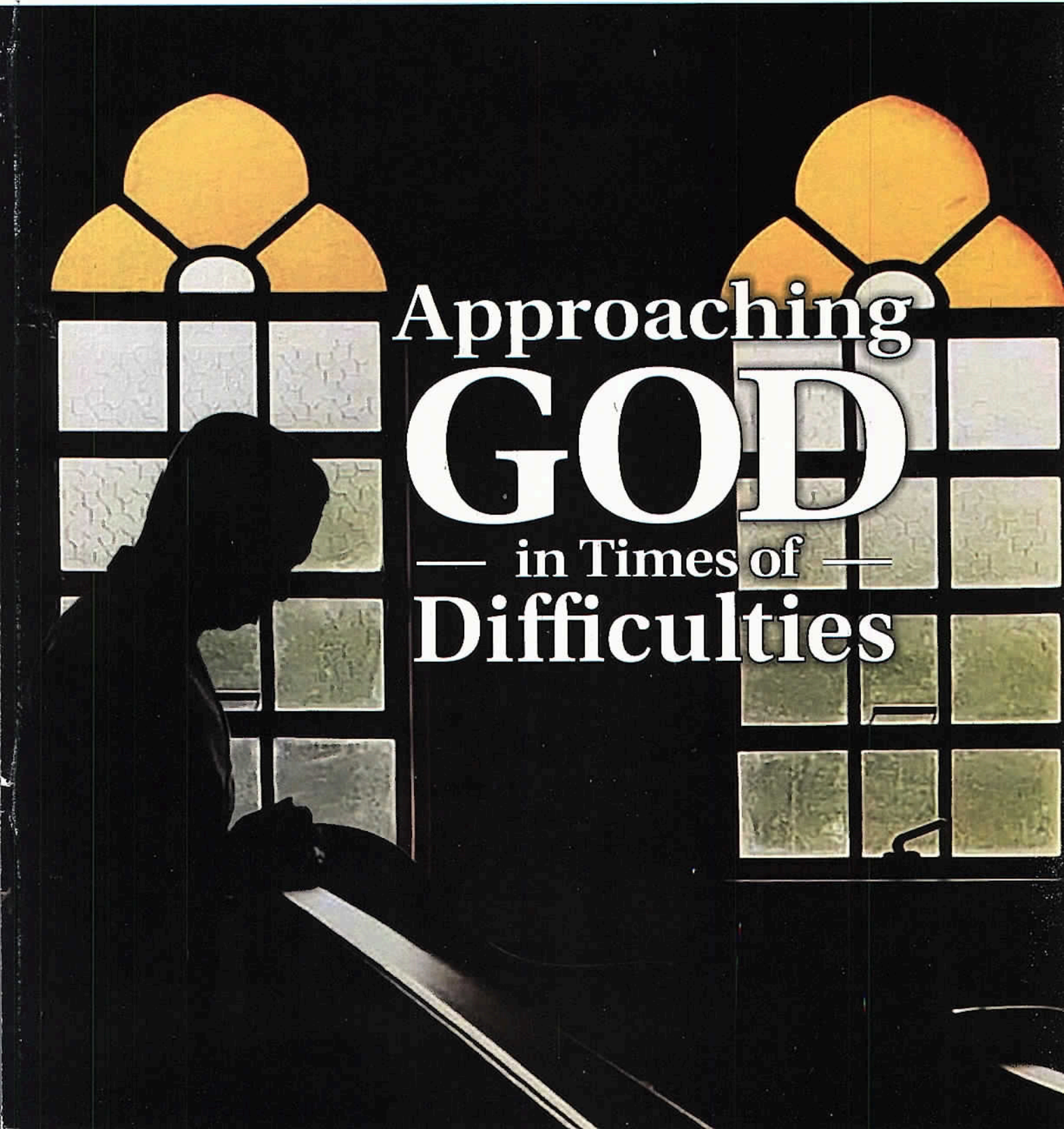


PASUGO

NOVEMBER 2022

# GOD'S MESSAGE

The Magazine of the Iglesia Ni Cristo (Church Of Christ)



## Approaching **GOD** — in Times of — Difficulties

# Ang Pagbati na Aking Alay

(Sa kaarawan ng Kapatid na Eduardo V. Manalo)

Kapatid na Eduardo V. Manalo,  
Pinakamamahal po naming kapatid.  
Ang haplit ng pandemya ay di pa napapalis.  
Kailan kaya matatapos? Hindi pa mabatid.

Gayunman, batid naming, kami pa rin ay mapalad;  
Pagkat naririnig ang turo n'yong hinahayag—  
Salita ng Diyos, sa aming pusong napanatag,  
“Salamat po, Ama,” ito'ng aming nabibigkas.

Sa aming unaha'y, kay giting, kay sigla,  
Pinangangasiwaan ang aming pagsamba.  
Kalooban namin ay puspos ng sayá  
Panibagong lakas, punô ng pag-asa.

Maligayang-maligayang kaarawan po!  
Ang aming kasigla'y di po maglalaho.  
Anuman ang mangyari'y manghahawak sa turo,  
Kami po'y tatalima't pasasakop nang buong puso.

Yamang kami ay hinirang at nasa kahalalan,  
Mamumuhay kami sa gawang kabanalan.  
Kami po ay susunod nang buong katapatan,  
Di bibiguin ang aming Tagapamahalang Pangkalahatan!

Ilaw naming tanglaw ang Pamamahala;  
Lakip tuwina sa dalangin namin sa Maylikha.  
Katapatan sa kanila'y sa isipan at sa gawa,  
Lalo pa't kay lapit na ng bagong langit at lupa!

At kung may ilan mang nadaya ng kaaway,  
Kami'y determinado na hindi mawawalay!  
Sa mga aral na tinanggap, manghahawak na matibay!  
Sa Pamamahala kami, habang nabubuhay!

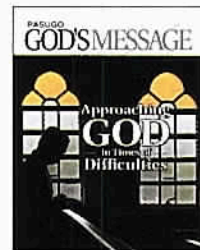
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ISSN 0116-1636

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# FAQs

During congregational prayers, why do Church Of Christ members stand, close their eyes, and say 'Yes, Father,' 'Yes, Lord,' and 'Amen'?

IN THE *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ), prayers are an integral part of the congregational worship (I Cor. 14:26, 15). Members are, therefore, taught to give high regard and respect to prayers. They show this by following what the Bible teaches regarding what true servants of God should do when praying to Him. For instance, they answer "Yes, Father," "Yes, Lord," and "Amen" during and at the conclusion of the prayers. The Bible teaches:

"Let the Lord God of Israel be blest from eternity, world without end.' The response of the people was, 'Amen!' praising the Lord." (I Chr. 16:36 Modern Language Bible)

The practice of saying "Amen" was also observed by the early Christians as proven by this statement of Apostle Paul:

"Suppose some strangers are in your worship service, when you are praising God with your spirit. If they don't understand you, how will they know to say, 'Amen'?" (I Cor. 14:16 Contemporary English Version)

The word "Amen" is defined by Bible scholars this way:

"Amen, literally 'true;' and, used as a substantive 'that which is true,' 'truth,' Isa. 65:16; a word used in strong asseverations, fixing, as it were, the stamp of truth upon the assertion which it accompanied, and making it binding as an oath." (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*, p. 35)

So, when Church Of Christ members say, "Yes, Father," "Yes, Lord," or "Amen," during prayers, they express their agreement with what is being said in the prayer. Hence, they become active

participants in their prayers (I Cor. 14:16 New Living Translation).

Actively participating in prayers helps in keeping the minds of true Christians focused on every word that is said in prayers. This is in line with what Apostle Paul said: "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also" (I Cor. 14:15 Revised Standard Version).

Regarding stance or position, Church Of Christ members kneel or sit down when praying to God personally or when participating in devotional prayers, although they usually stand during congregational prayers. Records in the Bible show instances of God's servants in ancient times standing while praying:

"To stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at evening." (I Chr. 23:30 New King James Version)

Even in the Church Of Christ in the first century, standing during prayers was not an uncommon practice. In fact, the Lord Jesus Himself teaches, "When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25 New International Version).

Prayer is a means by which a congregation or an individual communicates with the Creator. It should be done with propriety and order (I Cor. 14:40). Thus, when the congregation prays during the worship services, worshipers stand properly and close their eyes while praying so as to avoid distractions and to focus their attention or thoughts on the prayers. 🙏

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PASUGO: GOD'S MESSAGE is published monthly by the Iglesia Ni Cristo. Entered as second-class mail matter at the Central Post Office in Manila on February 13, 1979. Published under PCPM Certificate of Registration No. Sp. 237. All manuscripts and photographs submitted for editorial consideration must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and return postage. PASUGO: GOD'S MESSAGE assumes no responsibility to return unsolicited materials. Copyright © 1986 by Iglesia Ni Cristo.

## The refuge of God's servants

**I**N THE FACE of affliction and danger, people strive to seek refuge.

When people feel that their lives are at risk due to plagues, tribulations, violence, oppression, and chaos that are taking place around them, they look for someone or somewhere to run to for their safety and protection. Usually, they put their hope on the wise, the wealthy, and the powerful to provide them the help and refuge they need.

Like our fellowmen, we, members of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ), are also vulnerable to various difficulties and dangers in our time. We need to feel safe amidst troubles. Hence, we do our utmost to also seek refuge. And we choose to take refuge in the Lord God: "God *is* our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1 New King James Version).

This is our firm conviction because we believe that the Lord God, Who called us to become members of the true Church, is the One Who will protect, support, and help us. The Church members before us also went through difficulties, especially when the mission of the Church was just starting in the Philippines; their situation was exacerbated by the persecutions and threats from people of other faiths. Still, they did not lose hope.

They endured the hardship during the Second World War. They did not allow the great turmoil and violence to hinder them from upholding their services and worship of God. Their faith in God never wavered, taking refuge in Him, thus receiving His care and protection. Because of this, they were able to overcome all those trials and troubles—and the Church was able to carry on. And we now see the Church with its mission extending far and wide. Thus, it is the Lord God in Whom we continue taking refuge. We do not doubt what is stated in the Bible: "It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes" (Ps. 118:8–9 New International Version).

Although people, especially those in power and of great affluence, also have the ability to help their fellowmen, but there is a limit to what they can do. They are unlike the Lord God Who is Almighty, and nothing is impossible with Him. Thus, His servants firmly believe that it is much better to take refuge in God than to trust in people.

The chosen people whom God has set apart for Himself prove that they take refuge in God by calling or praying to Him (Ps. 118:5–6 Good News Bible). Hence, praying is part of their everyday life.

And the proof that God accepts His chosen ones as they take refuge in Him is that He answers their prayers and He saves them. Thus, they have nothing to fear and they have peace in their hearts because they receive the Lord's favor.

Those who take refuge in God do not rely on what they think they know or can do. As humans, they recognize that there is a limit to their knowledge and ability. Hence, they fully trust God and acknowledge Him in all their ways (Prov. 3:5-6, 1, 4). They prove this by always keeping His commandments (I John 2:3).

Therefore, taking refuge in God is proven not only by calling on Him but more so by obeying His commandments. The one who does so will surely find His grace and blessings. On the other hand, that will not happen to anyone who disobeys God because, according to I John 2:4, such a person "is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (NKJV). And even if he prays, God will find his prayer too hateful to hear (Prov. 28:9 GNB). Instead of hearing his prayer, God will bring upon him what he dreads (Isa. 66:4 NIV).

It is vital for God's chosen people to be prayerful and obedient to the Lord God to be able to take refuge in Him and be certain that He will listen to their prayers, especially in times of difficulties and distress.

We, *Iglesia Ni Cristo* members, firmly believe that we are God's chosen ones to whom He gave the divine election through His Son. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ Himself testifies about the chosen ones:

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit,

and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

"I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:16, 5 NKJV)

The chosen ones in the Christian era have union with Christ. That relationship, according to Christ's description, is similar to how branches are attached to a vine. The equivalent of what He said was taught by His apostles in I Corinthians 12:27: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (NKJV). Therefore, those who were chosen and given divine election became members of the Church, the body of Christ (Col. 1:18). The name of the Church, to which the chosen ones belong, is the Church Of Christ (Eph. 4:12 Norlie's Simplified New Testament).

Because of our God-given election, we, *Iglesia Ni Cristo* members, have the confidence in approaching Him in prayer and taking refuge in Him. He will grant us our supplications, and He will protect and save us from dangers.

We can also hope that with all His abundant wealth through Christ Jesus, God will supply all our needs (Phil. 4:6, 19 GNB). Hence, whatever our worries are, let us leave them with God because, as I Peter 5:7 (GNB) states, He will care for us. 🙏

**Bienvenido A. Santiago Jr.**  
**Associate Editor**

# Church Bulletin



## Blood donation drive benefits community in Port Moresby, PNG

"The blood donation [drive] is very timely. We would like to thank the Church Of Christ for organizing it," Julieth Ohuesaho said of the socio-civic activity that the Local Congregation of Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, Ecclesiastical District of Australia West conducted on September 25, 2022.

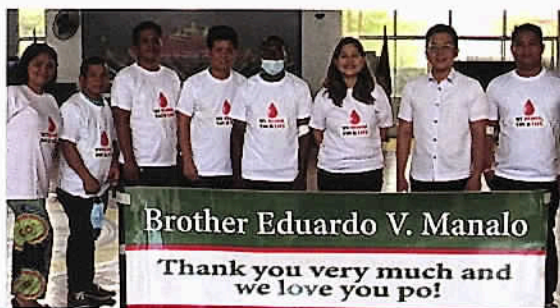
"Without all of you, this day will not be a success. We're glad that many came here because it will help many of the patients," Ohuesaho, a Blood Bank nursing officer from the Port Moresby General Hospital (PMGH), added.

The PMGH Blood Bank benefited from the blood

donation drive, which was held in collaboration with the Filipino Association of Papua New Guinea (FAPNG). The humanitarian activity took place in the association's clubhouse along Geauta Drive, Gordons in Port Moresby.

"Through this activity, a sizable portion of the community here in Port Moresby would benefit from the blood supply we've collected," said Anne Suplac, a FAPNG officer.

"The blood donation is an expression of the Church's willingness to be of humble help to the community," said Brother Mark Jayson Montes, resident minister of the Local Congregation of Port Moresby. "We thank Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, our Executive Minister, for approving this activity, as well as Brother Angelo Eraño V. Manalo, the Christian Family Organizations (CFO) Coordinator, for his support and guidance." (Bunny Quiñola)



## Cagayan de Oro City District wins 'Songs of Salvation' Buklod Edition regional finals

*Buklod* (the family organization for married members) delegates from the Ecclesiastical District of Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental bested five other districts in the regional finals of "Songs of Salvation" on October 14, 2022 at the Pavilion Hall in Pagadian City, Zamboanga del Sur.

Other finalists who participated in the said competition were from the ecclesiastical districts of Lanao, Misamis Occidental, Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga City and Gingoog City, Misamis Oriental.

The winning district's rendition of *Ang Sugo ng Diyos sa mga Huling Araw* (God's Messenger in these Last Days) garnered the highest score. The districts of Lanao and Misamis Occidental placed second and third, respectively.

Brother Nelcar F. Loberiano, supervising minister of the host district, said, "The unity and happiness of the married couples who participated and all the brethren were truly evident in the recently concluded activity in commemoration of the *Buklod* organization's 60th anniversary." (Romy Coveta)



**Tacurong Congregation’s evangelical mission draws hundreds of guests**

As a result of the brethren’s unified efforts in inviting their relatives and friends, the evangelical mission on October 20, 2022 held in the house of worship of the Local Congregation of Tacurong, Ecclesiastical District of Sultan Kudarat yielded hundreds of guests.

“It was raining early in the morning but we didn’t mind if the rain would stop or not because we were so excited for the activity. When the guests started to arrive later that night, I was very happy. I can’t express how I felt when I

saw some of whom I invited also brought their family with them,” expressed Brother Jose Abing Jr., head deacon.

The study of God’s words was led by Brother Glicerio P. Santos III, a minister of the gospel. In his Bible-based preaching, he emphasized on the importance of becoming a Church Of Christ member in order to be saved on the Day of Judgment.

Joven Tagulimot, one of the guests, said, “Upon hearing the words of God, I realized that I have to do something to attain salvation. I promise that I will continue to listen more and eventually be part of the Church Of Christ.” (*Liway Abing*)



**Hanoi, Vietnam GWS elevated to full-fledged local congregation**

*Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) members in Hanoi, Vietnam continue to praise and thank the Lord God because the group worship service (GWS) there has been elevated to a full-fledged local congregation through the approval of the Church Administration.

The inaugural worship service of the new local congregation was held at their place of worship on October 9, 2022, and officiated by the Thailand Ecclesiastical District supervising minister, Brother Willen D. Regalado, together with Brother Allan Gomez, assistant district supervising minister.

Brother Regalado taught from the Bible the significance of prioritizing the worship service for the brethren to continue experiencing God’s goodness in their lives, most especially to be certain of receiving salvation as Judgment Day is fast approaching.

Afterwards, a new set of Church officers took their oath of office.

In an interview, Brother Regalado relayed, on behalf of the brethren, how meaningful the elevation of their congregation was





### More Liberians embrace the true Christian faith

More people in Liberia, in West Africa, have embraced the true Christian faith as they received baptism inside the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) on September 30, 2022, thus increasing the membership of the Local Congregation of Monrovia, Ecclesiastical District of Northern Africa.

Brother Albert B. Alaán Jr, the assistant district supervising minister, officiated at the holy gathering held in Paynesville, a suburb of Monrovia, which is the capital and largest city of Liberia.

During the study of God's words, Brother Alaán emphasized

to the would-be members that they must wholeheartedly uphold their services to the Lord God and fully obey His laws so that they will receive the promised salvation on Christ's Second Advent.

Brother Ziam Condor, resident ministerial worker of the said congregation, expressed, "With the help and mercy of God, the Church Of Christ in this part of Africa continues growing. We promise that we'll continue to be one with the Church Administration in their aim to all the more intensify the works of propagation for the glory of our Lord God." (Eric Ramirez)

for them, "It means a lot to the brethren here in Hanoi, Vietnam, so they can all the more perform their duties and unite with the Church Administration in all the undertakings being launched in the Church."

