



# Friends & Disciples

Easter 2025

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MISSIONARIES OF JESUS - AMERICAS

## AN UNSUNG HERO

A Tagakolu teacher and anthropologist, Marites "Mate" Gonzalo is named one of the Ten Unsung Women Heroes of 2024 by Soroptimist International.



The background of the entire image is a white wall covered with numerous crucifixes and faces of Jesus. These are made from various materials, including wood and metal, and are arranged in a grid-like pattern. Some faces are mounted on simple crosses, while others are on more ornate, circular or rectangular frames. The faces themselves vary in expression, from serene to suffering, and some are adorned with halos or crowns of thorns. The text "THE FACES OF JESUS" is superimposed in the center of the image in a bold, green, sans-serif font.

# THE FACES OF JESUS



Missionaries  
of Jesus

# FROM THE EDITOR

**I**t was the women disciples who first witnessed the resurrection of Jesus according to the Gospels. At the most important moment in our faith's history, the first witnesses were the seemingly most insignificant members of the Jewish society. This reflects the kingdom of God that Jesus preached during his ministry and embodies the meaning of Easter: everything is made new! Easter is not merely an event in the past but a reality that Christians must live each day.

In this issue, we share stories of people whose lives reflect the message of Easter.

**Marites Gonzalo** shares her joy in working with the mothers of the learners at the IP schools she supervises in the southern Philippines. The volunteerism of these women benefits not only their children but the entire community. Gonzalo is the School Director of the Malita Tagakaulo Mission (MATAMIS) Indigenous Peoples (IP) Education Ministry, which the Missionaries of Jesus assist.

Before being appointed Bishop of Gumaca in the Philippines by Pope Francis, **Euginius Cañete** was a missionary in Zambia, Africa, and later General Coordinator of the Missionaries of Jesus. **Melanio Viuya** writes his reflection on Euginius' new path as shepherd of the Diocese of Gumaca. Cañete is a missionary who has become the bishop of a mission diocese.

We often take for granted the food we eat each day. **Giltrude Mario** writes about his experiences living with the farmers of Tinoc in the northern Philippines during his missionary training. Mario details the hardships that farming communities endure so that others may have food on their tables. Mario is a seminarian of the Missionaries of Jesus currently living with and among the Kalanguya people of Tinoc.

We are able to share the joy of Easter with communities in different countries, not only because of the commitment and dedication of missionaries, but also because of the generosity of our families, benefactors, and donors. It is this partnership that helps us bring the joy of Christ's resurrection to the marginalized people of society. We thank all of you for always being there for us. May God bless you and your loved ones. Happy Easter!

*Joey Ganio Evangelista, MJ*

# JOIN THE MISSIONARIES OF JESUS

We are called to find Christ in the poor,  
to lend our voice to their causes,  
but also to be their friends,  
to listen to them,  
to speak for them and  
to embrace the mysterious wisdom  
which God wishes to share  
with us through them.

*Evangelii gaudium, 198*



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# PASSION FOR EDUCATION

*Marites Gonzalo*

I was overjoyed when I received the news on my birthday that I was one of the ten women awardees of the 2024 Unsung Women Heroes Awards, given by Soroptimist International of the Americas Philippines Region. There were ten awardees from across the three island groups of the Philippines. Soroptimist International is a global volunteer organization that provides women and girls access to education and training. The recognition honors women who have contributed to the development and welfare of their communities.

I was accompanied by Fr. Roger del Rosario, MJ, an elder and a Catholic priest of the Missionaries of Jesus who had been assigned to Mindanao doing mission ministry among Christians and Muslims for many years. When my name was called to receive the award, I stood up immediately and walked toward the stage.



*Marites Gonzalo with Fr. Roger del Rosario, MJ at the awarding ceremonies.*



While walking, I felt that the children and women, especially the mothers in our IP (Indigenous Peoples) schools, were walking with me.

I have been working with and for the Indigenous Peoples (IP) Education program of the Malita Tagakaulo Mission (MATAMIS) of the Diocese of Digos since 2016. My passion and commitment to community work are rooted in my mother's early community involvement during my childhood. She was a *barangay* health worker (the *barangay* is the smallest administrative division in the Philippines, similar to a village or neighborhood) for many years and, at the same time, a leader-organizer for the health program of MATAMIS and the Tribal Filipino Apostolate of the Diocese in the mid-1980s. I witnessed how my mother actively served our Tagakolu community, especially women and children. This was my early training in service, in addition to my experience with the early missionaries in our commu-





nity, the PMÉ Fathers from Quebec, Canada. I was always by her side, conducting household surveys, distributing vitamins, interviewing women in the mountains, and always attending her meetings and training sessions.

