan and Soledad Marfori of Calauan, Laguna. He entered the Society of Jesus on June 20, 1953 and was ordained Priest on June 10, 1965 in Woodstock, Maryland. He took his Final Vows to the Society of Jesus on February 2, 1978.

Fr. Ruben M. Tanseco, S.J. joined the Jesuit order after emerging from both Benedictine portals (San Beda High School Class 1949) and Dominican (Conservatory of Music, University of Santo Tomas, 1952). He also finished Master of Arts in Philosophy from Berchmans College, Cebu City. His 1965 ordination in New York was later followed by a Master’s Degree in Pastoral Counseling from the University of Detroit, and an Internship Program at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California.

He came home and embarked on a journey that has come to define his whole life’s mission: to be a formator of future priests (as professor at the Loyola School of Theology), to give unceasing service to others, and to keep a fervent commitment to that sacred unit of humanity called family. The extensive path he has carved bears vivid testimonies to his devotedly-used capabilities as a marriage counselor, associate professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, Rector of Loyola House of Studies, retreat master, book author, columnist, lecturer, and speaker.

Fr. Ruben Tanseco, S.J. was responsible for bringing in the Marriage Encounter Weekend to the Philippines, adapting it to our culture and transforming the lives of some 50,000 couples and families in the Philippines. He pioneered in professional marital and pre-marital counseling as well as formal courses in marriage and pastoral counseling and established the Center for Family Ministries, Foundation, Inc. He also established the Discovery Weekend Foundation, Christian Parenting for Peace and Justice Foundation, and Magis Deo Community Foundation. He authored the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Marriage Counseling Service, and he is also a columnist of the Philippine Star.

Fr. Ruben died at 4:45 PM Sep. 23, 2020, two months short of his 89th birthday.
“Eternal rest unto your soul, Fr. Ruben. WE LOVE YOU, WE WILL MISS YOU, BUT YOU’LL ALWAYS BE IN OUR HEARTS.”

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Calendar of Activities: November - December 2020

November	
15	Advent Recollection and Community Celebration
3rd week	Pastoral Council Election

December	
6	Family Day

To die is to live

GOD'S WORD TODAY - Ruben M. Tanseco S.J.
(The Philippine Star) - September 12, 2015 - 10:00am



“**He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, ‘Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.’**” (Mk. 8:34-35).

This passage from today's Gospel reading clarifies the very meaning of the life of each one of us. In just a few words, it describes the what, the why, and the how of human life. And the overall meaning of it all is God's love for each one of us, and the mission that he gives us – to love him in return by loving one another. And this means giving our lives for one another, as Jesus did for us. As God the Son, he became one of us precisely to show us the meaning of human life. His life was one of love in word and action. He lived a poor and simple lifestyle. He healed the sick, forgave sinners, befriended and sat down with tax collectors and sinners, he worked on the Sabbath day, and he also reached out to women. As a climax of it all, he washed the feet of his apostles, a task not given even to slaves.

All of the above were against the Jewish law. As a consequence, he was continually persecuted by the Sanhedrin and the Jewish leaders, all the way to his cruel crucifixion, only to resurrect on the third day. All of this is what he is inviting each one of us, his disciples, to follow. There are many ways of dying to the self. You and I know that. What motivates us in taking risks, big and small, is the love within us, which is no less than God's intimate presence. God's love emboldens us to risk our lives, even to the point of death, for the sake of love.

Inspired by no less than Christ himself, our beloved Pope Francis has started his Papal leadership with radical reforms, which are the inspiration for all of us. He started with what he calls the 15 ailments of the Papal Curia in Rome. Over and above this is his goal toward “a poor church for the poor.”

He insists that we need “pastors who carry the smell of their sheep.” He is deeply convinced that social injustice must be changed. In his own words: “The unjust distribution of good persists, creating a situation of social sin that cries out to heaven and limits the possibilities of a fuller life for so many of our brothers.” He strongly condemns global capitalism and inspires us to move toward a social revolution. Like Christ, he is taking great risks for his own life. Recently, he dismissed a bishop of Limburg, Germany for remodeling the bishop's residence for \$42 million, \$1 million for landscaping, and no less than \$20,000 for a bathtub!

In our own Philippines, according to a recent research, 76% of our country's wealth is owned and controlled by forty to fifty families! The Christian country in name that is most unchristian in practice. Let me repeat here what I have previously expressed: Our beloved country must move toward a socialist socio-economic system, and not remain in this unjust, capitalistic system. Let us pray that our next President may move toward a spiritual conversion process in this regard.

Today, we are very much surrounded and victimized by a highly consumerist culture from the West. Malls and supermalls are all over the place. Our newspapers are full of one-paged colored advertisements of consumer goods. All this and more are powerful temptation to spend our time and money more and more in enjoying our lives in a material, self-centered, lavish way – rather than spend our time and what we have with those who are in need, and there are so many of them.

On the other hand, we have the other side of the fence. The numbers of apostolic groups, organizations, and NGO's are continually increasing, not to mention the many parish churches that are reaching out to the poor. This is a response to God's Gospel message of today. But the capitalistic system and its injustices still prevail.

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God Will Make a Way

Francis and Dolly Llamas,
Pastoral Council/Psalm 98 BCGG

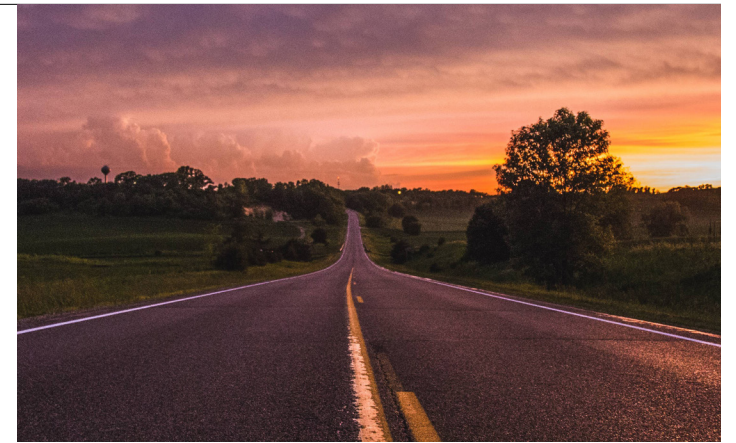
As the number of corona virus cases climbs, being quarantined at home coupled with social and physical distancing, can be emotionally and psychologically challenging. With the fear of the unknown and feelings of helplessness, it's natural that we find ourselves seeking God more. In these times we would like to believe that God has made a way for each of us to cope with the crisis that has befallen us and the whole world.

We have felt socially isolated yet we were also able to refocus our attention to our families and have found time to reconnect with our loved ones here and abroad through various social media like FaceTime, Zoom, Messenger and other means developed for the growing demands to communicate.

We have missed the regular physical Sunday routine of going to Church but God made a way with daily TV and online masses in the comfort of our homes.

At the onset of the pandemic, we were apprehensive that our Magis Deo Community's activities would end but God found ways for us to celebrate and be together though we are physically apart. Through the efforts of our Spiritual Director Fr. James Gascon and our members who contributed their brilliant ideas and minds on ways to keep in touch, our community carries on, grows. We may have fumbled at the beginning and even felt apprehensive about this new normal, but we have succeeded, and take pride in these.

In September and October, our Magis community was full of activities, all conducted and carried out online. In addition to



the online Community Celebrations, the Community Services Ministry organized the very first Zoom-ba, where many members participated via Zoom and FB live. The Magis Youth experienced Yoga Meditation with teacher Gi Yap, while Zarah Gagatiga and her son Val generously spent their time with the kids through their Songs and Story. Our Outreach Ministry continues to reach out to others, especially to our front liners and medical professionals by serving them food, donated by community members. The Magis Tulong sa Edukasyon was launched to help deserving kids with their online learning needs.

For the first time, two Annual Ignatian Retreats (AIR) were held on the same date and time. The AIR on “God's Love and Mercy” was led by Fr. James Gascon, while the AIR on Knowing, Loving, Following Jesus” was led by Fr. Bob Buenconsejo.

The second Marriage Booster was another success, with Fr. Allan Abuan's talk on “An Affair to Not Remember.” We are quite sure many are looking forward to the third Marriage Booster, with the topic “The Art of Fighting” by Fr. Bob Buenconsejo.

The Praxis Ministry is now working out the 3rd BCGG Interface meetings for the October-November period, anchored on Lectio Divina.

Continued on page 7

To die is to live, continued from page 4

On the personal, individual level, especially within the family, there are exemplary disciples of Christ in responding to God's call of love, at the risk of their own lives. Take this young wife whose husband lost his job because the company he was working in closed down. He kept looking for a job but was unsuccessful. Finally, the wife, with the consent of the husband, went abroad as an OFW. The pain in her heart was so deep, for she was so emotionally attached to her husband and their two children. But she carried her cross out of love for them. Until after two, long years, her husband was finally employed, so she was able to come home to her dear family. No less than the resurrection.

Let me finally single out this young man whose elder brother was suffering from cancer in his one and only kidney left. Out of love and compassion, the younger brother volunteered to donate one of his kidneys to save his brother's life. The operation was successful. However, after a year or so, the younger brother himself likewise developed cancer in his one, remaining kidney. The doctors did all they could, but they were not able to save his life. In some way or other, he gave his life for his elder brother out of love for him. God's ways are not our ways. But we know in our hearts that it is God's love that is the answer. The younger brother is now with God in the other life, while the elder brother is with God, but still in his life here on earth. Amen.

His Spirit Lives

Milo Parada, Magis Youth



The simplicity was all over the place: his living place barely consisted of anything but a single bed, a shelf of books, a cabinet, and one bag in one corner. The whole setup was unassuming, but expectedly organized.

This has got to be Fr. Ruben's signature lifestyle, having known him as a person who routinely shunned extravagance and cupidity. It was a pleasure to have been invited to see the place, where he asked me to sit down on his chair and handed me a piece of paper and pen.

"Please put your number so that I can call you when I can."

I did write down my cellphone number, to which lamented that he only used a landline. Not a problem, we both supposed, as he showed me some of his books. His modesty and humility were so alluring, one could be forgiven for almost overlooking the sheer presence of a well-respected man, dubbed by his contemporaries and pupils as one of Asia's most dignified theologians.

I have, however, always seen him in a much more intimate light.

