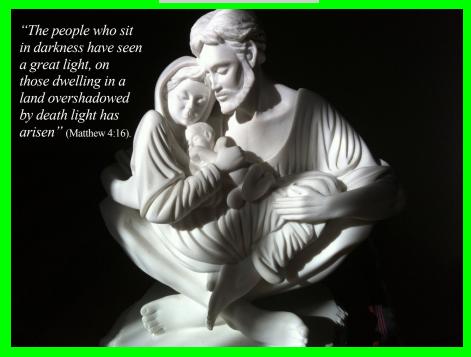
### Friends & Disciples

Official Bulletin of the Community of the Missionaries of Jesus-USA
December 2011

Missionaries of Jesus



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#### God's Love Became Human Solidarity

"The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen" (Matthew 4:16).

As we look around us and deep down in our pockets, we identify with what Matthew, citing Isaiah, is telling us. This is one of the main messages of Christmas season. There is hope!

We have become witnesses of one crisis after the other that seems to darken our world. Fortunately, each crisis becomes an opportunity for us humans to outshine ourselves. In every crisis we take part in bringing to birth a new life and light through different expressions of human solidarity. When there is crisis, love becomes human.

The members of the Missionaries of Jesus are not unfamiliar with this phenomenon. The religious missionary group is a product of a crisis and human solidarity. The history of the Missionaries of Jesus is a proof that when there is crisis love takes the form of human solidarity.

More than two thousand years ago, the world was also in crisis... and God's Love became human. Let us continue incarnating God's Love in our everyday life. Let us not cease giving flesh and blood to love through our human solidarity. Let us not grow tired bringing to birth a new life through different expressions of human solidarity. And if and when we do this, we can truly say, "Emmanuel," God is with us for God's Love became human and expressed his solidarity with us.

This is our dream as members of the Missionaries of Jesus. "As friends and disciples of Jesus we live and work together in search of God's liberating presence, especially among our brothers and sisters in frontier situations.... We establish links... other entities that work for peace, global interdependence, ecological well-being, healing and reconciliation, thus rendering common service to God and people" (MJ Constitution).

In this issue, we read the attempts of the Missionaries of Jesus in the persons of Fr. Elmo Tactacan, Fr. Joey Evangelista, Fr. Efren "Wren" Reyes, Fr. Gerry Charcos and Fr. Aris Villanueva, to bring the Light of Christ in the face of various crises in Digos, Davao del Sur in the Philippines and in Tierra Blanca in Guatemala. In their behalf and in the name of all the members of the Missionaries of Jesus and of all the people we serve and work with, I thank you for helping us spiritually, morally and financially. Thank you for sharing out of your poverty.

May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord show his face to you and have compassion on you! May he turn his face to you and give you peace! Amen (Numbers 6:24-26). MERRY CHRISTMAS!

- Fr. Melanio Viuya, Jr., MJ

#### Flores de Mayo in Matamis



MATAMIS children singing Marian Songs

May is the month for children here in Matamis (Malita Tagakaulo Mission) in Davao del Sur. It is a month of fun learning about the Christian faith in catechetical classes for children we call *flores de Mayo* (mayflowers).

Young volunteers from the different basic Christian communities under the care of the Missionaries of Jesus came to the mission station at the beginning of May this year for several days to prepare for *flores de Mayo*. These volunteers were high school students who had literally crossed rivers and mountains to come for the training. They had opted to spend a great part of their summer vacation helping the children in their communities learn more about their faith. The head catechist, together with her team, facilitated the training. The volunteers were not only instructed on what to teach but were also trained how to teach children. They also took turns trying out what they had learned in mock-classes with their peers, the latter playing the role of young pupils. These sessions were closely supervised by the catechists.

The training was also an occasion to meet new friends and to reunite with old ones. Thus, the end of the days of formation was met both with eagerness to begin their ministry, as well as with a bit of heavy-heartedness due to the parting of ways with friends. Mass was presided by Fr. Elmo Tactacan, MJ on their last day of formation. Together they thanked God for the things they had learned and for the friends they had met, and asked God for continued guidance for the tasks they were about to carry out in their basic Christian communities.



