



# Friends & Disciples

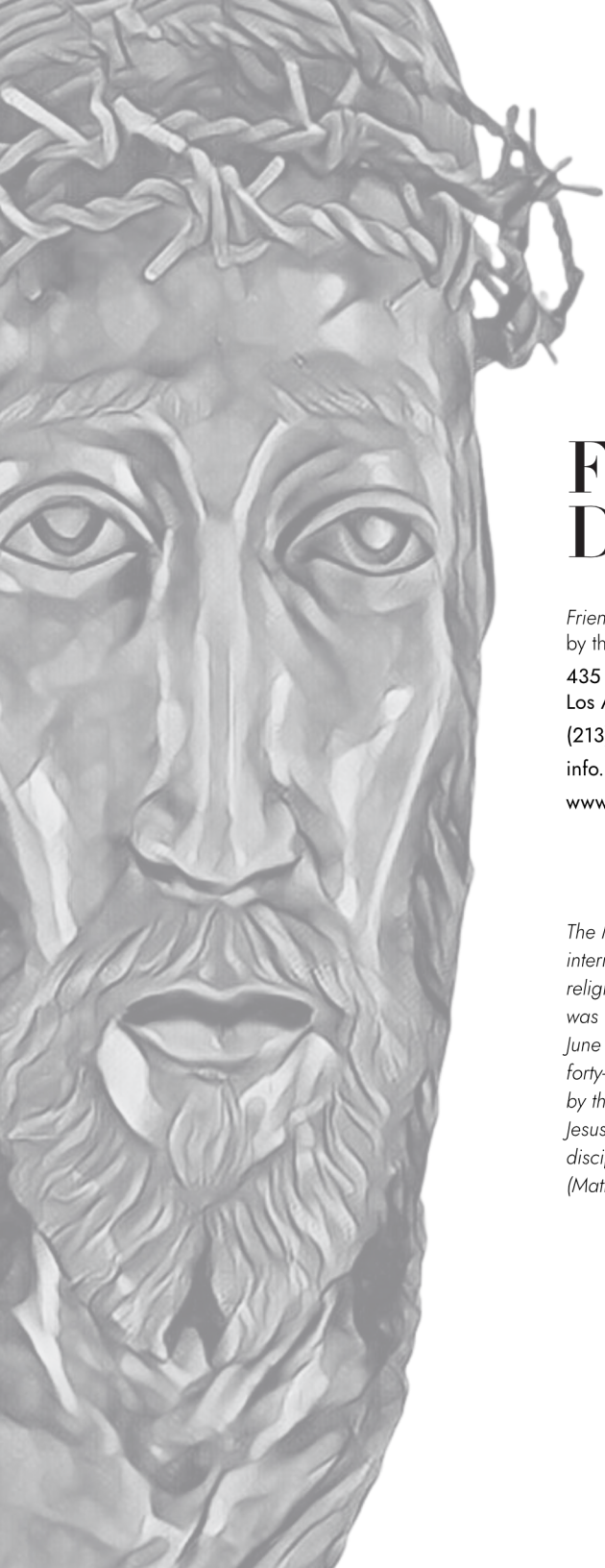
Easter 2026

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MISSIONARIES OF JESUS - AMERICAS



**EASTER**  
*New life, new hope*



# Friends & Disciples

*Friends & Disciples* is published quarterly  
by the Missionaries of Jesus.

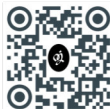
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*The Missionaries of Jesus is an international and multicultural religious missionary community. It was founded in the Philippines on June 12, 2002 by a group of forty-one men called and inspired by the mission and humanity of Jesus, who calls us to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).*



## *from the editor*

**E**aster brings us the message of hope that all our tribulations will eventually yield to the power of God's love. This took place on that first day of the week when Mary Magdalene encountered the risen Lord; Jesus Christ had won over death itself! However, that event is unlike any other historical narrative; its power overflows through history and into the present. You and I are active participants in this unfolding, ongoing grace brought forth by that eschatological event.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ does not only demonstrate God's power over death; it also reveals a new way of living. This life flows through our Christian communities as we strive to follow Jesus and proclaim the Kingdom of God.