I was literally a Magis baby, as my parents, Leony and Mia, have been part of Magis Deo for almost three decades. In my eyes as a little boy, he was extremely terrifying to look at – his stature, mannerisms, and way of speaking were very much in vogue with what my parents and many other Magis Deo members could only describe as disciplinarian and perfectionist. I may have not lived earlier enough to experience his younger, energetic, and perhaps stiffer youth, but descriptions of his very operative and unrelenting personality will certainly not be lost in the minds and hearts of countless people – from the lives of

couples to families, to individuals seeking life advice from all walks, it's not surprising that as grandpa-like, he also captivated children like me.

Eventually, I began seeing him as a lolo figure. I may have scarcely assisted him during masses, but our ensuing relationship over time was very unexpected. Already in his old age, it is surprising how he could still remember my name, but not my parents', and would often call me over the phone and invite me to visit him at his place. Often, he would hobble down the halls with sheer persistence, despite the existence of a wheelchair or an elevator. Pity his joints, I thought to myself, as he repeatedly declined any form of physical help. "No, no, no. I can do this on my own," he would say all while he descended the stairs for God knows how long.

Perhaps a nod to his Jesuit values, he loved doing things by himself, from carrying his decades-old satchel, to slowly dressing up for mass on his own, God forbid that his barely existent hair ever got messed up. I asked him why he did not request for a helper; he simply supposed he didn't need one while he could still do what he needed to do. He was very much satisfied at how he was able to conduct himself independently but assuredly. If there's anything I learned from these encounters with him, it's that there's nothing futile in doing ordinary things extraordinarily, even if they take a stretch to undertake.

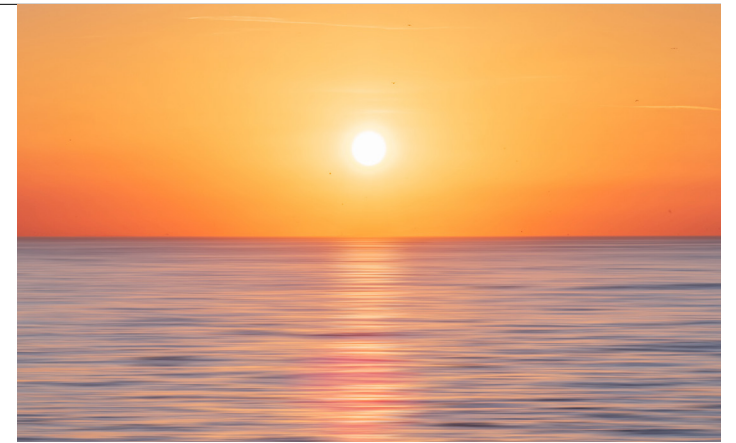
Even at the sight of his visibly less animated movement, one can't help but admire him for his wisdom, knowledge, and especially his faith in the Lord. Magis Deo was undeniably born and molded out of his desire to be *magis* and bring out the *magis* in every family and couple. My family has certainly benefited heaps from Magis Deo; Magis Deo has given us a community we can call our extended family.

But beyond Magis Deo, he has, throughout the decades of his sacerdotal ministry, established countless initiatives geared towards helping couples and families, notably the poor and the disenfranchised, in their marriages; and making accessible the essence of Ignatian Spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises.

True to his Jesuit values, he was intent on pushing the boundaries of his apostolic ministry. He founded communities and foundations where people can balance the realities of modern life with the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the Lord, and he did so successfully, having been one of the pioneers of the Marriage Encounter movement in the Philippines. No wonder, then, that he was very much sought after despite his seldom appearances in the latter part of his years; members still flock to him, asking for photo-ops as well as his blessing and advice.

Despite his celebrity-like status in the community, there's no doubt that he was bound to have his limitations. Joking about his "hour" almost all the time, it gave me a glimpse on the realities of being human: we all are gifted to reach for success in life, but we are limited by our nature; our bodies eventually get weaker that we huff and puff faster than the desires our minds and souls could ever reach. But if man is indeed created in the image and likeness of God, I'm very certain that Fr. Ruben, a simple man who gave himself to the service of the Lord, may probably be one of the best manifestations of that, because his spirit of service and faith still lives on, seemingly possessing no funeral date.

Somehow, every word of wisdom that came from his mouth always commanded respect, even if the snail-like pace of his homilies at times may have brought a person or two to sleep. He helped grow, nourish, and in many cases, save dying or lifeless marriages. The communities he established and the



lives he touched are way too many to count, that sometimes it's a wonder how he was able to execute all these, despite the realities of life.

He may have had a very selfless apostolate, but it's humbling to see how full of faith and humility he was. He came from a very influential family, but in no way did he feel the part; his serenity was just manifest. People often talk about not being happy enough with what they have now – cars, mansions, travels abroad, and other luxuries. But there he went inside his room, a place I was truly fortunate to have visited. With all his unfinished books, unpublished news articles writings and journals containing all his memoirs of a life well lived, his spirit of happiness and peace will never be lost with me, and with others. If indeed God is love, Fr. Ruben, with all the love and goodwill he has showered upon every one of us, may very well be the quintessential representation of who God is.

I will forever miss his phone calls and my visits to him. I will never forget the day I finally became his sacristan and overcame my fear of his rather intimidating appearance. But above all, I will always remember the Lolo figure that he became for me.

Rest in Power.

God Will Make a Way, continued from page 5

While the community mourns the demise of its founder and former spiritual director, Fr. Ruben M. Tanseco, an online Mass of the Resurrection and Necrological service was offered. Fr. James presided the mass and expressed the community's gratitude and love for Fr. Ruben with his heartfelt homily. Selected members of the community as well as the siblings of Fr. Ruben paid tribute to him by sharing their memories and how their lives were touched and influenced by the teachings and character of Fr. Ruben. In honor of our dear Fr. Ruben, the community is raising funds to become the benefactor of the big conference room for the youth at Mirador Jesuit Retreat House, which will be named after Fr. Ruben M. Tanseco, SJ.

As we look forward to the remaining months of the year, the

community through its ministries will remain full of activities and programs, with an Advent Recollection on November 15 by Fr. Ted Gonzales, the Pastoral Council Election, and Family Day on December 6.

In connecting with each other, we believe we have become closer, knowing that we are all in this together. We have surpassed emotions, despairs, and helplessness at the immensity of this crisis but are hopeful that this pandemic will come to pass. We will learn to live with it and survive with God's grace and providence.

God "Will Make a Way" for our Magis Deo Community.

Lord, never permit us to be separated from you!

Tribute to Father Ruben M. Tanseco, S.J.

Tina and Monchito Mossesgeld
Cana, BCGG



Fr. Ruben first touched our lives in 1984, when we attended the Marriage Encounter Weekend in Villa Adelaida in Tagaytay. Fr. Ruben was the presenting priest; Pompoy and Marilen Dinglasan and Ping and Josie Sison were the presenting couples. Fr. Ruben's deep spirituality powerfully touched us, as did the presenting couples' sharing. That weekend marked a new beginning for us and our marriage. It was as if a window was opened and light and fresh air filled the room which had grown dark and musty over the years.

Little did we know then that Fr. Ruben's influence in our life would continue and that he would play a major role in our spiritual growth. Upon his invitation, Tina and I served as ME Weekend presenting couple for a number of years. Sometime the year after our ME Weekend, he gathered a small group of ME graduates, us included, on a weekly basis, introduced Ignatian spirituality, and nurtured it in our hearts. He also conducted a series on the social teachings of the Catholic Church which opened our eyes to a dimension of our faith that we were not very familiar with. All these led later on to the founding of the Magis Deo Community and its marriage and family spirituality, which Fr. Ruben nourished spiritually as it grew.

Today, Ignatian spirituality is the guiding force in our lives, our way to God, influencing the way we relate with God, others, and His creation. Magis Deo Community has been God's instrument in the spiritual growth of hundreds of couples and their families for over 30 years now. All these, thanks to Fr. Ruben.

Fr. Ruben challenged and disturbed our perspectives and points of view about faith and spirituality. He raised and developed our social consciousness. He taught us in the Magis Deo Community that we, as husband and wife, as parents, and as families, are called to be for others. He never tired of telling us that to reach out, be in solidarity with the poor and share with them what we have, is an essential expression of our faith. He constantly reminded us that to love and care for our country and our fellow Filipinos is integral to loving God. He encouraged and inspired us to ground our lives on the values of stewardship, simplicity, service and sharing in our lives.

On a personal basis, our own family owes much to Fr. Ruben. For many Christmases, he offered a mass specially

for our family. When we experienced a serious family crisis, he was the first and only person Tina and I thought of going to for guidance. He was a great comfort to all of us in the midst of the darkness we felt then. But he was also with us in happier times of weddings and wedding anniversaries. He officiated our 25th wedding anniversary mass and renewal of marriage vows. He presided at the weddings of our two children and celebrated the 10th wedding anniversary mass of our daughter Pia and son-in-law Albert.

We remember a funny experience with Fr. Ruben. Sometime in 1999, Monchito had a gall bladder operation and as he was being wheeled to the operating room, he asked me to call Fr. Ruben to request for prayers. I called Fr. Ruben's office and left a message, "Please **pray** for Monchito's operation." Some time after, Fr. Ruben called me and, sounding very concerned and puzzled, asked, "Tina, what happened to Monchito?" "Why Father?" I replied. What he said floored me, "I received a note asking me to **pay** for his operation!" I burst out laughing. The message to **pray** for Monchito's operation somehow lost an "r" when it was passed on to him. I clarified the message and we had a good laugh. And we still laugh every time we remember the incident.

Fr. Ruben was a guiding light to Tina and me for over 30 years. There is no other person who has had that impact on us as a couple. He is, as a book that is a compilation of his regular Sunday columns is entitled, "one really valuable pearl" whose influence in our life we treasure.

Good-bye, Fr. Ruben. You have left us but, in a very real sense, you will continue to be with us. You will remain in the gratitude of our hearts and in the way we live our lives. Your presence will endure in the relationships and lives of the countless couples and their families who have been blessed by your person, your marriage and family ministry, your healing kindness, compassion, and love.

Thank you, Fr. Ruben. We pray that God will take you into His arms and keep you in His loving embrace for all eternity. Please continue praying for us and watching over us. We love you very much.

An Open Letter to Fr. Ruben Tanseco...

Josie Llamas, Genesis BCGG



Dear Father Ruben,
I thank the Lord for the gift of you, for coming into our life in November 1984, at the Marriage Encounter Weekend at Villa Adelaida, Tagaytay. We were known then as Epsilon V, of the Alpha Omega Series.

