

# Magis

Formation for Mission

Stewardship  
Simplicity  
Sharing  
Service

Official Publication of the  
Magis Deo Community  
September 2023 Issue



## Dear God, What's Next?

As an individual and as a community, what are the things that we need to STOP, to CONTINUE, and to BEGIN?

## "Ruined" For Life Together

Living our faith in the concrete brings joy which is compounded by striving with our companions in Magis Deo

## Eat, Pray, and Laugh

Sharing faith, laughter, and fellowship is crucial in any community. It is an excellent way to strengthen relationships and create a sense of belonging

## ME Weekend Harvest

Siksik, liglig, umaapaw ang grasya ng Diyos. 26 couple graduates to form ME Class 136 A and ME Class 136 B

## Stewardship and Service

A loving response to the Lord's invitation to be one of His workers in the vineyard and harvest field



# ABOUT THE COVER

## Levenspeil Sangalang, Magis Youth



It is natural for a person to long for a special someone by their side. Having their own corner of the world, traversing together beyond the familiar, are some of the experiences one hopes to achieve with another. Life is more difficult now, which could explain the mix of security and escapism searched for when people commit to relationships. There is movement in moving furniture, slow dancing to Sunday tunes, bookkeeping using spreadsheets... the list goes on. However, with constant movement in a couple's shared journey one might feel fatigue, stall, resort to hurting or self-deprecation. Nobody is ever not worthy of love just because of a stumble, but keeping overlong, angry outbursts at bay is always welcome. Conveying clearly why one was hurt, what one is sorry for, is a quick two-step resolution to a conflict.

Humans are flawed; we change with time, even as we grapple with its elusive hands. We each have different layers that define our uniqueness and, paradoxically, identify our similarities and boundaries. Nurturing a healthy relationship entails treading rough, narrow, dented pathways; liaising to simplify life and satisfy what it means to live; and softening up together every time the sun sinks below sight. Maintaining a relationship may feel like constantly filling the proverbial void that modern life keeps punching through, but looking inward and outward goes a long, long way forward.

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*Magis*

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*pssst . . . kakanta na ba ako?*

Save the Date:  
December 2, Saturday  
starting 530pm

*Get ready with your dancing shoes  
for a Magis Christmas Night !!!*



# Stewardship and Service

We take part in and conduct an important event every October – our community's Pastoral Council Election. We choose our next set of leaders based on several qualification criteria; more importantly, we vote based on the fruits of our discernment.

There have been times the community had difficulty finding nominees for the council, primarily due to potential candidates' time concerns about family, work, and commitments with other organizations and communities. But by God's grace, we always surpassed these difficulties and filled the vacant positions.

Being in the Pastoral Council, or in any leadership position in Magis, is not an easy task. Time is always a challenge, a scarce commodity even, especially for those actively employed, and for the fathers and mothers with young families. Being in the PC also entails being more active and involved in various community activities, while continuing to explore ways of strengthening and enriching couple and family relationships.

It is amazing that there still are members willing to take on the demanding and time-consuming leadership roles, not only in the Pastoral Council, but also in ministries and in the Basic Christian Growth Group (BCGG). In fact, some have tirelessly served, and continue to serve in different ministries for many years. Young faces and millennials have started expressing their willingness to participate and even lead. How was this made possible? What has encouraged members to take on the challenges of leadership? Perhaps the best answer is in this passage:

"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

– Matthew 9:35-38

Servant leadership is a loving response to the Lord's invitation to be one of His workers in the vineyard and harvest field. It is that deep desire to bear fruits for the Lord by being good stewards and tenants. It is the recognition and acceptance of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the expression of sincere gratitude for God's love and mercy.

While our community's leaders have provided inspiration and hope, it is disheartening to see the opposite in the leaders of our country today. The political surnames we heard when we were in the elementary grades are still the same names that came up in the past elections, names of political dynasties, names that were involved in scandals, cases of plunder, bribery, graft, and corruption. Confidential and intelligence funds have become the norm, and we are not even allowed to question these, otherwise we will be accused of being an "enemy of peace and of the state."

But amidst this political turmoil and dysfunctional government, Magis Deo has remained steadfast in its mission to become a spiritually strong and vibrant community, anchored on Ignatian spirituality, and fueled by its passion to serve and reach out to others.

# CALENDAR OF ACTIVITIES

		<b>OCTOBER</b>
Until	Nov	Third (3rd) Interface
8	Sun	ComCel and Elections via Zoom
13-15	Fri-Sun	Spiritual Deepening Retreat, Face-to-Face at the Oblates Missionary Center, Quezon City
21	Sat	8:00-9:30 PM: Marriage Boosters "The Broken Vow" – Why do couples break their vows? How can you stay faithful and resilient?
22	Sun	Suyuan in Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Taktak, Antipolo; sponsor: Song of Ruth BCGG
29	Sun	Suyuan in National Shrine of St. Michael Archangel Parish in San Miguel, Manila; sponsor: Easter BCGG

		<b>NOVEMBER</b>
5	Sun	Advent Recollection (ComCel)
17-19	Fri-Sun	Marriage Encounter Weekend at BLD
24	Fri	8:00-9:30 PM: Tending the Sheep Series
25	Sat	Advent Rocollection Bilibid. Medium Security Prison Camp, New Bilibid, Muntinlupa

		<b>DECEMBER</b>
2	Sat	Magis Night
8-10	Fri-Sun	Annual Ignatian Retreat, Face-to-Face

\*TBA: Reaching Out Beyond Ourselves with Ted Concepcion



# "Ruined" For Life Together

Mark & Cathy Maulit, Council Overseer for Youth Ministry / Prodigal 102 BCGG

One might say we both were reasonably well-nourished spiritually by the time we reached adulthood. We graduated from Jesuit universities where we were active in religious organizations. Through our schools and organizations, quite early we received formation in Ignatian Spirituality and being persons for others.

We first met via this common formation. Fresh after graduation we joined a volunteer group that assigned us to work together for one year as diocesan campus ministers at the state university in Northern Samar. In this volunteer group we jokingly considered ourselves "ruined for life" because Ignatian reflection over the volunteer experience challenged us to question the usual career paths and make choices in favor of the disadvantaged and marginalized.

Ignatian formation made us "partners for life" too by bringing us and keeping us together.

Our marriage has always been about accompanying each other, our kids, and anyone else God entrusts to us, along the journey of responding to the Lord who reaches out and draws us to Himself. The journey has not always been easy, but any setbacks only allow grace to shine through.

Among the graces that have shone through is the Magis Deo Community. Early in our marriage, we longed to again be with a prayer community, the kind that each of us were part of as young adults. Most of all, we missed the regular three-round faith sharing in small groups. When we discovered Magis Deo through a referral and learned that it practiced Ignatian Spirituality, we happily signed up. One Marriage Encounter Weekend and almost nine years later, we are still active particularly in our BCGG, Prodigal 102, and in the Youth Ministry. Now we are finishing a two-year term in the Pastoral Council.



We can describe our membership in Magis Deo as grace bubbling over. The spiritual nourishment we receive in our BCGG and in the formation activities we participate in bears fruit and finds expression in humble works of service and justice. Magis Deo gives us the opportunity to do these works within the community and beyond it – especially for those who may not have the same blessings we have.

When we as a couple in Magis Deo's leadership team and its ministries help make spaces for other couples to enrich their relationships with each other and the world, and for young people to grow in various aspects of their lives, we profess in the concrete what we believe. Truly faith only comes alive in action.

Living our faith in the concrete brings joy which is compounded by striving with our companions in Magis Deo – our BCGG members, our teammates and advisers in the Youth Ministry, and our colleagues in the Pastoral Council. We are forever grateful for having such friends in pursuing the community's mission over the years.

That is what the Magis Deo Community makes possible for us – to continue to be partners in this "ruined" life.

As we approach the final quarter of 2023, we look forward to the completion of all planned activities and the promise of greater things to come in the years ahead.

## July 2023 Community Celebration

# REACHing OUT to families and individuals with special needs

COMMUNITY SERVICES MINISTRY  
YOUTH MINISTRY



**COMMUNITY CELEBRATION**

**MAGIS DEO**  
COMMUNITY CELEBRATION  
FB Group



JOHN BCGG  
MAGNIFICAT BCGG

**TOPIC:**  
**REACHing OUT**  
to families and individuals with special needs



**OUR SPEAKERS AND PRIEST**



**CYNTHIA MAGDARAOG**  
President, Philippine Society for Orphan Disorders  
Parent of a Pompe patient



**CHARLENE AGATI**  
Inclusive Education Consultant and SPED Teacher



**FR. ELIS SANTOS, SDB**  
Asst. Parish Priest of San Ildefonso Parish Makati




**July 2 9AM** Lay Force Chapel, San Carlos Seminary









# September 2023 Community Celebration: Wellness Day & Birthday Celebration of Fr. James Gascon, SJ

Karen Madrid, Youth Ministry / John BCGG

Our September Community Celebration was very special because not only did we have a family-oriented event but we also celebrated the birthday of our dear Spiritual Director, Fr. James Gascon, S.J. Our sponsors, the Youth Ministry, Prodigal 102, Psalm 98 and Samaritans BCGGs decided on the theme – Family Wellness.





In a world often dominated by screens, it is heartening to witness an event that encourages the whole family to engage in physical, real-world activities that promote physical and mental health as well as social interaction. The main activity was a Zumba session with Congresswoman Chiqui Roa-Puno. Side activities included a Chair Massage Station for those who wanted to relax some of their tired muscles and joints and a Nutrition Counseling Station for those who wanted to get their physiological indicators and guidance on how to improve or maintain them through diet and lifestyle.