Nowadays, I see my mother reflected in the active involvement of the mothers and women in the three IP schools under the care of MATAMIS. These women have been doing their best to serve and look after the well-being of their families, especially their children. They perform multiple tasks, ranging from household chores, which include fetching water, raising livestock, and backyard gardening. Despite the bulk of responsibilities at home, their vibrant contribution to the implementation



of IP Education among Tagakolu children in the IP schools is evident. During the schools' monthly meetings, planning and tasking for school development, and especially the daily feeding of the schoolchildren, these women and mothers are always on the go, ready to participate and work alongside their husbands. Every time we have guests at school, whether the visit is planned or a surprise, the mothers are always ready to go to the school and bring food. Moreover, many of the elder mentors for the IP Education of the children, imparting their cultural knowledge and experience at school, are women, though some are men with significant experience and cultural knowledge in the community.

Their active involvement in the school has become an avenue and an opportunity to better organize themselves as women in the community, nurturing each other's capacity and giftedness. In 2022, we started our daily feeding program at school in partnership with the Hapag-Asa Integrated Feeding Program of the Assisi Development Foundation, Incorporated (ADFI), a Philippine-based non-governmental organization that assists Philippine indigenous communities. The

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*Tagakolu children and their teacher in the southern Philippines who the Missionaries of Jesus assist in administering their school that truly respects their culture.*

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mothers in the IP schools were clustered into five groups. Each cluster is composed of three to seven members, depending on the parent population in the school. Every cluster takes turns preparing food for the children's daily feeding. Each mother brings vegetables, half of which she contributes for free, and the other half the school purchases for the feeding program. The vegetables are harvested from their backyard gardens, which had been supported by the Land and Livelihoods Project, another program supported by ADFI in partnership with MATAMIS. Little by little, the mothers had decided to contribute money from what they earned from their backyard gardens. They contribute half of their income from the vegeta-



# JOIN 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.

*MJ Constitutions, no. 2*



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bles purchased by the school to accumulate an amount and have an income-generating project (IGP) for their group.

Today, they have already acquired a sow and are waiting for the piglets to be weaned in February 2025. They plan to share the piglets with the mothers who are willing and able to raise pigs in their backyards. During the 2024 Christmas Family Day, they received food containers as tokens for their hard work and from the amount they were saving. Their desire is that, in the coming years, their project can slowly support the feeding of their children at school. Aside from hog raising, they also planted passion fruit trees for family consumption and hope to develop it into a product to sell in the future.

The journey of the IP Education Ministry of MATAMIS has not been easy. There have been many difficulties and challenges encountered, one of the most pressing being financial support to sustain the schools with the present one hundred ninety-eight children, nurturing cultural identity while learning academics through IP education. We, the Tagakolu teachers, have been grateful to all our friends, partners, donors, benefactors, and the Missionaries of Jesus who have been helping our ministry among Tagakolu children. With courage, passion, and by trusting *Tyumanem's* (God's) grace, we thrive and continue. I believe *Tyumanem* is accompanying us, working through many generous people and the active participation of women in our IP schools. We keep praying for fruitful and abundant blessings as we begin a new year. ■



# JOIN THE MISSIONARIES OF JESUS

Let's open ourselves  
to the light of Jesus,  
and let's never be  
diverted from His light!

*Pope Francis, February 25, 2024*



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# COMPLETE WHAT IS LACKING

*Rev. Melanio Viuya, MJ*

**M***ater Iesu ad eum vinum non habent.* The mother of Jesus told him, “They have no wine”. This sentence is inscribed on the dome of the Cathedral of our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage in Antipolo. One specific reading of this came to mind on December 28, 2024—the day of the consecration of Bishop Euginius Ma. L. Cañete, MJ, DD, now the bishop of the Diocese of Gumaca in Quezon Province. For almost two years, the clergy, the religious and the laity of Gumaca were orphans after the untimely death of Bishop Victor de la Cruz Ocampo on March 16, 2023. They had no bishop. Something had been lacking in Gumaca.