That Friday evening, we heard you say "Your being here this evening is not accidental, nor a coincidence, but providential. For some important reason, God wanted you here. You may run away from God for a while, but you cannot lose Him."

We followed you, because you gave back to us the meaning of remaining in love in our marriage, because what God has blessed in a sacramental marriage, can never be lost. You reminded us that Love... Life is beautiful and precious. When trials come and in every sorrow... there we can see the outstretched arms of our Lord... lovingly, caressingly, embracing us.

We learned that God's kingdom is very much alive in our midst. We find it in creation spirituality. The God of the universe. The God of creation. The global God. And God can be found anywhere and everywhere, most especially in the poorest of the poor, if only we seek Him there.

Father, you were also full of surprises, like one time you came to the house unexpectedly, because you had a break time from a seminar that you were giving in a parish nearby. Ike was surprised to see you by the door that he commented, "Salvation has come to my house." We all ended laughing. A very memorable occasion was when Ike and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary, and you insisted on celebrating the mass in our home, together with our family and BCGG. What made it more meaningful is that during the consecration, Ike and I felt the Lord's presence so strongly telling us to "Come follow Me."

Ike and I always looked forward to picking you up in Ateneo for a Marriage Encounter Weekend or for a meeting we had to attend. There was always so much to talk about, endless funny stories to more serious ones. One time you said that what inspired you to found CEFAM and to work with married couples was the Love you felt and saw from your father and mother. What a wonderful way to pay tribute to your parents.

In one ME Weekend, after our Talk on Awareness of God's Presence (Wedding Feast of Cana), you quietly leaned over and whispered to us, "Your second wine is much, much better than the first." At that moment tears just flowed out of our eyes in gratitude and thanksgiving. You, Fr. Ruben, were the instrument in turning our life around. You never gave up on us in spite of all our flaws and imperfections. You never tired guiding us, even calling us when you did not see us around. We felt God's Love through you. You kept on inspiring us to follow Christ and serve in the community. You, Father, with God's grace, saved our marriage, and for that I am forever grateful.

As I write this, I am filled with emotion, thanking God gratefully for sending you to us and to thousands of other couples whom you touched with your love, care and compassion, during the countless retreats, seminars, MEWs, CPPJs, etc. Truly you were the hands, eyes, mouth, and feet of Christ, because the spirituality you preached flowed out of your life.

You have touched our lives in a very special way and I will forever treasure you in my heart.

We love and thank you Fr. Ruben...

Yours,
Ike and Josie



Eulogy for Fr. Ruben

Nina Lim-Yuson, Sirach BCGG



There was a moment of hesitation whether to proceed to Tagaytay for the ME Weekend.

Despite the pouring rains and leaving behind our youngest child, we decided to drive to Tagaytay. That weekend, it must've been that charismatic priest, Fr. Ruben, who made a difference in our lives. Surprisingly, we were chosen to be the Coordinating couple for this Kappa 4 ME Group of 1982. Even today, I treasure our ME notebooks, a valuable gift from the weekend.

Joey and Fr. Ruben were a tandem. I thought that Joey would've been a good priest as he embraced fully the teachings and thought often of the ME Foundation that Fr. Ruben established. It was a meeting of prayers and minds and God's presence that had a motley group set up MEFP.

There are many distinguishing and even outstanding marks in Fr. Ruben's life, but allow me to dwell on two of them.

One is his heart and soul that went out for the poorest and call for justice. It was the Christian Parenting for Peace and Justice, a weekend format for families. Although my kids, who were ages 3 to 13 then may not recall the particular talks, it was an early impression on them to understand why we need to

work for peace and justice. It was also that period of martial law and eventually the EDSA revolution where we saw our actions speak louder than our thoughts. Never have I seen such deep love that Fr. Ruben's had for our country. It was so impressed in us and I thank God for this.

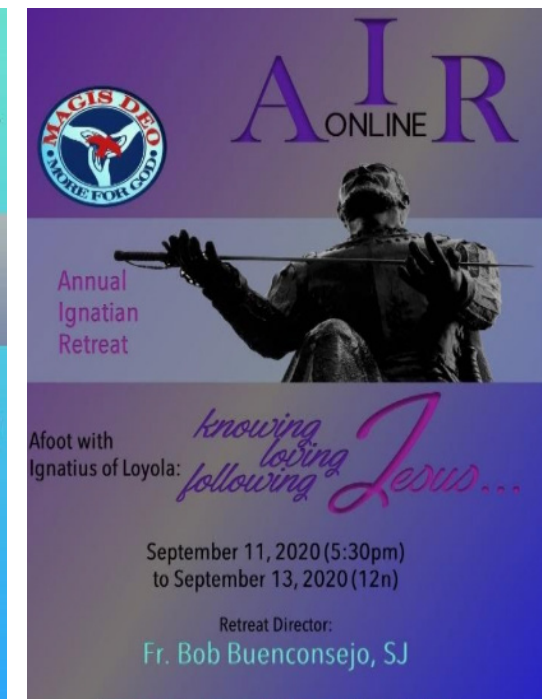
Second, reaching out to the poorest. Two events stand out. Our day with the poorest in Leveriza, Pasay where I saw a deeply moved Joey. We stayed with a poor family the whole day and ate their shared tuyo and rice. The other was in Tubao, Anduyan in La Union. A strong earthquake devastated this area. Our Magis Deo group responded by helping rebuild the community, not only by rebuilding homes but holding prayer sessions there as well.

Two very special people have left my life, Joey and Fr. Ruben. Whenever I see heart-shaped leaves or heart-shaped water stains or feel the cool breeze, I know that Joey is assuring me that he is around.

This morning, as I went outside to walk, deep in thought of what to write, I was taken by surprise to see on the ground a blanket of white flowers (kalachuchi). It must be Fr. Ruben! He is telling me "All is well."

First Online Annual Ignatian Retreat Came in Twos

Philip & Malu Panlilio, Formation Ministry / Mustard Seed BCGG



After... the Lord sent them in pairs to every place where He intended to go... (Luke 10:1). And He blessed Magis Deo in a similar way last September 11-13, providing members with two paired Annual Ignatian Retreats (AIR) – and online at that!!!

There was overwhelming response to the first online AIR. Many signed up for the AIR which covers Week 2 (Humanity of Christ and His public ministry) of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. However, a significant number of members lacked the foundational retreat experience of Week 1 (God's love and mercy), a prerequisite to the Week 2 retreat. In response, Fr. James Gascon, SJ, generously agreed to conduct an online AIR on God's love at the same time, back-to-back with the AIR on Week 2 graces with Fr. Bob Buenconsejo, SJ.

Eighty members attended the two online retreats. Everyone came with deep desire to seek God and rose to

the challenge of maintaining silence and creatively praying at a home retreat. These 80 retreatants came from 18 BCGGs: Agnus Dei, Archangel Gabriel, Cana, Chronicles, Easter, Emmanuel, Exodus, Francis, Genesis, John, Magnificat, Matthew, Mustard Seed, Psalm 98, Prodigal 102, Transfiguration, Samaritans, and Sirach.

The bounty of God's graces came to the retreatants: *tagos sa puso*; touched my core; life changing; enlightening; very inspiring; amazing; remembering; challenging but grace-filled; eye and heart opener; connected to God; moving; enriching; great experience of God; very timely; settling stir; value of forgiveness; deep prayer; generosity; grounding of existence and God's meaning in life; knowledge of God and myself; intimate relationship with God; integration of prayer into daily lives; and gratitude for God's blessings. Hear more from the retreatants in the next pages...

Maraming salamat, Panginoon!

Fruits of my AIR... Knowing, Loving, Following Jesus

Jeannette Wong, Chronicles BCGG

My husband Roel and I have been attending marriage encounters (ME) for a long time. Our ME through CEFAM was our third and last. Through CEFAM I met my support groups, namely, Chronicles BCGG headed by Jojo and Jane Aldeguer, our spiritual counselor Fr. Ted Gonzales, SJ, Mood Harmony (a group of people diagnosed with various mental illnesses, in my case depression) and my psychiatrist.

Indeed, miracles still do happen! After attending the AIR last September 11-13, 2020 with Fr. Bob Buenconsejo, SJ, I realized that it was God's way of making me feel His presence more. As I read the daily scriptures of Sacred Space, slowly I was enlightened by God's words. I could hardly understand the readings before but lately, after the AIR, I felt it was God's loving whisper to me, to have a deeper understanding of Him and to entrust to Him everything beyond my control. I surrendered to Him all my worries, my fears, my frustrations, my heartaches, my illnesses. There were times I wanted to give up but with God's grace and with the guidance of my support groups, slowly I'm learning and trying different ways to fight negative emotions, feelings and thoughts. I try to let go of the "baggage" that hinders me from following God.

My depression was triggered during this pandemic because my top 3 strength characters – love, appreciation of beauty and arts, and spirituality (based on a personality test conducted through Mood Harmony) where shattered. Aside from this, I'm now experiencing post-menopausal syndrome.

As I take my baby steps towards full recovery, I discovered ways to control my emotions, to remain calm and composed despite of my present condition. I start and end my days with prayers (novena to Padre Pio, journalize my reflection of the daily readings in prayer form). I meditate a lot. I listen to inspirational songs like "God Will Make a Way" by Don Moen, "I Offer My Life" and "Letting Go" by Jaime Rivera. Lately, I'm also watching short videos of Fulltank by Bo Sanchez. I exercise and now I'm more conscious of my diet. I just feel so blessed because my hobbies like cooking, baking, journalizing, crocheting, listening to music and my newly discovered talent in painting turned out to be part of my therapy. I focus on God's blessings, the goodness of the people around me and trust in the power of Holy Spirit to battle all the negativity surrounding me.

As a child of God, I am still struggling on how to balance my time and energy to be a better wife, a better mom to our four kids, and a "mamita" to our two "apo".



At present my husband and I are having our individual counseling. As a couple we are "a work in progress," trying to improve our marriage by reconciling our differences through "dialogue" (communication). As unique individuals we are still coping with our differences and weaknesses. According to Fr. Ted, it is like an "addiction", impulsively doing something that one can hardly control. I am a product of a broken family and I don't want our kids to go through the same trauma and hardships that I experienced.

I know that marriage is a commitment and a decision we made 27 years ago. We just need to find the right time to "dialogue," to freely express our feelings and negotiate on issues we don't agree on. There is no perfect formula to this but if we put God at the center of our relationship, then everything else will follow. Maybe we just need more time and space to better understand each other. To have a deeper and personal relationship with God. This year's AIR was an eye opener for me. The Holy Spirit touched me miraculously!!! I became more sensitive to my husband's needs. Now, I'm more patient, more understanding and more considerate in dealing with him, my family and loved ones.