This same life inspires the Missionaries of Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom even in places where we once feared it might not be welcomed. **Elmo Tactacan** serves among the Meranao people, a predominantly Muslim community in the Southern Philippines. Through the Church's education ministry, he fosters communion and transformation within both the local community and society at large. In Navotas City, near the Philippine capital, **Vincent Pham** witnesses this hope within urban poor communities. As a transitional deacon, he helps provide vital nutrition to children who would otherwise be deprived of healthy food. From Guatemala to the Philippines, **Arsenio Sumeg-ang** continues his dedicated work with indigenous communities—those so often overlooked by the world. As he walks alongside the Tagakolu people, he shares the living hope that wells up from the resurrection.

The Missionaries of Jesus continue to proclaim the Kingdom of God in these regions thanks to your prayers and financial support. While the hope of the Resurrection reaches many shores through God's grace, it becomes even more tangible in our missions because you walk this journey with us.

Thank you very much for your continued spiritual and financial generosity. 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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# COMMUNION AND TRANSFORMATION

*Rev. Elmo Tactacan, MJ*

As the Prelature of St. Mary in Marawi, in the southern Philippines, stands at the threshold of a new chapter in its challenging and grace-filled missionary journey, it joyfully marked the official launch of its Golden Jubilee on November 20, 2025, at Sto. Tomas de Villanueva Parish in Maria Cristina, Balo-i. This historic moment signaled the beginning of a year-long celebration that will culminate in a grand Jubilee celebration in November 2026.

More than a mere commemoration of time, the Golden Jubilee is a profound celebration of faith, resilience, and enduring hope. Guided by the theme “Pilgrims of Hope and Witnesses of Reconciliation and Peace,” the Jubilee invites the faithful to look back with gratitude at the Prelature’s humble beginnings while courageously embracing the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.



For five decades, the Prelature of Marawi has faithfully walked hand-in-hand with our Muslim brothers and sisters, fostering harmony through the Dialogue of Life and Faith. In a land rich with culture, diversity, and shared history, the Prelature has remained a steadfast presence—offering reconciliation, accompaniment, and hope amid trials and uncertainties. This enduring commitment has helped nurture trust, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among communities.

The Jubilee launch marks the beginning of a sacred year dedicated to gratitude, healing, and renewed missionary zeal. It serves as a call to deepen our shared commitment to building bridges of trust, compassion, and unity—so that peace may not merely be spoken of, but genuinely lived in everyday relationships and communal life. At its heart, the Golden Jubilee is an invitation to come together as one community of believers and dreamers, embarking on a shared pilgrimage of hope toward a future shaped by dialogue, reconciliation, and peace.

As Missionaries of Jesus, we take part in this Jubilee celebration through our humble yet meaningful contributions to pastoral, missionary, and educational ministries.

BE OUR PARTNERS IN  
**SERVING THE POOR**



*The Missionaries of Jesus help feed urban poor children and assist their families in sending them to school.*

HELP US!