We also organized activities that brought together Youth Ministries, Kids, Teens, and YSA (Young Single Adults) for a day filled with board games, cards, chess, and a delightful reading nook activity, complete with a special author signing.

The event kicked off with a fantastic assortment of games. Tables and mats were set up, featuring classics like Jenga, the Tapple game, cards, Uno, chess, and other board games. Children of all ages gathered around these game boards, working together, strategizing, and having an absolute blast. It was truly heartwarming to see them fostering teamwork and critical thinking skills while having a great time.

Amidst all the excitement, there was also a cozy reading nook for kids, skillfully curated by Tita Zarah. Equipped with bean bags, comfy mats, and shelves filled with children's books, this corner encouraged kids to explore the world of literature. The reading nook provided a peaceful escape for those who wanted to take a break from games and dive into captivating stories. As an extra treat for young readers, Tita Zarah graciously signed copies of her own books, which were made available for purchase.





The youth activities that combined board games, cards, chess, and a reading nook with an author signing was an overwhelming success. It showcased the enduring appeal of traditional activities and underscored their educational and social benefits. More importantly, it emphasized the significance of nurturing a love for reading and storytelling from a young age. Events like these are a testament to the power of community and the unwavering commitment to nurturing the minds and hearts of the next generation.



The birthday of Fr. James was one of the major highlights of our Community Celebration. The whole community was given the opportunity not only to sing a birthday song for him but also to give him blessings of love, peace and long life. He obviously enjoyed that day as he was one of those who danced with a lot of energy & enthusiasm during our Zumba session.





In line with his birthday celebration, we were able to sell Magis Deo commemorative shirts for a cause and that is to raise funds for Fr. James' traditional birthday lunch treat for Ateneo de Manila's security guards and gardeners.



We praise God for another successful and fun-filled celebration attended by 163 community members with their beautiful children.

See you all in our next one!





## ME Weekend Harvest

Benz & Vina Dimanalata, ME Ministry / Francis BCGG

Siksik, liglig, umaapaw ang grasya ng Diyos. 26 couple graduates to form ME Class 136 A and ME Class 136 B. 🙏

Maraming salamat po sa Magis Deo family sa inyong mga pinadalang couples, sa pagdarasal, sa mga donations, at sa pag-Harana kahit na may bagyo.

Maraming salamat sa lahat na naglingkod nang buong puso:

- ME 134 Auxies headed by the best Jojo & Jane Aldeguez, Regie & Daisy de Guzman;
- Singer with angelic voice, Ethel Araullo (she also made our wonderful MEW countdown posters);
- Inspiring couple sharers Cesar & Marivic Pareja and Noel & Gigi Resurreccion;
- Our new retreat director, Fr. Munching de Guzman, SJ.

Tiring but always refreshing, meaningful and grace-filled. Thank you so much Heavenly Father for our harvest and fellow workers.





### Marriage Encounter Weekend

Experience one of the most romantic & meaningful weekends with your spouse.

July 14 (6pm) to 16 (5pm)

Spiritual Retreat Director:  
Fr. Munching De Guzman, SJ

St. James Retreat House  
#344 Neogan Road, Purok 136  
Brgy. Neogan, Tagaytay City

Fee: P5,200 per couple (w/ fan, no aircon)  
P6,200 per couple (w/ aircon)  
\*both w/ private room and T&B  
Pay thru: Magis Deo, Inc.  
Metrobank acct. #0933093515391

Register via Google Form  
Visit: Marriage Encounter Weekend  
Philippines FB Page  
Contact (+632) 84267191 or 0917149050







*Praying that the love and inspiration that they experienced in the MEW continue to grow in their hearts.*



# Passing on the Grace

## Reflections on the Sponsorship of the Marriage Encounter Weekend of ME Class 136

Kish Abante, ME Class 134

Following every couple's meaningful Marriage Encounter Weekend (MEW) are 10 reunion sessions to ensure that what was learned and experienced in the MEW are practiced and sustained in their day-to-day encounters as husband and wife. At the first reunion of our batch, ME Class 134, we were informed that we would be sponsoring the MEW of couples two batches after ours (i.e., ME Class 136). I got confused and my anxious and fearful self was hesitant, thinking that this was an added huge responsibility. I have been living on the 'safe' side since the pandemic began – evading small and big matters that may complicate our life. Despite the hesitation, OJ and I found ourselves attending the reunions, not missing a single one, because "something within us is moved after every session."

As we neared the end of our reunions our shepherds, Jojo & Jane Aldeguer, reminded us of our MEW sponsorship, that each couple would be assigned to a committee. Still full of fear, I had inhibitions about being assigned to the secretariat because I know how detail-oriented and taxing this committee's duties and responsibilities are. At first, it was only Rizza Reyes, Bong Bulay, and OJ & I who were involved. Eventually, Meg & Kevin Chia joined us. Jane Aldeguer, Vina Dimanalata, the entire ME 134, and the ME Ministry coordinated with us, entertained our questions, and assisted us in the preparations.

Then came the weekend (July 14 to 16, 2023). Together with the ME Ministry, the team couple sharers, and Fr. Munching de Guzman, SJ, we met, interacted with, and served the 26 couples who comprised ME Class 136. With the many events and sessions, module after module, day



day after day, changes here and there, we were exhausted... but how fulfilled we were! What amazed me most were the flexibility, the swiftness of response, and the volunteerism of each ME 134 member to take on the required tasks and provide and donate materials for the Weekend.

We were confronted with situations that are a mix of happy and comfy to nerve-racking and tiring. But we all persisted and joyfully carried on, finding things to smile and laugh about through our individual and couple tasks. I was also impressed by the level of dedication exhibited by the ME Ministry and other volunteer couples. The ME 134 members who could not be with us made sure that their support was felt by sending little comforts for us. At the close of the Weekend, many people came for the harana, almost filling the large convention hall. The time, treasures, and talents that so many offered and shared are deeply heartening and encouraging.

The collaboration, teamwork, and shared experiences at the ME weekend with our ME 134 batch and shepherds prove the extent and depth of our formed friendships. And with the level of emotional, psychological, and spiritual support we offered each other, our connection can be said to be even more than friendship... more of family!



# REFLECTIONS

As a couple, the MEW we sponsored was a remembrance of our own MEW experience, a renewal of our marriage, only this time we worked in the back end. For OJ and me, our MEW was more meaningful as OJ's parents, and my brother and sister-in-law were there at our graduation. We were elated to share the MEW with them so their lives could be touched the way ours were.

The MEW sponsorship, our own MEW, and the subsequent reunions were God's work in my life. My ME 134 family knows how much I questioned God's existence at the onset of the pandemic and the endless turmoil in the world and in the country. The MEW and the Magis Deo community were the reintroduction of God's unceasing presence in my life. This was confirmed on the last day of the ME 136's

Weekend when three couples shared their "Dear God" reflections during the mass. I cried listening to each one as their words resonated with me – my heart, mind, and spirit were profoundly touched.

From fear, anxiety, and depression last year, to transformative faith this year. I owe this inner conversion to Magis Deo, ME 134, our shepherds Jojo & Jane, Regie & Daisy de Guzman, and most of all to God who has been working in our lives in immeasurable ways. The MEW sponsorship was not only service, it was more of a passing on of grace, of God's gift, to the next batch of encountered couples. I was overjoyed to have witnessed other couples take on one of the most meaningful, most loving, and most transformative experiences they will ever have in their married life.



*Troy & Pam Almario, Joseph & Nhilet Garcia, Omar & Lhen Rosales, Regie & Daisy De Guzman, Jojo & Jane Aldeguez, Kevin & Meg Chia, Rey & Jovy Aquino, OJ & Kish Abante*

# Tending the Sheep Series with Fr. James U. Gascon, SJ Bioethics: A Vocational Approach to Morals

Eden Acosta, Song of Ruth BCGG

This article reports on the July 22, 2023 talk of Fr. James Gascon, SJ, on Bioethics. This talk, part of Tending the Sheep Series, was attended by 67 participants, 63 of whom are BCGG members from 17 (out of 24) BCGGs.

Our Ignatian spirituality is deepened as we live a moral life, heeding it as a call from God, a vocation. This stems from the foundational principle of doing good and avoiding evil. This is a process of becoming fully human, that leads to genuine happiness.

Practicing morality involves defining what is right from wrong, good from evil; and choosing what is good or right, and avoiding what is evil or wrong. This practice allows us to navigate the gray areas in our day-to-day life. Discerning what is good and evil involves these approaches: ethics of duty or obligation (rule-centered), ethics of consequence or utility (outcome-oriented), "old style" Catholic moral theology (what is sinful and what is not, Divine and Church rules), and virtue ethics (person-based). There are acts which the Church's moral tradition terms as "intrinsically evil" on account of their very object [affirmed by John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor* (1993)].

The person as moral agent has both (1) freedom of self-determination and choice, and (2) knowledge that is conceptual (head) and evaluative (heart).

Bioethics responds to the moral and ethical questions related to the person's biological being. The foundational principle of bioethics is the "Sanctity of Life." Human life is sacred because it involves "the creative action of God" and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator. God alone is the Lord of Life from life's beginning until its end. No one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to directly destroy an innocent human being [Donum Vitae, CCC 2258].



There are exceptions that limit our obligation to preserve life, as stated by Pope John Paul II. These are: martyrdom, conflict between human lives, respect for individual autonomy, quality of life, and medical futility.