Looking back, I'm so grateful and overwhelmed by the blessings God has bestowed on us. How He moved and maneuvered my life when I felt so helpless, lonely and tired. I may not know His will yet but with an open mind and a listening heart, I trust that only God can save me from this turmoil I'm going through. He is and will always be my Savior, my healer, my constant companion, my comforter, my teacher, my best friend... my everything!!! For only God knows what's best for all of us. I hope and I pray that all these shall pass, in God's "perfect time"!

My First Online Retreat Experience

Marivic Pareja, Prodical 102 BCGG



When it was announced that there will be an online AIR, my first thought and reaction was, "Really???"

I was kind of skeptical, apprehensive and hesitant for fear that my goal for deep reflection and prayer may not be met given the environment/place where all possible distractions are present (kids, friends, gadgets, Netflix, etc.). However, my desire to have one-on-one time with the Lord prevailed and I convinced myself that perhaps, this online retreat will do for now since my scheduled 3-day retreat at the Sacred Heart Novitiate last March didn't push through because of the lockdown. So, I signed up. That was the first grace I received.

That Friday morning, during my morning prayer, I offered my retreat to the Lord and begged for His grace of quietness and stillness of heart and for the Holy Spirit to guide me in this 3-day retreat as I deepen my personal relationship with the Lord.

Before the five o'clock call time, I was able to prepare dinner for the family, delivered food orders for the day, set up my "sacred space" in our bedroom (Cesar is using the TV room as his "sacred space") with candle, rosary, image of St. Ignatius, Mama Mary and the Crucified Jesus. I then fixed myself ensuring that I will be presentable to the Lord when I meet Him at 5 pm.

Then came the lectures, reflections, and prayers. The insights of Fr. Bob were full of wisdom and I relished his every explanation. I did not realize I was already doing long hours of reflecting, praying, and writing my love letter to God. As I reviewed my letters to Him after the retreat and as I am writing this article, I realized that the gist of those letters

was acknowledging Him with all humility and gratitude, that everything I am now and everything I have, are solely because of God's overwhelming love for me. Likewise, one of my most significant reflections during the AIR was accepting that I still struggle with my COMPULSION that usually triggers my anger and temper. And admittedly, during those times, I was drawn away from God. My conversation with the Lord that Saturday night was so long I didn't notice it was already midnight. In my prayers, I offered my struggle to the Lord and begged for His mercy and healing.

Then came Sunday and what struck me is the word "self-emptying." It is said that this is the heart of the second week of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. It was also cited that self-emptying is directed for the purpose of accomplishing the will of God in one's everyday decisions. Personally, it was a perfect way of ending the retreat as I again renew my deep commitment to know Him more clearly, to love Him more dearly, and to follow Jesus more nearly.

Should I consider my first online retreat as a success? Yes indeed! As I look back on that three-day retreat, what helped me most was the silent and prayerful disposition I was able to have during that time. Having a "sacred space" was also a big factor for maintaining stillness and quietness, as all my housemates knew that when I entered our bedroom, I was not to be disturbed. Another thing that helped me maintain a quiet demeanor was listening to meditation music when I do chores like cooking and other stuff. Will I again join another retreat in this mode? Yes, I will. Definitely.

I realized that the success of any retreat lies not in the form or mode, but in the heart of the retreatant. My AIR experience was fruitful, it was meaningful, and it was full of grace.

Contemplation on the Incarnation

Myr Serranilla, Mustard Seed BCGG

During our Annual Ignatian Retreat last September 11 to 13, 2020, the following statements struck a chord in me:

1. “Incarnation – blossoming of the presence of God in a world where He is absent.”

Was God ever absent in my life? Were those the times when I failed to see Him? In the 71 years of living that God has granted me, I have experienced pains and suffering in many forms that, more often than not, “blinded” me. The burdens of my heart somehow clouded my vision, plunging me into darkness. I’ve asked God countless times, WHY... Why me? Why now? God seems to be absent because He does not seem to answer my questions.

And then, a glimmer of hope. God does not allow me to remain in the dark. He reaches out to me, knocking on the door of my heart. Gentle. Never forceful. Waits patiently for me... to open the door, to give Him permission to enter. And like an artist, He puts my shattered pieces back together. His latest masterpiece: a healed Myr.

This, for me, is my personal experience of Incarnation. He became flesh and entered my history to work His plan of salvation.

2. “Two hungers: World hungry for God and God hungry for the world.”

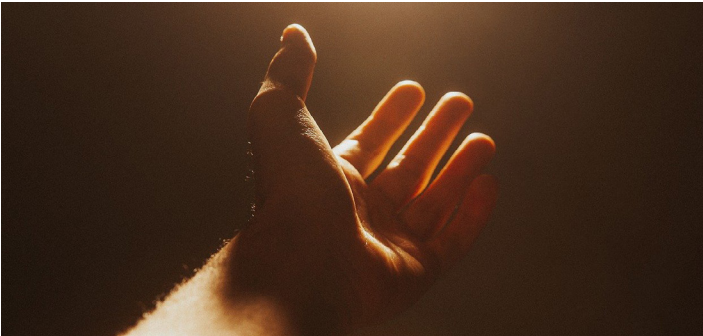
Like the Blessed Mother Mary, I am called to “gestate” Jesus within me. “Kailangan ipag-lihi, ipag-buntis, at ipanganak ko si Cristo sa aking buhay.” Consequently, I am able to incarnate the love of God... to breathe and live Christ as I enter the world hungry for God.

St. Paul’s Letter resonated well with me. It describes exactly how the love of God is being incarnated in me.

Galatians 2:19-20 “I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live now is not my own. Christ is living in me. I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

3. “Our union with God is by entering into the world in every possible juncture so that God can move through us in our world.”

“Our union with God is by entering into the world in every possible juncture so that God can move through us in our world.” It was in the noontime of my life that I felt God’s movement in my world.



I was in the corporate world for 20+ years. When the Retrenchment Program in our company was offered, I grabbed the opportunity. So, in my early 40’s, I found myself “retired.”

After a few years of living the life of a “mid-lifing retiree,” the Lord led me to RMT-CEFAM in Ateneo to attend a series of growth seminars. One thing led into another and before I knew it, I was enrolling in the diploma course of Pastoral Counseling. After one semester, I decided to take the masteral degree in Family Ministries and Pastoral Counseling. I finished the whole program in October 2002. I graduated at the same time with my daughter’s college graduation in March 2003.

The “retired mid-lifer” was catapulted into her 2nd career – Pastoral Counselor. Yes! I “re-tired” in the true sense of the word – changed tires to enter the world of ministering to God’s people. I have been moved to join Jesus in His redemptive mission.

4. “Contemplating the beauty and the wounds of God’s creation, we see a ‘crucified people’ hanging with Jesus on the Cross...”

How then do I actually move into the real world of our suffering people? “Help me heal my people.” It was at a poignant moment during the Consecration that these words rang in my ears. God’s call gradually unfolded in my consciousness.

The Colloquy of the Prayer Exercise (“... we see a ‘crucified people’ hanging with Jesus on the Cross”) was spot on! The imagery reminded me of the God’s first call to minister to His people. It became clear at the core of my being that He wants me to be His instrument in healing His beautiful and broken people.

Thus, I embark on a journey towards wholeness and healing with my counselees. Like Moses in Exodus, I become their Passover Companion in crossing over their particular Red Sea – that which causes them emotional turmoil, deep sorrow, and pain. The compassionate accompaniment is rewarding and self-fulfilling. Throughout the journey I am a privileged witness of God’s transforming Hand and movement in the lives of my counselees. Praise and glory to God!

Reflection on Annual Ignatian Retreat

Nina Vinluan, Matthew BCGG



I believe that nothing is by chance. Everything that is happening is orchestrated by our most loving God. Just like attending the Annual Ignatian Retreat for the first time last September 11-12. There were so many excuses to not attend like the previous sessions. I remember the saying: “kung gusto maraming paraan, kung ayaw maraming dahilan.”

My God will always call me and as always, loving and patient with me, will wait for me to say yes. And wow what a revelation to attend the AIR. So many realizations...

It has not been an easy pandemic, being locked down at home, not being able to do my normal activities. During this time, I went through the emotions of fear, anger, frustration, hope, thanksgiving. In my mind, my prayer has always been thanksgiving that so far, we are spared from getting the virus, thanksgiving that we are provided with food, shelter, clothing. But in my heart, there are questions, asking God: in Your great power, why are these things happening? Why are people dying of the virus? When is this going to end?

All my questions were not answered during the AIR but what I experienced is to just bask in this love of God. I felt so much the love of God during the 3-day retreat. I felt loved as I am – not with what I have accomplished, not the many people I have helped, but that I am loved fully and perfectly by God. It was such a great feeling – I am beloved, and God is my lover.

Attending the AIR was also special as I attended this with Mon, my husband of 29 years. Every night before we sleep, we talked about the love of God for us. We are truly blessed.

Fr. James asked us to read and meditate on Psalm 136 and change some of the words. Here is my prayer...

Alleluia, give thanks to Yahweh for He is good, His faithful love endures forever

Give thanks to the God of gods, for His faithful love endures forever

He calls me by my name Nina and I am His beloved, for His faithful love endures forever

I am wonderfully made, I am His perfect creation, for His faithful love endures forever

He brought out the sun this morning to wake me up to this beautiful day, for His faithful love endures forever

At night He allows me to see the moon, the stars, and the planets that give me awe, for His faithful love endures forever

He protects me from harm specially during this pandemic that I am spared of the virus, for His faithful love endures forever

For giving me this life to live for always being with me every single moment of my life, His faithful love endures forever

For the gift of a wonderful husband Mon, for the gift of a happy and fulfilling marriage. Through Mon I feel so much Your love for me, His faithful love endures forever

For blessing Mon and me with 4 wonderful sons when at the first 4 years of marriage, it was so difficult for me to conceive, His faithful love endures forever

For the blessings of a satisfying career, the respect of my peers, the dignity of work and to earn with dignity, His faithful love endures forever

For loving me as I am, for loving me first, for being His beloved, His faithful love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven, for His faithful love endures forever. Amen.