Some days before September 30, 2024 (the day Pope Francis announced in Rome the good news), Eugene, then Coordinator General of the Missionaries of



*Fr. Melanio concelebrates Mass with Bishop Euginius at Sto. Niño Parish in the Philippines, which is administered by the Missionaries of Jesus.*

Jesus (MJ), and I were driving somewhere in the capital of the Philippines when his phone rang. He whispered to me, "it's from the Nunciature". He did not take the call but instead sent a short text message. I did not inquire what it was about nor did he volunteer any information. He told me though that he would invite the MJ members of PH North to celebrate the birthday of Fr. Benedicto Lagarde on September 29. I told him that I would be back in Vietnam by then.

In completing what was lacking elsewhere, he would be leaving a void in the ranks of the Missionaries of Jesus. This is a gain for the universal and local Church while a big loss to MJ. Out of our poverty we share Bishop Eugene to the Church. This ambivalent feeling is palpable not only among the members of MJ but also among his family members and friends. Everybody's lips uttered, "*Sayang. Hindi na nasaksihan ni Nanay Mila ang pagiging obispo ni Eugene*" (It's a pity that Eugene's mother, Mila, could not witness her son's ordination as bishop). Nanay Mila passed away in July this year. We are sure Nanay Mila, together with Tatay Luis and Mama Nene are rejoicing in heaven praising God for all the graces be-

## HAVE YOU ALREADY INCLUDED THE MISSIONARIES OF JESUS IN YOUR LIVING WILL?



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*Pablo Virgilio Cardinal David presided over the episcopal ordination of Bishop Euginius.*

stowed upon their family. I rejoice with the siblings of Eugene and their families for the grace of having a family member as bishop. The sorrow caused by Nanay Mila's passing was eclipsed by the joy of Bishop Eugene's election. Again, completing what was lacking. The election of Bishop Eugene came some weeks after



*Bishop Euginius being vested in the sacristy of the International Shrine of Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje in Antipolo.*

the election of Bishop Pablo Virgilio David (MJ's bishop protector) as one of the 21 cardinals elevated by Pope Francis. "From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace" (John 1:16).

Personally, I feel both joy and sadness. Sad because I will miss our regular chit-chats during short and long-distance commutes and after meals; our regular visits to the mission stations in Vietnam and our walks and coffee time in a mall in Antipolo and in coffee shops in Vietnam. I would not venture to say that I lost a good friend (because I did not) but I will surely miss our conversations about our families, friends, the institute and the mission. Joy because of his willingness to answer another call. He himself said this several times between September 30 and January 4, the day of his installation in Gumaca. I am sure that Bishop Eugene has in mind what is written on the epitaph of Fr. Jose L. Saplala, MJ, the institute's firstborn and first offering: "There is the mystery of the inner call, hearkening to the more, the other, the beyond". Bishop Eugene's response to the call is not confined to the CICM nor to the MJ. As a religious missionary, Eugene cannot settle, cannot relax, cannot permanently pitch his tent in a certain place. He always allows God to disturb him.



## SPONSOR AN MJ SEMINARIAN

IN HIS STUDIES  
AND IN HIS  
MISSIONARY  
TRAINING PROGRAM.

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*Bros. Brezilda Fianza, Jason  
Varona and Joshua Areola*





Cardinal David lays his hands on Bishop Euginius.

The homily of Pablo Virgilio Cardinal David on December 28, the feast of the Holy Innocents reminds us that our life will not always be a silent night, holy night, when all is calm and all is bright. There will be a scary night, horrible night, when all is tense and all was dark.



Bishop Euginius prays in front of the image of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage.

“Bishop Eugene, in a little while, we will be imposing our hands on you so that you will be set on fire by the Spirit for participation in the life and mission of the Church to the world. Be reminded always of Jesus who said, ‘I have come to light a fire on earth, how I wish it were already ablaze.’ With the fire of his love and the power of God’s Word, you are to bring light wherever there is darkness, and warmth wherever there is cold. Like the ancient priests of the temple, you are to guard this perpetual fire, stir it aflame, keep it burning, kindle it with care.”