Fr. Joey joins the children practicing Marian songs for the Flores the Mayo.

Flores de Mayo is always eagerly awaited by children ages four to twelve in the different basic Christian communities here. Going around, I often saw children trooping to their community chapels in the early afternoon, some accompanied by adults, others walking in groups. At a community chapel near the mission station, it was interesting to watch the younger children being taught by the volunteers how to make the sign of the cross and how to pray the Our Father and the Hail Mary. The older ones were taught how to pray the rosary and were sometimes tasked to assist the volunteers in teaching the smaller children. They were all told stories from the Bible about Mary and Jesus. They were also taught how to sing Marian songs as well as songs for mass. On a few occasions I tried singing the Our Father with them. Almost always the children would start giggling as soon as I opened my mouth to sing: they found my Tagakaulo downright funny! I would just smile and carry on with my singing trying even harder to pronounce each word properly.

The children were not always warming the benches in the community chapel; classes were interspersed with games during the week. The silence of the mountains was often interrupted by the laughter of children at play during the *flores de Mayo*, making the green environs seem even more alive. There were days when the children would prepare *merienda* (snacks) together with the volunteers. They would prepare *champorado* (chocolate rice porridge), *butong* (young coconut), or *binignit* (sliced taro, banana and sweet potato boiled in water with coconut milk). The children always went home happy and contented at the end of the day.

The volunteers who had offered their time for the children this year had benefitted from the *flores de Mayo* of the previous years when they themselves were children. They were giving back to the children of today the generosity they had received from the volunteers of yesteryears. *Flores de Mayo* is not just catechetical class for children during summer; it's helping children concretely experience the goodness of God in a manner that they can comprehend with the hope that they too will share this goodness with other children when the opportune time comes.

- Fr. Joey Gánio Evangelista, MJ

#### Come and See

Come and see. About two years ago, a friend invited me to participate in some of our parish activities. I always go to mass on Sunday with my family; but it never crossed my mind to be involved in the liturgical or pastoral works of our parish community. At first I was hesitant. Perhaps, it was because of the negative things I had heard of people active in our parish, like intrigues, quarrels, discrimination of the poor members, etc. Nonetheless, due to my friend's insistent invitation to come and see, I finally decided to go.

New acquaintances and friends. I started my more active participation in the community life of our parish by helping regularly in the cleaning of our church and its surrounding area. My three young children usually come along with me—Jessica, Jericho, and Joannes Mai, aged 13, 11 and 6 years old respectively. We are happy to get involved and have new acquaintances and friends. Eventually, Jessica became a member of our Parish Youth Organization. She was also among those chosen as beneficiaries of the Parish Scholarship Program. The said-scholarship grant is intended for the financially poor but deserving

students of our parish. Jericho, on the other hand, became an Altar Server

I am grateful to my friend who invited me to come and see. I am happy that my family got more involved in the community life of our parish. We live in a slum area, a kilometer away from the church. Drug abuse is rampant in our locality and it has also become a hiding place for criminals. My husband who works in a construction firm in another province and can only be with us on weekend is truly glad that our children are now spending a great part of their time in a safer and healthier environment.



Like the first Christian communities. The Sto. Niño Parish, which was erected in 2002, is just like one of the first Christian communities. The parishioners come from different provinces of the Philippines. They belong to different ethnic groups. This diversity brings richness and beauty to our parish; but at times, trials and difficulties.

The first big trial I witnessed and experienced was in January 2011, on the occasion of our parish fiesta. It could have been a real happy and meaningful celebration had there not been a quarrel in the distribution of food during the reception. I felt so sad and disappointed.

A week or two after our fiesta, as I was reading the Bible I came across this passage from the Acts of the Apostles: "Some time later, as

the number of disciples kept growing, there was a quarrel between the Greek-speaking Jews and the native Jews. The Greek-speaking Jews claimed that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1).