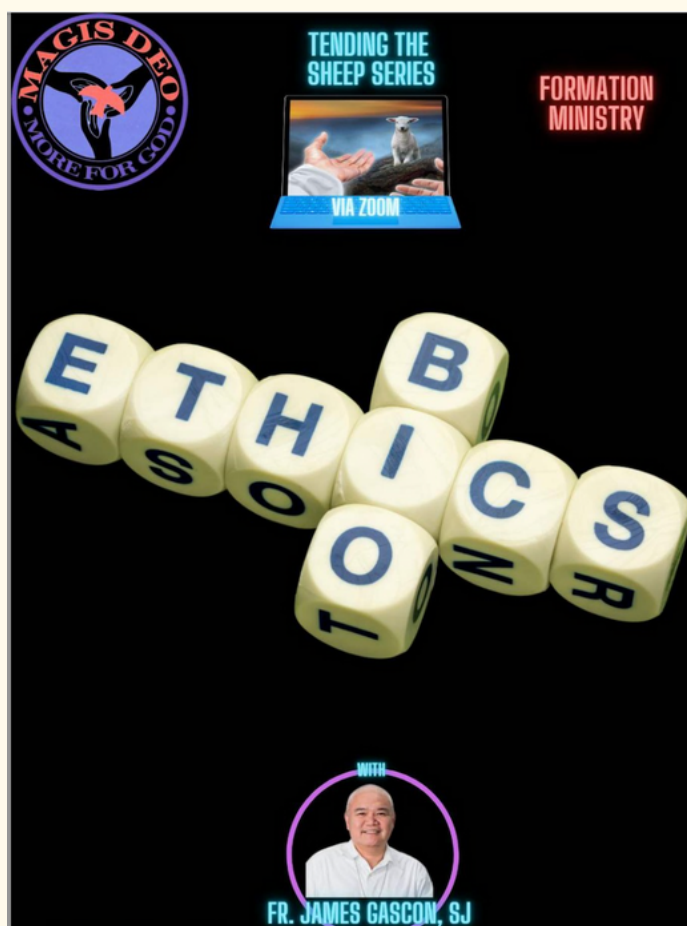
There are four principles in the approach to bioethics, namely: respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice.

Respect for Autonomy involves respecting the decision-making capacity of autonomous persons. It acknowledges a person's right to hold views, to make choices, and to take action based on personal values and beliefs. For example, the crucial role of patients in decision-making is acknowledged since the patient bears the consequences.

An appropriate surrogate is identified if the person cannot be autonomous, e.g., infants, suicidal individuals, unconscious patients, drug-dependents. Informed consent or refusal promotes autonomy, but this requires information, comprehension, and freedom. Culture underscores the relational value of autonomy. For example, Asian culture is family oriented. In the Philippines, patient autonomy is exercised mostly by deferring to the family.

The conditions for autonomy are fostered. At the same time, dangers need to be avoided such as excessive individualism, excessive focus on reason, and being unduly legalistic.





Nonmaleficence means avoiding the causation of harm. This includes whatever thwarts, defeats, or sets back one's interests. Negligence is the failure to fulfill the standard due care. Professional malpractice is an instance of negligence.

Beneficence involves providing benefits and balancing benefits against risks and costs. It is a moral obligation to act for the benefit of others.

There is a need to balance harm and benefit. We seek the highest net benefit, although this is not an absolute principle. This can sometimes be a source of guilt, leading to the feeling of not having done enough. But the question is, what is enough?

Justice means distributing benefits, risks, and costs fairly. It refers to fair, equitable, and appropriate distribution of what is due. Problems arise when there is scarcity and competition to obtain goods or avoid burdens.

Distributive justice involves balance, based on other values and realities, besides justice. This goes beyond the individual good to seriously consider the common good. Confidentiality and a well-informed conscience need to be considered in bioethics.

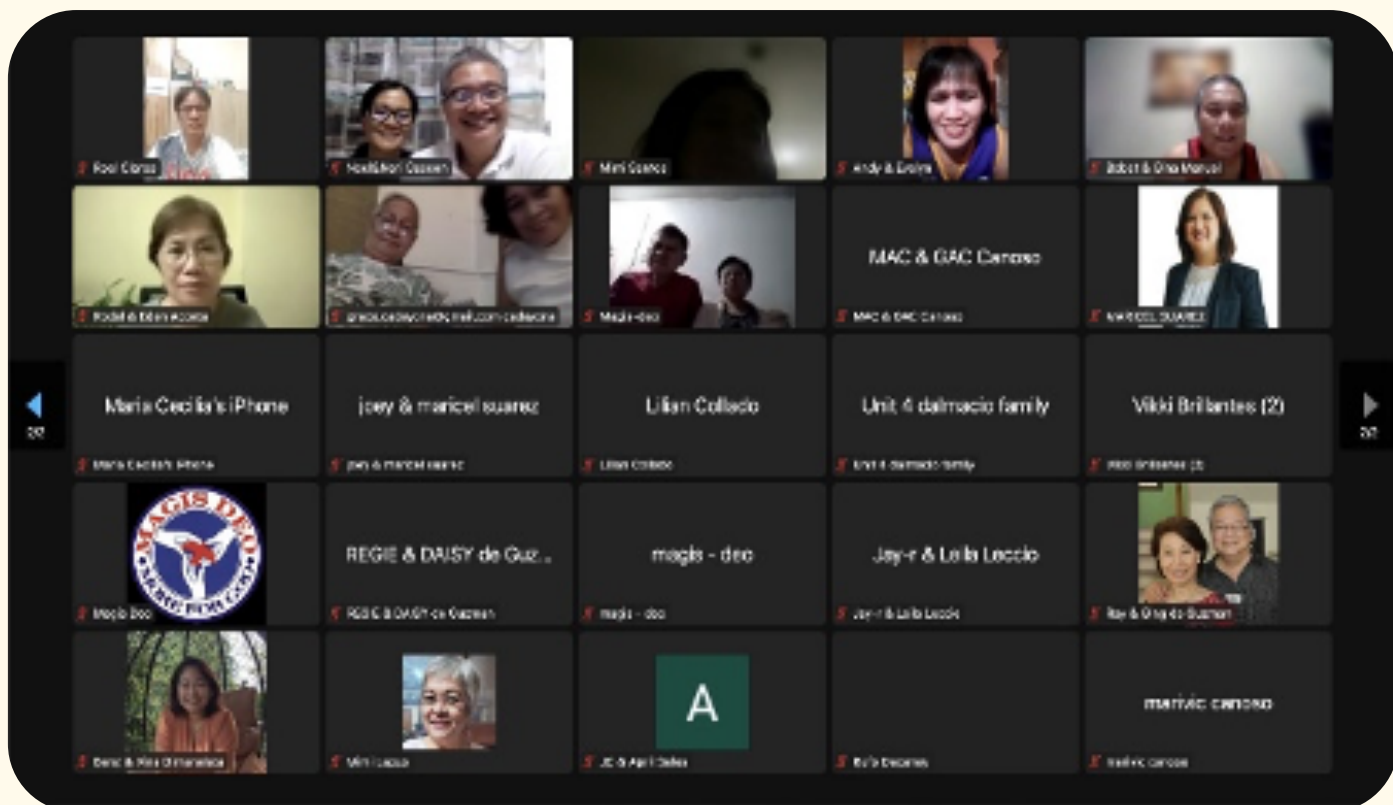
Confidentiality involves protecting private information and disclosing only with consent. The responsibility to keep confidentiality in health care belongs to the professional. The health care person is not to access information about one who is NOT under his care.

Confidentiality is not absolute. Examples are exceptions according to law (e.g., mandatory reporting of gunshot treatments), a peculiar physician-patient relationship (e.g., third party payor), and exception due to proportionate reason (when confidentiality threatens the good of other individuals, e.g., husband who has a sexually transmitted disease).

A well-informed conscience involves informing the conscience as completely as possible, to judge or decide based on the conscience, to act according to the judgement and to assume responsibility for the act. In health care decisions, a well-informed conscience not only considers information and recommendations of doctors, but also values the teaching of the Church, the good of the community, and the fruits of discerning prayer. One decides in the context of a loving relationship with God. Discernment and prayer are important in bioethics. As moral agents, we need to emphasize the importance of discernment and prayer in medical care, not only individually but communally.

We are to avoid all forms of suffering when we have the power to do so. However, suffering and pain are part of human life, and there are instances when they have redemptive value, not only for the individual but for the community as well.

## Tending the Sheep Series with Fr. James U. Gascon, SJ





# Dear God, What's Next?

## An Online Annual Ignatian Retreat on Synodality: The Call for Communion, Participation, and Mission

Philip & Malu Panlilio, Formation Ministry / Mustard Seed BCGG

In the domestic monasteries of our homes from August 4 – 6, 2023, Fr. Willy Samson, SJ, led 35 retreatants from 9 BCGGs to pray and ponder on Pope Francis' call for synodality. This is a theme in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius (SPEX). To our pleasant surprise, Fr. Willy started by helping us look into our inner selves first and how each one of us is connected to the call for communion, participation, and mission.

**Call for Inner Conversion: From Pilgrims to Fishers of People; From Maintenance Church to Missionary Church.** The gap between God and us causes the gaps in our family, society, Church, and nation. When we are no longer sensitive to the movement of God in our prayer, we lose our sensitivity to others. Our interior journey of metanoia is a continuing journey of changing of one's mind, heart, or way of life. Spiritual renewal calls us to enter into our hearts (*Balik-Loob* or conversion through listening); to see others' *Kalooob* (graces); to be aware of our inordinate attachments (purification of spirit); *magbagong-loob* (to change our *loob* to change our *labas*). This means changing from being a maintenance church to a missionary church.

**Listening: The first duty of Love.** Listening to others closes the gap between us. It is the beginning of radical transformation. When we listen, it is all about others. To listen is to see. Like the two disciples of John who listened to Jesus: Come and see. This began their mission in the work of Jesus. Like Mary, our model of a listening disciple and a person of action.