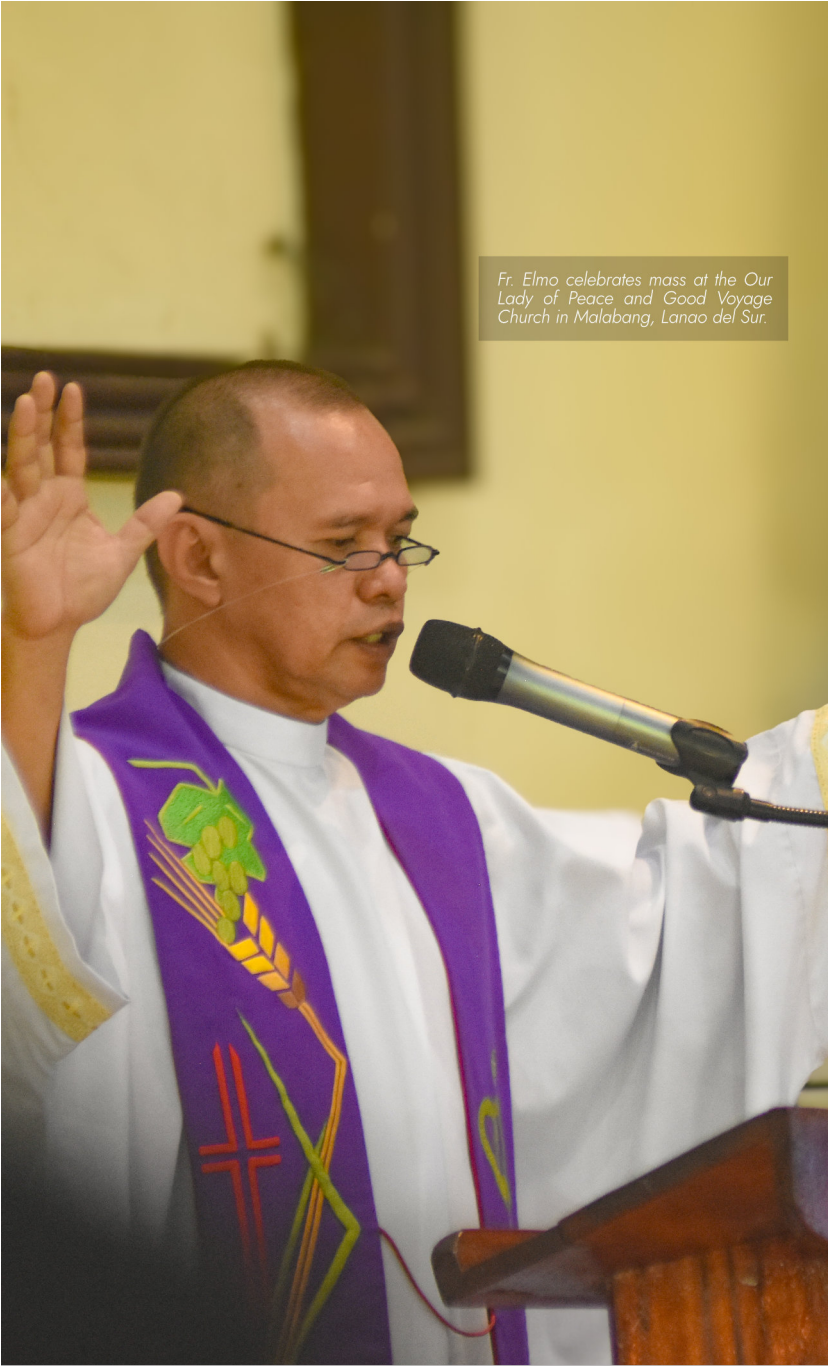
*Fr. Elmo joins the Christian community for the Stations of the Cross.*

Entrusted to our care are the Parish of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage and Our Lady of Peace High School in Malabang, as well as San Isidro High School in Balabagan. Through these ministries, we continue to serve as instruments of communion and transformation in the local Church and society.



*Christian and Muslim high school students learn together and build friendships. Despite the challenging context of the region, the two Catholic schools of the Prelature provide the space needed for the young to live and experience peace and harmony.*

*Fr. Elmo celebrates mass at the Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage Church in Malabang, Lanao del Sur.*





*Catholic education in the Prelature does not aim only for academic excellence but dares the youth to dream of peace and invites them to be agents of this peace in their families and communities.*

Faithful to the Vision, Mission, and Goals of the Prelature, our parish and school ministries seek to foster communion among peoples of diverse cultures, religions, and traditions. We are committed to providing a lifelong process of holistic formation that nurtures the intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social development of the whole person.



*Fr. Elmo, together with leaders of the Christian and Muslim communities, inaugurate a new structure at the Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage School.*

Our schools aspire to be leading Catholic educational institutions in Lanao del Sur, offering not only quality academic formation but also preparing students for lifelong learning, responsible citizenship, and active participation in the promotion of lasting peace and integral well-being in this region of the Philippines.

In continuity with the mission of the Prelature, our educational institutions strive to break down walls and build bridges by promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Within our school communities, Muslims, Christians, and Lumads are encouraged to share life and faith experiences while honoring and respecting the rich diversity of religions and cultures.