Jessica (middle) is helping in setting the table in one of our parish seminars

I could not but smile after reading this passage. This made me realize that a Christian community is not a community of already holy and faultless people, but rather of human beings like me—sinners who are praying and struggling to become worthy sons and daughters of God. Thus, instead of being judgmental we should be supportive to one another. And as our Parish Priest, Fr. Efren N. Reyes, MJ, would often remind us — "let us pray for one another."

Glory and praise to God. I am truly grateful to my friend who invited me to come and see. Now it is my turn to do the same—invite others to come and see. It is true that it is never that easy to live in community. However, I have discovered it is in the community where I can find true friends who also desire to follow and serve the Risen Lord in whatever little ways we can. As one of the nuns in our parish once told us, "We are not expected by the Lord to do great things but rather do simple things with great love." In my letter to our parish priest last April 2011 I wrote: "Even if my daughter Jessica would no longer qualify next

school year for the parish scholarship grant for whatever reason, still we will continue to be actively involved in the parish. We are happy to belong to Jesus' friends and disciples."

Glory and praise to God who loves us forever. Thank God we have Fr. Gerry Charcos and Fr. Efren Reyes in our midst. Both are Missionaries of Jesus. In our parish community, even if most of us try to give the best of ourselves, still time and again we experience heartaches, misunderstandings and disappointments. We are fortunate that the Missionaries of Jesus are always there to pray with us, guide and inspire us.



Fr. Efren (in blue shirt) with Joannes who was chosen to represent the Students Assistant Program in a beauty pageant for kids on our last Parish Fiesta in January 2011

I have experienced that it is not always easy to follow Jesus. But I have also experienced and realized that following Him together with my family and friends in the parish has made my life and that of my family a lot happier and meaningful. Thus, at times, when some of my friends feel like giving up because of some difficulties in our parish community, I would remind them of what Peter replied when Jesus asked: "Are you also going to leave me?" Peter's replied: "To whom would we go, Lord? You have the kind of life we are dreaming of."

Getting wounded is part of the risk of following Jesus. But as Fr. Efren told us in his homily last Easter, we should not be afraid of being hurt and wounded in Jesus' name. It is by the wounds we have suffered in following Jesus that we would be recognized as His true friends and disciples.

- Mrs. Ellen M. Pantig Mother of one of our Parish Scholars

Prayer for the Missionaries of Jesus (MJs)

Lord Jesus Christ, Let the Holy Spirit take hold of all the Missionaries of Jesus.

Consume them with the fire of your love as you did with the First Apostles at Pentecost, always lead them where you want them to go.

Enable them to proclaim God's reign to those who seek you.

Son of God and Son of Mary, show them the way to our brothers and sisters where the need for you is felt most.

Inspire young men to join the Missionaries of Jesus, to live as friends and disciples, and to proclaim your Good News.

O Provident and Abiding Love, guide and protect the Missionaries of Jesus both now and forever.

Amen.

### "Ob Carabao, My Carabao..."



BASIKONG community, situated in a far-flung barangay, is one of the basic ecclesial communities (BEC) of Malita Tagakaulo Mission (MATAMIS) of the Diocese of Digos, in Davao del Sur. It is considered one of the smallest, having more or less a population of 20 families. In spite of that, it prides itself for its simplicity, hospitality, dynamism, unity and creativity.

The people are engaged in upland farming. The rugged terrains and rolling hills are planted with corn, cassava, abaca, different fruit-bearing trees and other root crops. The community is beset with a lot of challenges because of its remote location. The abject poverty is a result of the negligence of the local government authorities to help these people improve their plight. The only way to reach the community is through an hour hike or horseback ride. The whole area of this hinterland depends on farming as its primary source of income.

One of the pressing concerns of this farming community is the absence of a carabao (water buffalo), the most needed companion of a

farmer in this part of the globe to help them till their farmlands. A family must have one but that never happens. To resolve that problem somehow, they would often resort to hiring a carabao from other barangays or nearby communities. This can be very expensive, not to mention the difficulty of having to wait for the availability of the carabao. As they are so dependent on rainfalls for the success of their cultivation and harvests, proper timing is crucial. Thus, the need for a carabao to make their fields ready for planting come the rainy season.