After the celebrations at the Cathedral of Antipolo, Peter Minh Hai and I decided to walk back to MJ House in Villa Ligaya, only a stone’s throw away from the cathedral. We were surprised to see Cardinal Ambo walking behind us—catching up with us. We talked as we walked together. Hai was so grateful that he had moments with the Cardinal. We invited him in and he felt at home with all the MJ members and guests—Bishop Eugene’s friends, families and members of parishes where MJ work. He obligingly indulged in what seemed to be an endless photo op with the guests until he was able to sit down and enjoy conversations over a



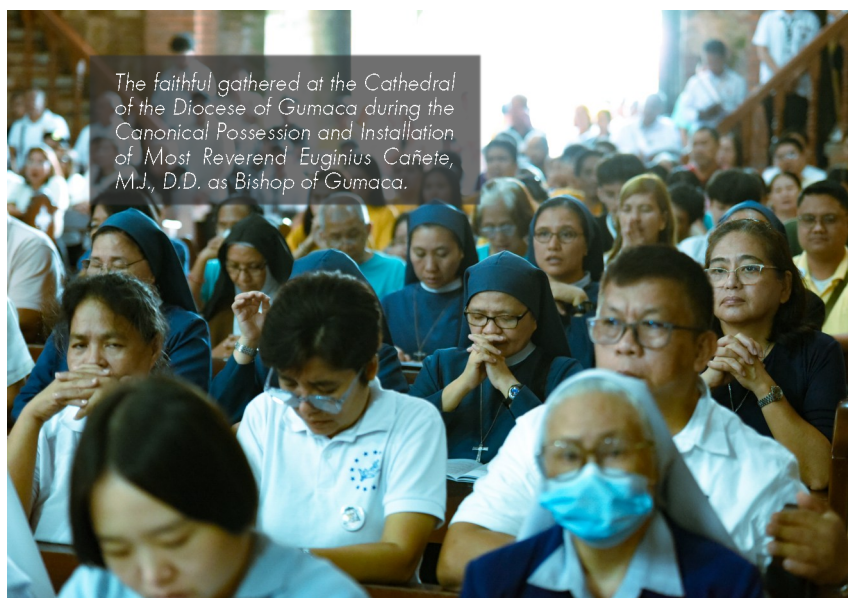
## HELP US BUILD A CAPITAL FUND

As a very young congregation, the community of the Missionaries of Jesus is building a CAPITAL FUND (\$1,500,000.00) to help finance MJ seminaries, missionary sustenance, homes for retired and sick missionaries, and programs for evangelization and efforts to uplift the poor through education, health and other services. HELP US BY MAKING A DONATION!



HELP US!





cup of brewed coffee with the ICM sisters and others. Even this was interrupted regularly by those who wanted to have photos with the Cardinal. This is an example Bishop Eugene would certainly emulate: being graceful to the invitations to enter; being at home in any situation and sitting down to exchange stories with people.



*“Tara na po sa loob. Huwag po kayong mahihiya. Maupo po kayo”*. Please come in. Feel at home. Please be seated. These are the words addressed to Bishop Eugene by Fr. Ramon Uriarte—who had been the Diocesan Administrator for almost two years—during the introductory rites of the installation on January 4, 2025. He acknowledged that Bishop Eugene was a missionary by heart. He informed him that the Diocese is also a mission: a population of more than a million; with 29 parishes (the farthest being 120 kilometers away) and two mission parishes; a total of 79 priests (both active and retired; at home and abroad); with ten religious communities working in the Diocese; with a college seminary and parochial schools and almost 600 Basic Ecclesial Communities. Bishop Eugene later responded that he was a Synodal bishop (having been elected after the Synod) and therefore promised to listen and to walk together with the laity, religious and the clergy. He promised to reach out to those in the periphery and to be a voice of the voiceless. Completing what is lacking. God and the prayer of God’s people will complete what human efforts cannot achieve.

Bishop Eugene, my friend and my confrere, the Missionaries of Jesus will sorely miss you. I will surely miss you. Know that when you happen to be in a place where there is a community of MJ, we extend the same hospitality: *“Tuloy ka sa loob. Ituring mong pamamahay mo ito. Maupo ka’t magpahinga”* (Please come in. Feel at home. Take a seat and rest for a while). And may I add, *“Ikaw na ang bahalang pumuno sa ano mang pagkukulang”* (Please complete whatever is lacking). ■



# FARMERS AND THE KINGDOM

*Bro. Giltrude Mario, MJ*

I would like to begin my reflection with a quote from the Holy Father, Pope Francis: “It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together. Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same



earth, which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all" (*Fratelli Tutti*, no. 8). This message from Pope Francis reminds me of my duty as a member of the Missionaries of Jesus. Serving God in my mission assignment means recognizing that the people I serve are my brothers and sisters, whose dignity I am called to uplift.