Our Goal: Union with God and fulfilling His perfect will. Saint Ignatius also explains that to accomplish this goal, one needs to name and eliminate every inordinate attachment to the things of this world: favorite sins; ill feelings; people; wealth, power, fame; apostolate; past issues; wounds/pains; past



mistakes/regrets. We remember God's litany of His frustrations:

- "You have never heard my voice." (John 5:37)
- "You have not seen my form." (John 5:37)
- "You do not see me in others." (Luke 16: 19-31 *The Rich Man and Lazarus*)
- "You do not have my Word remaining in you." (John 5:38)
- "My word has no place in your heart." (John 15:1-17 *Jesus as the True Vine*)
- "You do not want to come to me to have life." (John 5:40).
- "I come in the name of my Father, but you do not accept me." (John 5:43).

**Living a Life rooted and grounded in Love.** The value of our service is not identified with how much we do, but in how deeply we love. In the washing of the feet of the disciples, (*John. 13:1-17*), Jesus makes us aware that 'service out of love' is the way of life of His disciple, there is no service that gives life without the giving of oneself. Living our life in service out of love is only possible as a response of our experience being loved. Having an interior knowledge of all the good we have received from God stirs us to profound gratitude, that in all things, we love and serve the Lord, and makes us see the the qualities and capabilities God has graced us with.

## God's presence is a laboring presence of love.

Not only is God as Creator sustaining everything into being by His presence (*Wisdom 11.27*), but also because God is love, his presence is also a loving and living presence. God is a laboring God in the past, present, and future. Love is manifest in deeds. God is constantly at work for the good of his creatures (*Rom. 8.28*). My Father is always working and so am I (*John 5:17*). May the Father through his Spirit working in you, enable you to grow strong in your inner self... so that built on love and planted in love... you may be filled with the utter fullness of God (*Eph. 3:16-21*).

**Ignatian Generosity.** It is not about getting "results." It is not about "doing well" and "achieving." It is not about getting "success" or being concerned about what the eventual outcome of our giving would be. If we give mainly because (or only because) we know that in the end we will do well and be "successful" in our present enterprise, then we may end up being too selective and even self-serving in our giving, which is contradictory to the virtue of generosity in the first place. This is why Ignatian generosity is all about giving and not expecting anything in return. And this includes not expecting any "good" results from the very start. If "good results" are produced by our giving generously, then we should be happy and thankful. However, if no such results are produced by our giving generously, then we should be happy and thankful just the same.

Giving is a privilege. The opportunity of giving should be the value and reward in itself because by giving without counting the cost, without expecting anything in return, without any strings



attached, already pleases the Lord. To know that we please the Lord is enough for the one who is giving.

In my life, do we give my best to God, to others, to our community, and to those in need without counting the cost?

Call to Synodal Church. Let us go across to the other side (*Mark 4:35-41*). We ask for the desire to participate in the mission of His church:

- To be available and prompt for the church and being at her service.
- To participate in her universal mission, according to Magis Deo's mission and vision.
- To work with the local Church in a spirit of synodality and missionary zeal.

A real conversion involves "metanoia" (change of mind and heart) and embracing the mission. It is a return to Jerusalem (Emmaus) and embracing the Mission. "We cannot even claim to be a church without being a missionary in our orientation" (Bishop Ambo David). We need to create a space for listening and dialogue.

We heard the life-giving stories of faith as well as the struggles, conversions, hopes, and dreams of the faithful from all the parishes around the country. We rejoice in the best practices of the particular churches, and the inspiring commitment of ordained ministers, consecrated persons, and lay faithful, especially women, who generously give their time, treasures, and talents in building up the church Jesus dreams for us.

**An Annual Ignatian Retreat (ON-LINE)**

**Synodality**

*The Call for Communion, Participation & Mission (SP23 Theme)*

August 04 (5:30 pm) to August 06 (12:00 nn)

Fr. Willy Samson SJ

FOR REGISTRATION & INQUIRIES:  
 HALLU PANGULLO (0908 888 1138 (VIBER)  
 SUSAN CONCEPCION (0917 829 0382 (VIBER)  
 RICKY SUNI (0918 953 2857 (VIBER)



We realize that the Church is still **MALAYO** (distant) from the faithful, especially to those in the "existential peripheries," because of our absence or lack of presence in their daily life concerns, **MALABO** (ambivalent) because of our inconsistencies and lack of witnessing, **NAKAKALITO** (confused and confusing) because of our disorganized and uncoordinated efforts in mission.

We consider our pastoral programs and catechism to be too theological, heavy, and lacking a biblical foundation. We have not fully utilized popular religiosity as a powerful vehicle for catechesis and faith formation. We fail to maximize the use of new technology and social media in our work of evangelization.

The Church remains self-referential, exclusive, hierarchical, and authoritative. The poor, in many places, still feel they are not welcomed, nor do they feel they belong or are even wanted. The Church has no sustained intervention to make the poor self-reliant and empowered. It lacks a more aggressive and systematic approach to the national issues involving extra judicial killings, fake news and trolls, and massive corruption.

We dare to look at the sin of clericalism that continues to divide: when the pastor is close only to the rich and lives a lavish lifestyle that betrays the vision of a church of the poor; when he fails to

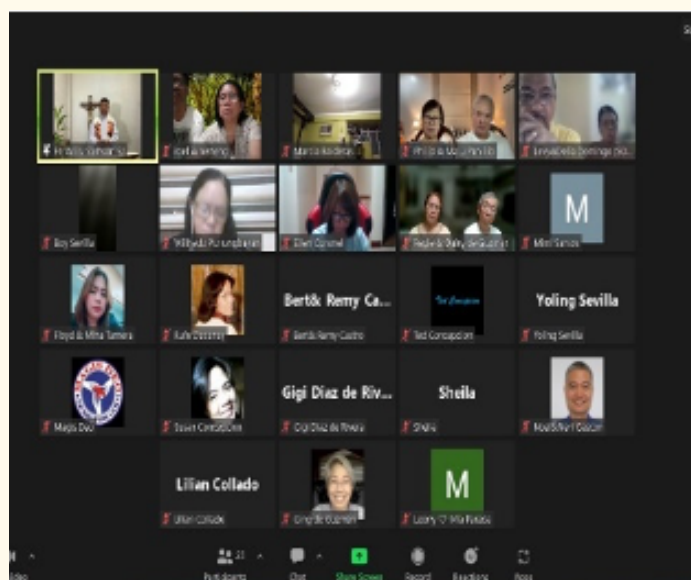
"walk the talk" and "walk the walk" he vowed to follow; and, when the sacraments are merely officiated and not celebrated meaningfully by the lack of bridging between faith and daily life.

The SYNOD disposed us to be more sensitive to the movement of God's Spirit in our sharing of experience of sadness and joy, woundedness, and healing, despair and hope, failures and victories, and our dying and resurrection. The presence of each other has revitalized our COMMITMENT TO A MISSIONARY CHURCH that prioritizes the "existential peripheries."

**Direction: New Doors.** As an individual and as a community, what are the things that we need to STOP, to CONTINUE, and to BEGIN?

**Distractions.** Who are those who "walk together" with us in our community? What groups or individuals are left on the margins, neglected, or left behind? Are we good at listening to others? What are the gaps that we need to close to build a community and effective ministry?

**Synodality as a Way of Life.** The call is to make synodality our way of life by cultivating a "culture of encounter," and to create spaces of conversations and dialogue towards our interior movement of conversion from **kamanlalakbay** (fellow pilgrims) to **mamalakaya** (fishers of people).



## AIR on Synodality: Some Reflections

Bert & Remy Castro, Easter BCGG



Communion, participation, and mission are vital elements of Synodality. Let us create a space for God. If we do not create space for prayer, we cannot hear God.

Synodality calls us to conversion through listening (Balik Loob) to see other Kaloob (graces). We need to change our Loob to change our Labas. These are the terms Fr. Willy used. It is also a call for us as the people of God, to engage in the exercise of deep respectful listening to one another. It is how we live together in the community, serve those in need, and evangelize.

In the last week of July 2023, I was in a state of emotional stress and chatted with some of our Easter BCGG members about it. Our shepherd, Rico Lim, recommended attending the August 4 to 6, 2023 online Annual Ignatian Retreat led by Fr. Willy Samson, SJ. This was a very timely invitation, and Remy and I attended.

We had a lot of distractions at home on the first day so we decided to stay overnight in a unit near Trinoma, so we could focus on the retreat. We very much appreciated the teachings and clear visuals presented by Fr. Willy on synodality. I would like to share our valued learnings.

Synodality means journeying together as the people of God. It is a way of listening to everyone as a member of the church and understand how God may be speaking to us. Fundamentally, synodality is realizing that the Holy Spirit can speak through anyone to help us walk forward together, in our journey as God's people.

Synodality is what the Lord expects from the church. We are the Church. Likewise, we must keep praying. Prayer keeps the mind and heart open to all that God does and desires for humanity and creation. Prayer nourishes and conforms the will, so that we always seek and desire according to God's will.

Attending the AIR is a great privilege for couples like us. The AIR creates a space for dialogue and understanding. It strengthens our goal to be More for God, to learn to share our blessings, to be generous, and be of service to others.

Every time we attend an AIR, we feel the "peace and contentment." We realize the need to listen and understand others across our differences. Another important message we received is Faith, that in all the challenges face and the struggles we undergo, "GOD IS ALWAYS THERE."

We are immensely privileged and proud to be with the Magis Deo Community and to be members the Magis Deo Choral.