In one of our community meetings, the problem was presented to us, the mission staff of MATAMIS, with the hope of finding a charitable institution that could provide them a carabao. However, due to the absence of an institution with such a program, we came up with the idea of pooling our resources through the help of friends and benefactors to come up with the needed amount. Once the amount was available, this was lent to the community for the procurement of the carabao. This will be paid back by the community on a monthly basis without interest. Such an idea was developed to avoid borrowing from local businessmen who are known for their usurious practices (a rampant practice of the local businessmen in the area) and to promote community participation. With this, we count that the community will learn to value and care for the carabao since it belongs to them. It is a fruit of their effort working as a community

impelling them to unite more. The carabao plus the accessories needed was worth 20,000 pesos (around \$500.00). The community will pay 1,000 pesos (\$25.00) as monthly instalment, thus giving them 20 months to pay the total amount. The amount will then be used for similar project for other communities.

With the procurement of the carabao, the people of Basikong community exclaimed with excitement and joy saying, "Oh Carabao, my carabao (from the tune: O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree) ...." Indeed a great relief for these wonderful people. Since they already started to take turns in using the carabao, especially during the onset of the rainy days, the community did not fail to prepare and to plant their fields. They too were able to pay their monthly dues.

They are so excited to come up with other innovative ideas and projects to help them alleviate their lives. They also hope for generous people to continue helping them to be able to stand on their own and to have a more dignified existence.

- Fr. Elmo Tactacan, MJ

#### Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



#### Zapote Journal (Los Curanderos)

On the evening of May 16th, I was resting inside the hut where I stay in Zapote when a soft knock sounded at the door. I hesitated to open it for I thought it was just a sound caused by the wind. Then it came again accompanied with a soft voice calling out, "B'aanu, Qaawa' Padre" ("Do me a favour, Father"). I hurriedly opened the door and saw the lonely face of Qaawa' (sir) Arroldo, the second *Chinam (mayordomo)* of the Christian community of the place. I gladly greeted him trying to make him smile. Then he asked me if there would be a mass the following day. I said yes and then he gave me a small paper with the name of one of her daughters written on it. I asked him what happened, and then he told me his story:

On the first week of March, the foot of Erlinda Mariela got wounded by a small stick while she was playing with her siblings in front of their house. It was just a small wound so the family did not pay much attention to it. The kid continued to go to school, played with the other kids of the community, and accompanied her mother to the river to wash their dirty clothes. She walked and played around the community barefooted, as most of the kids. Then her foot started to swell. It got infected. The father went to the health promoter of the community and was given a medicine but it did not help. On the first week of April, the kid could no longer walk nor stand on her own. The father went to Raxjuha (the nearest town from the community) and bought more medicines. Like most of the people of the community, he bought and gave her daughter medicines without the prescription of a physician. It still did not help the worsening condition of her daughter. Then he decided to bring her daughter to a "curandero" (faith healer) in a neighbouring community. For more than a week the "curandero" attended and tried to cure Erlinda Mariela but she only got worse. On the 16th of April, Qaawa' Arroldo brought her to a doctor in Raxjuha but then it was already too late. On their way home the following day, Q'aawa Arroldo lost her lovely seven year old daughter.

The following day, during the Eucharistic celebration, Qaawa' Gustaqio (one of the elders) led the community in praying for the soul of Erlinda Mariela, that she may be happy and continue to play in the presence of the Lord.

Three days later, I was in Coyo, the farthest community of the parish, to celebrate the mass and to spend a day with the people of the community. I was then resting while conversing with two elders of the place when the coordinator of Christian community arrived and asked me

if I could visit his house. I asked him what happened and he said that his wife was sick. I agreed to visit his house; together with the elders, we walked towards the house of Qaawa' Sebastian. When we arrived to the house, we found her lying in bed. Qaawa' Sebastian showed me the boil just above her ankle. He told me that it's been a week now that she could not walk because of the boil. As she is sick, the whole family suffers. Nobody washes their clothes and nobody prepares tortilla for their food (to a Q'egchi' family, to prepare the tortilla and to wash clothes are the chores of the women as the men spend most of their time in the fields). With God's help, he said, a lady neighbor once in a while comes in to prepare tortilla. And then Qaawa' Sebastian told me that he had been planning to bring her wife to a "curandero". I asked him why he did not bring her to a doctor but he softly replied, "Ink'a' ninnau Padre" (I don't know Father). Telling me 'I don't know 'was a gentle way of saving that he didn't really want to bring her to the doctor. Together with their kids and the two elders, we offered a prayer and then we said goodbye, wishing for her recovery.