In my mission assignment here at St. Niño Mission Parish in Tinoc, Ifugao, in the northern Philippines, I have witnessed the hardships faced by my brothers and sisters who work as vegetable farmers. Their work is arduous. They rise very early in the morning and return home late at night to provide food for others.

During my stay at St. Isidore the Worker Chapel, one of the parish's many chapels, Julie, a farmer in the community, shared, "Our lives as farmers are not easy. We wake up as early as four o'clock and go to our gardens to tend to our plants. Usually, we return home late at night. We do this as our mission to provide food for our brothers and sisters, both locally and abroad." Her words remind me of

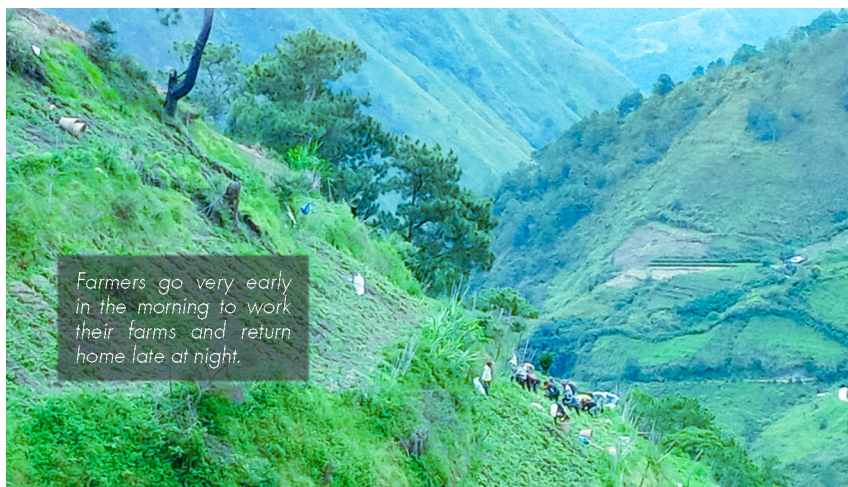
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*The Missionaries of Jesus provide free dental and medical services to the poor each year in the places where they work in the Philippines and Guatemala.*

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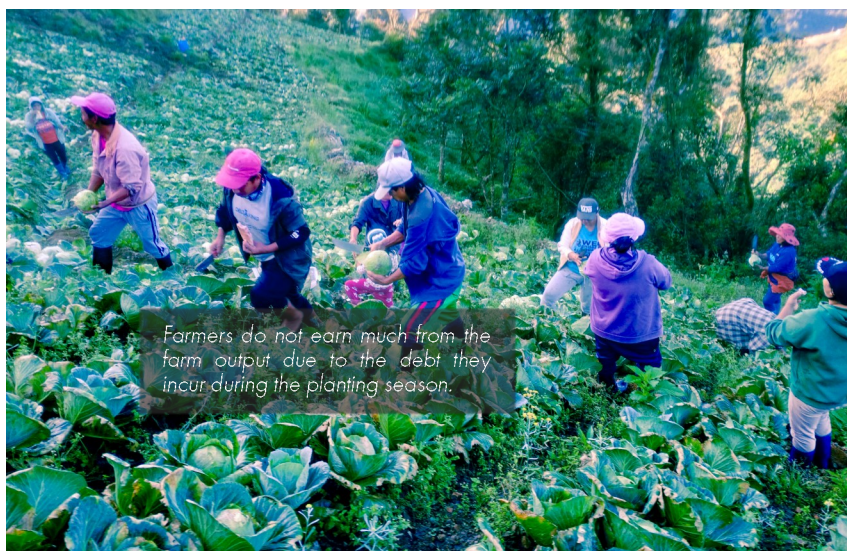
God's presence in the reality of the farmers' sacrifice for the common good.

At another chapel, Saint Joseph the Husband of Mary Chapel, I gained a deeper understanding of the challenges of a farmer's life. Edna, a farmer in her late seventies, described the economic hardships: "Being a farmer is not easy. For a half-hectare garden planted with cabbage, our expenses are nearly Php200,000 (\$3,508). Other vegetables, like carrots and tomatoes, may have even higher costs. That is why we need to sell our produce at Php25 (\$0.45) per kilo to cover our expenses. When the price falls below twenty-five pesos, we cannot even recoup our initial investment."