Remembering Dennis in My AIR Experience

Joy Rago, Agnus Dei BCGG

My AIR attendance was accidental and at random. It has been a while since I have not attended the AIR. I thought I must find a way and time to attend even if I'm still busy in this COVID time. Three days is a lot of hours to spend just sitting and listening to a lecture.

Lo and behold, it did not take my time out, the gap between the next session was spent for reading, praying, contemplating-slow pace to absorb the reading, the steps on how to achieve the meaning of contemplation.

For the first time after Dennis vanished from our sight, I was able to sit still, pondered upon our married life for 36 years with the following questions:

How did I feel God's presence during the quarantine? Before the lockdown, I remembered vividly a celebration of the gift of life—

On March 13, 2020 we celebrated the gift of life of a person who had been suffering, going in and out of the hospital for 5 consecutive years. We praise and thank you, Lord for your unending love and blessings that you have granted Dennis - 66 years on earth. Thank you for the very simple birthday breakfast celebration that he was still able to blow a candle stuck on a pandesal. Thank you, Lord, for connecting Maki who was in Bacolod and Luigi who works at a cruise ship. We were all together in spite of distance. Thank you for the making the world smaller through the internet. Thank you for the laughter, for the love and care. Thank you for family and friends, most of all- thank you that Dennis was still around to celebrate life with us. Our birthday wish for him was to keep him safe and away from catching the Covid virus---this we asked through Christ our Lord...

On March 16 – the day of lock down. There was a feeling of restlessness. I realized that there is really such a thing as lockdown---it's here, it's real, for how long? But at the same time, I felt happy that for the first time for so many years—I spent time with Dennis and Justine. However, fear and stress were creeping in because of the virus. What should we do? How were we going about it? So many questions of uncertainty but life must go on.

Because of my paranoia and panic---waking up all night to pray, no sleep---I had itchy throat, dripping nose, had difficulty



in breathing, body aches, LBM and no sense of smell and taste. Dennis was only laughing at me but maybe he was also in fear but I saw no worries on his face. Here, God's presence was so strong because as I was saying the rosary, my breathing was eased, and feeling better, I thought it was only due to stress. As the days went by, it was a moment to treasure since I was only focused on Dennis, 24/7. Truly, God's ways...

On April 10, Good Friday, I asked the Lord 'what's wrong?' I thought you heard our prayers of keeping Dennis safe, away from the fever, why did you allow this Lord? What were you trying to tell us? Please give light. O Lord. Dennis was rushed to the hospital because of seizure due to high fever. His Xray result showed pneumonia. Dennis had to be confined together with other PUIs. Inspite of my doubts, I thanked the Lord for leading us to the hospital.

But on the 11th day, I asked the Lord, why had You decided to end Dennis' pain and sufferings. Why? Were you fed up of another extension? Because he did not do his job well? Did it have to end this way? I felt afloat. I didn't know what to say, how to react, was I mad? Was I sad? Was I happy? Was I accepting? This day was the feast day of mercy and they say that a sinner will be forgiven. Was this part of your will? On the 11th day, the Lord had to end Dennis' suffering and took him away from us.

How the Lord had been my quiet companion, comforting me in my dark days.

Lord, this was not the way Dennis preferred his wake to be done, but the hospital's advice was to cremate him, giving us 12 hours to look for a funeral parlor.

You made your presence so strong Lord in our dark moments by easily sending people whom we do not know to arrange the pick up of Dennis body from the hospital morgue direct to the crematorium.

Continued on page 19

God's Initiative During Our Online Retreat

Mark & Cathy Maulit, Prodigal 102



Like the Spiritual Deepening Retreat in July this year, the Annual Ignatian Retreat facilitated by Magis Deo Spiritual Director, Fr. James Gascon, on 11-13 September was a home retreat. We had signed up for it because we desired a deep retreat experience. But to be honest, we did not have high expectations because we were going to be busier than usual during that weekend and therefore, we would not be able to give our full attention to the retreat. Nevertheless, we submitted ourselves to the process as much as we could and hoped that God would take care of the rest.

Fr. James designed the retreat with the intention of helping us examine how we saw ourselves, how we viewed God, the reality of sin, and our experiences of forgiveness. He gave prayer points in five brief sessions so we would have much time to pray. This also allowed us to keep up with the demands

at home. It was good practice for remaining prayerful (resting peacefully in God's presence) and immediately integrating the fruits of prayer into our daily lives precisely because we were not taken out of our usual context. The mundane household activities we continued to do – cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc. – became elevated into meditations through which God revealed Godself humbly, quietly, gently.

Our personal take-aways from the retreat were deeper understanding of ourselves, fresh images of God from our everyday lives, and greater clarity on and shame and confusion for our sinfulness viewed from the lenses of God's love and forgiveness. These were much more than we had hoped for and only prove that although personal investment counts a lot, God's initiative in reaching out to us and God's faithfulness weighs much more.

Remembering Dennis in My AIR Experience, continued from page 18

The family of Dennis readily sent financial aid for the expenses as well as my family, my Magis Deo community, friends here and abroad, ex-Jesuits and the Jesuit community who arranged for the virtual mass. We were so amazed that everything happened so fast- --what more can I say, O Lord, except to thank you more and more for your unending love and blessing to our family. Today, Lord, I am no longer afraid because I know you are present in whatever situation we are into. I know that you will not leave us as long as I trust you, thy will be done. Thank you, Lord, for being always around. I am sorry for my shortcoming in the past. I will do my best to commit myself to serve you in whatever way I can.

After listening to the lecture of Fr. Bob, I realized that during our married life, Dennis was trying to teach me to contemplate and discern – read and listen to the voice of God in every major decision that we have to decide in life. But I didn't believe him. I was a “go go go” and it is only now that I understood what he wanted to tell me.

I have been wanting to share our married life experience in one of the Marriage Encounter Weekends but he would always refuse. I thought he was not ready for it but now I realize he saw that it was I who was not ready. My only wish now is if given another chance to go back and live life with Dennis again, this time around- I will listen to him. He knows best when it comes to our relationship with the Lord. Life could have been easier.

Treats of Ignatian Retreat

Leslie Gatchalian, Psalm 98 BCGG

Nightfall of the first day of this Annual Ignatian Retreat on God’s love with Fr. James Gascon left me with tears flowing. We were encouraged to write our contemplations for this session, but the feelings were so overflowing, making it almost impossible to put into words!

I don’t know! I was just following instructions to think about who really I am if God asks me. There was this sudden bold answer from within, “You know who I am!” Indeed, He knows who I am more than I know myself! For almost an hour I battled with matters I like and don’t like about me. Every direction I took brought me back to realizing that God loves me.

In that instance I found it difficult to write, there was a sudden urge to paint my feelings instead. But how? Thinking it was my birthday the following day, I decided to paint a flower for me. I am to think and focus on myself and what makes me special and much more.

And just like that I stood up at 11:36 pm, filled my water pot and began to paint the narcissus. A flower symbolic of narcissism, of self-love... misinterpreted... misconstrued. Just like this flower, I dared look straight at my reflection and love me in all my imperfections.

Then there was freedom in every stroke of the brush and the hour-long meditation flowed in every watercolor laid down. This time, though, the brush strokes were punctuated with a smile. There was happiness with each single stroke, as if I were conducting a harmonious orchestra of colors gladly following with every beat. The experience was not easy to describe but the flower came out simple as it seems but with elements that surprisingly took to the right places.

Painting the daffodil helped me to love me and realize God’s love for me and my uniqueness. To know and love oneself is not exactly bad after all. It’s a beginning of loving God by seeing the uniqueness God has given and love in us. After all, can we love if we do not have it for ourselves?

How can we not reflect love when the Greatest Love created us and loves us all?

This is maybe why I gave time for this Ignatian journey, as a birthday gift to myself. Finishing at 12:12 am, I named my daffodil “Birthday Flower.”

Eager for the next day session, I intentionally didn’t look at the points given beforehand so I would listen. At the end, for the activity, I was thinking of ways to draw the Potter’s hand. As I was doing so, tears and words flowed, and I spontaneously wrote about God’s gifts and connected it with His forgiving love.



Birthday Flower

Soon it was time to get back for the Holy Mass. Such a delight to be specially prayed for by Fr. James in the Eucharistic Celebration of the day. It’s my birthday and he even took note of my birthday flower. Oh, my heart is full!

The night’s next session surprisingly dealt with forgiveness, the theme of my written prose! I don’t need to contemplate! I already did so much crying! As an added bonus, Father just wanted us to trace our hand and note on each finger one of the five senses. Observe around you 5 things you see, 4 objects you can touch, 3 sounds you can hear, 2 fragrances you can smell and 1 food you can taste and list on corresponding senses. Though it helped me relax a bit, my poster was a hurried artistic take, with me thinking it had to be finished by the next session.

This virtual retreat allowed me to have a deeper evaluation of self, due to less external, unfamiliar distractions in my room. I cannot put into words, to explain how this retreat created an internal “settling stir” in me. The privacy of being alone in my own room helped me unabashedly express and find myself, in more ways and modalities of expressions, than in the physical, face-to-face retreats I have attended. And that helped me tremendously in listening to an enlightening inner voice that went beyond emotional stirrings, culminating in settling peace or happiness, or both. As if everything comes clear, whether in words or artwork or intangible thoughts.

As suggested by Fr. James at the very start of the program, I made the home “distractions” part of my prayer and this grounded my existence and God’s meaning in my life.

That night, I slept wondering what my five senses poster was all about. He didn’t say anything about it.

Like every morning of the retreat, the last day brought excitement on what the topics will bring. But the last day was even more exciting. Being a night owl, I struggled to be able to join the morning prayers of this last day of the retreat. It was such a comforting moment that I fell asleep and missed the final session! Zzzzz.

Scrambling to join the Zoom retreat session at half past ten, I was disheartened as it was locked by the host! Frantically, I begged Fr. James to let me in, which he lovingly did, just in time for me to share my written prose with my small group:

Loving Forgiveness (12 September 2020 AIR)

If yesterday was in want

Today has more than what’s needed for a lifetime

So many gifts to last till eternity, enough to journey to
Your arms.

I am Your child and You want me to find my way back to
You, always, for that I am sure.

For I am Yours, not only now, but forevermore!

Thank You for loving me.

The tears were rivers to swim back to You.

The laughter, a roaring wind to blow me to You

The pains were there so I can gently fold in Your embrace

The skills and knowledge to let me know You are my source

Family and friends to savor a taste of Your never-
ending love

Yet in disregard, a foolish me stands

thinking the days are mine and the nights at my command.