Talking to some elders and to some leaders of some of the communities I visited after wards, they tried to explain to me the reason why they prefer to go to a "curandero" rather than to a physician when they are sick. They gave me varied reasons but the most prominent reason they mentioned was that the "curandero" speaks their language and speaks of the "world" they know.

Every time they go to a doctor they always say afterwards that the doctor does not know or could not cure their ailment. It is possible that they say this because they could not understand what the doctor says about their ailment for two reasons: very few Q'eqchi's, especially from the rural areas, speak Spanish and they could not understand medical terminologies that physicians utter at times.

They also claim that they prefer to go to a "curandero" because the "curandero" speaks their language and explains to them well the cause and the cure of their ailments. "They say that the doctors do not tell them where the medicines they prescribe come from or what they were really for." They say that a "curandero" uses herbal medicines that they know and place them to where they feel the pain. The "curandero" also burns "pom" (incense) and other things which they know so well because such materials are used in their different Q'eqchi' rituals.

They also say that they go to a "curandero because he tells them who caused or inflicted their sickness. Somebody who holds grudges or is jealous of them may be interpreted as the one who brought about their sickness. That someone, they say, will hire a "bad curandero" to harm their spirits and that causes them to have different sicknesses. So they say that they prefer to go to a "curandero" because he could identify who inflicted them harm and could help them cure the ailment inflicted on them. Because of these, they prefer to go to a "curandero" even if the "curandero" will charge them one to four thousand quetzals (equivalent of \$130 - \$530).

When visiting the different communities of the parish, one could hear many stories similar to that of Erlinda Mariela, the daughter of Qaawa' Arroldo and Qana' Aurelia, the wife of Qaawa' Sebastian. One could hear of stories of simple ailments that turned worse because they were not taken care of or the people took medicines without first visiting physicians. One could hear stories of ailments inflicted by others. One could hear stories of deaths because they claim that neither the doctor nor the "curandero" could heal them.

This is one of the realities the people are confronted with in the communities, a reality that is very much connected with the beliefs and the worldview of the people. It is a reality that sometimes causes misunderstanding within the community because of accusations regarding who inflicted the harm. It is a reality that challenges us to accompany the people and help them understand their simple ailments. Gone are the days when it was just enough to give people medicines thinking that it would resolve health concerns. It is a challenge for us to accompany and to journey with them in their process of understanding and learning.

What was written above are just glimpses about the life of the people, their reality, and how they perceive things. It is an invitation for us to continue dialoguing with the people, learning and sharing from both sides. It is always painful to hear about such experiences of sicknesses and deaths. However, it may serve as an impetus for us to be more present in the daily experiences of the people too.

- Fr. Aris Villanueva, MJ



Lights and Shadows. What was written above are just glimpses about the life of the people, their reality, and how they perceive things. It is an invitation for us to continue dialoguing with the people too. (Some leaders of San Marcos Evangelista Parish are shown here exchanging ideas on how to bring more light and life in the shadow of death).

You can also help Fr. Aris and his companions, Frs. Jose Guerrero, MJ and Rey Tejico, MJ, to continue helping the people of Zapote in Guatemala by sending your donations to the Missionaries of Jesus at 435 S Occidental Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90057. Please call 213 327 8793 if you decide to pledge a monthly donation and to include the Missionaries of Jesus in your Annuity and Trusts.