The community of Our Lady of Lourdes Chapel in Tukucan is composed of united farmers. They practice "ubo," a cultural tradition where community members assist each other with farm work without pay. This practice remains vibrant in this community. I observed a farmer named Edong, who had planted at least seventy thousand kilos of cabbage. During the harvest, the price plummeted to as low as Php8 (\$0.15) per kilo. He explained that he had spent over Php100,000 (\$1,754) but earned only a quarter of his expenses from the cabbage sales. He added, "I lost much money this time; however, I trust God will provide my next





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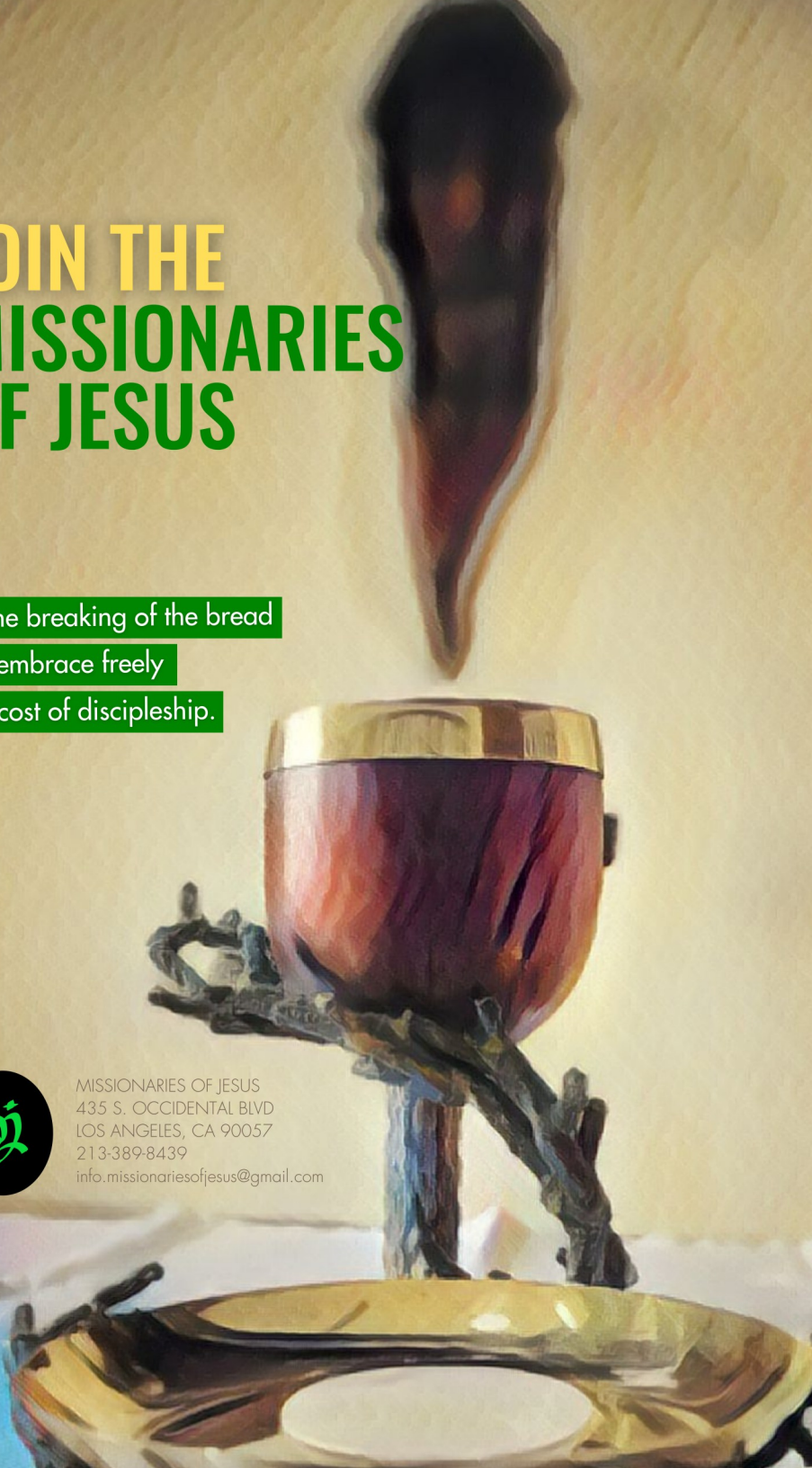
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In the breaking of the bread  
we embrace freely  
the cost of discipleship.