"To our beloved Executive Minister, Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, we would like to express our many thanks for approving Hanoi GWS to become a full-fledged local congregation. We promise that we'll strive to do our best in participating in all the works of the Church Of Christ," expressed Brother Jerome Pecaña, the head deacon. (Catherine Pascual)

For more Church news around the globe, visit [www.pasugo.com.ph](http://www.pasugo.com.ph)



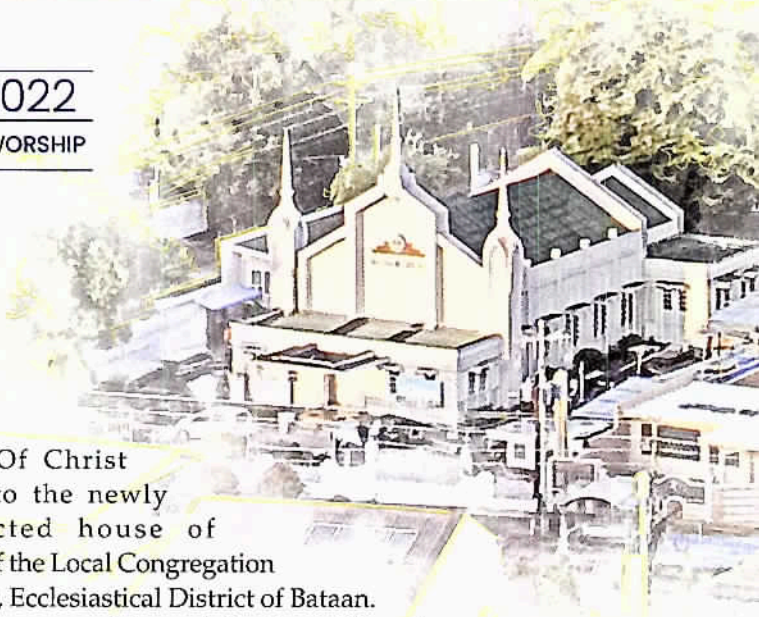
# God has **GOOD PLANS** for His People

**ABUCAY,** SEPTEMBER 30, 2022  
**BATAAN** DEDICATION OF 2 HOUSES OF WORSHIP

**P**EOPLE MAKE PLANS when they want to achieve something in life, such as securing a bright future for themselves and their loved ones. And to make sure that everything will go as planned, they strive to stick to whatever they have firmly decided on. However, as humans have limitations, their well-thought-out and carefully executed plans still meet unavoidable challenges that may result in failures.

However, when God is the One Who lays out plans for the good of His chosen people, no matter what happens, He will surely bring them to fruition.

Just a few days after Typhoon *Karding* (International name: *Noru*) hit Bataan, which was placed under Signal No. 2 when the storm struck the province, still, the members of the



Church Of Christ flocked to the newly constructed house of worship of the Local Congregation of Abucay, Ecclesiastical District of Bataan.

During the preaching of Brother Eduardo V. Manalo at the dedication worship service on September 30, 2022, he emphasized what God has declared in the Bible—God has good plans for His people, plans for their peace and security, as well as a good future. That is why the Executive Minister always exhorts members of the Church Of Christ to completely entrust themselves to God.

The 1,200-seater house of worship is currently the largest in the ecclesiastical district. Also, on the said occasion, brethren were able to witness through livestreaming the rededication to God of the house of worship of the



Local Congregation of National City, Ecclesiastical District of San Diego County, California after the edifice underwent a major renovation aimed at increasing its seating capacity.

Bataan District's supervising minister, Brother Isaias D. Antinew, led the opening prayer. Then, Brother Bienvenido C. Santiago read the profile of the houses of worship to be dedicated, followed by Brother Rene J. Panoncillo leading the ministers assigned to deliver the prayer for the dedication. As he began his homily,

Brother Eduardo Manalo greeted the local congregations celebrating their respective milestone anniversaries, and the district of Bataan for its 90th anniversary. After the preaching of the Bible-based lesson by the Executive Minister, Brother Romer D. Galang led the prayer, then Brother Eduardo Manalo said the benediction.

The following are stories of some of the brethren who witnessed how God's plans were fulfilled in their lives:

# STAYING INSPIRED

## No Matter What

### ABUCAY, BATAAN

Written by Chelsea Estrella

**D**uring the preaching of the Executive Minister, he referred to God's servants as the "most blessed people" as what await them are God's best plans. So, he encouraged the brethren to remain inspired, determined, and patient despite the persecutions and ordeals that they encounter in this world, for nothing compares to the promise of peaceful dwelling in the Holy City.

While attentively listening to the preaching of the Executive Minister, the congregants pondered on how God proves His mercy in their lives. Brother Bernardo Mangawang, endearingly called "*Tatay Ben*," has understood how important the house of worship is in his life.

Being the head deacon for 33 years, *Tatay Ben* witnessed how the brethren in the congregation have high regard for the house of worship. "The brethren here are not wealthy in terms of material possessions. But they are rich in faith," he said. Most of the brethren in Abucay get their livelihood from farming and fishing. Although most do not have material possessions in abundance, they are dedicated to the worship services and devotional prayers conducted in the house of worship where they cast their concerns and worries to God.

*Tatay Ben* himself has experienced a great deal of troubles and challenges that turned out to strengthen his faith even

more. In 1981, he was diagnosed with a gallstone that required an operation. He firmly believed that, because he held devotional prayers and completely put his trust in the Lord God, he was eventually healed.

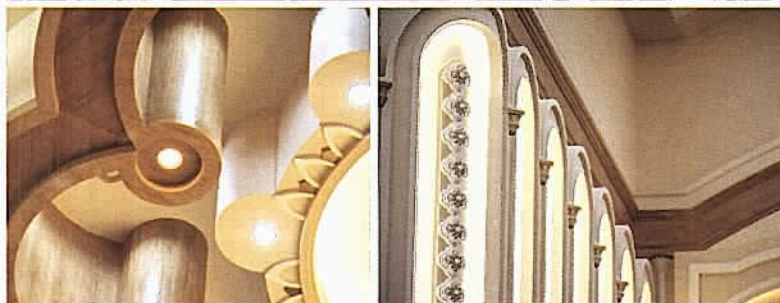
He was diagnosed with Stage 2 colon cancer. And in December 2021, he underwent a surgical operation. His family stayed with him at the hospital where they welcomed the new year. They continued holding their devotional prayers at the hospital, as well as the household worship services.

"When we finally left the hospital, I continued praying to God to help me get through the most serious disease I had," he said. As always, God stayed true to His promises, and *Tatay Ben* is now in a better condition, continuously fulfilling his divine duties even while having a colostomy bag and a catheter attached to him.

Just as what Brother Eduardo Manalo reiterated, God's faithful servants are fully assured of hope and extraordinary strength until the end. So, they stay inspired and patient, just as how the members of the Abucay Congregation waited patiently for the great blessing of a new house of



Brother Bernardo Mangawang (center) and his family



worship. “We vow to maintain the cleanliness and orderliness of the compound, protect the house of worship, and love this great blessing from the Lord,” he said.

In the house of worship, *Tatay Ben* and all the other brethren in Abucay hear the words of God and hold their devotional prayers, which keep them inspired no matter how hard life is and no matter what troubles they experience.

# MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES

- 90 years Ecclesiastical District of **BATAAN**
- 5 years Ecclesiastical District of **NEW ZEALAND**
- 95 years **ANAO**  
Pampanga East
- 90 years **NAGBUNGA**  
Zambales South
- 85 years **CAMILING**  
Paniqui, Tarlac
- PADRE GARCIA**  
Batangas North
- 75 years **BAGABAG**  
Nueva Vizcaya
- SIBUL**  
Bulacan North
- SINILOAN**  
Sta. Cruz, Laguna
- TANZA**  
Bacolod City, Negros Occidental
- 70 years **BAGUMBAYAN**  
Valladolid, Negros Occidental
- CASIGURAN**  
Aurora
- CENTRAL**  
San Jose, Mindoro Occidental
- LABANGAN**  
San Jose, Mindoro Occidental
- LAGUNDI**  
Bulacan
- MANAPA**  
Agusan del Norte
- MATAAS NA KAHoy**  
Patayan City, Nueva Ecija
- SINUKNIPAN**  
Naga City, Comarines Sur

65  
years

**BALLESTEROS**  
Cagayan West

**GUILING**  
Sta. Tomas, Pangasinan

**SIBALE**  
Bongabong, Oriental Mindoro

60  
years

**ARVISMEN**  
Quezon East

**HAMOGAWAY**  
Agusan del Sur

**PULACAN**  
Zamboanga del Sur

**TIGBAO**  
Zamboanga del Sur

55  
years

**TALISAY**  
Gingoog City, Misamis Oriental

50  
years

**MAYPANGDAN**  
Eastern Samar

**SAN JOSE**  
Aurora

35  
years

**DORTMUND**  
Central Europe

20  
years

**BOLOGNA**  
Italy North

**CHARLOTTE, NC**  
Virginia

15  
years

**DONGGUAN CITY GWS**  
Macau

5  
years

**KIBERA, KENYA**  
Northern Africa

**KYLE,  
SOUTH DAKOTA GWS**  
Northwest California

**TAMPA**  
Florida

# GOD'S LOVE

## Across Generations

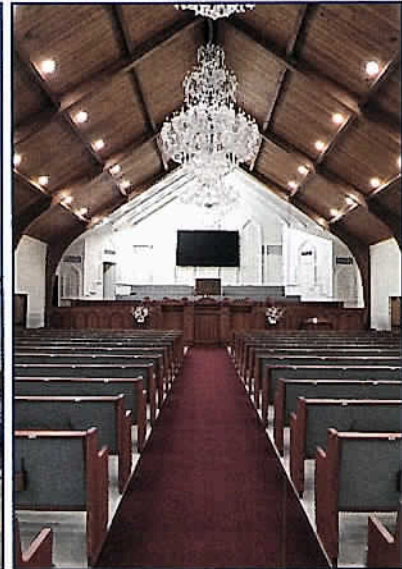
### NATIONAL CITY, CALIFORNIA

Written by Imelda Ladrillono

**T**he second oldest city in San Diego County, National City was established in the late 1800s when the advancements in transportation were beginning to take root. Having one of the first terminal stations of the transcontinental railroad in the Pacific Coast, the city's growth resulted in one of the largest lands and economic booms in the history of California. Additionally, the establishment of the United States naval military bases in the area paved the way for the influx of Filipino migrants serving in the military, among whom were some of the pioneering *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) members in National City.

The Local Congregation of National City was established on March 7, 1970. Another historical milestone was reached when the first *Iglesia Ni Cristo* house of worship in California was built from the ground up in 1984, and was dedicated to God on June 29, 1985. In 2022, with the edifice now almost four decades old, the Church Administration approved the renovation of the house of worship so it will remain fit for their sacred activities.

As the planned rededication worship service approached, the renovation faced many challenges, including supply chain issues and lack of manpower. The entire Ecclesiastical District of San Diego County united earnestly in daily devotional prayers to God, asking for His miraculous grace.



Brethren of all ages were at the chapel daily, volunteering to help in any way in the renovation of the house of worship.

Brother Robert Papa, one of the head deacons and son of one of the pioneer members of the congregation, recalls the many answered prayers he has uttered in this house of worship and how the chapel brings hope to all the brethren and the community. He said, "With everything that goes on in life, we come here regularly. It just gives us



the hope that we need to continue on. God gave us a [chapel] where we pray to Him. It is here where the Church Administration teaches us timely lessons. Especially when we're feeling down, but whenever we hear the words of God, they strengthen us once more. That's why the house of worship is important for us because it is here where we receive the spiritual blessings we need to continue on in this life and not lose hope." The brethren are united with this same sentiment.

On September 29, 2022 (September 30 in the Philippines), even amidst all the turmoil and unrest in the world, the rededication to God of this house of worship in National City pushed through. It was simultaneously dedicated to God with another one, in Bataan, Philippines, in the worship service led by Brother Eduardo Manalo through livestreaming. In his homily, the Executive Minister reminded the Church members to always remember the works of wonder that God has performed for His people and that His plan for them is always for their good. The rededication of this house of worship is testament to God's never-ending grace to His people.

# LAGING MAGTIWALA

## sa Pangako ng Ama

### TANZA, NEGROS OCCIDENTAL

Isinulat ni Jethro Depalobos

**N**agbunga ng kagalakan, dagdag na kalakasan, at inspirasyon sa mga nakasaksi ang isinagawang pagsambang pinangunahan ng Tagapamahalang Pangkalahatan, ang Kapatid na Eduardo Manalo, noong ika-30 ng Setyembre. Ang pananatili sa pagsunod at ang pagtitiwala sa Ama ay muling ipinagunita ng Namamahala sa kaniyang pagtuturo.

Isa sa mga dumalo sa pagsambang pinangunahan ng Namamahala ay si Kapatid na Cyrill Deocampo, isang diakonesa at maytungkulin sa pananalapi sa Lokal ng Tanza. Sa kabila ng mga naranasan ni Kapatid na Cyrill, siya ay nanatili pa rin sa masiglang pagsunod. “Dumating ang kahirapan, sakuna, at pag-uusig ngunit hindi kami nasiraan ng loob. Patuloy kaming nananalig sa Panginoong Diyos na Siya ang magpapalakas sa bawat isa sa amin,” wika niya.

Ang taong 1998 ay hindi malilimutan kailanman ni Kapatid na Cyrill. Ito ang taon kung kailan pinagpahinga ng Diyos ang kaniyang asawa. “Noong mga panahong iyon ay labis akong nalungkot. Nawalan ako ng karamay at katuwang sa pagpapalaki sa mga anak namin,” sabi pa niya. Noong namatay ang asawa niya ay maliliit pa ang kaniyang mga anak: sampung taong gulang ang panganay; pitong taon ang pangalawa; at ang bunso naman ay apat na taon.

Ngunit sa kabila nito ay hindi pinanawan ng pag-asa si Kapatid na Cyrill dahil inilagak niya ang kaniyang buong pagtitiwala at pananalig sa

Ama. Pahayag niya, “Para makayanan ko ang mga problema, pumupunta ako sa kapilya tuwing gabi at nagpapanata. Hinihiling ko sa Ama na sana ako ay tulungan, gabayan, at bigyan pa Niya ng lakas upang magamit ko ito sa pagtataguyod sa mga anak ko, at lalo na sa paglilingkod sa Kaniya.”

Dahil sa ganitong pananaw ni Kapatid na Cyrill, hindi kailanman sumagi sa isip niya na tumigil sa pagtupad ng tungkulin (siya ay isang mang-aawit nang mga panahong iyon). “Sa gitna ng ganoong kahirapan at kabagabagan, patuloy akong nanalig at nagtiwala sa pangako ng Ama sa mga nananatili sa pagtupad ng kanilang tungkulin anuman ang sumapit,” wika ni Kapatid na Cyrill. Dahil sa pagsampalataya niya sa magagawa ng Ama sa buhay niya, natupad ang kaniyang mga kahilingan para sa kaniya at sa kaniyang sambahayan. 🙏



Kapatid na Cyrill Deocampo  
(ikatlo mula sa kaliwa) at ang kaniyang pamilya

With research assistance from Alejandro Sino Cruz Jr.

Layout Artists: Jerald Azares and Carmie Cleofas  
Contributing Photographers: Mike Ocon, Lovel Oriel Qunitio, Imee Lad, and Richelle Poblete



# WE ARE HEIRS OF GOD'S PROMISE

San Fernando, Pampanga  
Ordination of New Ministers  
October 14, 2022

PEOPLE GREATLY VALUE a variety of things, including their very lives, peace of mind, rights and freedoms in this life, education, dignity or reputation, material wealth, profession or career, accomplishments, intellectual prowess, and families and lineage, among many others.

Members of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) also consider these as important but what they regard as more valuable than anything, even more than their very life, is their divine election. For, by virtue of it they are heirs of God for whom are reserved the greatest blessings that are incomparable to anything in this world—the Holy City and the everlasting life.

Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, the Church's Executive Minister, reminded the brethren of this truth during the worship service he officiated at the Local Congregation of San Fernando, Ecclesiastical District of Pampanga East on October 14, 2022. Among those in attendance were 36 new ministers ordained

by the Executive Minister, and brethren from ecclesiastical districts and local congregations around the world that celebrated their milestone anniversaries.

One of the newly ordained ministers, Brother Nehemias Dungca, said, "When I was studying to be a minister, I was far from my family. What strengthened my resolve then was my promise to God that I will be a minister someday. To be a minister is my lifetime commitment to Him."

Brother Mark Ace Paor, another ordainee and was once assigned in a remote island in Marinduque, recounted, "There was a Church member in my care that when I had to visit, I had to trek mountain slopes and cross river tributaries just to get there. But such experience did not dampen my desire to be ordained one day. And now, I give thanks to God that He gave what I have been praying for."

Brethren from the local congregations celebrating their respective milestone anniversaries also have stories to share. Here are some of them:



In his 82 years of age, Brother Conrado Mendiola Sr., a deacon and finance officer, had overcome a lot of trials and persecutions as proof of his loyalty to the Lord God.

Brother Conrado still vividly remembers how challenging it was to be a member of the Church Of Christ and to propagate the words of God during the time of Brother Felix Y. Manalo, the Messenger of God in these last days.

"I remember when we were conducting an evangelical mission. People threw rocks at us that there was a point where I was hit on my legs and my aunt was hit on her head. Instead of being afraid, we went to the corner of the room and prayed fervently to our Lord God so the activity would still be fruitful and successful," he recalled.

As more turbulence in Brother Conrado's life came, from natural disasters like typhoons, earthquakes and the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, to his deteriorating health due to old age, the words of God taught by Brother Felix Manalo remain instilled in his heart and mind.

"I always remember what Brother Felix frequently told us: 'Believe what the Bible is saying because these are the words of God.' That is what made my faith strong. I witnessed the fulfillment

# "LET US PRAISE GOD FOREVER"

• San Fernando, Pampanga  
Written by Jomar Manaloto

of God's promises not only to the entire Church but also to each one of us."