Indeed, You were there, like a Father on guard

I will always be Yours even if I have forgotten that!

Like a whimpering child for every hurt,

I turn to You with a confident stand.

But in laughter the moments change

Anti-Anxiety Five Senses 54321 (Activity Poster)



An interest clouds the view of Your face...

Or so I thought but then I am wrong

For You were always there with loving eyes so forlorn!

Oh! Give me a gift to always feel You in my calloused heart.

On that same afternoon, after the Holy Mass, I started on a forgiving journey. A daily thought on what I have forgiven during the day. Big or small it will help remind me of my sinfulness and my lovingly forgiving God.

It is with sincere gratefulness that I thank all the participants and organizers, Philip and Malu Panlilio, Keith and Kaye Angeles, and specially Fr. James Gascon, and most specially to God for holding our hands and making this Annual Ignatian Retreat on God’s Love virtually possible in this time of pandemic, a time that dearly needs a renewed awareness of God’s love for us!

And yes, the Five Senses 54321 is a therapy making you focus on these elements taking your brain away from what makes you anxious. It was something new and a real treat for me, as I struggled on the verge of a panic attack with the long Covid lockdowns! Stay safe and healthy, everyone!

In My Cell

Trixie Sun, Matthew BCGG

I have always looked forward to attending retreats as they provided me respite from the busyness of the “real” world, even for just a few days, and have been my source of inspiration and strength before immersing myself once again in the challenges of daily living. It has been a while since I have not attended the AIR. I thought I must find a way and time to attend even if I’m still busy in this COVID time. Three days is a lot of hours to spend just sitting and listening to a lecture.

I was earnestly awaiting this AIR as I had been experiencing my annual “burnt out” period and it was becoming difficult for me to fulfill my responsibilities, especially in the hospital. My waning enthusiasm was giving way to dread about seeing patients and listening to their problems. It was becoming harder for me to be compassionate when I was feeling empty myself.

I would always feel excited about traveling to a place surrounded by nature where I could breathe in fresh air but because of this pandemic, we had to stay home. Going on a retreat and still enjoy the company of my children and perform household chores, however, was a welcome deviation from what I had grown accustomed to.

As is true with the other retreats I had attended, Fr. Bob’s talks were rich in insights and concepts that I found interesting and profoundly enlightening. Some were familiar to me but which I only understood superficially; others I understood very well when discussed in previous retreats but which I now vaguely recall, while others were totally new.

Some concepts resonated with me more than others probably because of the state and stage in my life that I am at and because certain experiences have impacted greatly on the way I now perceive things.

The first set of insights from Fr Bob’s talk on “Domestic Monasteries” put me in the proper disposition for the retreat. He spoke about how important it was for early monks to stay in their own cell, that everything they needed to know to follow the path to God, will be taught to them by their cell. Fr Bob quoted Thomas a Kempis “Every time you leave your cell, you come back less a person.” I could not fully comprehend this until Fr. Bob expounded that St. Ignatius realized that the “cell” can be a metaphor referring to a person’s heart, to one’s interior life. It can also refer to one’s commitment or vocation in life to follow the path to God. I commit to be conscious and careful about what fills my heart and to aligning my thoughts and actions to my life’s vocation to follow and serve my Triune God.



The other talk that resonated with me was that on Discernment. This again calls for an understanding of the movement of the Spirit within us, striving for internal freedom and service of the Lord. It involves discerning whether the shifting movements within us are from God or not. Fr Bob pointed out that this can be achieved through Consciousness Examen which I commit to do whenever I experience confusion or inner turmoil.

Something I responded to during this talk was when Fr. Bob showed a picture representing the Holy Spirit which had an outline of a bird surrounded by lines in yellow and orange. I suddenly felt a swirling movement inside my chest which I had experienced on several occasions while praying for enlightenment and assurance, while praising Him, and while expressing my gratitude to and love for Him. I had come to recognize this as His way of communicating with me.

This swirling movement feels like a hurricane rapidly increasing in strength and dimension, an irrepressible buildup of joy that fills my chest which I cannot contain. I then experience a silent rapturous “explosion” of yellow and orange light after which I am filled with joy and tranquility. These internal movements would always come with a vision in my mind’s eye of orange and yellow light emanating from within me, enveloping my entire body then radiating all around me. I commit to journey inward consciously and regularly when faced with difficult decisions and challenges. I will not rush trying to understand the meaning of my internal movements and I will pay close attention to the feelings that accompany my subsequent course of action to ensure that I am treading the right path.

Continued on page 23

My “Dear God” Letter

Djarn Pestaño, Sirach BCGG

My everdearest Love (Jesus),

Thank you for inviting me to the AIR. I just wanted to be with my Sirach members, Ferdie J., Joy U., and Laney R. I miss also retreats – attending and giving one-on-one or IDR (individually directed retreat).

You know, my dearest Jesus, that I am discerning whether I will really accept the invitation of Sr. Josanne to be a lay monastic or not. Is this what I want for myself? Or is this what you want me to do, may I ask? What would you want me to do for you?

It is now Sept. 12, 2020 and what I am doing now also came from your invitation several years ago – to bring people closer to you, to accompany people in their spiritual journey. Before, I used to accompany lay (people) but after my 30-day retreat, you have invited me to accompany seminarians and nuns (cloistered) in their spiritual journey. Thank you, my dearest Jesus, for giving me the grace to be your co-pilgrim and companion. Being with you and accompanying people make me truly alive.

In My Cell, continued from page 22

Finally, I appreciated Fr. Bob’s talk on spiritual consolation and desolation. As I shared during the retreat, I had been in a state of spiritual desolation when I was much younger after losing my Mom to breast cancer and I know that it was God’s love and loyalty that pulled me out of it. He never stopped chasing me, calling me to return to Him. The harder I tried to stay away from Him, the more I felt I needed Him. The more I tried convincing myself that He did not exist, the stronger the desire to ask Him to save me from my despair became. The more I claimed that I did not need Him, the more difficult it was for me to suppress my longing for Him. Paradoxically, my state of spiritual desolation that lasted 3 years led to my spiritual consolation and this could have been possible only through His



My dearest Jesus, please continue to give me the grace in what I’m doing now and sustain me. I love you. You know that I love you. Thank you for being with me always especially in this Covid crisis. Thank you for granting my wish to be more intimate with you. I miss you so much! I miss going to mass (physically) and receiving you in the Holy Eucharist. Although, you have assured me time and again that you are in my heart and I am in your heart already.

Thank you for continuously pruning me. Please forgive me for those times that I did not trust you fully enough. Strengthen my faith in you, please.

Please continue to bless my family, esp. my two “apos” who give me happiness and are my source of strength, too. By the way, I will have another “apo” next week. Thank you and send your holy angels to Ana for her safe delivery. Bless our company and all our employees and their families. Bless our leaders and our country. Of course, please bless Fr. Bobby and our Magis Deo Community. Thank you, my dearest Love.

Your beloved,

Djarn

grace. I strive daily to know, follow, serve, praise, and love Him because He never abandoned nor gave up on me.

Should desolation ever threaten to overcome me, I will keep in mind what Fr. Bob said in his talk: I will not give in to discouragement and temptation, I will pray even harder and strengthen my resolve to stay on the path that leads me to God. I will patiently bear my burden and enliven my hope with the thought that consolation will return. I will say to myself that all things come to pass, no difficulty lasts forever, and I have a lot of experiences of consolation in my “Spiritual bank” that will keep me optimistic and faithful. And as always, everything is surmountable with God’s grace.

Spending More Personal Time with You

Anna Tongol, Transfiguration BCGG



Dearest God,
Thank You for the chance to attend the AIR once again. I have missed it for a long time. I am overwhelmed with gratitude and deeply appreciate the spiritual experience through the five points given by Fr. Bob: Fruits of Pandemic Experience, Be One of Your Pilgrim, Contemplation on Incarnation, Discernment on Consolation/Desolation, and Renewal of Commitment. Indeed, God, when You choose to make Your presence felt, You have a way regardless of circumstances. It was ironic that the pandemic made it possible for us to attend the retreat otherwise I am not sure if we can, considering the distance of retreat house from our present location, our limited resources, and my daddy’s health condition right now.

Bittersweet gifts during pandemic – I have experienced a lot but the one that I treasure the most is my spending more personal time with You. I have never been more prayerful... mass became more personal, Holy Week was more meaningful and sacred. This pandemic and the past year have been a challenge for me... a lot of crying but those tear drops have cleansed my eyes to see You more clearly... a lot of heartaches and frustrations but in my sorrow and brokenness, my heart becomes more open for You. Bad circumstances have created more space for You to occupy. I have learned to trust You more and leave everything to Your loving hand, compassionate heart, and mercy.

Be Your Pilgrim – I would like to pilgrim with You even it means being a container of sufferings. When I am tired, in doubt, confused, or drowned by trials and challenges, Lord, please strengthen me to bear more. Grant me the courage to accept things that come my way and please guide me always and teach me Your ways. Take away my pride and replace it with humility. Do take over all my plans – I entrust everything to You.

Contemplation on Incarnation. Thank You for reminding me that each one of us has a role to play, a purpose/mission to fulfill. I pray for a humble heart to be able to submit fully to Your plan just like Mama Mary at the Annunciation.

Of the five points what touched me the most was Discernment, turning my desolations to consolation. This has always been my weakness since most of the time I would wallow and give in to unhappiness and negativity. The retreat experience helped me understand myself more. No matter how stuck I feel, no matter how bad things are, no matter how hopeless/depressed I may feel, it won’t be that way forever. I should keep going. That it is okay to feel desolation but take courage and be humble enough to bring and offer it to You. After all, You did not promise days without pain or sun without rain; You did promise strength for the day and light for the way. When sadness fills my heart and tears flow in my eyes, may I always remember that You are with me, still with me, and always will. I offer my life to You and everything I have and am going through.

Renewal of Commitment. Marriage and Parenting vocation. I just need to remember these two when I am tired of domestic chores and when I don’t feel that what I do is important. I don’t need people to appreciate my efforts because in Your eyes I have value all the time. I just must bear in mind that this is where You want me to be right now. Though, I would not mind if You will give me a chance to do more for You. I will be waiting and looking forward to the time You will unravel Your plans to me; until then I will continue to serve You in my capacity.

Lastly, thank You Lord for all the angels You have used, Magis Heads, Organizers, and our Shepherds to make this retreat possible for us. I am full of gratitude.