As the Prelature of Marawi journeys through its Golden Jubilee year, may this celebration renew our collective commitment to be true pilgrims of hope and courageous witnesses of reconciliation and peace—today and for generations to come. ■

# THINK OF MISSIONS IN YOUR EASTER DONATIONS.

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# LIFELONG JOURNEY OF FAITH

*Deacon Vincent Pham, MJ*

**S**ome missionary journeys do not begin on a road, but with a calling. That call echoes quietly in the heart, urging me to step out of my comfort zone and go where my heart can touch the pain of others. For me, as a deacon and a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, that call led me to San Andres Mangingisda Mission Station in Tangos, Navotas City, Philippines. It is here that the poorest and weakest live, and yet it is also where I most clearly see the face of Christ in them.

Every morning, as I step out of our mission station, I see familiar faces: mothers selling fish, the vendors, street children, and elderly people sitting outside their old houses, and kids playing around. They greet me with kind smiles, sometimes only with their eyes; yet, I always feel the presence of God in them. Amid the dusty, wet, and narrow streets, I have learned that being a friend of Jesus begins with becoming



*Deacon Vincent with some of the children of the mission station.*

a friend of the little ones.

Our basic ecclesial community (BEC) gatherings in Tangos are truly schools of the Gospel. There, I not only share the Word of God but also learn from the living faith of the poor. One rainy evening, inside a house with a leaking roof, we prayed, and a mother softly said, “Even if the roof leaks, God is still present here with us.” Her words shone like light in my heart. I realized that the faith of the poor is the most powerful homily, teaching me about faith, hope, and loyalty to God in all circumstances. To be a friend of Jesus is to learn how to be present, to listen, and to share. In the eyes of the poor, I see the image of Jesus—the one who bends down to love and accompany others.

The ministry of a deacon does not happen only at the altar, but also in the streets, homes, and hospitals. When I visit the sick in the families around the San Andres Mangingisda Mission Station, I don’t just bring Holy Communion and prayers; I also bring the presence of a friend. Some are bedridden and speechless; some have just lost loved ones; others have lost all hope. I often sit quietly beside them, hold their

BE OUR PARTNERS IN  
SERVING THE POOR



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

HELP US!





*Deacon Vincent presides the Liturgy of the Word at the Sta. Cruz Christian community.*

hands, and let silence speak. I remember an old woman, Lola Carmelita, eighty-six years old and blind, living alone in a dark room. As I prayed beside her, she whispered, "Brother, I can't see anything, but I know God is here." Her words moved my heart deeply. I understood that I am only a small instrument through whom Jesus touches them.

Jesus said, "I no longer call you servants, but friends" (John 15:15). To be His friend means to live like Him—gentle, humble, and ready to serve. Each time I wipe the



*Together with volunteers from the Christian community, Deacon Vincent distributes food to children around the mission station.*



sweat of the sick or give Holy Communion to the weak, I realize that I am preaching the Gospel through the hands and eyes of Christ Himself.

The program *Busog Puso* (which means “Sated Heart”) is one of my favorite activities in our MJ Community at San Andres Mangingisda Mission Station. Every week, I have the chance to join volunteers as we prepare simple meals for the poor and the children here. We cook, pack, and distribute food to the children along the streets. Whether under the heat or heavy rain, joy always fills our hearts. Every time we deliver food, some of the children say, *“Kuya, maraming salamat po!”* (Thank you very much!) Those simple words moved me deeply. In that moment, I realized that



what people truly need is not only food for the body, but also care and compassion, nourishment that feeds the heart more than rice and bread ever could.

In the *Busog Puso* program, I see the Gospel being lived out most simply. A spoonful of rice, a smile, or a word of peace all become signs of God's Kingdom. I have learned that true love is not measured by size but by the way we give it.

Every Sunday, we gather together in our small chapels at the San Andres Mangingisda Mission Station to pray and celebrate the Holy Mass or the Liturgy of the Word. In a quiet and sacred atmosphere, the young people sing, share the Word of God, and open their hearts about the struggles and challenges they face in life. I listen to them with the heart of an older brother and a companion on the journey of faith.

Praying with the youth has helped me realize profoundly that faith is not merely a statement, but a lifelong journey of learning to love and to be loved. Prayer is truly the breath and the lifeblood of mission. When I pray, every act of service takes on a new meaning, no longer as a duty to fulfill, but as a gift of love offered to God and shared with my brothers and sisters.