Years may have passed, but Brother Conrado still remembers and shares with the younger generations of Church members and officers the same lessons he learned from the Messenger and are still being tirelessly taught by Brother Eduardo Manalo:

"Whenever life is difficult, set a devotional prayer to our Lord God. We should always attend our worship services and be faithful in fulfilling our duties. Let us praise God forever."

Brother Conrado adds, "And if we are being encouraged to hold duties as Church officers, we should wholeheartedly accept them because such are gifts from God and our divine election is our only wealth. By doing so, we are sure to please our Lord God and receive His blessings."

# TRUST THE LORD, AND DO GOOD THINGS

Tagakpan, Davao City  
Written by Felma Lubenario

As the Local Congregation of Tagakpan celebrates its 70th anniversary, Sister Beatriz Ico looks back on the 49 years and counting of her being the congregation's choir leader. One of the pioneering members in Tagakpan, she is now 72 years old. As a long-time Church member, she is no stranger to life's travails. Nonetheless, she never wavers in her conviction:

"We all go through various tests in life, and these trials vary in severity. But for whatever problem I face, I have only



Sister Beatriz Ico

one solution and that is to pray to God everyday. I learned from our Church leaders even then, that God will not give us a test we cannot pass," Sister Beatriz shared.

Her steadfast faith was even more edified when

## MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES

- 20 YEARS ♦ Iglesia Ni Cristo in BAHAMAS
- 15 YEARS ♦ Iglesia Ni Cristo in HAITI
- 5 YEARS ♦ Ecclesiastical District of NORTHERN AFRICA
- 106 YEARS ♦ DE CASTRO Metro Manila East
- 104 YEARS ♦ TINAJEROS Comanava
- 103 YEARS ♦ SAN FERNANDO Pampanga East
- 102 YEARS ♦ GUAGUA Pampanga West
- 95 YEARS ♦ BALINGCANAWAY Tarlac City, Tarlac
- MORONG Rizal East
- 90 YEARS ♦ HAGONoy Metro Manila East
- LIMAY Bataan
- ORION Bataan
- TERNATE Cavite
- 85 YEARS ♦ MATURANOC San Jose City, Nueva Ecija
- SAN RAFAEL Bulacan
- 80 YEARS ♦ AMACALAN Paniqui, Tarlac
- STA. MARIA Paniqui, Tarlac
- 75 YEARS ♦ MALIGAYA Tarlac City, Tarlac
- STO. TOMAS San Jose City, Nueva Ecija

she heard Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, the Church's Executive Minister, preach the words of God as her local congregation was among those connected to the livestreamed worship service on October 14, 2022. She fondly recollects Brother Eduardo Manalo's message during the sacred gathering:

"Trust God, and do what is good. This is also what I will always remind my family. Have faith in God and continue to fulfill what He commands."

Sister Beatriz remembered the time when her trust in God was put to test. In 2012, her husband was diagnosed with cancer. During that time, she witnessed how incredibly hard her husband's daily living had become as he had great difficulty in eating and speaking. She remembers even today how her heart ached seeing her beloved spouse wither and eventually pass away.

Throughout her husband's sickness, Sister Beatriz recalls, he never missed to attend a worship service. "While our family then was deep in weariness and pain, we all remained active members of the Church performing our Church duties," she shared.

For her, this test made her understand that she is never on her own, as God is always by her and her family's side. She expressed, "The Almighty Father did not forsake us. My children and I mourned. However, He guided us in times when we were weak."

Almost a decade has passed after their sad experience, but she continues reminding her children, who now have families of their own, to never fail in performing their obligations to God and to always put in their hearts and minds the teachings they receive in the Church.

"I always tell them, do not forget to pray to God, and never lose hope whatever we all encounter. We promise God to fulfill our Church duties and that is what we will all do no matter what happens. And when the burdens seem too heavy to bear, we can wait expectantly that God will always act for our sake."

# “TUNAY NA MIABUTI ANG DIYOS”

Isabela, Kabankalan City,  
Negros Occidental  
Sinulat ni April Ann Denaga

May hindi malilimutang pangyayari sa kaniyang buhay si Kapatid na Noelo Ciocon, pangulong diakono ng Lokal ng Isabela, na nagugunita niya kapag sumasapit ang anibersaryo ng kanilang lokal. "Agosto 29, 1998—nagkasakit ang nag-iisa naming anak at dinala sa ospital," pagsasalaysay niya. Ilang linggo na lamang at itatalaga na ang gusaling sambahan ng lokal nila noon. Bilang pangulong diakono, maraming gampanin ang nakatakda sa kaniya para sa napipintong pagsapit ng okasyong iyon.

"Kinabukasan, nagsimula na ang panata para sa pagtatalaga ng gusaling sambahan. Sa panahong iyon, ako ay litung-lito sa sitwasyon na nang ako ay may mahalagang gampanin ay nasa pagamutan ang aking anak. Ang naisip ko—ito ay pagsubok ng Diyos sa aking pananampalataya, kung ano ang aking dapat na ipagpapauna."

Itinuring ni Kapatid na Noelo na ang pangyayaring iyon sa kaniyang buhay ay isang pagsubok ng Diyos sa kaniya. Kaya, inilagak niya ang buong pagtitiwala sa Diyos, "Nagpasiya ako na mas ipagpauna ang makatupad ng aking tungkulin. Ipinaubaya ko sa Panginoong Diyos ang kalagayan ng aking anak."

Ang desisyong iyon ang kinikilala niyang dahilan kaya kinalinga siya ng Diyos. Gumaling sa sakit ang kaniyang anak at masiglang tumutupad ngayon ng tungkulin bilang mang-aawit sa lokal. "Dulot ng pagsubok na iyon," ani

Kapatid na Noelo, “lalo pang tumatag at tumibay ang aming pananampalataya at pagtitiwala sa Diyos.”

Sa 53 taon na pagiging kaanib ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo*, at nagsimula bilang Pangulong *KADIWA* ng lokal, si Kapatid na Noelo ay 30 taon nang pangulong diakono ng lokal, at ang kaniyang buong sambahayan ay mga maytungkulin din sa Iglesia. Ang hangarin ng kaniyang puso at ng kaniyang pamilya ay magkaroon sila ng sapat na magagamit araw-araw at, higit sa lahat, maitaguyod ang kanilang paglilingkod at pagtupad ng tungkulin.

Sabi ni Kapatid na Noelo, “Itinuro ng Kapatid na Eduardo Manalo na ang magagawa ng Panginoong Diyos ay hindi natin kayang mahulaan. Ang mabuting hangarin ng puso ng Kaniyang mga lingkod ay Kaniyang diringgin at nagkakaloob Siya ng higit pa sa ating hinihiling.” Kaya, sumasampalataya

siya na dahil sa kasiglahan ng kanilang sambahayan sa paglilingkod sa Diyos ay nagkaloob Siya ng malaking biyaya sa kanilang pamilya. “Ipinagkaloob pa Niya na makatapos at makapagtrabaho ang aking anak,” wika ni Kapatid na Noelo.

Kinikilala ni Kapatid na Noelo na ang lahat ng ginawa ng Diyos sa kaniya at sa kaniyang pamilya ay bunga ng pagtitiwala niya sa Diyos. Pahayag niya, “Tunay na mabuti ang Diyos. Ang magtiwala sa Kaniyang magagawa sa pamamagitan ng pagpapanata ay napakahalaga sapagkat sa pamamagitan nito, diringgin Niya tayo.” Ang isa sa mga mensahe sa mga pagsamba na tumatak sa kaniyang isipan ay ang lalong pagpapakasigla sa pagtupad ng tungkulin at lalong panghahawak at pagtitiwala sa Panginoong Diyos.

Sa kabila ng lalong bumibigat na pagdadala ng buhay ay taglay pa rin ni Kapatid na Noelo ang matibay na pananalig at pagtitiwala sa Diyos. Pangako rin niya, “Bilang pangulong diakono, lalo akong magpapasakop sa Ama at sa Pamamahala sa anumang tagubilin at tuntunin sa pangunguna sa aming lokal.”



Kapatid na Noelo Ciocon at ang kaniyang pamilya

70  
YEARS

**BAGONG SICAT**  
Palayan City, Nueva Ecija

**BUTTONG**  
Laoag City, Ilocos Norte

**DOLORES**  
Abra

**FLORIDA**  
Agusan del Norte

**ISABELA**  
Kabankalan City, Negros Occidental

**MANGUIAO**  
Carcar City, Cebu

**OTAVI**  
Sorsogon

**PEQUEÑO**  
Isabela South

**SAN MIGUEL**  
Alaminos City, Pangasinan

**TAGAKPAN**  
Davao City

65  
YEARS

**CABAYO**  
Laoag City, Ilocos Norte

**GATTARAN**  
Cagayan East

**PALACAPAC**  
Ilocos Sur

**SABANG**  
Aurora

60  
YEARS

**CALAWAG**  
San Jose, Mindoro Occidental

**CALIAN**  
Zamboanga del Sur

**LINIS**  
Rizal East

**SAN FELIPE**  
Camarines Norte

55  
YEARS

**BAHAO**  
Naga City, Camarines Sur

**SAN FRANCISCO SUR**  
Antique



# 36 NEW MINISTERS

- |                            |                                |                                 |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Adalla, Israel IV L.    | 13. Castillo, Jonald C.        | 25. Mariñas, Francis Bernabe C. |
| 2. Adalla, Raoul Jr. Y.    | 14. Ceballo, Danilo Jr. P.     | 26. Marquez, Roi Jacob D.       |
| 3. Alibuyog, Jonathan H.   | 15. Chico, Kris Ian D.         | 27. Martinez, Alejandro III L.  |
| 4. Andres, Aldrin D.       | 16. Dungca, Nehemias D.        | 28. Paor, Marc Ace M.           |
| 5. Arceo, Biemer M.        | 17. Fernandez, Mark D.         | 29. Ramirez, Raul Jr. P.        |
| 6. Bagnes, Arthur D.       | 18. Gutierrez, Oley Ven D.     | 30. Sagun, Jefferson L.         |
| 7. Bernardo, John Emil B.  | 19. Ibañez, Ianfriend A.       | 31. Soriano, Leo A.             |
| 8. Bunye, Jerome Emor B.   | 20. Igos, Peter John C.        | 32. Sumile, Floriezer Admon A.  |
| 9. Cachero, Denver T.      | 21. Jimenez, Joeren Q.         | 33. Tapado, Ariel R.            |
| 10. Caoile, Kevin Lloyd L. | 22. Laplana, Godfrey C.        | 34. Tiad, Mark Patrick C.       |
| 11. Casiano, Sonny Jake G. | 23. Laza, Charles Nathaniel M. | 35. Unajan, Jonathan B.         |
| 12. Casiraya, Russel D.    | 24. Malinis, Joeren O.         | 36. Vasquez, Emerson S.         |

## ‘HINDI IPAGKAKAIT NGDIYOS ANG ATING KAILANGAN’

Hagonoy, Taguig City  
Sinulat ni Gerlie Barete

**H**indi na bagong bagay sa mga hinirang ng Panginoong Diyos ang makaranas ng iba’t ibang pagsubok—ito ang paninindigan ni Kapatid na Neftali Cardozo o mas kilala bilang Ka Tali, pangulong diakono ng Lokal ng Hagonoy, bagaman hindi naging pangkaraniwan ang mga dumating na pagsubok sa buhay niya.

“Noong malapit nang ipanganak ang aming panganay, nasuri na ang batang nasa sinapupunan ng aking asawa ay walang buhay. Nanganib din ang buhay ng aking kabiyaq dahil sa kalagayan ng bata. Nang pagkakataong isinugod sa ospital ang aking asawa, ako ay nasa pagtupad sa pagsamba.” Nang naiparating na sa kaniya noon ang kalagayan ng kaniyang mag-ina, sinikap ni Kapatid na Neftali na panatilihing

nakatalaga ang kaniyang sari-li sa isinasagawang pagtupad at taimtim na ipinaubaya sa Panginoong Diyos ang kalagayan ng kaniyang asawa.

Nang muling suriin ang kalagayan ng kanilang anak ay napatunayang buhay pa ito—taliwas sa naging resulta ng unang pagsusuri sa bata. At nang makarating si Kapatid na Neftali sa ospital ay maayos na ang kalagayan ng kaniyang mag-ina. “Nagpapasalamat ako sa Ama sapagkat maayos na naisilang ang aking anak at hindi naapektuhan ang aking asawa. Sila ay naligtas sa panganib.”

Batid ni Kapatid na Neftali na ang pangyayaring ito ay isang pagsubok lamang sa kaniya at itinuturing niyang pag-ibig ng Panginoong Diyos.

“Lalong pinatatag ng karanasang iyon ang aking pag-asa na kapag ang lahat ng bagay ay itiniwala natin sa Diyos, hindi Niya ipagkakait na ibigay ang ating pangangailangan,” ayon pa sa kaniya.



Kapatid na Neftali Cardozo

Pinangungunahan ni Ka Tali ang kaniyang buong sambahayan sa masiglang paglilingkod sa Diyos. Lumaki ang lahat ng kaniyang mga anak na masiglang tumutupad ng tungkulin. Walang anumang bagay ang hinayaan niyang humadlang sa kanilang paglilingkod, kahit pa ang kadalamhatian.

Palibhasa’y prioridad ni Kapatid na Neftali ang pagtupad, banggit niya: “Bago pa nagkaroon ng pandemya ng Covid-19, ang aking maybahay ay namayapa na. Masaklap mang maituturing subalit nagpatuloy pa rin ako sa pagtupad ng aking tungkulin at pagdalo sa mga aktibidad at gawain.”

Puspos na ng mga karanasan si Ka Tali na may 74 na taong gulang na. Palaging payo niya sa kaniyang pagdadalaw sa mga kapatid, “Natutuhan natin sa Pamamahala na huwag tayong mawawalan ng pag-asa bagkus lalo tayong magtalaga at magtiwala sa Diyos sa panahon ng mga pagsubok. Sa mga karamdaman, ipinagkakaloob ng Ama ang kagalingan, sa mga paglalakbay, ipinagkakaloob Niya ang proteksyon. Dapat ay makita lamang sa bawat isa ang matapat na paglilingkod sa Kaniya.”

With research assistance from Mandy Nepomuceno

Layout Artists: Ramfel Serreno, Jerald Azares, and Carmie Cleofas  
Contributing Photographers: Errol-Kyle Cabrera and Lovel Oriel Quintino

50  
YEARS

CAMAAL  
Isabela West

DELANO  
Los Angeles County

GATIAWIN  
Pampanga East

LLORENTE  
Eastern Samar

MAHARLIKA  
Bulacan East

MALABOG  
Davao City

MANGGAHAN  
Metro Manila East

PROJECT 4  
Quezon City

STA. RITA  
Leyte East

40  
YEARS

WELLINGTON  
Edmonton, Canada

30  
YEARS

DOWNTOWN  
Calgary, Canada

20  
YEARS

ROMA SUD  
Italy South

15  
YEARS

OAK HARBOR  
Washington State

PETIT GOAVE  
Caribbean

10  
YEARS

HERTFORDSHIRE  
United Kingdom

MERRILANDS  
Australia West

SOUTHAMPTON  
United Kingdom

5  
YEARS

BOWEN GWS  
Australia East

SAVANNAH, GA  
Virginia



## On the importance of worshiping God in the face of adversities

By SIEGFRED T. GOLLAYAN

**T**HE STRENGTH OR WEAKNESS of one's faith in God is revealed when it is subjected to different kinds of tests or trials.

There are two possible but opposite outcomes of trials of faith: The tests can cause discouragement, hopelessness, and demission from the service of the Lord; or, and this is what true servants of God strive for,

the trials can result in stronger faith and hope in the Lord God, which is necessary for attaining His promises.

One of our primary duties is worshiping God. But in upholding our services to Him, we cannot avoid adversities and sufferings. It is even more true during our times now that the wickedness, hardship, turmoil, and life-threatening diseases

are worsening and becoming more widespread. Nevertheless, such trials should not cause us to neglect but instead be all the more devoted to worshiping the Lord for, among others, the strengthening of our faith.

### **Even in trying times**

All the unfortunate things that are happening in the world today cause



serious problems to people's lives and livelihood. Because we are still here on earth, there are times when we, God's chosen people, also experience them. However, they should not deter us from serving God and from upholding our membership in the Church Of Christ. Instead, it is during such times when we should all the more be diligent in worshipping Him:

"I worship at your holy temple and praise you for your love and your faithfulness. You were true to your word and made yourself more famous than ever before. When I asked for your help, you answered my prayer and gave me courage. ... I am surrounded by trouble, but you protect me against my angry enemies. With your own powerful arm you keep me safe." (Ps. 138:2-3, 7 Contemporary English Version)

When is the best time to ask God our needs? King David stated, "When I asked for your help, you answered my prayer and gave me courage." This instance, when King David prayed to God and immediately received the answer to his prayer, was when he worshiped God.

Hence, even in these trying times, we, members of the Church Of Christ, should continue worshipping God, for it is the promise that when we make our requests known to Him during such occasions, He will surely listen to us.

### **Making a decisive decision to worship**

We must never allow ourselves to be hindered by anyone or any situation from our services to God. If we allow ourselves to be hindered,

“  
**Every day I will  
praise you and extol  
your name for ever  
and ever.**  
”

Psalms 145:2  
New International Version

then our right to receive salvation on Judgment Day will surely be ruined. So, how should we face the trials that we encounter in our life? The apostles enlightened us, thus:

"So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

"For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay." (I Pet. 1:6-7, 4 New Living Translation)

Apostle Peter said, "Be truly glad ... even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while." Furthermore, we should face

the trials with gladness, for God's purpose in subjecting His chosen servants to tests or trials is honorable—"These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure." If we remain firm in our faith despite the severe tests, the apostle said that "It will bring [us] much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world." We will be certain of receiving "a priceless inheritance" that is "kept in heaven" or salvation on Judgment Day.

Hence, we should be dedicated to worshipping God. Let us "make a decisive dedication of [our] bodies ... as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God." That, according to Apostle Paul, is our "reasonable [and] intelligent service *and* spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1 Amplified Bible).