# Pagninilay sa AIR on Synodality

Neneng Claros, Council Overseer for Formation Ministry / St. Peter BCGG



Ang buhay ay isang paglalakbay na patuloy na tumatawag sa atin na iwanan ang ating mga sarili upang suungin ang hindi tiyak na pagkabalisa na nagtutulak sa atin upang hanapin ang Diyos at lumago mula dito.

Sa ating paglalakbay ay natatagpuan natin ang mga taong kapwa nagmamahal at dito natin natutuklasan ang mga bagong bagay tungkol sa pag-ibig ng Diyos sa tao. Ito ang Magis Deo sa amin ni Roel.

Hindi madali ang magdesisyon para sa sarili, pero higit na mahirap ang magdesisyon na kasama ang buong pamilya sa pagharap ng panibagong hamon sa buhay. Limang taon na ang nakalilipas ng kami ay magpasiyang lumipat sa bayan ng San Jose del Monte. Ipinagpasalamat namin na marahan kaming itinulak ng biyaya ng Diyos upang bumalik dito. Nang magkaroon ng pandemya ay napagtanto namin na inilagay Niya kami sa mas ligtas na lugar. Katulad ng naibahagi ko na, sa lugar na ito ay ang mga kasalamuha namin ay iba't ibang tao mula sa mahirap at pinakamahirap na antas ng buhay. May ilang porsyento rin ang nakakaluwag.

Kumilos kaming mag-asawa sampu ng aming mga anak para sa pag-asa ng pagbabago. Nabigo man, ay humanap pa rin ng ibang paraan para ipagpatuloy ang misyon na iniatang sa amin.

Ipinakita ng Panginoong Hesus sa amin kung ano na ang kasunod na landas na tatahakin. Tinawag kami sa paglilingkod sa simbahan upang makilahok sa programa para sa mas maayos na pagsasama ng mag-asawa; habang itinutuloy pa rin ang pagkilos at pagmumulat sa tunay na kalagayan ng lipunan sa kabila ng hirap at panganib na kaakibat nito.

Dalangin ko na patuloy kaming tunghayan ng yong liwanag, o Panginoong Hesus, at panatilihin ito sa aming mga puso. Patibayin mo ang aming pananampalataya at panatilihing ligtas sa anupamang uri ng kapahamakan. Gabayan mo kami ng iyong biyaya upang sa tuwina ay buong puso at diwa kaming makasunod sa Iyong Kalooban. Amen.



## AIR Reflection: The First Duty of Love is to Listen

Noel & Neri Gascon, James BCGG



The first duty of love is to listen.

This is the phrase we pondered during our first virtual Annual Ignatian Retreat. Being in love and to be loved seems very easy in a relationship. But wait, do we really know how to love? Loving is showing emotional liking and affection to the one you care for. As a couple married for more than 25 years, we have been through ups and downs in our journey. We learned from Magis Deo how to listen to our spouse through our ears, and

down to our heart. One of our biggest trials early in our marriage was when we listened to reply but not to understand. We became selfish, thinking only of our self without caring about the feelings of the other. The passing of time made us change, and we listened more to each other, and realized our indifference.

Now we can listen, understand, and be sensitive to the feelings of the other. Indeed, listening is one of the most important and sometimes difficult ingredient for a couple to survive and nurture their relationship. By listening, we can level up our love into respect, selflessness, and sacrifice.

Most often, God talks to the husband through the wife. That is why the Magis Deo husband's key words of "Yes, dear" is equivalent to "Yes, my Lord"... LISTEN, LOVE, PRAISE.

Always remember – listen through/with your Heart.

## Look. Listen. Love. A Reflection on the Annual Ignatian Retreat

Yoling Sevilla, John BCGG

*"Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
deepen our silence so we can seek and find you in all things."*

This first line of the Prayer to the Holy Spirit that began our Annual Ignatian Retreat struck me to the core. It was the call my soul was longing to hear: the call to interior silence and stillness that would enable me to listen.

Post-pandemic, I was thrust into a whirlwind of activities that left me gasping for breath. I would seek refuge in prayer, but felt a need for more, for a deeper understanding of what was distressing me.

In response to the opening prayer, I was able to express my need in this heartfelt prayer:

*"O Holy and healing Spirit, deepen my silence  
amidst the noise and distractions that surround me,  
that I might hear You speaking to me  
through the people, events, and circumstances of my daily life."*

I resonated with two images offered by Fr. Willy Samson, SJ, for contemplation: Zechariah muted by the angel so that he could look and see, listen, and hear; Mary who kept things in her heart and pondered on them.



1. The call to mute myself: to maintain the twin dispositions of looking and listening to enable me to see the signs and hear the call of the times.
2. The call to ponder: to reflect on what I have seen and heard, that I might understand, that I might know how God might be inviting me to respond to the people, events, and circumstances of my life.

What else did I hear during the retreat? Fr. Willy's invitation to create a space for listening and dialogue. This called to mind the current mission entrusted to my husband Boy and me to shepherd Magis 135. This is precisely what we are tasked to do: to help encountered couples make the decision to create a time and space for listening to and dialoguing with each other.

*"O Holy Spirit, I beg for the grace of interior stillness  
That I might continue to hear You speaking to me  
In the silence of my heart."*



# Reach in, Reach out, and Enrich

Rico Lim, Outreach Ministry / Easter BCGG

2023 has been a busy and challenging year for the Outreach Ministry. With the Magis Deo community's thrust of being a spiritually strong and vibrant apostolic community in the service of others ("Reach in, Reach out, and Enrich") the Outreach Ministry plays a significant role in achieving these goals. We sought and continue to seek members' assistance and urge them to give and share their time, talent, and treasure in Magis Deo's Lingap Projects. Here are the Lingap Categories our members can choose from:

1. Lingap Karunungan: Educational Subsidy for deserving children. Students from underprivileged and Suyuan communities are screened and endorsed by the BCGG sponsoring the subsidy. This year we have 21 scholars in this program.
2. Lingap Kabuhayan: Skills training and employment. We provide Php10,000 for vocational skills training, then match trainees with companies (mostly in construction) needing their respective skills. Who are eligible for the subsidy? Suyuan parents and their family members, and Bilibid family members.
3. Lingap Kabanalan: Spiritual enrichment and Christian value formation for Suyuan communities and other approved communities. These programs include Buhay Espiritwal ng Mag-asawa (BEM) Retreat, Suyuan Retreat, Suyuan Reunions, Kasalan Bayan for of Suyuan couple graduates, and Lenten and Advent Retreats for Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL, as we refer to our brethren in Bilibid Prison).
4. Lingap Kalikasan: Initiation and organization of Environment Protection and Awareness Programs. These programs are our Tree Planting in Tanay, Rizal, and last year's Recycling of Plastic (Green Ant Project).
5. Lingap Kalusugan: Support for hospitals, halfway houses, orphanages, Bahay Kalinga, Bahay Aruga, and other communities via supplies, food, clothes, toys, books, hygiene kits, and sundry materials needed by these institutions.

We encouraged members to assess their three T's, to be aware of their capabilities and limitations, and what they are ready to share for others. We distributed assessment forms at one of our community celebrations where Fr. James talked about Reaching Out. Many were inspired by 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God



loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

Many are now reaching out financially, physically, financially, to less privileged communities and to those deprived of liberty. Yearly we conduct several Suyuan retreats. Suyuan is one of the main focus of Magis Deo's Outreach. This activity for married or soon-to-be-married couples in less privileged communities, enhances and deepens their couple life and their personal relationship with the Lord.

The Buhay Espiritwal ng Mag-asawa Retreats further address couples' spirituality in their marriage. Outreach Ministry supports the yearly Lenten and Advent Recollections for PDLs, for which we have allocated more funds this year. We have conducted trainings for members to enhance their skills, knowledge, purpose, and faith in serving others. We further encourage member to participate in activities for caring for our precious environment like Tree Planting and Recycling. We sponsor and give education subsidies for deserving children from the communities we serve. In addition to these Outreach Ministry sponsored activities sponsored, some BCGGs have embarked on their own outreach activities.

The year is not over, and we have several more outreach activities these coming months. We will have a Suyuan in the National Shrine of St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Manila, and in the Presentation of the Child Jesus Parish in Parañaque. Towards December there is the Advent Recollection in Bilibid, and Christmas Gift activities in many communities. There will also be Christmas parties for our Suyuan communities. Hello, Magis Deo... what are you waiting for? The year is not yet over; there is still time to participate, help, and support the upcoming programs and activities. Just contact the Outreach Ministry. We will be glad to assist and point you to where you can help and make a difference.

## Some recent Outreach activities:

### Facilitators' Training for Suyuan, 1st Session

Objective: Enhancing/enriching participants' basic knowledge of the Suyuan and its purpose; training on conducting a Suyuan.

Date: April 16, 2023

Mode: Online and F2F

Facilitators: Panlilio, Angeles, Gascon, Pestaño

Participants: 8 (Magis and non Magis)

Project Category: Lingap Kabanalan and Karunungan

CeFam and guest participants joined the training.



### Joint Tree Planting in TANAY

Objective: To enrich participants of the value of taking care of our environment and to feel God's presence in Nature. This is an interface project of the Outreach Ministry.