#### Los Curanderos

En la primera semana de marzo, Erlinda Mariela se lesionó su pie mientras jugaba con sus hermanos. Era sólo una pequeña herida por lo que la familia no le presté mucha atención. La niña continuó yendo a la escuela, jugando con otros niños de la comunidad, y acompañando a su madre al río para lavar <del>la</del> ropa sucia. Como Erlinda, mayoría de los niños andan y juegan descalzo en la comunidad. Luego, su pie comenzó a hincharse. Se infectó. En la primera semana de abril, la niña ya no pudo caminar ni estar de pie por su cuenta. Su padre, Q'aawa (don) Arroldo, se fue a Raxjuha (el pueblo más cerca de la comunidad) y compró medicamentos. Como la mayoría de la gente de la comunidad, él compró y le dio medicamentos a su hija sin la prescripción de un médico. Esto no ayudó para que se mejorara el estado de la salud de su hija. Entonces, decidió traer a su hija a un curandero en una comunidad vecina. Durante más de una semana, el curandero trató de curar a Erlinda. Sin embargo, su condición se empeoró. El 16 de abril, su padre la llevó a un médico en Raxjuha pero ya era demasiado tarde. En su camino a casa el día siguiente, Q'aawa Arroldo perdió a su hermosa hija de siete años.

Hablando con ancianos y líderes de algunas comunidades que visité después de la muerte de Erlinda, ellos me explicaron la razón porque la gente prefiere ir a un curandero y no a un médico cuando están enfermos. Ellos me dieron razones variadas, pero la razón más destacada que mencionaron fue que el curandero habla su idioma y habla del "mundo" que saben.

Visitando las diferentes comunidades de la parroquia, se puede escuchar muchas historias similares como las de Erlinda Mariela. Se podría hablar de historias de enfermedades simples que se empeoraron, porque la gente no presta mucha atención a la curación o la gente toma las medicinas sin visitar primero a un médico. Se escuchan historias de enfermedades culpando a personas como causantes de las mismas. Se escuchan historias de muertes, ya que la gente afirma que ni el médico ni el curandero podrían curar a los enfermos.

Esta es una de las realidades que la gente enfrenta en las comunidades. Es una realidad que está muy relacionado con sus creencias y su cosmovisión como indígenas. Es una realidad que a veces causa confusión en la comunidad debido a las acusaciones sobre quien era causante de la enfermedad. Es una realidad que nos desafía para acompañar a la gente y ayudarlas a entender sus dolencias simples. Han quedado los días en que regalar las medicinas bastaba, pensando que esto resolvía las preocupaciones con la gente. Es un reto para nosotros acompañar y caminar con ellos en su proceso de comprensión y aprendizaje.

Lo que fue escrito arriba son sólo vislumbres sobre la vida de la gente, su realidad, y cómo perciben el mundo. Nos interpela para que sigamos dialogando con la gente y que aprendamos y compartamos con uno al otro. Siempre nos duele escuchar experiencias sobre enfermedades y muertes que afectan a la gente. Sin embargo, estas historias nos desafían y nos motivan para convivir cercanamente con la gente especialmente por medio de sus experiencias cotidianas.

- Padre Aris Villanueva, MJ

#### Help the Missionaries of Jesus

Help the Missionaries of Jesus in their mission to bring the Good News to the poor and marginalized children, women and men!

Remember the Missionaries of Jesus in your planned or deferred gifts that may include the following:

- 4 You can establish a charitable gift annuity with Missionaries of Jesus.
- Bequests: You need to name specifically in your will the Missionaries of Jesus.
- In writing your will, choose to set up a living trust to avoid probate. You can list specific gifts from your estate to Missionaries of Jesus.
- Your estate consists of all the assets you own at the time of your death: cash, securities, jewelries, art, your home or other real estate. Any of these assets would be an acceptable gift to make to the Missionaries of Jesus
- 4 Missionaries of Jesus can be named as one of the beneficiaries in your life insurance policy.
- Missionaries of Jesus can be named as a beneficiary of your IRA or other retirement account.

For more information, please contact
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Tel: 213 389 8439 ext 19; 213 327 8793





# Merry Christmas! Feliz Navidad! - Missionaries of Jesus

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## Mission Statement



We are called to assist in the emergence of a new face of the Church integrating into the life of the people, in the struggle of self-determination, in reclaiming their stories, and we journey together

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heard and responded to God's call to mission. in the celebration of life and culture.



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