Now that the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ or Judgment Day is very near, we must never neglect attending our worship services. The apostles instructed, thus:

"Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord's coming is getting closer." (Heb. 10:25 CEV)

The apostles were emphatic in telling us that we must not get out of the "habit of meeting for worship." Thus, what many brethren in the Church Of Christ are doing is right—they do not allow anything or anyone to hinder them from attending the worship service. They prioritize fulfilling such sacred duty over their

work, or school, or anything that they do. Even if there are hindrances, bad weather, or they have to make distant travels, they do not miss the worship service.

### **What the dedicated can hope for**

When we dedicate ourselves to worshipping God, we can hope for His blessings. The Bible says:

“How blessed are the people who worship you! O LORD, they experience your favor. They rejoice in your name all day long, and are vindicated by your justice. For you give them splendor and strength. By your favor we are victorious.” (Ps. 89:15–17 New English Translation)

Happy or blessed are those who worship God because they will “experience [His] favor.” They are “vindicated by [God’s] justice.” Is it not a great blessing that we be forgiven of our sins? And aside from that, we will be given splendor and strength. The Bible also assures the dedicated worshiper, thus:

“Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. ... You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.” (Ps. 145:2, 16–20 New International Version)

Let us firmly believe in these promises of God because He does not lie. Because He is the All-powerful God and is the Creator and owner of all things, He is more than able to grant all our petitions. And the most opportune time to say our prayers to Him is during our worship services. Each time we pray to God, especially during worship services, He does not refuse us His help. He answers our entreaties and provides our needs. 🙏

# Humble my heart

Humble my heart, dearest God—  
Let Your words dwell in my heart and mind,  
Help me renew my life that I may be righteous,  
now and always before Your most holy sight.

Humble my heart, for You have blessed me so much—  
Not just me but also those who are close to my heart;  
Countless times have You protected and saved us,  
And so, under Your loving care we stand unharmed.

Humble my heart, so I may be Your perfect servant—  
never doubting Your power and forever grateful  
For all the love You have given to me;  
Untainted by sins and the corruption of this world.

Humble my heart, Almighty Father, for I want to be  
A guiding light for people to see the way back to You,  
that we might all be together in worshipping You,  
inside the only true Church Of Christ.

Dear Father, humble my heart, I beg—  
Help me follow Your words always, no matter what  
So that I can spend my life as You expect me to,  
For me to be worthy of the crown of life.

FRANCIS HARVEY  
FLORIDA, USA

# The Lord God is merciful to His people

By MELENCIO G. MARCOS JR.

**I**N THIS DAY and age, people are beset by different problems in all aspects of their life—from serious family and personal problems to simple hassles of daily living. As a result, many suffer from considerable amount of stress that takes a toll on their mental health.

The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed further to the many stressors in life from which many people suffer. In a study conducted by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the pandemic has resulted in a significant increase in cases of depression in many countries, with numbers even doubling in some.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are approximately 280 million people suffering from depression, which can result in poor functioning at work, school, or even in day-to-day activities. When left untreated, depression may lead to serious consequences.

## **A perilous time of great stress**

As members of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ), we, too, are exposed to the many stressors in life. Consequently, we may also feel the same emotions and share the same sentiments as other people.

However, we must keep in mind that as true Christians we have an advantage over others when faced with the many troubles in life. While other people may be confused on how they should react to adverse conditions in life, we, on the other hand, are guided by God's wisdom written in the Bible. Holding on to God's words brings us the confident trust that we will not be lost in the midst of life's uncertainties.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has forewarned that His disciples will experience tribulation, trials, distress, and frustrations in this world (John 16:33 Amplified Bible). Moreover, Apostle Paul wrote "that in the last days will come (set in) perilous times of great stress *and* trouble [hard to deal with and hard to bear]" (II Tim. 3:1 AMP).

The last days referred to by Apostle Paul are the days when the end of the world or the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ is near. This period of time, also referred to as the ends of the earth, would commence with a war that, according to Christ, would be rumored or news about it would be heard the world over (Matt. 24:3, 6–8). The fulfillment of this is the First World War, which broke out on July 27, 1914. Thus, we

live in what Apostle Paul called "the last days."

Indeed, our time is a perilous era of great stress and trouble that are hard to bear. But since we have already been forewarned about these things, we have the advantage of not being caught by surprise when they come. We have been prepared to face them. It is only proper that we learn how to cope with worries and stress.

Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches that we should not be overwhelmed by them (Mark 4:18–19 The Message). In that way, we prove ourselves to be among God's true servants, who have great endurance in the face of hardships and persecutions, and do not lose courage in time of stress and calamity (II Cor. 6:4, 6 The Passion Translation).

## **Learn to trust God**

As true Christians, we must realize and focus on the good things that spring from our difficult experiences, instead of giving up. In II Corinthians 1:8–9, Apostle Paul described how hard things were for him and the other Christians with him at one time: "It was so bad we didn't think we were going to make it. We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us" (MSG).

“

**The LORD hears good people when they [They] cry out to him, and he saves them from all their troubles [distress]. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted, and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed.**

”

Psalms 34:17–18 Expanded Bible

However, despite the great stress they felt, the apostle said, “As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened” because in such dire situation, instead of trusting in their own strength, they learned “to trust God totally ... since he’s the God who raises the dead.”

We must always remember that our God is not only the Almighty God but also a Father to us. As such, He will certainly rescue us, His children, “as many times as we need rescuing” (II Cor. 1:10 MSG). What we should do when we are stressed out because of our sorrows is to call on our Lord God. He promised that He will hear our voice especially when we say our prayers in His temple or the house of worship (II Sam. 22:7).

Apostle Peter taught the true Christians to entrust all their worries and concerns to God:

“Casting all your cares [all your anxieties, all your worries, and all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares about you [with deepest affection, and watches over you very carefully].” (I Pet. 5:7 Amplified Bible 2015)

God’s Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, can also do great things for His disciples, as the Apostle Paul had experienced:

“I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens *and* empowers me [to fulfill His purpose—I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace].” (Phil. 4:13 AMP2015)

Therefore, no one among us should feel or think that we are alone when facing our battles in life. We should never think that no one understands our plight or no one cares about how we feel. Both our Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ guarantee that They care for us. That is more than enough reason for us not to be overcome by stress and depression.

### **The Lord hears our prayers**

As human beings, we cannot ignore how we feel and our emotions affect our well-being. There are times when, because of our failures and frustrations, our heart is gripped by sorrow. No matter how much we try to be strong, there are instances when we feel that the remaining strength in us might not be able to sustain us in our journey. If such situation confronts us, we should do what the Bible teaches:

“The LORD hears good people when they [They] cry out to him, and he saves them from all their troubles [distress]. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted, and he saves those whose spirits have been crushed. People who do what is right may [are righteous] have many problems [afflictions], but the LORD will solve them [saves them from them] all.” (Ps. 34:17–19 Expanded Bible)

When our spirits are crushed and we are broken-hearted, we should cry out to God. He will provide the solutions to our problems and save us from our afflictions since we cannot make it on our own. So, if we want to overcome the troubles and distresses that come to our life, we should always involve God in everything we do. For such reason, the Church Administration never ceases in reminding us to always be prayerful and to conduct personal and household devotional prayers to call on God and bring to Him our pleadings.

God is merciful. He will relieve us of our worries and distresses. He will save us from all our troubles. He will protect us and keep us from defeat. Just as parents do not count the times they help their children, the Lord God Who is our Father will be there for us as many times as we need Him to be. 🙏

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# Treasure what is precious to God and to Christ

By ARNEL M. ARMENIA

**M**ANY OPENLY CALL themselves Christians yet reject what members of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) have always been sharing: membership in the Church Of Christ is necessary for salvation. For such people, being a Christian is not dependent on membership in any particular religion or denomination but on accepting and believing in Jesus. The only thing precious to them is having a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

What they do not know is that God and His Son Jesus Christ Themselves consider the true Church Of Christ to be precious.

## **Precious to God**

There is no doubt that God Himself considers the true Church important. This is reflected in what one of His messengers, the Apostle Paul, taught:

“In the church God has put all in place: in the first place apostles, in the second place prophets, and in the third place teachers; then those who perform miracles, followed by those who are given the power to heal or to help others or to direct them or to speak in strange tongues.” (I Cor. 12:28 Good News Bible)

Take note that it is God Himself Who places people in the Church. He placed not only the apostles but His other servants as well. So, among the myriad churches that have sprung around the world, there is one Church that is important to God—the Church where He places His servants. To help people identify which Church this is, the Bible enlightens us, thus:

“God is to be trusted, the God who called you to have fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.” (I Cor. 1:9 GNB)

The one Church that is precious to God is where we can find those whom He called to have fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ. This is none other than the “one body” or Church, the head of which is Christ, the Son of God (Col. 3:15; 1:18; Eph. 2:15). Since it is the body of Christ, it is called by the apostles the “church of Christ” (Acts 20:28 Lamsa Translation).

Therefore, the one Church that is precious to God is the Church Of Christ or the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*. It is in this Church that the Father places those whom He called to be in fellowship with His Son.

## **Precious to Christ**

We are certain that as the Church Of Christ is precious to God, it is also precious to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is one of the proofs:

“  
**How much more,  
then, will the blood of  
Christ, who through  
the eternal Spirit  
offered himself  
unblemished to God,  
cleanse our  
consciences from  
acts that lead  
to death, so that  
we may serve  
the living God!**  
”

Revelation 22:12  
Common English Bible

“Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood.” (Acts 20:28 Lamsa)

Christ purchased or redeemed the Church Of Christ with His blood. Among the many churches, this Church alone is precious to the Lord Jesus Christ. Were it not so, He would not have laid down His life for it. He would have also redeemed other churches. But He did not. He redeemed but one Church—the Church Of Christ.

Christ’s redemption of His Church sets it apart from all other churches. This is because, those who have been redeemed with the blood

of Christ have received the right and privilege to serve the living God:

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Heb. 9:14 New International Version)

Without benefiting from Christ’s redemptive act, man cannot serve God worthily. This is so because man sins and has come under God’s judgment. Man will pay with death the sins that he has committed (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:14; Isa. 59:2). What can cleanse man from sins or from “acts that lead to death” is none other than the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ:

“And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.” (Heb. 9:22 NKJV)

Blessed, then, are the members of the Church Of Christ. Having been redeemed with Christ’s blood, they have been forgiven of their sins and can now worship God, which is man’s purpose of existence (Eccles. 12:13). The benefit that comes along with being among those redeemed does not end there. Apostle Paul said, thus:

“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave his life for it. He did this to dedicate the church to God by his word, after making it clean by washing it in water, in order to present the church to himself in all its beauty—pure and faultless, without spot or wrinkle or any other imperfection. Men ought to love their wives just as they love their

own bodies. A man who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hates his own body. Instead, he feeds it and takes care of it, just as Christ does the church.” (Eph. 5:25–29 GNB)

The testimony of the apostle about the Church is crystal-clear: “Christ loved the church and gave his life for it.” Being the beneficiary of Christ’s death, it is the Church Of Christ—and not any other church—that the Savior will present to God.

These truths prove that the Church Of Christ is important for man’s salvation. In this Church, God places those whom He called to serve Him. Christ gave His life for this Church and so, its members have been forgiven of their sins and now have the right to serve the living God and to be with Him and His Son in the Holy City (Rev. 21:1–4).

### **Treasure it as well**

One should not stop with simply learning the truth about how important the true Church is. One should become its member and, thus, a branch of Christ, Who is the vine (John 15:1). He declares:

“Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.” (John 15:4 GNB)

The importance of becoming a branch of Christ or becoming a member of the Church Of Christ (Col. 1:18) cannot be overstated. In fact, Christ is calling upon those who already are His branches to “remain” in Him. Hence,

not only does man need to be united with Christ by becoming His branch or a member of His body, but must also remain as such. Failure to remain will mean failure to bear fruit. The fruits which those who are separate from Christ cannot bear are the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:11).

Afflictions may come but these should not separate one from his membership in the Church Of Christ. Instead, he should "rejoice in [his] sufferings" for overcoming such sufferings will make him "worthy of the kingdom of God" (Col. 1:24; II Thess. 1:5-7). Thus, he should heed the apostles' advice, thus:

"So then, my dear brothers, stand firm and steady. Keep busy always in your work for the Lord, since you know that nothing you do in the Lord's service is ever useless." (I Cor. 15:58 GNB)

It is no wonder then why members of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* never back down from their services to God. Led by Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, the Executive Minister, they spend their lives proving to God and His Son Jesus Christ that they hold their divine election or their membership in the Church in high esteem. They do this out of faith, knowing that "nothing [they] do in the Lord's service is ever useless," for the guarantee stands, thus:

"This calls for endurance on the part of God's people, those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Happy are those who from now on

die in the service of the Lord!' 'Yes indeed!' answers the Spirit. 'They will enjoy rest from their hard work, because the results of their service go with them'." (Rev. 14:12-13 GNB)

Enlightened by these truths, millions the world over have chosen

to treasure what is precious to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. They did not simply accept the truth revealed to them—they acted on it by joining and remaining in the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*. The Father and His Son are waiting for you to do the same. ☺

## Random notes

### **Rosary is rooted in pagan practices**

"The Buddhists of the Far East, the Brahmans of India, the Lamas of Tibet, the old pagans of Rome, and the people of Ephesus in their worship of Diana (Acts 19:28), all existing before the Roman Catholic Church came into existence, constantly used beads in reciting their many prayers." (*Roman Catholicism in the Light of the Scripture*. By Dreyer, F.C.H. and E. Weller, n.p: Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1960, p. 137)

"... The rosary, however, is no invention of the Papacy. It is of the highest antiquity, and almost universally found among Pagan nations. The rosary was used as a sacred instrument among the ancient Mexicans." (*The Two Babylons: Or, The Papal Worship Proved to be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife*. By Hislop, Rev. Alexander. U.S.A.: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1950. p. 187)

# Features

## INCinema, EVM Awards 2022 inspire couples, families

By NOEL V. DELIGERO JR.

ON OCTOBER 31, 2022, the Excellence in Visual Media (EVM) Awards 2022 held at the Manila Hotel in Manila, Philippines and streamed live via YouTube culminated this year's INCinema competition. It was participated in by 177 ecclesiastical districts worldwide.

With the theme "The Time of the Fulfillment of Our Redemption is Near," every film entry this year was even made more special as it focused on the life of married couples to help strengthen families in the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ). This is also in line with the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of *Buklod*, the organization for married members.

Indeed, INCinema has continued to successfully carry out its primary objective a decade after it was launched by Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, the Executive Minister, which is to produce short but worthwhile films that promote true Christian values to help edify the brethren. It is also a way to propagate the gospel to more people in different parts of the world.

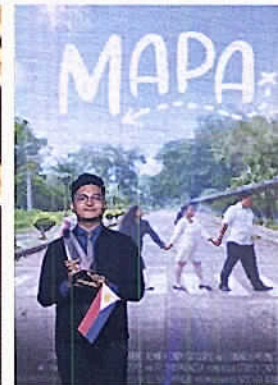
The INCinema serves as an avenue in exemplifying the conviction of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* members and also opens doors of opportunities for the brethren who pool their efforts in making the film entries of their respective districts. It helps them cultivate their skills in the field of filmmaking.

The event commenced with the reading of the letter from the Executive Minister, Brother

Eduardo V. Manalo, by Brother Joel V. San Pedro, a minister of the gospel. In his message, Brother Eduardo Manalo expressed his heartfelt gratitude to God for His abiding guidance and help to the brethren in producing the short films. The Executive Minister also commended the brethren for their selfless efforts and for remaining active in the other activities of the Church. He encouraged them to create more remarkable movies that will reinforce the genuine Christian culture and impart valuable lessons to the parents and to the children as well for the spiritual growth of every family member in the Church.

Brother Allan Agapay, director of the Maynila Ecclesiastical District entry, "Investment," which won "Best Film," enthused: "I am very thankful to our Lord God for giving

us the skills and talents in making films. Thus, it is just right to give back all the glory to Him. Also, I am thankful to our Executive Minister, Brother Eduardo Manalo, for giving us inspiration in producing short films. In fact, the lesson the viewers can learn from our film was inspired by one of the Executive Minister's preachings in the worship services that, in these difficult times, we ought to always choose what is good and right in the eyes of God. This is the real and best spiritual investment



PHOTOS BY JAIMAR DAN OROSA



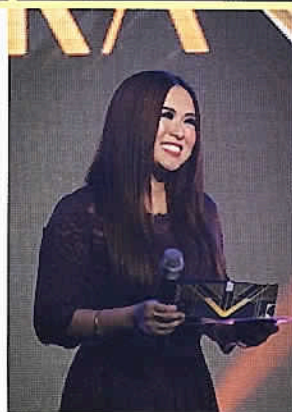


## LIST OF AWARDEES

- BEST FILM: INVESTMENT, *Maynila*
- BEST DIRECTOR: Allan Agapay, INVESTMENT, *Maynila*
- BEST SCREENPLAY: Abegail Venturanza, BEYOND TIME AND SPACE, *Rizal*
- BEST IN PROMOTING CHRISTIAN VALUES: Uye Wakhumbula, *Southern Africa*
- BEST ACTOR: Richard Alvero, OFFROAD, *Qatar*
- BEST ACTRESS: Chris Antonette Pugay, SANDALAN, *South Korea*
- BEST CHILD PERFORMER: Bryj Ivan Cabral, Stan International , *Tarlac City, Tarlac*
- BEST EDITING: Merwin Serdenia, BEYOND TIME AND SPACE, *Rizal*
- BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN: Sharmaine Colon, INVESTMENT, *Maynila*
- BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY: Allan Agapay, INVESTMENT, *Maynila*
- BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR: Ramil Enolva, OFF ROAD, *Qatar*
- BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS: Princess Cubelo, SANDALAN, *South Korea*
- BEST SOUND DESIGN: Genesis Cruz, PRIORITY MAIL, *Virginia*
- BEST MUSICAL SCORE: Ron Martin Menorca, NO MATTER WHAT, *Washington, D.C.*
- BEST ORIGINAL THEME SONG: Mapa, Valencia City, *Bukidnon*
- BEST MAKE-UP AND COSTUME DESIGN: Camille Encabo, INVESTMENT, *Maynila*
- BEST POSTER: Kore, Kara Nagoya, *Japan*
- BEST FILM TRAILER: TAHANANG WALANG BUBONG, *Lingayen, Pangasinan*
- BEST BEHIND THE SCENES: Stan International *Tarlac City, Tarlac*
- PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD: Hiraya, *Isabela East*

that gives peace to our hearts and opens the doors of graces from God.”