Date: July 08, 2023

Where: Reyes Farm Sampaloc, Tanay Rizal

Participants: 20 pax (children and parents)

BCGG sponsor : Easter, Chronicles and James

Project Category : Lingap Kalikasan





## Suyuan sa Datem

Date: July 9, 2023

Where: Datem Compound in Taguig City

Participants : 22 couples

BCGG: Transfiguration and ME 133

Facilitators: Pingols, Claros and Sta. Marias



## Suyuan sa Datem Reunion

Date: July 30, 2023

Where: Datem Compound Taguig

Who: Suyuan July 8 Graduates

Auxies: Transfiguration and ME 133

What: 1 day reunion that tackled all 4 Suyuan Reunion Topics on Love and Marriage



## Buhay Espiritual ng Mag Asawa (BEM) sa Olandes

Date: July 30, 2023

Where: Nativity of Our Lady Parish, Calle Industria, Marikina

Participants: 43 pax

Sponsor: Mustard Seed, Chronicles, Matthew, St. Peter and ME 134

Facilitators: Djarn Pestano and Sta. Maria

Note: Our first BEM after so many years. Great feeling to revive this enriching retreat for the Suyuan Graduates



## Kasalan Bayan sa Olandes

Date: September 16, 2023

Where: Nativity of Our Lady Parish, Calle Industria, Marikina

Who: 6 couples of Suyuan sa Olandes

Magis Deo Outreach Ministry donated some funds for 6 couples of Suyuan sa Olandes for their participation in the Kasalan Bayan. Congratulations Olandes Couples!





# Buhay Espiritual Mag-asawa for Olandes Suyuan

Philip & Malu Panlilio, Mustard Seed BCGG

This year, on the eve of the feast day of St. Ignatius, Magis Deo revived the Buhay Espiritual Mag-asawa (BEM), the Spiritual Deepening Retreat in Tagalog, after a hiatus of more than 15 years. Olandes Suyuan was blessed as a recipient of BEM graces on 30 July 2023.



Fort-three Suyuan graduates from Olandes Suyuan participated, prayed, and reflected. Djarn Pestano and Dodo & Jon Sta. Maria led the BEM participants in reflecting on God's love in their lives, marriages, and families. The BEM team helped the participants face their sins courageously, knowing how God's mercy is limitless.

Deepening of prayer and reflection was facilitated via group spiritual conversations. Magis Deo members from Mustard Seed BCGG (Floyd & Mina Tamera, Leony Parada, and us); Chronicles BCGG (Lito & Mona Ramos and Rady & Vivian Flores); Matthew BCGG (Ian & Elaine Serranilla); St. Peter BCGG (Roel & Neneng Claros); and ME 134 (Alex Aquino) led the small group sharing.

The BEM experience serves as catalyst in the monthly household prayer group meetings of Olandes Suyuan. All for the glory of God 😊



# Reflections on the Suyuan and BEM

Rey & Jovy Aquino, ME Class 134

My experience as a volunteer facilitator at the July 30, 2023 Buhay Espiritual Mag-asawa (BEM) for Olandes Suyuan couples is "an experience we look forward to experiencing again."

The topic at the BEM (led by Djarn Pestaño and Dodo & Jon Sta. Maria) was "The Seven Deadly Sins" (Pride, Envy, Wrath or Anger, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony, and Lust.

To achieve rapport and a casual atmosphere, I cracked a joke after the introductions, making the participants relaxed and eager to share their answers to: "Ano ang kasalanan na madalas mong nagagawa? At ano ang iyong nararamdaman pagkatapos mo itong ginawa? Paano mo ito babaguhin? (What sin do you frequently find yourself doing? And what do you feel after doing it? How will you change it?). I presented the questions in a manner that all would deeply reflect and engagingly share their responses. And since the sharing started with me, I emphasized our belongingness to the group. Everyone followed with their fruitful sharings.

Pride, wrath, and sloth were prominent in the discussions, and the participants acknowledged their guilt and expressed remorse. They found HUMILITY as the key to FORGIVENESS and ACCEPTANCE, leading to TOTALCHANGE.

With the rich sharings, I remembered 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 "The Seven Holy Virtues" (Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice), which are simplified in one word – HUMILITY.

This BEM for Suyuan couples refreshes and revitalizes their relationships and gives them the chance to know more of their spouse, to rekindle and deepen the love in their marriage, and to rediscover the SELF. This conversion of the heart leads to the deepening of one's faith; it is an opportunity to more clearly hear God's call, seek God's healing grace, and attain a renewed spirit.

I shared with the couples, especially with those co-habiting, the value of the Sacrament of Marriage and its pillars: Love, Trust, Respect, Understanding, and Faith; and the Five Graces given to couples: Grace of Unity, Grace of Elevation or Sanctification, Grace of Radiation, Grace of Parenting, and Grace of Healing.



On August 6, 2023, my wife Jovy and I were part of a Suyuan held at the Barangay Hall of Mayamot, Antipolo. Euphoria enveloped Jovy and me when we were invited to be one of the couple speakers at this Suyuan sponsored by Prodigal 102 BCGG. We were confident, as we give talks at Pre-Cana and at children's recollections in the parish. But then I felt a chill down my spine, and my confidence seemed to walk out on me. Jovy felt anxious too. This was our first time to give a talk in a Suyuan, and this "first time" will be remembered in unexpected, good, or bad ways. I told myself, expectations will excite or make us anxious, but what matters is the joy of being of service to others. This is a great fulfillment for us, and we learn too from the reflections and experiences shared by couples ❤️🙏❤️.

Reaching out to couples and families in the "laylayan," is one of our hearts' desires. Suyuan opened the door for us to expand our apostolate for couples planning to get married (Pre-Cana) and couples living together (Suyuan); to bring the Church to their doorstep, a synodality of families being one with the Church and with Christ.

Kaya, very thankful po kami sa Magis Deo for the opportunity to pay forward what God has given us. We are committed sa aming advocacy and apostolate for couples and families.

Salamat po ng marami sa tiwala 🙏❤️😊.



# Praxis Communes with BCGGs

Jane Aldeguer, Praxis Ministry / Chronicles BCGG

For the past weeks, members of the Praxis Ministry have been joining the prayer meetings of BCGGs, communing with them, getting to know them more, and vice versa. The Sector heads personally introduced themselves and presented the first half of the year's FORMICom report.

We look forward as well to the final Interface of BCGGs this year.

Nice seeing everyone!



## Cana BCGG



## James BCGG



## Easter BCGG



## Tala BCGG



## Mustard Seed BCGG

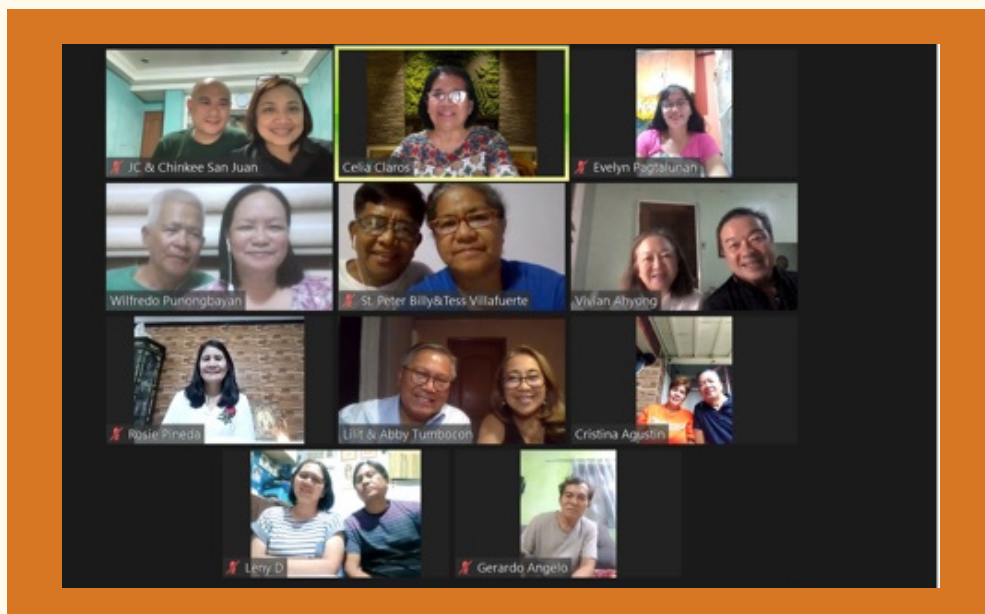




## Samaritans BCGG



## St. Peter BCGG



## Exodus BCGG



## Ang Daan ng Puso

Chacho Angeles, Matthew BCGG

Ang buhay ko ay isang paglalakbay  
Kung saan tutungo'y di noon mawari,  
Aking akala'y matiwasay na buhay  
Kasama ang mga mahal sa buhay,  
Na walang inaapakan. Ang aking paroroonan  
Sa buhay na ito'y maayos na lipunan  
Di lamang para sa akin, nguni't para sa lahat.

Kinalauna'y sa tulong na rin ng aking  
Mga kasanlakbay, aking nawari na  
Mga kagustuhan ko, at ang aking  
Pagtalima sa mga bagay-bagay  
Ng mundong ito, ay di sapat.  
Ang buhay dito, at ang mundo mismo,  
Ay mayroong hangganan na di naaayon  
Sa aking kalooban, kamalayan, at pagkatao.  
Ang pagmamahal ko sa kapwa't kalikasan  
Ay isang marangal at dakilang adhikain.  
Nguni't ang aking kaluluwa'y pumipiglas,  
Dahil dama ko na mayroong kakulangan.