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Farmers play a crucial role in any society because they provide the food that not everyone can produce on their own.

capital.” When I asked him what he meant, he replied, “I will look for a middleman at the trading post, and that middleman will lend me capital to be repaid after my next harvest, hoping that the next harvest will sell at a higher price.” This conversation reminded me that the farmers are blessed because they never lose their hope in God. They are more prayerful and more missionary than I am. Their sacrifices remind me of Jesus.



Grandparents also work on the farms to help the family earn an income.

In another community called Tellep, I met a farmer who had planted carrots, and I helped him harvest his produce. It was a tiring but rewarding task. While harvesting, I saw Jesus in them, making a great sacrifice to produce food for others. Indeed, they are also a face of Jesus. After the harvest, I accompanied the farmer to sell his carrots at the trading post in La Trinidad, Benguet, a journey of several hours through mountain passes. We arrived in the middle of the night. Early the next day, a buyer arrived and began packing the vegetables. The carrots sold for a good price. However, ten percent of the earnings went to the middleman who facilitated the sale, and the remaining amount went to the farmer. After deducting all other expenses, the farmer was left with nothing to fund the next planting season. He would be forced to seek a money lender for the next crop, incurring higher interest. Consequently, the farmer ends up with significant debt.

This situation reminds me of what Pope Leo XIII wrote in *Rerum Novarum*: "This becomes still more clearly evident if man's nature be considered a little more deeply. For man, fathoming by his faculty of reason matters without number, link-

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ing the future with the present, and being master of his own acts, guides his ways under the eternal law and the power of God, whose providence governs all things. Wherefore, it is in his power to exercise his choice not only as to matters that regard his present welfare, but also about those which he deems may be for his advantage in time yet to come. Hence, man not only should possess the fruits of the earth, but also the very soil, inasmuch as from the produce of the earth he has to lay by provision for the future. Man's needs do not die out, but forever recur; although satisfied today, they demand fresh supplies for tomorrow. Nature accordingly must have given to man a source that is stable and remaining always with him, from which he might look to draw continual supplies. And this stable condition of things he finds solely in the earth and its fruits. There is no need to bring in the State. Man precedes the State, and possesses, prior to the formation of any State, the right of providing for the substance of his body" (*Rerum Novarum*, no. 7).

The message is clear. The welfare of everyone, including farmers, should be promoted to achieve justice for all and make the life of the farmer a life worth living. Only then can we say that the farmers of Tinoc feel and enjoy the kingdom of God in the here and now. ■



A farmer harvests ripe tomatoes in his farm.



*Everyone wants  
to leave a good  
legacy in this world.*

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- **HEIRS TO YOUR ESTATE**, make Missionaries of Jesus heirs to your estate – cash, securities, jewels, arts, your home, or other real estate;
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BY GIVING TO MISSION.**



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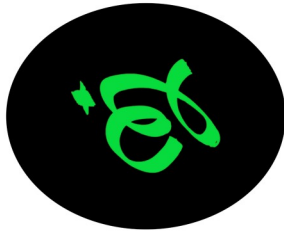
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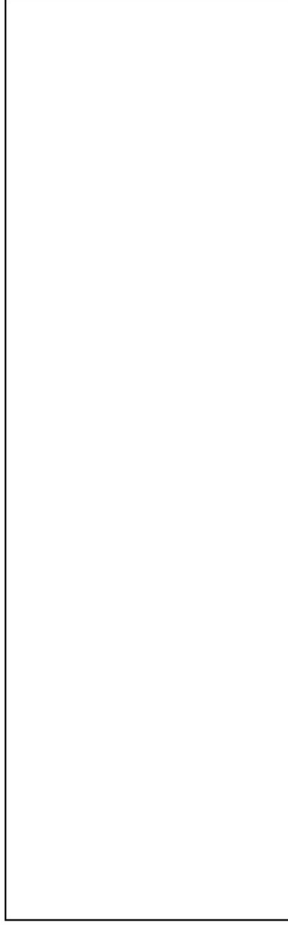
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*We are called to assist in the emergence of a new face of the Church and we journey together integrating into the life of the people, in reclaiming their stories, in the struggle of self-determination, in the celebration of life and culture. This is our story in retelling God's Story of mission. May the passion for God's mission continue to burn in our hearts.*