Through the video presentation before the event concluded, district supervising ministers from different ecclesiastical districts around the world expressed their heartwarming greetings to Brother Eduardo Manalo, as his birthday falls on that same day. 🙏



## Ang kanlungan ng mga lingkod ng Diyos

**S**A PANAHOON ng kagipitan at mga panganib ay naghahanap ang mga tao ng mapagkakanlungan. Ang pangangailangang ito ay lalo nilang nadarama kapag nalalagay sa alanganin ang kanilang buhay dahil sa mga salot, kahirapan, karahasan, at kaguluhang nangyayari sa kanilang paligid. Tumatakbo sila patungo sa mga inaakala nilang makapagsasanggalang at makapagliligtas sa kanila. Karaniwan na ang marurunong, mayayaman, at mga may kapangyarihan ang kanilang inaasahan na magkakaloob ng tulong at kanlungan na kanilang kailangan.

Tulad ng ating kapuwa-tao, tayong mga kaanib ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo* ay hantad din sa mabibigat at mapapanganib na pangyayari ngayon. Nais din nating maging ligtas sa gitna ng mga kaguluhan. Kaya, buong pagsisikap din tayong naghahanap ng mapanganganlungan. At ang pinili nating kanlungan ay ang Panginoong Diyos: “Ang Diyos ay ating kanlungan at kalakasan, isang handang saklolo sa kabagabagan” (Awit 46:1 Ang Bagong Ang Biblia).

Itong ating paninindigan sapagkat nananalig tayo na ang Panginoong Diyos, na tumawag sa atin upang maging kaanib sa tunay na Iglesia, ang Siyang mag-iingat, aalalay, at tutulong sa atin. Ang mga nauna sa atin na naging kaanib ng Iglesia, lalo na

noong nagpapasimula pa lamang ito sa Pilipinas, ay dumaan din sa mahihirap na sitwasyon, na pinabigat pa ng mga pag-uusig at pagbabanta ng mga kaibayo natin sa pananampalataya. Gayunman, hindi sila nawalan ng pag-asa.

Tiniis nila ang naranasan nilang kahirapan sa panahon ng Ikalawang Digmaang Pandaigdig. Hindi sila pumayag na mahadlangan sila ng matitinding kaguluhan at karahasan sa pagtataguyod ng kanilang mga paglilingkod at pagsamba sa Diyos. Hindi natinag ang kanilang pananalig sa Diyos. Sa Kaniya sila nanganlong, at nadama naman nila ang Kaniyang pagkalinga’t pagkukupkop. Dahil dito ay nalampasan nila ang lahat ng pagsubok at ang Iglesia ay nakapagpatuloy. Ngayon, ang Iglesia ay lalong malaki at malaganap na. Kaya, hanggang ngayon ay nananatiling ang Panginoong Diyos ang ating kanlungan. Hindi tayo nag-aalinlangan sa pahayag ng Biblia na: “Lalong mabuti ang manganlong sa Panginoon Kay sa maglagak ng tiwala sa tao. Lalong mabuti ang manganlong sa Panginoon Kay sa maglagak ng tiwala sa mga pangulo” (Awit 118:8–9).

Bagaman ang tao, lalo na ang nasa kapangyarihan at may malaking kayamanan, ay may kakayahan ding makatulong sa kaniyang kapuwa, subalit may limitasyon ang kaniyang magagawa. Hindi siya tulad ng Diyos na Makapangyarihan sa lahat at walang imposible

sa Panginoon. Kaya ang pananalig ng Kaniyang mga lingkod ay lalong mabuti ang manganlong sa Diyos kaysa magtiwala sa tao.

Inihahayag ng mga taong hinirang at ibinukod ng Diyos ang panganganlong sa Kaniya sa pamamagitan ng pagtawag sa Kaniya (Awit 118:5-6 Magandang Balita Biblia). Kaya ang pananalangin ay bahagi na ng kanilang buhay araw-araw. At ang katunayang tinatanggap ng Diyos ang panganganlong nila sa Kaniya ay sinasagot at inililigtas Niya sila. Kaya, napapawi ang kanilang takot at nakadarama sila ng kapanatagan sa kanilang puso dahil natatamasa nila ang pakikisama ng Panginoon.

Ang mga nanganganlong sa Diyos ay hindi nanghahawak sa sarili nilang kaunawaan at kakayahan. Alam nila na bilang tao ay may hangganan ang kanilang nalalaman at magagawa. Sa halip, lubos silang nagtiwala sa Diyos at kumikilala sa Kaniya sa lahat ng kanilang lakad (Kaw. 3:5-6, 1, 4). Pinatutunayan nila ito sa pamamagitan ng laging pagsunod sa lahat ng ipinag-uutos Niya sa kanila (I Juan 2:3 New Pilipino Version).

Kung gayon, ang panganganlong sa Diyos ay hindi lamang napatutunayan sa pamamagitan ng pagtawag sa Kaniya, kundi lalo na sa pagsunod sa Kaniyang mga utos. Ang gumagawa ng gayon ang tiyak na makasusumpong ng Kaniyang paglingap. Sa kabilang dako, hindi ito mangyayari sa sinumang sumusuway sa Diyos sapagkat, ayon sa I Juan 2:4, ang gayon ay “sinungaling” at “wala sa kanya ang katotohanan” (NPV). At kahit tumawag pa siya sa Diyos ay hindi siya pakikinggan (Kaw. 28:9 MB). Bagkus, ipadadala sa kaniya ng Diyos ang mga bagay na kaniyang kinatatakutan (Isa. 66:4 NPV).

Sadyang napakahalaga na ang mga nasa bayang hinirang ng Diyos ay maging mapanalanginin at masunurin upang makapanganlong sila sa Kaniya at makatiyak na diringgin Niya sa kanilang pagtawag, lalo na sa panahon ng kahirapan at kagipitan.

Sumasampalataya tayong mga kaanib ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo* na tayo ang mga hinirang ng Diyos at

pinagkalooban Niya ng kahalalan sa pamamagitan ng Kaniyang Anak. Ganito ang patotoo ng Panginoong Jesucristo mismo tungkol sa mga hinirang:

“Ako’y hindi ninyo hinirang, nguni’t kayo’y hinirang ko, at aking kayong inihalal, upang kayo’y magsiyaon at magsipagbunga, at *upang* manatili ang inyong bunga: upang ang anomang inyong hingin sa Ama sa aking pangalan, ay maibigay niya sa inyo.

“Ako ang puno ng ubas, kayo ang mga sanga: Ang nananatili sa akin, at ako’y sa kaniya, ay siyang nagbubunga ng marami: sapagka’t kung kayo’y hiwalay sa akin ay wala kayong magagawa.” (Juan 15:16, 5)

Ang mga hinirang sa panahong Cristiano ay nakaugnay kay Cristo. Ang kaugnayang iyon, ayon sa paglalarawan ni Cristo, ay katulad ng pagkakakabit ng sanga sa puno. Ang katumbas ng sinabi Niyang ito ay itinuro ng Kaniyang mga apostol sa I Corinto 12:27: “Kayo nga ang katawan ni Cristo, at bawa’t isa’y samasamang mga sangkap niya.” Samakatuwid, sa Iglesia na katawan ni Cristo (Col. 1:18) naging sangkap o miyembro ang mga hinirang at inihalal. Ang pangalan ng Iglesiang kinabibilangan ng mga hinirang ay ang *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Roma 16:16).

Dahil sa kahalalang natamo natin mula sa Diyos ay may pagkakatiwala tayong mga kaanib ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo* sa ating mga pananalangin at panganganlong sa Kaniya. Ipagkakaloob Niya ang mga kahilingan natin at ipagsasanggalang at ililigtas Niya tayo sa mga kapahamakan.

Makaaasa rin tayo na “buhat sa kayamanan niyang hindi mauubos, ibibigay niya ang lahat ng [ating] kailangan sa pamamagitan ni Cristo Jesus” (Filip. 4:6, 19 MB). Kaya, anuman ang ating kabalisan ay sa Diyos natin inilalagak sapagkat, ang sabi sa I Pedro 5:7 (NPV) ay ipagmamalasakit Niya tayo. 🙏

**Bienvenido A. Santiago Jr.**  
**Associate Editor**

# Ingatan ang pananampalataya ngayong malapit na ang wakas

NI GERSON S. NONATO

**S**ANDALING PANAHON NA lamang, mapapawi na ang lahat ng ating tiisin, kadalamhatian, kalungkutan, suliranin, at mga pagsubok sa buhay sapagkat tatamuhin natin ang pangakong kaligtasan, ang buhay na walang hanggan, at ang maluwalhating pamumuhay sa Bayang Banal sa piling ng Panginoong Diyos at ng Panginoong Jesucristo. Tayong mga kaanib ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo* ay lubos na sumasampalataya na ang panahon ng katuparan ng ating katubusan ay napakalapit na.

Gayunman, nais namang pinsalain ng diablo, ang kaaway ng Diyos, ang ating pananampalataya upang hadlangan tayo sa pagtatamo ng kaligtasan lalo na ngayon na malapit na ang kawakasan. Kaya, napakahalagang maingatan natin ang ating pananampalataya anuman ang mangyari.

## Ang panawagan sa mga Cristiano

Pagsikapan nating matugunan ang itinagubilin ng mga apostol sa mga Cristiano na dapat gawin kapag malapit na ang wakas ng mundo:

“Ang gabi [isang paghahambing sa kasalukuyang masamang kapanahunan] ay halos tapos na ... , at ang araw [ang panahon ng paghatol at pagkakaloob ng gantimpala sa wakas] ay halos narito na [malapit na; abot-kamay na]. Kaya dapat na nating itigil [isaisantabi; itakwil] ang paggawa ng mga bagay [mga gawa/mga gawain] ng kadiliman at itaas ang mga sandata [o isuot ang baluti] [na pag-aari] ng kaliwanagan na ginagamit sa pakikipaglaban.” (Roma 13:12 Expanded Bible)\*

Ang araw ng kawakasan na siya ring Araw ng Paghuhukom

ay tunay na malapit na. Sa araw na iyon, may mga hahatulan at mayroon din namang mga gagantimpalaan. Kailangang matiyak natin na gantimpala, hindi hatol na parusa, ang ating matatamo. Kaya, ibinilin ng mga apostol na itigil, isantabi, at itakwil ang mga gawa ng kadiliman o mga kasamaan.

Bilang mga Cristiano, kailangan nating ipakipaglaban ang ating pananampalataya. At upang magtagumpay tayo laban sa lahat ng pakana at panlilinlang ng diablo, kailangan nating isuot ang buong baluti ng Diyos o *full armor of God*—ito ang Kaniyang mga utos o kalooban na kapag ating taglay ay tulad tayo ng isang *heavily-armed soldier* (Efe. 6:11 Amplified Bible 2015). Kaya, hindi tayo magagapi ng diablo kailanman kung sumu-

sunod tayo sa mga salita o utos ng Diyos sa atin.

Sa kabilang dako, "ang mga taong hangal ay namamatay dahil sila ay tumatangging sumunod" at "masayang nagpapatuloy sa mga hangal nilang landas" (Kaw. 1:32 Easy-to-Read Version).<sup>\*</sup> Samakatuwid, sasapit sa kanila hindi lamang ang pagkalagot ng hininga, kundi lalo na ang ikalawang kamataan na siyang ganap na kabayaran ng kasalanan o ang walang hanggang kaparusahan sa dagat-dagatang apoy; kaya tiyak na hindi sila malilig-tas kundi mapapahamak.

Hindi ito ang nais ng Diyos na sapitin natin na Kaniyang mga lingkod. Ang nais Niya ay lubos nating pakinabangan ang pagkahirang Niya sa atin. Subalit upang mangyari iyon ay kailangan nating sundin ang Kaniyang kalooban. Ganito ang ginagarantiyahan ng Biblia kung susunod tayo at magli-lingkod sa Diyos:

"Kung sila ay susunod at magli-lingkod sa Kaniya, ang nalalabi sa kanilang buhay ay magiging matagumpay, at ang nalalabi sa kanilang mga taon ay magiging maligaya." (Job 36:11 New Century Version)<sup>\*</sup>

### **Lubos na magtiwala sa Diyos**

Kung paanong magiging matagumpay at maligaya ang buhay ng mga masunuring lingkod ng Diyos, tinitiyak din ng Biblia na sa buhay pa lamang na ito ay wawasakin na ng Diyos ang tumatanggi sa Kaniyang mga payo at saway (Kaw. 5:12-14 The Message).

Kung mayroon mang mga tao na umuunlad at sumasagana sa buhay na ito kahit hindi sila sumu-

sunod sa Diyos, hindi sila dapat kaiinggitan at lalong hindi dapat tularan. Kung bakit ay ganito ang pahayag ng Biblia:

"Hindi mo ba nalalaman na matagal na mula pa noon, mula nang ang mga tao ay ilagay sa daigdig, na ang masasamang tao na tulad mo ay hindi nagpapatuloy na magdiwang sa loob ng mahabang panahon, na ang napakasasamang tao ay maligaya lamang sa loob ng isang sandali / sa napakaikling panahon? Bagaman ang kanilang reputasyon / labis na pagpapahalaga sa sarili ay umaabot sa kalangitan at ang kanilang katanyagan ay pumailanglang na kasing-taas ng mga ulap, sila ay maglalaho magpakailanman, tulad ng sarili nilang dumi, at sila na nakakakilala sa kanila ay magtatanong, Saan na sila nagpunta / Ano ang nangyari sa kanila?" (Job 20:4-7 Translation for Translators)<sup>\*</sup>

Hindi papayag ang Diyos na ang masasama ay makapamayani. Tinitiyak sa atin ng Biblia na ang kanilang pagdiriwang at kasiyahan ay "sa napakaikling panahon" lamang. Ang kanilang karangyaan at katanyagan ay kasama nila na "maglalaho magpakailanman."

Ganito pa inilalarawan ng Biblia ang magkaibang kalagayan ng hindi tapat sa Diyos at ng nagtiwala sa Kaniya:

"Kaya ang konklusyon ko ay ito: Marami ang mga kalumbayan at mga kabiguan ng mga hindi nagpapakatapat sa Diyos. Subalit kapag nagtiwala ka sa Panginoon para sa kapatawaran, paliligiran ka ng Kaniyang bumibigkis na pag-ibig." (Awit 32:10 The Passion Translation)<sup>\*</sup>

Ang paglabag sa mga utos ng Diyos ay kawalang-katapatan sa Kaniya. Ang mga hindi nagpapakatapat sa Diyos ay tinitiyak ng Biblia na "marami ang mga kalumbayan at kabiguan."

Kaibayo naman ng mga gayon ang mga nagtiwala sa Kaniya. Kahit pa gaano karami ang masagupa nilang suliranin at mga pagsubok sa buhay, paliligiran sila ng Diyos ng "Kaniyang bumibigkis na pag-ibig."

Isa sa kahayagan ng pagtiwala sa Diyos ay ang pagsunod sa Kaniyang mga utos, kahit pa may hadlang. Ang mga halimbawa ng nakagawa nito ay ang mga lingkod ng Diyos na sina Job at Ezequias.

Sa kabila ng sunud-sunod na trahedyang sa buhay ni Job—naubos ang mga alaga niyang hayop, namatay nang sabay-sabay ang kaniyang mga anak, at nagkasakit siya at nagkasugat mula ulo hanggang paa—hindi niya sinisi ang Diyos kundi patuloy siyang nagpurri at nanatiling tapat sa Kaniya. Kaya, pinagpala siya ng Diyos nang higit pa sa dati niyang kayamanan (Job 1:1-22; 42:12-13, 16-17).

Nang magkasakit nang malubha at nakamamatay si Haring Ezequias, ay nanalangin siya sa Diyos at sinabi, "Kahabagan mo ako, Yahweh, yamang ako'y namuhay nang tapat sa iyo. Buong puso kong ginawa ang lahat ng bagay ayon sa iyong kalooban" (II Hari 20:1-3 MB). Pina-galing siya ng Diyos at dinugtungan ang kaniyang buhay ng 15 taon.

Kung paninindigan din nating mga kaanib ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo* ang katapatan sa Diyos ay magagawa nating maingat ang ating pananampalataya at hindi tayo

“  
**Bago pa  
 sila manalangin,  
 tutugunin ko na;  
 at habang  
 nagsasalita  
 pa lang sila,  
 diringgin ko na.**  
 ”

Isaiah 65:24  
 Unlocked Literal Bible

matutukso na gumawa ng masama para lamang sa panlupang kapakinabangan.

#### **Mamuhay nang marapat sa pagkatawag**

Ang Iglesia ay katawan ni Cristo kaya inaasahan sa mga kaanib nito na “ilagay sa ayos ang inyong mga buhay at pangasiwaan ang inyong mga sarili sa pagkakaisa at pagsang-ayon sa kaniya” (Col. 2:6 Amplified Bible).<sup>\*</sup> Masama na hindi nagbabagong-buhay sapagkat ang gayon ay hindi nakalalakad nang marapat sa pakikiisa kay Cristo o sa pagka-*Iglesia Ni Cristo*. Kaya, kinakailangan sa mga binigyan ng kahalalan na sila ay namumuhay sa kabanalan.

Ang mga hinirang sa *Iglesia Ni Cristo* ay inaasahan na malalim ang ugat ng pagkakataanim kay Cristo— hindi sa umpisa lamang masunurin sa mga aral ng Diyos, manapa’y lalong tumitibay sa pananam-palataya habang tumatagal sa Iglesia (Col. 2:7).