Hanggang ako'y may nabasa, na sa taong ito,  
Ang kanyang pananampalataya ay nakaugat  
Sa dalawang utos ni Hesus: Mahalin niya ang  
Diyos ng buong katauhan niya, at mahalin ang  
Kapwa gaya ng pagmamahal niya sa sarili.  
Siya ay Kristiano na gaya ko, at ang ugat na ito'y  
Kailangan kong isabuhay araw-araw, sa lahat ng  
Aking iniisip, sinasabi at ginagawa, saan man  
Ako naroroon, at sino man ang aking kasama.  
May galang, kagandahang loob, pagtulong,  
Paglilingkod, pag-unawa, pakikiisa sa hirap  
Man o ginhawa, mapagbigay at mapagmahal.  
Mahirap man gawin, aking pagtitiyagaan dahil  
Ito and aking buhay na pinili, at ito'y bahagi  
Ng aking paglalakbay. Kaya ko ito, sa tulong  
Ng Diyos na mapagmahal.



Jesus, as I travel with you towards Golgotha,  
I can feel every wound opened by the  
scourging.  
I can feel the pricking pain inflicted by  
Each thorn of that crown on my head.  
I can feel the weight of that cross,  
Getting heavier with each step  
And the pain in my knees and legs.  
I can feel the pain on the soles of my feet  
For every little stone I step on.

I can feel the sharp pain of the nails  
Hammered into my hands and feet.  
I can feel the pain of hanging on my hands,  
My bleeding feet supporting all of my weight.  
I can feel my chest tighten, each breath  
Becomes more difficult, as my lungs are  
Pulled down by the weight of my body.  
I cry out, and all is gone – the pain,  
My senses, my consciousness, my thoughts,  
My hopes, my dreams, my plans, my loves.  
The curtain hiding my God is torn open,  
And He is made visible, available  
And present to me and to all of us.

I offer these to You as reparation  
Since I am one of those among many  
Who inflicted such atrocities on You.  
I pray for Your mercy and Your forgiveness.  
I pray too that when You rise from death  
And return to the Father, that You bring  
Me with You, even if You carry me  
On Your shoulders because I am weak.  
For my destiny and my place is in  
Your loving and compassionate heart.



# Helping Preserve the Sacrament of Marriage Amidst Massive Filipino Migration

Josephus B. & Emma S. Jimenez, Cana BCGG

### Introduction: The Endemic Assaults Against the Sacrament of Matrimony

One of the most destructive, albeit silent disruptors and destroyers of the nation's strength and stability is the continuing and relentless erosion of Filipino families and marriages brought about by outward labor migration. For the last 45 years, Filipino marriages have been shattered and families broken due to the prolonged absence of the father or the mother. There is a casual link between the volume of outward migration and the increasing destruction of marital unions and the dysfunctionalization of families. The social costs of Philippine outward migration can never be justified by the billions of dollar remittances sent home by our OFWs. For what profits a nation with an abundance of foreign currencies but at the expense of destroying Filipino marriages and families?



### An Exodus of Five Thousand Filipino Human Talents Leaving the Country Each Day

There are now 12 million Filipinos working in 170 countries all over the world. This means 12 million families deprived of a father or a mother or both. This means husbands left alone by wives who are working as domestic helpers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Jordan, Israel, even in Lebanon and Libya, or in Malaysia, Hongkong, Singapore. This means wives left alone by husbands who work in Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Europe, Canada, and all over America. This means children left behind without the love, affection, guidance, and protection of parents. This means a marriage challenged by physical separation and family pushed to dysfunctionalization.

### Alarming Statistics, Disturbing Empirical Data

Studies indicate that two of every six marriages where one of the spouses works abroad, end in annulment, divorce, legal separation, or just "de facto" separation. These hard facts do not even get immediate and urgent responses from the government, the Church, or civil society. More saddening, on top of the breaking up of marriages and the shattering of families, is the seeming indifference of human society to the growing menace of labor migration. Public officials are too busy debating about the West Philippine Sea, or fighting the pandemic, managing disaster responses, or preparing for the forthcoming famine and food crisis, that they, we, have not focused on saving marriages and families. We have neglected what really matters most.

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## The Call of Christ and the Church to Save Marriages and Families in Relation to Labor Migration

In Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy we are reminded as the people of God that migration or the movement of people to foreign lands to seek livelihood, should not become the justification for the fragmentation of families and breaking up of marriages. In Matthew 19:6, we are constantly warned that whoever God has joined together, no man should put asunder. In the second chapter of the Gospel of John, we are reminded how Jesus institutionalized the sacrament of Matrimony in the Wedding in Cana.

If we have been attentive and discerning enough as an Ignatian community of encountered couples, we should have realized that as early as 1891, in his *Rerum Novarum* Pope Leo XIII already warned the Catholic laity to guard the sacrament of marriage and the family as an institution. Pope Paul VI mentioned this in 1971 in *Octogesima Adveniens*. Pope Saint John Paul II also mentioned this in *Laborem Exercens* in 1981, in his *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in 1987, in *Centesimus Annus* in 1991, in *Evangelium Vitae* in 1995, and in *Fides et Ratio* in 1998. Pope Benedict XVI also exhorted Christians to protect marriages and families from the effects of migration in his *Deus Caritas Est* in 2005. Pope Francis reemphasized this in his *Fratelli Tutti* in 2020. But many of us were not listening.

## The Magis Deo Community's Response to the Call of the Lord and of His Church

The continuing program of the Marriage Encounter Weekends by the Magis Deo Community, and the Suyuan as well, are only two of the many positive and proactive interventions undertaken by our community to respond to the call of the Holy Fathers and to remain faithful to our calling to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Our response can perhaps be further enriched by targeting migrant couples and doing Marriage Encounter Weekends abroad where there are husbands and wives together. We can also have on-line encounters between husbands and wives who are physically separated by labor migration. We can help take care of their children who are left behind. We can do a thousand and one interventions. For to whom much has been given, more is expected.

## My Wife's and My Response to the Call to Save the Families

For nine years, I left my corporate comforts and perks and embraced a life of poverty and simplicity, living with the migrant workers in Kuwait, Malaysia, and Taiwan. My wife would visit me every other month and stay with me in the service of OFWs. Together with the Filipino communities, we put up a Migrant Sunday School in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johore, and Kota Kinabalu. We gave technical training and spiritual formation seminars to OFWs and helped them preserve their marriages and families. For nine years, we had no rest days because we spent our weekends serving, being the servants of the Filipino domestic servants. We set up bible studies and prayer meetings, and provided psycho-social counseling sessions and free legal services for the Filipino migrant workers. Our focus was to preserve marriages and families. In Taiwan, as we did in Kuwait and Malaysia, we had visitations of sick OFWs, and jailed, detained, and arrested Filipinos. We gave away bibles and spiritual readings, and the focal point of our ministry was always marriage and family.



## Conclusion: The Fruits of our Labor, Happy and Reunited Families, Testimonies of Grateful OFWs

Today, we continue to receive outpourings of gratitude from OFWs we saved from social injustice, from legal problems. We helped maids study nursing and 18 of them are now working as nurses. They finished their studies through a scholarship program we put up in Kuala Lumpur. We also caused the reconciliation of a number of couples through prayers, counseling, and community support. We are very happy that we, as a Magis couple, have allowed ourselves to be used as instruments of God in preserving and protecting the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony and in helping build Christian communities even in far away and non-Christian lands. This is our blessing, and we never stop thanking the Lord for this.



# Eat, Pray, and Laugh

Rhea Rosas Gaddi, Prodigal 102 BCGG

Sharing faith, laughter, and fellowship is crucial in any community. It is an excellent way to strengthen relationships and create a sense of belonging. In today's fast-paced world, where everyone is busy with their daily activities, taking a break and spending time with others is essential.

Laughter is known to have many benefits, including reducing stress, boosting the immune system, and releasing endorphins that make us feel good. It is also a great way to connect with others and build relationships. When people laugh together, they become more comfortable with each other, leading to better communication and understanding.

Fellowship plays an essential role in building a community. Togetherness and unity come from sharing common beliefs, interests, or experiences. In a community where camaraderie is prevalent, people feel valued and supported. They know they are not alone and that others share their struggles and joys. This sense of belonging can lead to a more positive outlook and a greater sense of purpose.



Our weekly prayer meetings with our BCGGs allow us to recall our week and share where and how we experienced God's presence. In my group, Prodigal 102 BCGG, our weekly meetings include having dinner together, where we catch up on each other's lives and can freely talk about our work, parenting, children, and almost anything we wish to share. In one of our dinners, I almost fell off my chair when our older members joked that they prefer having oral sex and explained since they cannot have it anymore, they talk about it.

Kidding aside, the prayer meetings allow me to be myself where I can freely express my thoughts, opinion, and concerns without fearing judgment from my fellow BCGG members. During dinner and formal faith sharing, God invites me to be aware of how I listen to and reach out to others. Do I listen to understand? Do I respond so I can reach out to help?

Sharing faith is also an essential aspect of building a community. When people pray and share how they encountered God, it reminds them of our shared beliefs and values. Shared beliefs and values can be a powerful source of encouragement and inspiration, especially during difficult times. It is also an opportunity to learn from each other and grow in one's faith.

In our weekly BCGG prayer meetings at Magis Deo, let us take the time to connect with others and share in the joys of life. One solid, one liquid, and one laughter at a time.

# Gospel Reflections

Rey & Jovy Aquino, ME Class 134

1 Thessalonians 4:9-11

*"For you yourselves have learned from God that you should love one another"*

*"To choose work that allows you to be tranquil."*

Each of us has innate gifts and talents, even before we are conceived. (Jeremiah 1:5 "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you hope, and a future.")

This relates to Matthew 25:14-30 (The Parable of the Talents). From the beginning God has given us gifts; He expects us to discover, cultivate, and use these gifts. The parables tell us that we need to work on these God-given abilities and talents. These innate abilities and talents are like seeds sown in us by God. He wants us to be responsible for them, to develop and use them for others' good and ours. However, we tend to falter, with shallow reasons, e.g., fear of failure, bothered by the expectations of others, afraid to take risks, comparing ourselves with others, blaming God and others for what we are lack. We become jealous of others, we focus on what do not have, instead of being grateful for what we have and making use of them. In all this we deny God our confidence in His Divine Providence. We do not trust in His wisdom, that He will not make us face what exceeds our abilities, until we have proven we are trustworthy of much more.