## SPONSOR AN MJ SEMINARIAN

IN HIS STUDIES  
AND IN HIS  
MISSIONARY  
TRAINING PROGRAM.



*Bros. Vicente Bellano, Jr. and  
Phuc Tan Hoang Nguyen*





*It is in San Andres Mangingisda Mission Station in Tangos, Navotas City where the poorest and weakest live, and yet it is also where I most clearly see the face of Christ in them.*

Serving in Tangos has taught me three important lessons for my mission. First, love means being present; sometimes silence and gentle care speak louder than words. Second, real service is humble; God looks at the love we give, not the results. Even when I feel tired, I remember that small acts done with love please God most. Third, friendship with Jesus gives me strength and direction each day. Without prayer, I lose heart; with Him, I find peace and joy. So I pray daily: "Lord, help me to serve with



## 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 M3 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!






*Friendship with Jesus gives me  
strength and direction each day.  
Without prayer, I lose heart; with  
Him, I find peace and joy.*

Your heart.”

When I look at the photos of the people of Tangos, I see their smiling faces, rough hands, and kind eyes, and I feel deeply that Jesus is truly living among them. I have learned that being a friend and a disciple of Jesus are not two different things. When I serve, I become His friend; when I pray, I become His disciple. Both come from one heart that loves God and others.

As a deacon of the Missionaries of Jesus, I feel His presence every time I give Holy Communion, visit the sick, bless homes, or share food with the poor and the abandoned. In those moments, I seem to hear Jesus say, “You are my friend. Love as I have loved you.” In the narrow streets of San Andres Mangingisda Mission Station, through the laughter of children and the tears of the poor, God’s love is alive. There, in simple and humble ways, the Gospel is written each day through small acts of great love. This is my joy, my vocation, and my mission: “to be a friend and disciple of Jesus,” serving the poor, the humble, and the little ones of His Kingdom. ■



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

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**SERVING THE POOR**



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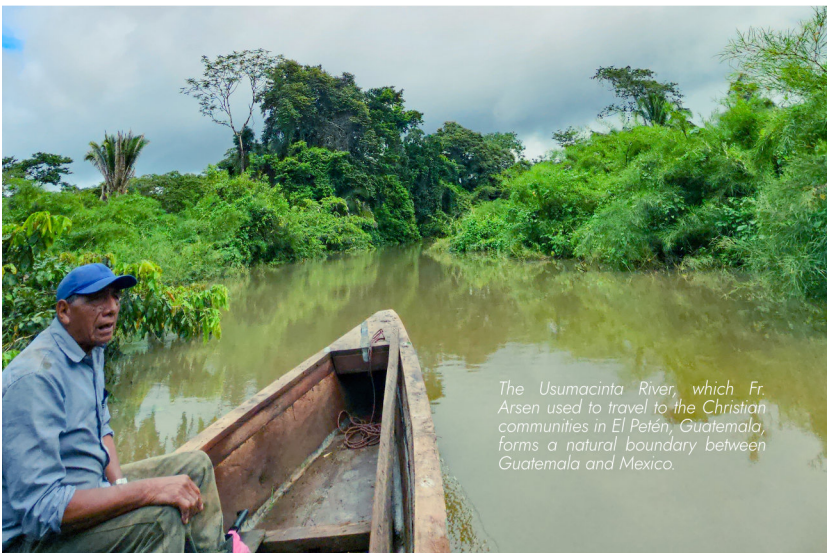


# GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISE

*Rev. Arsenio Sumeg-ang, MJ*

**F**or almost six years, I worked as a missionary in the northern region of Guatemala, called Petén. The parish where I worked is located near the border of Mexico and Guatemala, surrounded by rivers and streams. What actually separates Guatemala from Mexico is the Usumacinta River. It flows through the Petén region of Guatemala and the Mexican state of Chiapas, serving as a natural boundary and a historic, navigable waterway. Thus, crossing rivers has always been part of our daily life in Guatemala.