Pinapag-iingat din ang mga Cristiano upang hindi sila masila o madaya ng mga pilosopiya ng tao at ng intelektuwalismo (Col. 2:8 AMP) na sa ngayon ay naglipana sa *internet* at sa *social media*. Sa halip, ang dapat nating panghawakan at gawing gabay sa buhay ay ang mga aral ng Diyos na itinuturo ng Pamamahala sa Iglesia. Dapat maging maalam tayo sa mga kalooban ng Diyos sapagkat ito ang magdadala sa atin sa kaligtasan. Kung ang ating susundin ay ang masamang kaisipan ng tao, tulad ng pagiging materyalistiko, hindi natin maiingatan ang ating pananampalataya at ito ay ikapapahamak natin.

Bilang mga lingkod ng Diyos, marapat lamang na tayo ay “mamuhay na nagpapakita ng maka-Diyos na pag-uugali” at may “integridad sa sarili” o “katapangang gawin ang tama” (Efe. 4:1 AMP2015).<sup>\*</sup> Inaasahan din ng Diyos sa atin na “buong kababaang loob” at “may pagtitiyaga” na dadalhin natin ang ating mga banal na sagutin; at ipadarama natin ang pag-ibig sa kapatid at maging sa ating kapuwa sa pamamagitan ng pag-akay sa kanila sa pagsunod sa kalooban ng Diyos (Efe. 4:2 AMP2015).<sup>\*</sup> Inaasahan din Niya na gagawin natin ang ating “makakaya na ingatan ang pagkakaisa” sapagkat nais Niyang magtagumpay ang Kaniyang bayan o ang Iglesia.

Mangyayari ito kung “bawat indibidwal ay gumagawang magkakasama upang magtagumpay ang kabuuan” (Efe. 4:3 AMP2015).<sup>\*</sup>

Sa ganitong uri ng pagdadala ng buhay inaakay ng Pamamahala tayong mga kaanib ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo* upang maging karapat-dapat tayo sa pagtatamo ng kaligtasan na halos abot-kamay na natin.

#### **Pahalagahan ang ating kahalalan**

Kung may higit na dapat pahalagahan tayong mga kaanib ng *Iglesia Ni Cristo*, ito ay ang ating kahalalan bilang bayan ng Diyos.

Tularan natin si Moises sa kaniyang pagpapahalaga sa kahalalan. Bagaman itinuring siyang anak ng anak na babae ng hari ng Egipto subalit dahil “sa pagtitiwala niya sa Diyos ay tumanggi siya na tanggapin ang mga pribilehiyo na dapat sana ay para sa kaniya ... Napagpasiyahan niyang mas mabuting pagmalupitan ... kasama ng mga tao sa bayang Israel” o bayan ng Diyos (Heb. 11:24–25 T4T).

Nagawa ni Moises na magtiis dahil sa pagtitiwala niya sa pangako ng Diyos na “Mesias” o Tagapagligtas. Dapat mapansin natin na bagama’t wala pang Cristo noon, kundi pangako pa lamang, sinampalatayanan na ito ni Moises. Ganiyan katatag ang kaniyang paninindigan anupa’t “Sa pagtitiwala niya sa Diyos ay nilisan niya ang Egipto. Hindi siya natatakot na magagalit ang hari sa paggawa niya niyaon.” Ni hindi niya pinanghinayangan “ang kayamanan ng Egipto” dahil “naka-tingin siya sa hinaharap na panahon kapag ibibigay na ng Diyos ang walang hanggang gantimpala” (Heb. 11:26–27 T4T).<sup>\*</sup>

Ganito rin ang dapat sampalata-  
yanan nating mga kabilang sa bayan ng  
Diyos sa mga huling araw—ang mga  
bagay na panlupa ay may katapusan  
samantalang ang ibibigay ng Diyos ay  
walang hanggan:

“Kaya masdan ninyo, malapit na  
akong lumikha ng bagong langit at  
bagong lupa, at ang nakaraang mga  
bagay ay hindi na maaalala o maiisip.  
Pero kayo ay magagalak at magsasaya  
nang walang hanggan sa aking lilikhain.  
Masdan ninyo, malapit ko nang likhain  
ang Jerusalem bilang isang kaligaya-  
han, at ang kanyang mamamayan bilang  
isang kagalakan. Ako ay magsasaya sa  
Jerusalem at magagalak sa aking bayan;  
ang pag-iyak at pananangis sa pagdu-  
rusa ay hindi na maririnig sa kaniya ...  
Bago pa sila manalangin, tutugunin ko  
na; at habang nagsasalita pa lang sila,  
diringgin ko na.” (Isa. 65:17–19, 24 ULB)\*

Ang inilalaan ng Diyos sa atin na  
Kaniyang bayan ay isang maluwalha-  
ting buhay sa bagong langit at bagong  
lupa kung saan wala nang pagluha at  
pagdurusang kundi pawang kaligaya-  
han na walang hanggan. At dahil sa  
naglalakbay pa tayo sa mundong ito  
na napakadilim at napakagulo ay may  
pangako ang Diyos sa atin: “Bago pa  
sila manalangin, tutugunin ko na;  
at habang nagsasalita pa lang sila,  
diringgin ko na.” 🗣️

\* *Isinalin mula sa Ingles*

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*Batay sa leksiyong itinuro ng Kapatid  
na Eduardo V. Manalo, Tagapamahalang  
Pangkalahatan, sa kaniyang pagdalaw-pasto-  
ral sa Lokal ng Tundo, Distrito Eklesiastiko  
ng Maynila noong Mayo 27, 2022*

# ‘We are surrounded by so many examples of faith’

By MANDY A. NEPOMUCENO

**A**POSTLE PAUL declared in Hebrews 12:1:  
“Since we are surrounded by so many examples of  
faith, we must get rid of everything that slows us down,  
especially sin that distracts us. We must run the race that lies  
ahead of us and never give up.” (God’s Word)

The “so many examples of faith” he was referring to were  
those he had listed in the previous chapter of the said book  
(Hebrews 11)—God’s servants who demonstrated their faith in  
the midst of what they had to go through as they served Him.  
Because of God’s power, these people accomplished seemingly  
impossible deeds.

This shows that faith is crucial. First of all, people are made  
right or acceptable to God by faith (Rom. 5:1). However, having  
the wrong kind of faith is dangerous. It is not an exaggeration  
to say that there are kinds of faith that are even more dangerous  
than the calamities and disasters that are happening now, for  
they will bring people to certain destruction on Judgment Day  
and eternal punishment.

Apostle Paul taught, too, that “faith is the substance of things  
hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1 New King

James Version). So, having faith does not merely mean having good character. It is the resolute conviction and eager anticipation that the Lord God will fulfill everything that He has promised, the greatest of which is His salvation. But how can one know for certain that the faith he has is the true faith that will surely lead him to God's promised salvation?

### The various kinds of faith

There are various kinds of faith, according to the Bible.

Some people claim that they have faith in God in the sense that they believe that God is the ultimate power Who exists. They believe that such is sufficient. However, even the demons have such faith—they believe that there is one God—and they even tremble (James 2:19). Surely, the demons will not receive salvation.

What about those who believe that faith alone is enough? What kind of faith do they have? Apostle James taught:

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17 NKJV)

Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). However, faith by itself or faith alone is dead. The dead can not do anything, as faith alone cannot do anything. It can neither please God nor lead one to salvation. It is like a lifeless carcass, a body without a spirit (James 2:26). Such faith is also referred to in the Bible as “barren” (James 2:20 Revised Standard Version). “Barren” implies being worthless, so faith on its own is useless (James 2:14). Such is a dangerous faith.

Another kind of faith that is dangerous is false faith that results from listening to false teachings (Gal. 5:20) from false prophets or preachers (Jer. 23:21 Amplified Bible). When people listen to false preachers, they receive lies rather than the truth or God's commands, for these preachers pervert the words of God (Jer. 23:36 Good News Bible). People may even hear them cite biblical verses, but what they teach is not really from the Bible and even contradicts what the Holy Scriptures contradicts what the Bible teach.

People who have a faith like that of demons, a dead and barren faith, or a false faith will not be saved, even if they show sincerity, because they have the wrong kind of faith. It is possible to be sincerely wrong, after all.

### The perfect faith

What kind of faith will lead a person to salvation? According to the Bible, a person should have the perfect faith. Apostle James clarified, thus:

“Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (James 2:22 NKJV)

The perfect faith is “complete” (New International Version). Complete means sufficient. Truly, such faith is sufficient to lead one to salvation. How can faith be made perfect? What will make faith a perfect one or a person be justified? The apostles declared, “A person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24 English Standard Version).

“

**Since we are surrounded by so many examples of faith, we must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially sin that distracts us. We must run the race that lies ahead of us and never give up.**

”

Hebrews 12:1 God's Word

The works that can make faith perfect are not the works we deem important on our own, nor are they the works that are just prescribed by other people; rather, a faith working through love (Gal. 5:6). Faith has to be coupled with works—works that are done through love.

Can such kind of faith be seen in a person? Yes. Apostle James asserted, thus:

“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18 NKJV)

Thus, those who believe that the way to God is by faith alone, is gravely mistaken. Faith does not mean



merely reciting a set of words in front of witnesses. Works are indeed necessary—works are not something merely secondary. Without works, one's faith is incomplete. It is by works that one can prove his faith. If a faith does not have works, then such is not the true faith.

### Examples of faith

Whom should we follow in having the perfect faith or faith accompanied with works? The apostles reminded us of Abraham. He proved his faith in God not just by professing it but by offering his son, Isaac, on the altar—in obedience to God's command to him (James 2:21).

The Bible also tells us about Rahab, the harlot, who lived during the time of ancient Israel. Someone living a life like hers is regarded as wicked. But she proved her faith in God not just by declaring it but by deed—receiving the messengers whom Joshua had sent (James 2:25), and thus, she did not perish when God sent the Israelites to conquer Jericho (Heb. 11:31).

In spite of the threat that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days should be cast into the den of lions, Daniel showed his absolute faith in God by kneeling down three times, praying, and thanking Him as was his usual practice. Because of his faith and works, when he was seized and cast into the den of lions, God sent an angel so the lions would not hurt Daniel (Dan. 6:1–10, 16, 21–22).

During the time of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, all people knelt and worshiped the golden image he had created. Those who disobeyed were thrown into a fiery furnace. But Shadrach, Meshach,

and Abed-Nego stood their ground and refused to worship the image, so they were cast into the fiery furnace. Because of their firm resolve, though they were thrown into the fire, they were not hurt. Their hair was not even singed. Their clothes were also not burnt (Dan. 3:1, 4–9, 12–13, 15–18, 21–27).

These historical records in the Bible prove that the Lord God does not forsake those who prove their faith through works—the works they couple their faith with are not the works they think on their own as good or sufficient (Titus 3:5), and not the works that are based on man-made teachings (Matt. 15:9); rather, they fulfill the commands of the Lord God and do what God expects them to do (Matt. 7:21). As a result, even in the face of danger, God does not abandon them and He keeps them safe and blessed.

### Obey God first

In the Christian era, when the apostles were threatened and forbidden by powerful and influential people to preach the gospel, they asserted, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:26–29). What should we learn from the determination shown by the apostles? If what other people want, or even what we want, contradicts God's will, then the right course of action is to always obey God rather than men. One has perfect faith—faith coupled with works—when he prioritizes God's will.

God revealed to us His will that we should all fulfill. Apostle Paul taught, thus:

"Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His

good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him." (Eph. 1:9–10 NKJV)

It is the Lord God's will that we all be gathered together in Christ. How can we be all gathered together in Christ? The apostles further declared:

"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." (Rom. 12:4–5 NKJV)

We ought to be members in the one body of Christ. The one body of Christ is the Church, which recognizes Him as its head (Col. 1:18); the Church that He Himself built. He referred to it as "My church" (Matt. 16:18). His apostles thus called it the "Church of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–13 Norlie's Simplified New Testament).

Therefore, one is in the right path toward having perfect faith by joining the Church Of Christ. By remaining in this one true Church until the end, a person will receive the fulfillment of God's promises: he will be kept safe and blessed even in this life, and more importantly, he is assured of the promised salvation, because he is among those who are redeemed by Christ:

"Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood." (Acts 20:28 Lamsa Translation) 🙏

# Which side are you on?

*Modern society oftentimes puts a person in a critical dilemma challenging his or her character to make a choice between which to uphold and which to eliminate.*

By BENILDO C. SANTIAGO and CELERINO G. BACLAAN

“THERE IS A WAY that people think is right, but it leads only to death” (Prov. 14:12 Easy-to-Read Version). The verse conveys that people by themselves alone, even if they think they are that learned and competent, cannot rely on their own knowledge as the must-be basis or guide in making right decisions in life. The biblical message is very clear as a precaution of extreme importance to everyone.

The tragic fall of the first man and the first woman is the first and a timeless case in point of what a person thinks as being good and the right thing to do, but leads only to disaster. Indeed, an all-time lesson to all. So blessed were the couple living in the garden of Eden—provided with all their needs to sustain their life and most of all with

God’s commandment instructing them clearly what they should not do to protect them from sure death (Gen. 2:8–23). The narrative below was their life’s turning point.

“Now the snake was the most cunning animal that the LORD God had made. The snake asked the woman, ‘Did God really tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?’ ‘We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden,’ the woman answered, ‘except the tree in the middle of it. God told us not to eat the fruit of that tree or even touch it; if we do, we will die.’ The snake replied, ‘That’s not true; you will not die. God said that because he knows that when you eat it, you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad.’ The woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how

good its fruit would be to eat, and she thought how wonderful it would be to become wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, and he also ate it.” (Gen. 3:1–6 Good News Bible)

The first couple knew full well God’s prohibition. Yet, they deliberately disobeyed the Almighty Creator, by not heeding to what He did tell and command as a warning. Instead, they chose to believe in the lies of Satan—the worst destroyer, the unmatched shrewd deceiver and influencer of mankind, and the prowling sower of all evil thoughts, always opposing God’s will from the beginning—and did what he wanted them to do. The tragic end of the couple and the perpetual damages their gravest error—their failure to choose what

“

**‘My thoughts,’ says the LORD, ‘are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours.’**

”

Isaiah 55:8–9 Good News Bible

is right over what is wrong—have brought upon mankind are indeed a must-learn lesson to all. Such error has been repeatedly committed through centuries as evident in the worsening crises and disorder plaguing the world today.

### **Most relevant today**

The message of extreme importance, the lesson being taught by the fall of Adam and Eve is more than ever applicable today, the latter part of the Christian era called by Apostle Paul as the last days and described as perilous times. He noted in his letter to the first-century Christians that during such times it would be difficult to be a Christian, for people would only love themselves and their money, would be proud and boastful, would be thoroughly bad,

would sneer at those who try to be good, would love pleasures more than they love God, would think nothing of immorality, and they would be sneering at or mocking God (II Tim. 3:1–4). Apostle Paul’s description of the last days is a picture of moral decadence and spiritual immaturity, indicators of a culture behind the worsening crisis globally rampant today.

The people described as morally and spiritually in crisis live in defiance of God’s will. This manifests the perpetuation of the sown spirit of disobedience at work in them. They continuously deviate from the order of righteous living set by God. They do not believe in the Holy Scriptures as the universal and absolute standard of morality for knowing what is good and what is evil. Their view of good and evil is relative and subjective, and order for them is socially decided. Unchristian their changing values are, as being shown by how they regard God with their behaviors utterly disrespecting Him.

Such is what Christians living in postmodern societies have to contend with in this Information Age, an era of proliferation of radical ideas promoting sweeping changes regardless of the direction they take. As a God-fearing individual has to face the adverse impact of these changes in him, he needs to take a brave stand on certain compelling issues and firmly grounded not

only on correct but more so on the right values reflective of his attitude towards others, towards his environment, towards himself, and especially towards God. And if one is being continuously swayed or made to compromise his values to pressures of societies that grossly disregard the biblical moral standard, the saying—history repeats itself—applies to him.

### **The turbulent age**

Since the 20th century and during the 21st century, the world has witnessed how man has been that aggressive to prove the thinking that he is the measure of all things and the master of the universe. This idea strategically being articulated in various forms and platforms disconnects him from his Creator and drags him to insist both what he desires and pleases him and to free him from control of anyone or anything.

Overwhelmed by his successes, he exploits his increasing knowledge to amaze the world with tremendous advancements in science and technology. The amazed have turned to science and technology, as well as to philosophy or ideology and the like, for the answers or solutions to questions or problems concerning man and his destiny. These two dynamic cultural tools have been used, almost without restraints, in promoting the view that change is inevitable

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**After all, there is only one thing to say: Have reverence for God, and obey his commands, because this is all that man was created for. God is going to judge everything we do, whether good or bad, even things done in secret.**

”

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14  
Good News Bible

and is absolutely necessary to attain progress. This progress includes significant improvements in man's day-to-day activities related to material production, transportation, communication, medical science, as well as other secular concerns.

However, such progress has its price. In the aspects of man's life beyond the secular, apparently the world has been suffering from crisis brought about by the changes of the times. The institutions that used to provide youth character formation—family, community, school, mass media, and religion especially—

have weakened in their positive influence over their life. Indisputably, modernity makes society's information rich but has displaced or obliterated the fundamental values that are a strong foundation of proper conduct for human society. Religious organizations called Christian churches, especially in Western Europe and North America, worry about how their respective members' faith is being affected profoundly in many adverse ways. They see the continuing decline in the moral and spiritual life of their members as huge impact of secularization on religion and assaults to Christianity. In an interview with Vatican Radio, Cardinal Franc Rodé warned that secularization “has penetrated many communities and consciences” (*tldm.org*).

Being overcome by the pressures of both modern science and technology as pervasive forces of socio-cultural changes, conservative church leaders are compelled to give way and adapt to the trend. For bothered leaders and critical observers, if the alarming crisis worldwide remains unabated, much worse disaster and chaos will follow, signifying the worst end coming fast upon this world.

### **Revolutionary and radical changes**

Mesmerized by the enormous benefits of modernity to satisfy their worldly concerns, many have given in to self-indulgence and let their long-cherished values, being

eroded by new ones, to give way to their cravings whatever these are. People's beliefs, behaviors or attitudes, and practices, particularly concerning sexuality that through centuries have been categorically unacceptable, wrong, or immoral, are now made acceptable and legal in different countries. This socially constructed new moral order is continuously trending and gaining wider grounds.