Your loving child,
Anna

Our AIR Reflection

Dong & Gin Galang, Chronicles BCGG



Gin: The AIR helped me accept myself and my life. It is not easy to see one’s own life from a distance. But trusting God’s love makes this easier. Knowing that He is in charge relaxes me. I am His creation and I have a mission. I need to be brave to carry on with my life for my Creator.

Dong: The online retreat was very helpful in teaching and explaining sin and forgiveness. There are many realizations for me. It is in my capacity to commit sin, to avoid sin, to follow Jesus’ way of loving, and to forgive myself and others.

It also helped me look at people I don’t necessarily like, or

those less pleasant to me. I realized that the person who will benefit most from my forgiving others is “me.”

The group sharing is also very important because this is where I can hear from other people, their life experiences, and how they were able to realize a better way of looking at and dealing with them. Sharing my experiences with others also makes me feel lighter about my issues and experiences.

Again, I feel blessed to be in Magis Deo Community – learning, sharing, living, and being more aware spiritually.

Online Retreat, Anyone?

Ferdie Joson, Sirach BCGG

People say, “There is always a first time,” and my online Annual Ignatian Retreat last September 11 to 13, 2020 was one of them.

Thanks to the efficiency of the admins for bridging the distance gap among the participants, making us feel we were seated beside each other.

My fear of getting lost or left out was overtaken by the disarming approach of Fr. Bob Buenconsejo, SJ, in making me feel God’s invitation to spend my weekend with Him.

Not everyone has the privilege of attending a retreat since

many cannot afford to take a rest. These are the people who live on a hand to mouth existence like the laborers in the market.

I appreciate the emphasis given on how to look on the positive side brought by the pandemic.

I am grateful to God for keeping me healthy as I have to go out daily to the depressed areas to bring our church closer to its flock.

The online retreat was indeed a welcome relief and it was for free!

Pilgrim's Pitstop: Into the Potter's House

Zarah Gagatiga, Emmanuel BCGG



I attended the first online Annual Ignatian Retreat (AIR) with Fr. James Gascon, SJ, last September 11-13, 2020.

Although I am used to attending online retreats and subscribing to prayer apps, this AIR delivered through Zoom was a life-affirming experience. The AIR which Fr. James designed and conducted was well paced and responsive to the call of the times. When loss is all around and unspeakable grief hovers like a Dementor, breaking bread online with members of the Magis Deo community is God's given grace.

Of the many prayer sessions and reflection points in the AIR, three made an impact, namely: the five senses and hand activity, the Parable of the Potter's House, and the session on sin and forgiveness. Let me share on these three some more.

I find the five senses and hand activity the most helpful form of stress, anxiety, and anger management technique during these trying times. I go back to the drawing of my hand and the valuables I enumerated there to draw comfort and consolation during days of doubt and discontent. My, oh my... I know I am still the same person with flaws and imperfections but what I cherish these days are very much different from when Domeng and I were just starting out on our journey in Magis Deo. What came to light after doing this activity is the recognition of how God has moved into and out of my life. The days that followed were visitations to roads and paths taken through the years and this process of prayer amplified God's enduring love.

The second prayer and reflection point that moved me was Jeremiah 18:4, "Whenever the object of clay which he was making turned out badly in his hand, he tried again, making of

the clay another object of whatever sort he pleased." I have read and encountered this verse many times in the past. Since I learned hand-built pottery from a professional potter and clay artist, the Bible verse presents a new meaning to my continuing journey and relationship with God.

You see, potters are patient people. They know that clay, earth as a natural element for this matter, has a life of its own. Water is essential to the potter as it helps in setting the consistency and plasticity of the clay being formed. Fire in the kiln strengthens the object's form, structure and make up. Experienced potters know the science and the chemistry behind this. But they are always open to what will come out of the kiln. Most of the time, hand-built pots and ceramics are imperfectly created despite the process of shaping on the wheel. For some mysterious reason, the shape, form and markings of hand-built pots and ceramics show the hands of the potter. My pottery teacher once told me, "*Ms. Zarah, kahit anong paghuhulma at pagkikinis ang gagawin mo sa bowl na iyan, pwede yan mag-iba ng hugis sa firing process.*" When the formed clay meets the heat in the kiln, it will move and bend to the touch of the potter's hand. The clay has a memory of the potter who created it. This experience gave me a new insight to the parable. God is my creator. I will always remember His touch.

As for the last reflection on sin and forgiveness, I admit that it is the session I struggled with the most. I have questions on mercy and justice. For one, I constantly ask, how does it factor in the process of forgiving?

I have been patiently praying for this since then.

Annual Ignatian Retreat Reflection Prayer

Mia Parada, Samaritans BCGG



Dear Lord,

I am grateful to have received so many graces during this retreat. Staying in the comfort of my home without getting stuck in traffic; no fees to pay for the accommodation; and most of all, both Leony and I were able to attend this weekend retreat.

Our house became our monastery for the past 6 months of seclusion, dealing with various conditions and sentiments, and having to adapt to a new environment. With the sense of spiritual rejuvenation that the Spiritual Exercises has given us, however, we were able to reach out to others, and extend our helping hands.

Lord, You have been gracious in providing for everything my family needed during these trying times. You allowed us to share our gift of time, talent and treasure together with other members of the community and other organizations who contributed as well to our front liners.

May the daily online masses, our weekly BCGG faith and the monthly teachings, community celebrations and retreats like this continue to nurture my spiritual hunger and strengthen my faith and hope in You, Lord.

As a Pilgrim, I ask You to accompany me as I want to know, love and follow You more. May I set aside all my self-interest to be able to be more of service to others especially during this Covid crisis.

Lord, forgive me for all my sins and shortcomings to You and others, as I forgive those who have done the same to me. Heal me of my hurts and pains. Thank You for calling me to serve despite of my unworthiness. Help me in my struggle to be more pleasing to You. Teach me to be more compassionate and merciful to others. I ask for the grace of humility and understanding during my moments of desolation. May I be able to discern what is best for me and my family and live the rest of my life in accordance with Your will.

Amen.

My Personal Psalm 136

Yang Reantaso, Samaritans BCGG



My husband and I have been Magis Deo members for more than 10 years now but it has only been more than a year that we have committed to be deeply involved by attending the weekly BCGG meetings and helping out in the CSM. I have always been curious about the Annual Ignatian Retreat and I feel truly blessed to have finally attended one at the comfort of my bedroom during the pandemic. Thank you, Fr. James, for the very enlightening and spirit-filled weekend. There were so many learnings and realizations I experienced like who God is and how good He is to me. I also appreciated the topic about sin and God's forgiveness and grace.

I would like to focus my sharing/reflection on HOW GOD IS SO GRACIOUS AND GOOD TO ME and this is the part where I got so emotional during the weekend. Fr. James asked us to pray and reflect on Psalm 136 and rewrite it to make it our own personal Psalm. Please allow me to share mine.

Give thanks to the Lord, His love endures forever!

To Him who loves me for who I am despite my imperfections, *His love endures forever!*

To Him who never gives up on me and always forgives me despite my stubbornness and sinfulness, *His love endures forever!*

To Him who provides my family's daily needs and sustenance despite the pandemic, *His love endures forever!*

To Him who keeps us healthy and protects us from the invisible enemy, *His love endures forever!*

To Him who gave me a God-fearing, purposeful, loving, persevering and loyal husband, *His love endures forever!*

To him who gave me beautiful, loving, and smart children, *His love endures forever!*

To Him who always keeps my marriage and family intact despite our individual differences, His love endures forever!

To Him who is always there to be with me to comfort me whenever I am lonely or whenever I feel persecuted or hurt, *His love endures forever!*

To Him who continues to give me the hunger and thirst to love Him and know Him more through the study of His Word, *His love endures forever!*

To Him who always gives me the opportunity to show His love through me by making a difference in other people's lives through my business, Magis Deo, my bible study group and our current feeding mission for the front liners and the hungry, *His love endures forever!*

To Him who blessed my family with very supportive relatives and groups of friends who we know will stick with us through thick and thin and who guide us not only to have a beautiful and abundant life but also to live a meaningful and purposeful life that is always centered to serving God by loving and serving others, *His love endures forever!*

While doing this reflection, I was reminded that despite the many challenges we are facing in life, especially now with the pandemic, His goodness, and blessings, whether big or small, are truly abounding. Lord, thank you for your enduring love and faithfulness. May your love always shine through me with the way I live my life so I can bring more people closer to You. Amen.

Overcoming an All-or-Nothing Mentality to Virtual Liturgies

Kaye C. Angeles, Genesis BCGG

It has been seven months now since the declaration of the cancellation of in-person, communal Masses at churches due to safety and health concerns brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. But thanks to the parish communities and livestreaming technology, the Mass has become a liturgy that we don't just "watch" alone or gather with household members only. The Mass, livestreamed across the world, has come to all of us, bringing us together, participating as one online, even when we are miles apart!

To many of us, participating in virtual liturgies is not as fulfilling as being physically present in church where we can see mass goers "in the flesh", singing and praying at the same time. However, even if physically gathering together in a chapel or church is a fuller experience, gathering "virtually" via available technology is also something very "real," something that truly nourishes our spiritual life, something that helps us connect with God and with one another, while we wait and hope for a full return to parish life.

It is by choice to be cautious and participate in livestreamed masses. But we can't deny missing being present at mass in church – the Eucharist, the songs and music, the communal worship, and the church building itself. There is somehow a void when physically absent in the Mass in the church.

How was this void filled?

And Jesus assured His disciples, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20 NAB). Most of us would think "gathered" means they must be "physically together in the same place at the same time." What if two or three Christians pray together while on the telephone, wouldn't we say that Christ is also present with them? Or if hundreds of people are "gathered



Photo by Grant Whitty on Unsplash

virtually" for a live-streamed Mass or watching the Pope's Urbi et Orbi blessings, wouldn't we still want to say that Christ is truly, really present with them?

For me, watching the Pope's Urbi et Orbi blessings was evident testimony that the blessing reaches not only those who are physically gathered in St. Peter's Square, nor only to people in Rome; rather, the blessings extend to all people throughout the world. The Church even says that blessings go even to those who hear the blessings rebroadcast from an audio or video recording. So, the "real effect" of one's participation in virtual liturgies and its blessings is neither limited by physical distance or temporal simultaneity.

The "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist, even though Christ is not "physically present" in the consecrated bread and wine, is a sacramental reality which should not be confused with or reduced to a "physical reality." Christ is not "physically" present in the consecrated bread and wine in the same way that he was "physically" and "historically" present to his first disciples. I have not been more reminded of this Catholic belief until this time of virtual realities.