It is the same with marriage. Like the servants in the parable of the talents, we have the free will to be act like first two responsible servants, or be the fearful third one. The person we say "I do" to, may test us our God-given-talents as a spouse not just in the context of the three T's (Time, Treasure, Talents), but in understanding and upholding the Pillars of Marriage: Love, Trust, Respect, Understanding, and Faith; and the Five Graces given to couples: Grace of Unity, Grace of Elevation or Sanctification, Grace of Radiation, Grace of Parenting, and Grace of Healing.

We are gifted and graced by God in different ways. God wants us to serve one another with what have been given. As how the third servant felt, fear will hold us back – fear of others, fear of failure. But God does not ask us to be successful, but to be faithful and trust in His will.

No one is an accident, no one is by chance. We chose the person beside us because God first chose our spouse for us. It is up to us to choose that same person, no matter what, in spite and despite of, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, 'til death do you part.



# Cesar's Prayer

Cesar Sangalang, Samaritans BCGG



"Thank you Lord for today. You reminded us once again of the reality of life. That whether we like it or not, there are always two opposing forces that can happen in our lives. In all these experiences, please be with us always. Please accompany us in our journey. Comfort us whenever we feel lonely and accept and love us even if we are not worthy of your love.

We thank you Lord for the gift of this prayer group. Through everyone's sharing, we are reminded that in order to love others, we need to think less of ourselves; that in order to forgive, we need to understand more than to be understood; that unexpected challenges can teach us valuable lessons; that praying over our worries and anxieties, specially for our children, can lighten our burden; that we are not in control and that You, Lord, always have a better plan for us; that we need to be more aware of the small miracles in our lives; that we need to closely examine our intentions before we say or do things; and that we have to be always prepared for Your coming by living a clean, simple, yet meaningful and purposeful life. Amen."



# Diversity in Couples, Unity Within a Community

Marivic Pareja, Prodigal 102 BCGG

Cesar and I had our ME Weekend at Betania Retreat House in June 1998. As I shared many times, I only wanted the Weekend; we already planned not to attend the subsequent reunions. But God works in mysterious ways – here we are still, celebrating our 25th year with the Magis Deo Community.

Twenty-five years ago, we were one of the young couples (newbies) in the community. After meeting the icons and pillars of Magis Deo, Cesar and I felt out of place. I was particularly intimidated by the likes of Sison, Mossesgeld, Llamas, Narciso, Del Rosario, and Cathy Rafael, among many; and even then we were not privy to their social status (after several years in Magis I found out that many members are Presidents or CEOs of companies, or owners of companies). I was intimidated and never considered looking at the diversity of members. All I did was observe them from afar, and admire their simplicity, humility, and dedication to serve.

My outlook changed when Cesar and I were tasked with various projects and had the opportunity to be up close and personal with the couples I was so intimidated by. I then realized how Magis Deo was able to sustain itself as an apostolic community. The diversity of couples – age, status, position, educational background – were the factors that made the Magis Deo community a success, with each couple sharing and offering their time, talent, and treasure for the benefit of the majority, and specially of the less privileged and the needy.

As we continued our journey, we witnessed how Magis Deo evolved and how members, with their varied backgrounds, adapted and coped with the changing times. One of the most notable changes was the pandemic. When the world suddenly stopped because of Covid, the leadership came up with creative ideas for continuing the practices and projects of Magis Deo through various social platforms. Techie couples organized and implemented monthly Community Celebrations in the format and conduct of prior ComCels, sans the fellowship and agape. While some organizations stopped or took a break, Magis members thought of what more we could do (very Magis!) to continue and



i sustain our advocacies. Thus, Marriage Booster was born (kudos to the group that conceptualized MB... not only did it boost marriages, it also boosted our ME Weekend participants). We celebrate the success of every edition of Marriage Booster; it has given birth to another worthy endeavor – the Magis TLC.

Thanks too to Zoom. It has become a valuable medium for continuing our weekly faith sharing meetings, which help many of us acknowledge and cope with feelings, fear, anxiousness, and uncertainties. It is very comforting to have a BCGG that supports and inspires when one's faith wavers.

When I facilitated an online interface in 2021, there were several 'not so young' couples who were not adept in using Zoom. They awed me with their perseverance and commitment. They requested their children or apos to assist them in setting up and operating various gadgets so they could join the interface and participate in the sharing. It was very heartwarming and inspiring to see that technical unfamiliarity and lack of proficiency did not hinder members' desire to grow in their spirituality.

Again, the diversity of members became the unifying factor as they continue to share their time, talent, and treasure, and persevere so we continue to be one solid community.

I believe the diversity of members is a gift from the Lord. We respect, accept, and celebrate members' uniqueness, gifts, and talents as we journey together towards God.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam!



## We made it to Magis Deo's 35th Anniversary!

Mina Tamera, Mustard Seed BCGG



We marked our 5th year with the community when Magis Deo celebrated its 30th Anniversary. My husband Floyd and I wondered if we would still be around at its 35th Anniversary, as we are the only remaining active couple from ME Class 116. And today here we still are, witnessing another milestone of our dear Magis Deo Community.

The day before Magis' 35th Anniversary, a transportation accident brought us to the hospital. I could barely walk that time, and I thought it would not be possible to attend the celebration. I kept my faith in the Lord who can move mountains, who I know will give me strength. Indeed, the following day, I got back my strength and the will to attend the August 12 event. I felt God's presence and guidance on my way to the Ateneo venue.

Our Mustard Seed BCGG was assigned to serve at the Holy Mass presided by Fr. James Gascon. During the gospel and homily, I and Tita Jane Aldeguer, who served as lector, had goose bumps. She said that our BCGG's responsibilities and assignments for the celebration depended on the schedule of Magis Deo's special guest, former VP Leni Robredo. The gospel was about a mustard seed. Was it a coincidence? She said, "Tinakda ng Diyos" that our Mustard Seed BCGG was selected and was faithfully serving at this mass.

At the homily, what struck me was, we Mustard Seed BCGG members may be a small group but each of us has this seed that continues to grow and extend its tree branches to others. As Fr. James said, "Even with my little faith, God is BIG in His love." I witnessed and experienced this with our BCGG and the Magis Deo Community – the commitment, the caring, the support for members and those outside the community.

I learned from and was inspired by the sharings of the pioneers of the community and the many challenges

they faced and overcame during the founding days of Magis Deo. I realize that in this community I can fulfill my purpose in life and respond to God's invitation. My favorite passage about the mustard seed...

*"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and lodge in its branches."*

...teaches me that huge things can happen, can result, from a small thing. By listening and learning, I will grow from a seed to a tree, and, like its branches, I can extend myself to and for others with the grace of kindness and hope.



On the celebratory side, how could I miss Magis Deo's 35th Anniversary? I want to support and be part of this celebration, no matter what happened the day before. Second, I want to meet our country's former VP, whom I supported and voted for at the last elections for president. And what a surprise! Leni and I had a selfie together and she signed the Magis Deo Mustard Seed Angat Buhay canvas tote bag given to me by Tita Mia Parada, and personally made by Tita Bebot Hurna. Our BCGG raised funds for our outreach activities from the sale of these tote bags. I was happy to see again the members of Olandes Suyuan that Tito Philip and Tita Malu Panlilio organized and supported these many years. I want them to know that my husband Floyd also started from Suyuan; I want them to be a significant part of this community as a couple, to grow in their spirituality and strengthen their faith and love, and their commitment to God.



# Up close and personal with Leni

Cecile Gacias, Matthew BCGG



It was one peaceful afternoon when Mae Cruz casually texted if Jun and I would be able to attend Magis Deo's 35th anniversary with Leni Robredo as the guest speaker. Little did we know that the casual question was to be followed by an invitation to have us emcee the event. How could we say no?

To be up close and personal to this lady is an opportunity we will not pass up; else we would have regretted for the rest of our lives.

Closer to Magis Deo's anniversary date, we received news of Leni being sick and cancelling some of her engagements. But when we saw the Angat Buhay staff setting up their merchandise outside the venue, we were relieved. Tuloy si Leni!

We got excited when we saw Elyn raise the card stating, "Leni arriving in 10 minutes!" I think even Noel and Gigi Resurreccion also got excited and kept their panel interview responses to a minimum.

Seeing Leni walk towards the stage was surreal. It was so moving to see Leni escorted by teary-eyed community members, taking her time going towards the stage, while graciously greeting people along the way. . I felt like a little girl about to meet Santa Claus. When we sat down on the

couch, I couldn't help but blurt, I'm speechless!!! Good thing Jun kept his composure and kept the conversation going.

Most of Leni's stories and what she talked about were not new to me. The only new thing that struck me was that she would fight her husband but "hindi lang siya pinapatulan" :). It was extremely reassuring, validating and comforting to see how consistent, real, warm, and genuine she is.

Leni's sharings were fitting content to encourage us in Magis Deo not to ignore the call to reach out, to respond and do our share in improving the lives of those around us no matter the consequence or situation, in our own unique capacities.

I felt so blessed to have some off-air time with Leni while the rest were lining up to have a picture taken with her. I grappled for some common ground with Leni and cherished those short moments of personal connection with her.

Thank you, Magis Deo, for this wonderful chance to be inspired up close and personal with my living heroine; how I wish I can be inspiring like her, kahit 0.5% lang :)