Labeled as “sexual revolution” of the 20th century, this trend or new norm has opened many alternatives to marital sex—that is, between a man as husband and a woman as his wife bound by marriage—the only one allowed by the Holy Scriptures. For conservative societies, remaining faithful in observing biblical teachings on man's sexuality, sexual practices outside marriage and between same-sex partners are definitely immoral.

Permissive societies, in contrast, do tolerate premarital sex, extra-marital affairs, and same-sex carnal affairs, for they merely take them as a matter of sexual preference or sexual orientation, a lifestyle, and an expression of individual freedom that one should not be deprived of. Anything, verbal or action, that expresses indifference or hostility to such freedom is treated as a serious offense against someone or a group that felt being offended.

Today, there have been movements and social and political groups in many countries that

promote same-sex sexual affairs with their beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes expressed through terminologies nowadays called “politically correct.” Among those advocating such ideology are those who belong to the so-called LGBTQIA+ community. They assert that they deserve to be recognized and be given the same equal rights as straight men and women have.

They say that just as a man has the right to marry a woman, a gay man should also have the right to marry another man, and so should a lesbian have the right to marry another woman. They call it “same-sex marriage” or same-sex union. They argue that whatever gender they prefer, even if it’s different from what their gender really is (male or female), it should be recognized and respected.

Whatever pronoun they deem appropriate to be used for their gender preference, it is supposedly what should be used in referring to them. The pronouns he, his, or him are supposedly not to be used to a gay, similarly she or her to a lesbian. A gay person would rather be referred to as “they” even though it refers to just one person. They believe that there are not just two but many genders of people.

### **The biblical standard on morality**

As His first and all-time order in creating humans, God created them as male and female only (Gen. 1:27), and He united the two as husband

and wife, clearly showing that marriage should be between a man and a woman only (Gen. 1:28). That such policy imposed as early as before the Christian era remains in our time (the Christian era), Christ attests to this and even emphasizes that marriage is just between a man and a woman (Matt. 19:4–6) and not between two men neither between two women.

Categorically, same-sex marriage or same sex union, which has been either asserted or insisted by a certain group to the point that eventually it has been legalized and being continuously promoted, has been prohibited by God. For God, a man having sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman is detestable (Lev. 18:22), and so is a woman with another woman (Rom. 1:26). In the Christian era, the lewd act of having sexual relations with a fellow male or a fellow female, as Apostle Paul declared, is being condemned by God, and that doers of such act—like thieves, drunkards, the greedy and the like—will not inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9–10).

In the midst of a crooked world, true Christians continuously uphold the instruction of the apostles—they should never compromise with sinful ideas and practices, neither blend in with people around them. Instead, they should live up to God’s standard of morality and should not condone immoral behavior, even if society accepts it.

### **Taking a stand**

As the fiercely invasive postmodern society continues promoting Gentile thoughts germinating and being sugarcoated with intellectualism, and articulated in various platforms, one is always threatened by these thoughts sown in him to disobey and sneer at God. God, so loving and protective, since the beginning has done His part. He provided mankind not only with a life-supporting habitat more than sufficient with basic necessities, but also gifted man with conscience and intellect to understand what is good and what is evil, and His laws.

In fact, God made mankind good or upright, but they “have gone in search of many schemes” (Eccles. 7:29 New International Version), that is, “they have found many ways to be bad” (ETRV). Thus, making things clear, says the Lord to man, “My thoughts ... are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours.” (Isa. 55:8–9 Good News Bible).

In every situation when God’s thoughts and ways are being opposed by man’s, we ought to make a choice. Which side do you take? The Holy Scriptures give this guiding wisdom: “After all this, there is only one thing to say: Have reverence for God, and obey his commands, because this is all that man was created for. God is going to judge everything we do, whether good or bad, even things done in secret” (Eccles. 12:13–14 GNB). 🌟

## A Pharisee and a tax collector

Among the two, God honored the tax collector because he prayed with humility.

In one of His interactions to the Christians, Jesus Christ told a parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector to teach a moral lesson about the importance of being humble—not thinking they are better than others and looking down on everyone else—when praying to God (Luke 18:9).

**T**WO MEN WENT into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood over by himself and prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not greedy, dishonest, and unfaithful in marriage like other people. And I am really glad that I am not like that tax collector over there. I go without eating for two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all I earn.”

The tax collector stood off at a distance and did not think he was good enough even to look up toward heaven. He was so sorry for what he had done that he pounded



his chest and prayed, “God, have pity on me! I am such a sinner.”

Then Jesus said, “When the two men went home, it was the tax collector and not the Pharisee who was pleasing to God. If you put

yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honored.” 🙏

(Luke 18:10-14  
Contemporary English Version)

# Why from the Philippines?



*On the claim that the true Church could not have emerged from a 'small and poor country'*

By JENSEN DG. MAÑEBOG

FOR SOME, the fact that the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) emerged in the Philippines appears to be a “red flag”—that is, something that suggests or calls attention to an inconsistency or irregularity, if not necessarily danger. Indeed, that this Church started in a not-so-well-known, “lower middle-income country” ([unido.org](http://unido.org)), to some, raises suspicion of being a pseudo-religion or a false faith.

Hence, when this Church conveys the biblical teaching that it is God’s nation in these last days, some raise their eyebrows and ask, “How can your Church be the true Church if it started in a small and poor country like the Philippines? Why would God choose the Philippines out of all nations in the world to

be the place from where the true Church would emerge?”

So, these bring us to the question: Does coming from a “small and poor” place not sit well with being of God?

## **‘You were the least of all peoples’**

Truth is, when certain facts in biblical history are factored in, one should not be surprised if the true Church in these last days would emerge in a “small and poor” country like the Philippines. In fact, the Bible proves that God does not take a country’s population, size, political strength, or economic status as His basis in choosing where His chosen people would emerge.

The ancient Israelites, God’s people of old, is a case in point:

“For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples.” (Deut. 7:6–7 New King James Version)

Notice that it was not because of its size nor power that God chose the ancient nation of Israel to be a people for Himself.

## **‘Little among the thousands of Judah’**

If the magnitude and economic or political standing of one’s place of origin were determinants of being of God—as others seem to imply—then

it would appear that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself could not be of God. Remember that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and this is how the Book of Micah describes this place:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” (Mic. 5:2 NKJV)

The Lord Jesus is unquestionably God’s begotten Son and greatest messenger, yet He was born in a small town. This alone proves absurd the contention that emerging from a small and poor place is not congruent with being of God.

“  
**But you,  
 Bethlehem  
 Ephrathah,  
 Though you are  
 little among the  
 thousands of Judah,  
 Yet out of you shall  
 come forth to Me  
 The One to be Ruler  
 in Israel, Whose goings  
 forth are from of old,  
 From everlasting.**”

”  
 Micah 5:2  
 New King James Version

**‘The scripture says’**

One needs to understand that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of biblical prophecies:

“The scripture says that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David and will be born in Bethlehem, the town where David lived.” (John 7:42 Good News Bible)

The Messiah, who was prophesied to be born in a small town of Bethlehem, is none other than Jesus Christ:

“Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king ...” (Matt. 2:1 GNB)

**‘From the far east will I bring your offspring’**

Now, take note that there are also biblical prophecies about the emergence of God’s sons and daughters from the “far east,” in the “ends of the earth:”

“From the far east will I bring your offspring, and from the far west I will gather you.” (Isa. 43:5 Moffatt Translation)

“I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ And to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’ Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth.” (Isa. 43:6 NKJV)

Far east, the place of origin of these people of God, was further specified by related prophecies to be a country described as “islands of the sea” (Isa. 24:15 New International Version; 42:10).

On a related note, the “ends of the earth,” the time of emergence of these prophesied God’s children, refers to a time when the end of the

world is near or “at the doors”—a time period that started with “wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:3, 6–8, 33 NKJV).

On July 27, 1914, World War I broke out—signaling the beginning of the time “ends of the earth.” Notice that it was the very same date when the Church Of Christ was registered with the government in the Philippines—a country “almost at the geographical center of the Far East” (*Asia and the Philippines*, p. 169), consisting of 7,641 islands and islets (*worldatlas.com*).

**‘He chose what the world looks down on’**

The Almighty God has sure reasons when He chooses things considered unimportant or weak by people. For one thing, He would put to shame those considered powerful and wise, that no one can boast in His presence:

“God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful. He chose what the world looks down on and despises and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. This means that no one can boast in God’s presence.” (I Cor. 1:27–29 GNB)

The emergence of the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*, God’s nation in these last days, from the Philippines is a fulfillment of biblical prophecies. Yes, its country of origin may be small and poor, yet it does not controvert its divine election, but rather all the more proves that this Church is certainly of God. 🌍



# Does the Bible teach us to pray the Rosary?

By KENNETH A. OUANO

ONE OF THE POPULAR and emblematic prayers for most Catholics is the Rosary. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* describes it as “a certain form of prayer wherein [they] recite fifteen decades or tens of Hail Marys with an Our Father between each ten” (Vol. 8, p. 184). A Catholic website claims that “except for the Our Father, no Catholic prayer or devotion may be more revered than the Rosary” (*simplycatholic.com*).

When Catholics pray the Rosary, they usually clasp a string of beads with a cross in one end, also called Rosary, to count the recited prayers. Like scapulars, candles, statues of saints, and crosses, this set of beads is one of the more common sacramentals (objects blessed by a Catholic priest and are used during their acts of worship) of the Catholic Church (*Christ Among Us*, p. 180).

Is praying the so-called Rosary in accordance with the teachings of the Bible? From where did it originate and when in history was it popularized? Should it, and other similar kinds of prayer, be done by those who want to glorify and pray to God?

## An 11th-century invention

As to the origins of the Rosary, Loraine Boettner, in his book *Roman Catholicism*, stated thus:

“Peter the Hermit invented the rosary, in the year 1090, more than a thousand years after the time of Christ. It is acknowledged by Roman Catholics not to have come into general use until after the beginning of the thirteenth century, and was not given official sanction until after the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.” (p. 288)

On the other hand, Catholic authorities mention not of a hermit inventing their famous form of praying, but of an oral tradition, which may be more compelling to their fellow Catholics than the narrative quoted above. In *franciscanmedia.org*, it is stated that the Rosary was popularized by someone who witnessed a so-called apparition of Mary:

“According to one tradition, the rosary’s defining moment came during an apparition of Mary to Saint Dominic around the year 1221. Dominic was combating a popular heresy in France called Albigensianism. Mary gave him the rosary, told him to teach people this devotion, and promised that his apostolic efforts would be blessed with much success if he did. We know the religious order Dominic founded (the Dominicans) clearly played

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**Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again.**

”



a major role in promoting the rosary throughout the world in the early years of this devotion.”

It is worth noting that the story of a supposed apparition of Mary, who subsequently gave a Rosary to one called Dominic, is a tradition. By definition, Catholic tradition is the word of the Catholic Church which is transmitted to its members orally, “meaning that it is not written in the Scriptures” (*britannica.com*). Many Catholics believe outright such traditions, especially since their popes have declared that the one they call Saint Dominic supposedly instituted the Rosary (*simplycatholic.com*).

### Not of Christian origin

Looking further into how the Rosary came to be, one would find more than just a Catholic invention. The Catholic Encyclopedia states that the origin of the Rosary is more pagan than Christian:

“It is tolerably obvious that whenever any prayer has to be repeated a large number of times recourse is likely to be had to some mechanical apparatus less troublesome than counting upon the fingers. In almost all countries, then, we meet with something in the nature of prayer-counters or rosary beads.

Even in ancient Nineveh a sculpture has been found thus described by Lavard in his ‘Monuments’ (I, plate 7): ‘Two winged females standing before the sacred tree in the attitude of prayer; they lift the extended right hand and hold in the left a garland or rosary.’” (Vol. 8, p. 185)

Alexander Hislop, a theologian, wrote on his book about the Catholic Rosary’s origins:

“Every one knows how thoroughly Romanist is the use of the rosary; and how the devotees of Rome mechanically tell their prayers upon their beads. The rosary, however, is no invention of the Papacy. It is of the highest antiquity, and almost universally found among Pagan nations. The rosary was used as a sacred instrument among the ancient Mexicans. It is commonly employed among the Brahmins of Hindustan; and in the Hindoo sacred books reference is made to it again and again. Thus, in an account of the death of Sati, the wife of Shiva, we find the rosary introduced.” (*The Two Babylons: Or, The Papal Worship*, p. 187)

This clearly shows that the Rosary was first used by pagans or worshipers of false gods. An ancient Nineveh sculpture shows two winged females in the attitude of prayer holding a Rosary.

Also, it was used as a sacred instrument in ancient pagan civilizations. Thus, the Catholic practice of using the Rosary is not of Christian, but of pagan origin. In fact, a Catholic dictionary states, thus: “The practice of using beads, etc., as a help to memory in reciting a set number of prayers is **not distinctively Christian**” (*A Catholic Dictionary by Addis and Arnold*, p. 717, emphasis ours).

### Against biblical teaching

Those who pray the Rosary violate the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ as written in Matthew 6:7:

“Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again.” (Living Bible)

Praying the Rosary goes against Christ’s teaching not to recite the same prayer over and over like the pagans do. The Bible forbids “meaningless repetition” in prayers (Matt. 6:7 Amplified Bible 2015).

When praying to or speaking with God, one should “ask God for what [he] need[s], always asking him with a thankful heart” (Phil. 4:6 Good News Bible). There is no need for meaningless repetitions because Christ teaches that “Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him” (Matt. 6:8 GNB). The Bible also teaches that God is in heaven and man is on earth, thus, “let your words be few” (Eccles. 5:2 NKJV). Therefore, God will not listen to those who pray with repeated recitations as the pagans do.

## The kind of prayer that will be heard

Does the Bible also teach whose prayers will God listen to? The *Book of Proverbs* states that the Lord hears the prayer of the righteous, for such pleases Him (Prov. 15:8, 29). Hence, "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16 New International Version). The apostles taught:

"For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil" (I Pet. 3:12 NKJV).

Thus, for a person's prayers to be surely heard by God, he should make sure that he is righteous before Him. On his own, a person can never be righteous in God's sight because of sin (Rom. 3:10, 23). But since the Almighty Father is full of love and mercy, He gave His only

“

**Do not be rash  
with your mouth,  
And let not  
your heart utter  
anything hastily  
before God.**

**For God is in heaven,  
and you on earth;  
Therefore let your  
words be few.**

”

Ecclesiastes 5:2  
New King James Version

begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who knew no sin, so that the people whose sins He answered might become the righteousness of God in Him. Apostle Paul taught:

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (II Cor. 5:21 NKJV)

It is the Lord God's great love that the Lord Jesus Christ died so that those who have sinned will be justified by His blood and will be saved from God's wrath (Rom. 5:8-9). Those who are justified by Christ's blood are made righteous in God's sight, thus, they are the ones whose prayers will surely be heard by God. Who are these people redeemed by Christ with His blood? This is written in Acts 20:28, thus:

"Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood." (Lamsa Translation)

The members of the Church Of Christ are the ones purchased or redeemed by Christ with His blood, making them righteous in God's sight. Therefore, those who want to make sure that God will listen to their prayers also ought to make sure that they become members of the Church Of Christ.

Dear readers, we continually encourage you to seek the words of God written in the Bible. Feel free to learn more about the biblical teachings that Church Of Christ members believe in so that you, like the multitude of people who left their former

religions and joined the Church Of Christ, would come to the knowledge of the truth that brings man closer to God and, ultimately, to salvation come Judgment Day. ☺

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InFocus

THE ECCLESIASTICAL DISTRICT OF COTABATO NORTH

# AN IMPREGNABLE FORT OF THE TRUE FAITH

By MARK ANDRO T. MILAN  
Photos by SAMUEL P. DE LEON



# Cotabato North

## District Profile

**R**IGHT AT THE HEART of Mindanao, Cotabato is a landlocked province in the Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City) region of the Philippines. It is bordered by Lanao del Sur and Bukidnon on the north; Davao City and Davao del Norte on the east; Maguindanao on the west; and Davao del Sur and Sultan Kudarat on the southeast. The Maguindanon words *kuta watu*, which is *kota batu* in Malay, means “stone fort” and it referred to Sultan Muhammad Kudarat’s seat of administration during his time. That place became Cotabato City from which the province derives its name.

Cotabato was once the largest province in the Philippines until, in 1966, South Cotabato was created as a separate province. Then, on November 22, 1973, the late Ferdinand E. Marcos signed Presidential Decree No. 341, which declared that the province be divided into three, namely, North Cotabato, Maguindanao, and Sultan Kudarat. The capital city of North Cotabato became Kidapawan, which is located at the foot of Mount Apo, the highest mountain in the country with an elevation of 2,954 meters (9,692 ft). It was on December 19, 1983 when North Cotabato was renamed just Cotabato under *Batas Pambansa* (national law) No. 660.

Considered as Mindanao’s major food basket, Cotabato is a top producer of rice, corn, cereals, coconut, coffee, freshwater fish, livestock, tropical fruits, vegetables, and sugarcane, as well as either raw or semi-processed rubber and industrial trees.