And finally, my own experience over the last seven months of staying on the "safe side" has shown me and my family (and thousands of others) that it is truly possible to "participate" to a high degree and in significant ways in a live-streamed Mass by keeping it holy as we take both the spoken and sung parts of the Mass as much as when we are physically present in the church.

Just as Jesus is not bound by the limits of space and time, and so is His creation, modern technology, which has allowed us to "participate" and be "truly present" in ways that were unimaginable to us before.

The Good in the Bad

Ysabela Tyne E. Tabilog, Magis Youth



Have you ever imagined seeing an ostrich casually jogging around a neighborhood? I never did. Apparently, that's how things go these days. Each one of us is facing a problem. No matter the gender, age, or social status, no one is exempt from the day to day worries. Everything just seems so wrong and messed up that's why I would like to share my thoughts about last week's gospel

The August 9 gospel tells us about the time Peter walked on water. While Jesus prayed alone in the mountain, the disciples went in a boat in the lake of Genesareth. When they were in the middle of the lake, a huge storm broke out. Overcome with fear, they saw a silhouette of a man walking on the water of the turbulent lake. It was Jesus. Peter offered to get out of the boat and meet Jesus in the water. Miraculously, Peter was able to walk on the water but when panic crept into him, Peter began to sink. Why did Peter start sinking? It is because his fear was greater than his faith.

In this time of our lives, we are like Peter. Overwhelmed with what are happening around us, we are consumed with fear. Our worries cloud trust, uncertainties flood our thoughts. But how can we get through all these? We must remain faithful. He is there. He sees us. We still don't know what these fears, concerns, trials are for, nor do we know when will the will end, but one thing's for sure: God has a plan. This is not the first time we experienced trials. This is not the first time we faced difficult circumstances. And we will not be here today if we weren't able to go through them.

The same will happen to us this time. Our lives are on a difficult spot right now but soon, in God's will, our sufferings will come to an end. Bad things may happen but not all the good is gone. There are still so much to be thankful for. We, being all right now, is already a great blessing. We just have to change the way we see things and be more focused on Him, for He will always be the answer to all our problems.

Virtual College

Therese Martin (Timmi) Castillo Aguirre

1st Year, U P College of Medicine

Magis Youth – Cana BCGG



“College is the most fun experience. You'll meet a lot of new people and gain new friends.” This was what mom would tell me to help me feel better about college. But what happens when there is a pandemic that requires us to stay at home and cut physical contact?

Entering a new chapter in life is scary. People always want certainty, so the absence of it makes us anxious. College, I would say, is like setting foot on uncharted territory, and it made me anxious. I thought, “My environment will change completely when I go to college.” Besides the change of school, my surroundings will change as well -- from living in a rural, peaceful setting to a busy, urban setting; from being sheltered by my family to living in a dorm with a person I might not know. I'm not good with change, and this was a big one. I was silently wishing and hoping that somehow, I can cling to those that felt familiar, so I would feel less scared. I hoped that even if my college was far, I can still stay here at home with my family.

“Be careful what you wish for,” they say. The next thing I knew, my wish was granted. College started, but I stayed at home, and clung to people and things that feel familiar. Honestly, I was happy. I told myself, “This will be easier than I thought.” The fact that my family is literally right beside me when I need them, reassured me. The first few days went well, and I wasn't as scared as I used to be. Little did I now that it was just the calm before the storm.

As time passed, I started realizing how hard it was to have classes online. Let me enumerate some of the difficulties and challenges I have encountered:

1. Fear of missing out because of the slow internet!

I used to worry about the class being too noisy that I couldn't focus. Now, I sometimes worry because I can't hear anything at all due to weak internet connectivity. This can cause students to easily miss out on information taught in class.

2. Misunderstandings. This can happen even when activities are done face to face, what more now? I can only talk and communicate with my block mates through Messenger and email. I had to create a Facebook account just so I can be updated with announcements.

3. Meaningful relationships? College is daunting at first, and many often get through this with the help of the friendships and bonds formed. School gets more difficult as you grow older, but if you're going through those hardships with others, you feel better. Sadly, because of pandemic, it is hard to make meaningful relationships online, compared to face to face. Besides this, the pandemic can easily make you feel like you're on your own. Yes, I know that I'm not the only one struggling; my block mates are struggling as well; but because of the isolation caused by Covid-19, I often feel I'm facing these challenges alone.

Again, these are just some of many difficulties I have faced.

The pandemic has caused many different problems to people, but we can only do so much to try and solve these problems. Because of the Corona virus, I believe there is a greater call to community. This is a possible solution to the obstacles I mentioned earlier since the common element in all three is the need for communication with others. Missing out, misunderstandings, and lack of meaningful relationships are caused by lack of communication with different parties. These problems can be solved by conversing, seeking, and providing assistance to others.

As Fr. Gascon mentioned, we need to do physical distancing, not social distancing. Especially in difficult times like this, we should work together to help each other. No doubt things may get harder from here, but together, we can always pull through.

Praying

Chacho Angeles, Thessalonians BCGG

I am trying to live my Christian faith the best way I can, given my circumstances: talents, resources, time, inclinations, hurts and pains. The story of Martha and Mary seems to show me two ways of living this faith – praying and working, like the Benedictine slogan Ora et Labora, with prayer coming first. While this was coined in the context of monastic life, I would think that this applies also to many other vocations. And the operative word for me is et, meaning and, both.

Jesus wants me to do both, to pray and know Him, and to live in this world in my chosen vocation, studying and committing to heart His Word, and proclaiming them in my deeds, thoughts, and words. This means that I pray to start (and end) the day and let Him work in me and through me. I do God’s will while I serve others by doing things that will redound to the good of others – my family, in my work and neighborhood, the environment, and that will help me avoid temptations that may come my way from every direction. In this way I am both Martha and Mary, working to spread the good news of our salvation.

Setting my priorities for the day is sometimes easy to do. But sometimes it can be difficult and confusing. But the task has become lighter ever since I learned how to really pray and develop my relationship with Jesus, when I started taking at least one retreat a year and when I began joining prayer groups that meet regularly. My priorities are now clearer because I am guided by my loving God. I try to develop a relationship with Him every day, beginning when I wake up, and this makes my priority setting easier.

I learned how to pray not only in times of joy, success, inspiration and peace, but even in times of difficulties, pain and disappointment. I realized that praying during these times, though difficult because of the distraction brought by the pain, is necessary. It is during these times that God appears to be so distant or irrelevant. Yet this is when God is most present, though I realized this belatedly. He is faithful to His assurance that He is standing by me, will provide the things I need, be it material, spiritual or emotional, that He will see me through, and that I will rise again, an aspect, a facet of that diamond called Resurrection.

(1)
My heart is always filled with
Concerns about work and money
For my food, home and health;
With the hurts that I suffer from
My loved ones and our friends;
With the fear, anxiety of the future.

By Your grace grant me pause,
So in solitude I can pray.
Lift the weight of all my troubles,
Empty my heart of non-essentials
That only make me cope
But leave me unsatisfied.

Let me feel my own heartbeat,
And let me hear my breath
And the passing of a breeze.
Let me see the beauty of your creation,
And contemplate the majesty of the heavens
Which all mirror Your divine glory.

Fill my heart with your words and
Your light, to banish the darkness of
Uncertainty and doubt, in community
With all Your children. Fill my heart
With your fulfilling presence, and forever
Strengthen my covenant with You,
Our Father...

(2)
Many friends and loved ones have died
And now returned to the dust of creation,
Joining my loving Father for eternity. Yet
With the inevitable mistakes, failures, betrayal
Littering the way to the end, water muddied
With blood, simple is complex, joy is grief,
Love is hatred, light is darkness, despair,
And the wheel continues to turn as I pull
Myself up with new-found strength and
Wisdom, as I grow into a taller tree, for
There is grace and forgiveness, embracing
My pains, my hurts, emerging from a cocoon,
A butterfly fluttering into a world, changed.
The air is the breath of life, a spirit inherent
From the dawn of creation, filling my heart
With the fires of love, simplicity and integrity.
The teachings, the spirit, the all embracing
Power, are love immanent and transcendent,
Circulating and flowing out to all of creation.



(3)
You sweated blood in your agony,
I shed tears for my pain and hurts,
You asked the cup be taken away,
Yet You chose to do His will,
You suffered and died painfully,
Yet you rose from the darkness
And gave me hope and the cure
For my own pain and suffering.

But before all these You enjoyed
The company of family and friends
In weddings and other celebrations,
You loved the children, blessed them,
You welcomed all, the poor, the sick,
The rich, religious leaders, sinners,
Tax collectors, sinners and foreigners.
You gave nourishment for the body
And for the soul. You gave me
Freedom from death and the means
To live my life through Your
Teachings, Your parables, Your
Life, Your prayers. You do not
Stop taking care of me, and You
Look for me when I go astray,
Wanting me to be by Your side all
The days of my life, and beyond.

(4)
You are such a mystery to me, my God.
Some experience you in visions, ephemeral and otherworldly,
Some in quiet of solitude, in peace, quiet and aloneness,
Some in nature, awesome, senses-filling, complete, infinite,

On the mountains, by the beach, in the forests and fields,
Some in babies and children, simple, dependent, vulnerable,
Some in words, bright, dark, dancing, singing, crying, moaning,
Some in acts of courage, of serving, in and outside the parish,
Some at work, in the home, the neighborhood, among friends,
In a garden, in church, in the office, in their room,
Some in the spotlight of success, celebration, triumph, fame,
Some in the darkness of separation from You, sin and misery,
Some in failure, despair, inutility, co-dependence, pain and grief.
And some in all of these.
Open my heart more to you, my God.

(5)
I am a pained outlier Canaanite mother
Who did not stop begging Jesus for relief.
For the healing of her beloved daughter.
I have walked slowly and painfully through
The valley of darkness, where the road is
Rough, littered with rocks from on high,
Wet, with the water rushing down from
The hillsides. Though suffering and lacking
Strength, I rise again into the sunlight.
This dying and rising it seems, as the day
And the night, come always. Whether the
Sun shines bright, or the dark clouds cry,
There is always present the comfort of His
Words, His love and His grace, that gives
Me sustenance, healing, peace and joy.
I beg the Father that I may always be His
Beloved child, in this life and forever.
With Jesus. In Jesus. Through Jesus.
Amen.