1970

Establishment

38

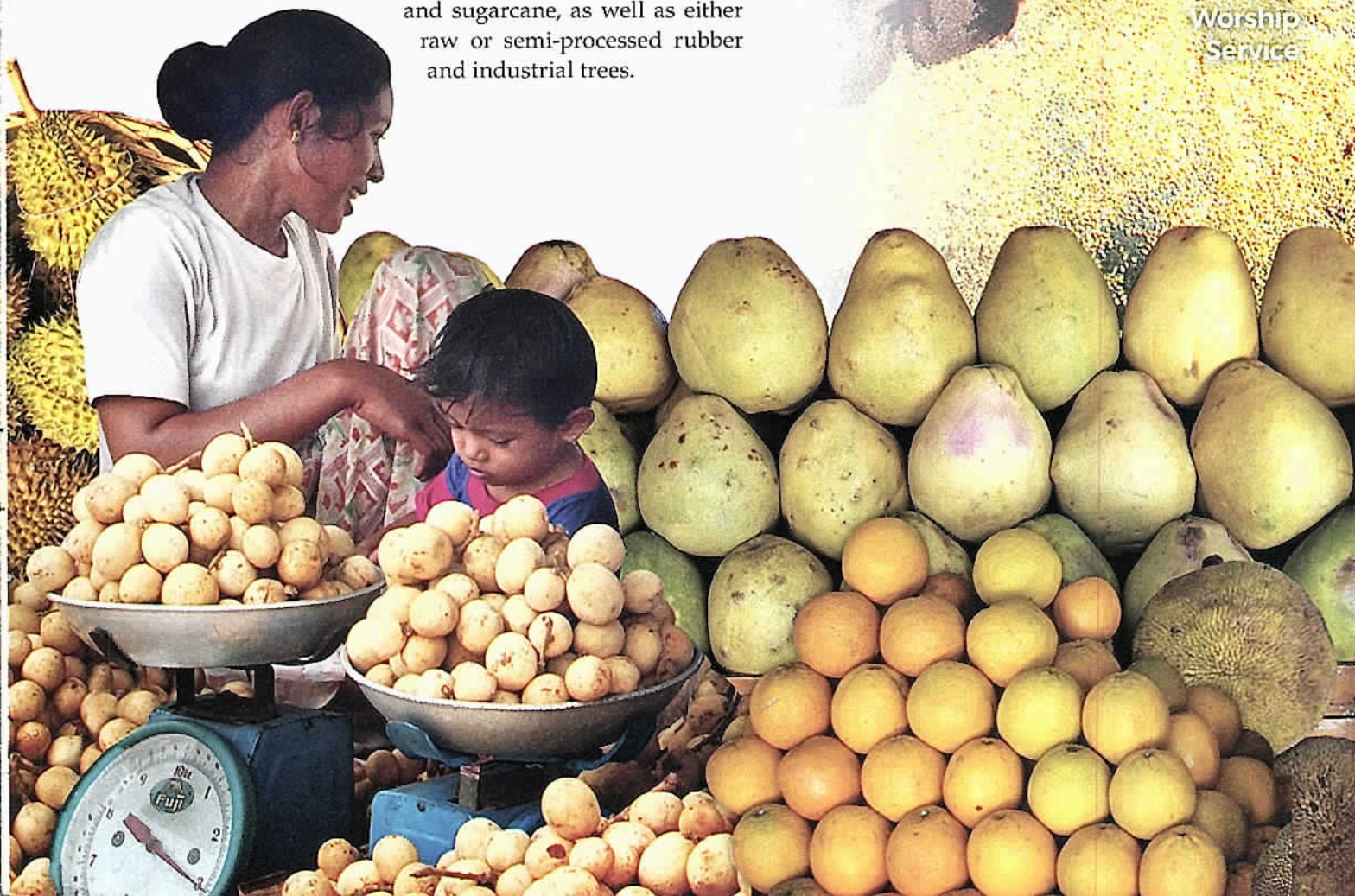
Local Congregations

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Extensions

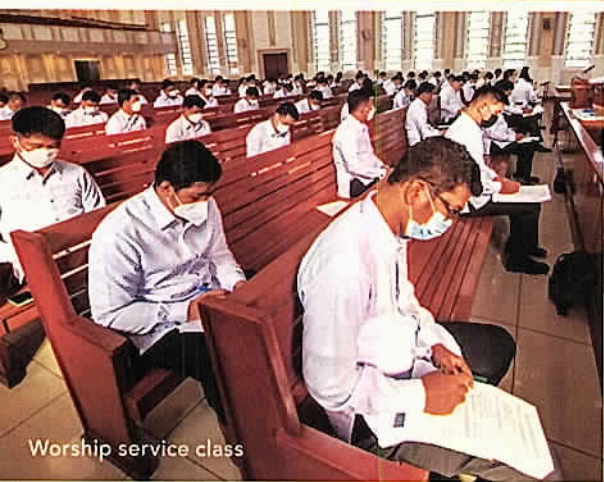
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Group  
Worship  
Service





The ministers and ministerial workers in the ecclesiastical district



Worship service class



The district staff



“With God's help, we, in our district, are one with the Church Administration in intensifying not only the works of propagation but also our efforts in edification, among other endeavors in the Church to which the brethren are responsive. As many more people within the reach of our district's jurisdiction are becoming members of the Church, more brethren heed the call to become Church officers and houses of worship continue to be built upon the approval of the Church Administration. Thus, we will keep on progressing in the faith. The whole district will remain ever united with Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, the Executive Minister.”

**Brother Cesar A. Gutierrez**  
District supervising minister



LA ESPERANZA



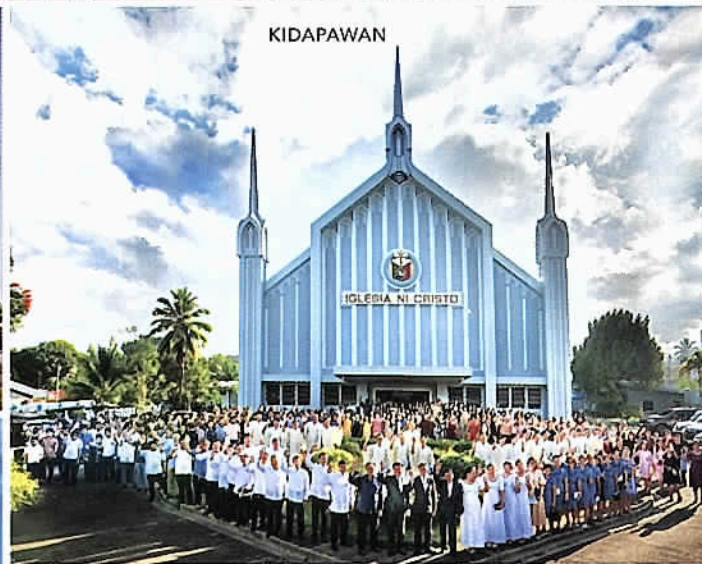
NEW CULASI



KABACAN



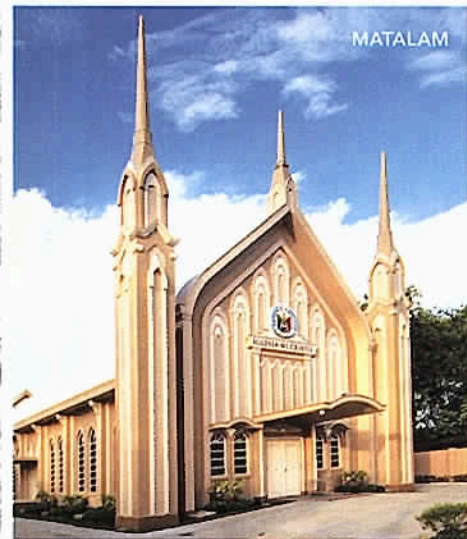
CARMEN



KIDAPAWAN



CAPITOL



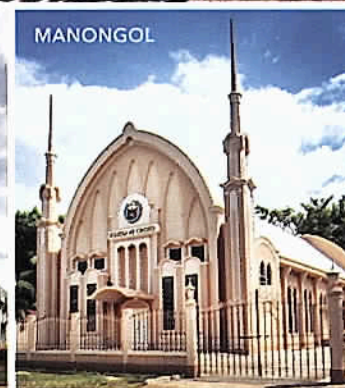
MATALAM



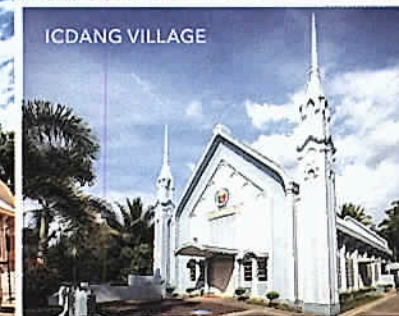
M'LANG



MAKILALA



MANONGOL



ICDANG VILLAGE

### Burgeoning of the ecclesiastical district

The *Iglesia Ni Cristo* (Church Of Christ) reached Cotabato in as early as 1941. Six years later, the first ecclesiastical district in Mindanao was established. As the Church kept extending its breadth, from the Ecclesiastical District of Cotabato (now Maguindanao) sprang forth more districts, one of which is the Ecclesiastical District of Cotabato North established in 1970 amid the internecine conflicts between the Muslims and the so-called Christian settlers that time.

By January 1979, Cotabato North has established local congregations not only in Kidapawan City but also in seven municipalities (Antipas, Kabacan, M'lang, Magpet, Makilala, Matalam, and Pres. Roxas) and in 14 villages (Balabag, Binay, Buayan, Bulacanon, Camasi, Canaan, Kibia, La Esperanza, Lika, Magkaalam, Malatab,

Nueva Vida, Salvacion, and Townsite, which is now called Manongol).

Religious debates, time and again, between the *Iglesia Ni Cristo* and other religions also paved the way for the truth of God's words to be all the more made known. One such occasion was held at a plaza in Kidapawan in 1979. With Brother Lope Torres, the district supervising minister then, representing the Church, the brethren that time witnessed how God's teachings upheld by the Church prevailed against that of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

With God's mercy and help, a year later, 11 more local congregations were established, that of Capitol, Carmen, Del Pilar, Dorulumán, Kisupaán, Mahayag (now Nueva Era), New Antique, New Culasi, Saguig (now Icdang Village), Sibsib (Tulunán), and Sumbac.



“My father, a Protestant pastor, encouraged me to become a ‘Sunday school teacher’ in my college years. After attending an evangelical mission, which was my first encounter with the *Iglesia Ni Cristo*, I felt so worried when the teaching I heard

was different from what I had been taught all along. I even prayed to God, apologizing to Him for I thought I’ve done a grievous sin by listening to such a ‘false teaching’. But subsequent Bible studies proved it was the other way around. I learned about Christ’s being human. I couldn’t accept it right away. But, as verse after verse proved that what the minister was preaching is biblically correct, I decided to be baptized later on. It has been 24 years since I joined the Church, but God’s love of calling me to the true Church is indeed still fresh in my memory. Praises be to God, for whatever I experience keeps fortifying me in the faith. With His help, my whole family and I are not only active members but also officers in the Church.”

**Erlinda Barroga**  
**Local Congregation of Kabacan**

### **Driving the pegs deep**

The succeeding years saw the brethren’s fortitude in relentlessly propagating the true faith. The year 1984 was memorable as the district achieved being “number one” in the field of propagation throughout the country. The supervising minister then was Brother Armando Angeles.

The building of bigger houses of worship also continued unabated. In February 1994, the bigger house of worship for the Local Congregation of M’lang was dedicated to God through a special worship service led by then supervising minister, Brother Zosimo Alicante. By April the next year, another big house of worship, that of the Local Congregation of Kabacan, was also dedicated to God.

Also blessed were the local congregations of Carmen and Salvacion as their houses of worship underwent general renovations and were dedicated to God on March 4 and November 27, 1999, respectively.



December 1 of that same year marked the establishment of the Local Congregation of Sundungan, which had also been blessed to have a concrete house of worship built that was dedicated to God exactly a year after, in December 2000.

Other local congregations of the district were not overlooked. Magnificent houses of worship were also built and dedicated to God for the local congregations of Balabag (Aug. 30, 2002), Makilala (May 15, 2003), Dalapitan (Dec. 17, 2004), Capitol (April 25, 2008), Kalasuyan (Feb. 26, 2009), Kibia (May 29, 2009), Manongol (Mar. 26, 2010), La Esperanza (Dec. 10, 2010), Kimadzil Extension (Aug. 14, 2015), Linao Ext. (Feb. 22, 2016), Del Pilar (Apr. 15, 2016), Icdang Village (Apr. 19, 2016), Camasi (Aug. 26, 2016), Bangkal Ext. (July 26, 2017), Luz Village Ext. (Nov. 2, 2017), Canaan (Mar. 23, 2018), Linangkob Ext. (Apr. 19, 2018), Lot 60 Ext. (Sep. 5, 2018), Nueva Era (June 28, 2019), New Culasi (Feb. 21, 2020), Buayan (Oct. 23, 2021), and Matalam (Mar. 19, 2022).

### **Reaching more places, converting people**

On February 28, 2012, the Church hosted simultaneous evangelical missions at the Quirino Grandstand in Manila and at 18 other sites throughout the country. For its part, the Ecclesiastical District of Cotabato North collaborated with four of its neighboring districts in hosting the grand occasion. With God’s mercy and help, the brethren from the district were able to shuttle thousands of guests to and from the General Santos City Gymnasium in South Cotabato using 70 buses, 30 vans, and other public utility vehicles. Thus, as the brethren continue to be instrumental in propagating God’s words, many people are being baptized into the true Church.





Striving to maintain such vigor in sharing the true faith with more people, the brethren throughout the district untiringly pool their efforts and resources every time their district holds propagational activities. The evangelical missions held on September 20, 2013 and February 8, 2014 are just two of these exemplary drives in which they were able to bring about 2,000 guests and fill to capacity the Elai and Kidapawan gyms, respectively.

#### **Towards maintaining an impregnable fort**

Although far in distance from the Iglesia Ni Cristo Central Office in Quezon City, Philippines, the Church members under the jurisdiction of Cotabato North warmly feel the love and care that Brother Eduardo V. Manalo, the Executive Minister, has for all the brethren the world over. This they always reciprocate by remaining united with the Church Administration. Moving as one, when the Executive Minister officiated at the evangelical mission dubbed the "Most Extensive Proclamation of God's Words" held at the Philippine Arena and livestreamed to 2,125 sites worldwide on September 26, 2015, they gathered together with their guests in seven gymnasiums and 20 other sites in their district.

Indeed, whenever their district is blessed to be among those included to listen to the preaching of the Executive Minister through livestreaming, they are eager to attend and keen to understand God's words taught to them.

Such blessed occasions include the dedication to God of the 150- and 250-seater new houses of worship of the local congregations of Buayan and Matalam on October 23, 2021 and March 19, 2022, respectively. Officiated by the Executive Minister at the Central



"I've known the Church Of Christ since the 80s. But it was in 2015 when my contractor, who happened to be a Church member, diligently invited me whenever there were evangelical missions. In effect, after two years of his persistent efforts, my wife and I decided to continue attending Bible studies and, finally, we were baptized in 2017," said Brother Johnny. "God's blessings kept on pouring ever since we became members of this Church. As a way of gratitude and to glorify God, it is our faith to be of help in propagating God's words that's why we offered our house to be a place for Bible studies. Just like our brother who was instrumental in converting us, we will also continuously invite others to join the Church so that, together with us, they will also be certain of salvation come Judgment Day," added Sister Lucena.

#### **Johnny and Lucena Dacumos Local Congregation of Carmen**

Temple in Quezon City as the pandemic kept reeling, these worship services were also streamed live to other local congregations, whose respective newly built houses of worship were also dedicated to God, as well as to the local congregations celebrating their respective milestone anniversaries that time.

As of this writing, the Ecclesiastical District of Cotabato North is comprised of 38 local congregations, 11 extensions, and one group worship service (GWS). Indeed, with Brother Cesar Gutierrez as its present district supervising minister, Church members herein will continue uniting with the Executive Minister in serving the Lord, ever striving in maintaining their district as an impregnable fort of the true faith. 🙏

**With research assistance from Nolan C. Castro**

# Top bar passer abides in God's laws

By KATE PALOMO

SISTER KRISTEL SHAYNE SIGUA, a choir member in the Local Congregation of Arayat, Ecclesiastical District of Pampanga East, has again proven that being faithful to God's teachings will lead one to prosper in life. Despite the impediments, she achieved more than what she hoped for. She said, "I firmly believe that success, whether great or small, comes from the Almighty Father. This achievement is not just my own, because even the skills and capabilities I acquired were also bestowed by Him."

Sister Shayne graduated *cum laude* upon receiving a degree in Business Economics at the University of the Philippines (UP) in 2016. Upon entering law school, she was welcomed as a member of the Order of the Purple Feather (UP College of Law's Honor Society). She finished a Juris Doctor degree, obtaining a Dean's Medal for Academic Excellence in 2020.



Sister Shayne

Notwithstanding the commitments that came with these honors, Sister Shayne remained an active Church Of Christ member. One of the notable moments in her experience was when she was preparing for the 2020/2021 Philippine Bar Examinations. "While it may seem counter-intuitive because it meant having less time for review and preparation, I always prioritize obeying God's commandments: fulfilling my Church duties and being prayerful to Him. That is why during those moments of uncertainty, I conducted devotional prayers to Him. I believe with all my heart that even if I studied so hard but God didn't help me, I would not have succeeded," she said.

The Christian Brotherhood International (CBI), the official student organization for Church Of Christ members in a particular school, also played a big role in her student life. Instead of joining organizations espousing different ideologies or getting involved with groups engaged in vices, she focused on being active in the CBI with fellow Church Of Christ members. She recalled, "I was aware that as a student, I would be exposed to some practices and cultures that are against God's teachings. Thankfully, we always received biblical advice and reminders from the Church Administration through the ministers who were our CBI advisers, so that we would always accord ourselves to what is morally upright for true Christians. Participating in UP CBI activities was crucial for me because it helped me in sharing my faith with others and it also edified my faith, as well as those of my fellow members."

It was not that easy for Sister Shayne to accomplish her goal. She narrated, "The bar exams were postponed multiple times for two years because of the pandemic. This led to many days of frustration, helplessness, and sadness. Then, the pandemic also added more uncertainties—we were not allowed to take the exams if we tested positive for Covid-19 prior to it. This added to my anxiety. Lastly, the entire experience of reviewing for one of the hardest exams in the country was a challenge in itself. A great amount of patience and focus is needed by anyone who takes it."



With God's help, Sister Shayne was not only among the 8,241 bar exam passers but she is also one of the top 14 new lawyers who earned recognition for excellent performance, having obtained grades higher than 90 percent. "I still could not believe that my name was among the top passers. At that moment, I really knew that it was the work of God," she exclaimed.

Currently, Sister Shayne is a court attorney in the Supreme Court of the Philippines. She continues to share her experience with others, affirming God's guidance to His people who are obedient to His teachings. As for her advice to those also aspiring for success in their respective endeavors, she said: "Let us make prayers a part of our life. Let us entrust everything to God. As we give all our efforts to achieve our dreams, let us never forget to prioritize the worship services and our duties to Him." 🙏

# GOD'S MESSAGE



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