But the river on the border is not just a body of water that silently exists. It is a silent witness to a dark history and the stories of the Guatemalan people. It is a companion to every immigrant on their journey toward better life opportunities. It has carried countless tears of sadness and the joys of unity and separation for every family. It



*The Usumacinta River, which Fr. Arsen used to travel to the Christian communities in El Petén, Guatemala, forms a natural boundary between Guatemala and Mexico.*



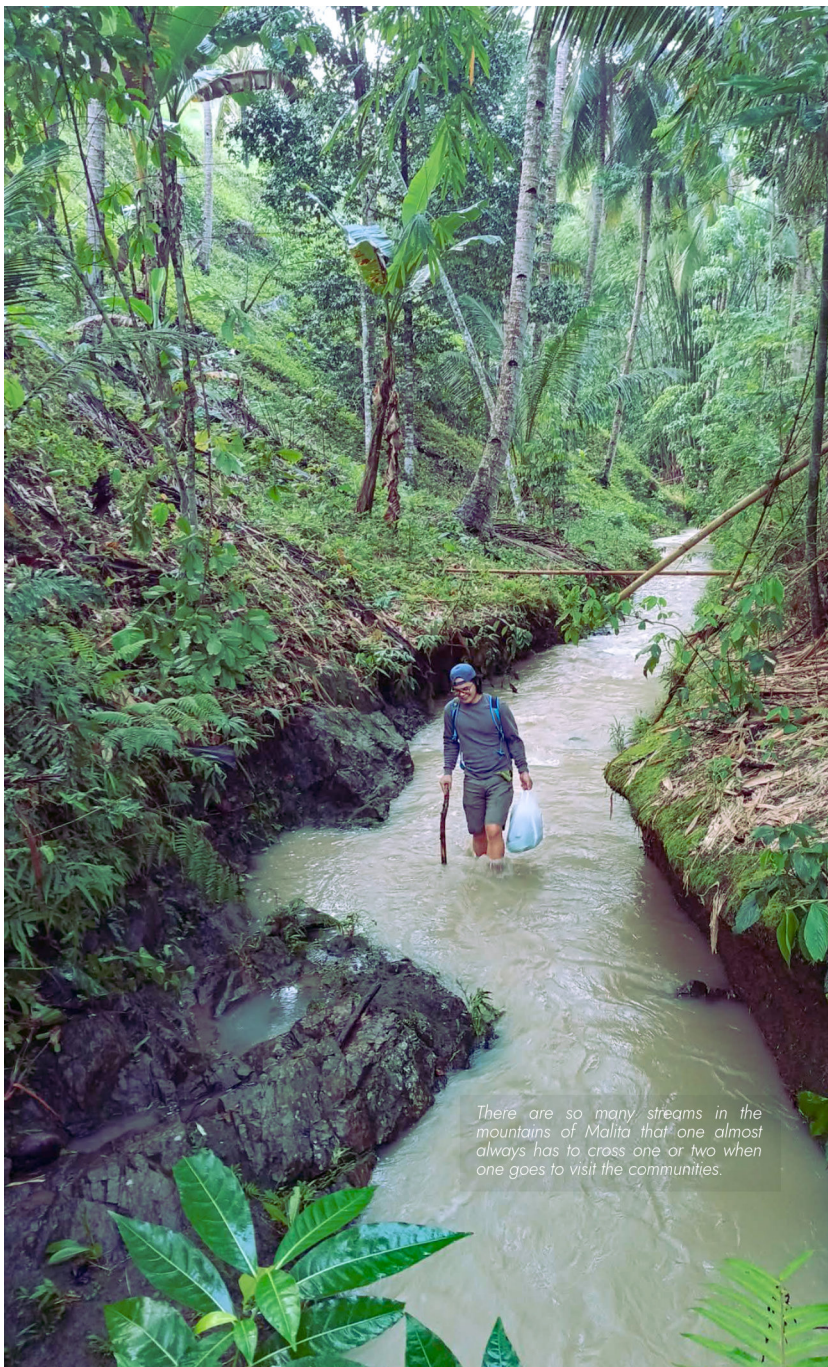
*This is the Dimuluk River that Fr. Arsen crosses from the mission station to visit the different Christian communities in the Southern Philippines.*

became a witness to the deaths and suffering of thousands of Guatemaltecos. Yet, I had to cross that same river to carry out the mission entrusted to me.

After my missionary life in Guatemala, on September 5, 2025, I arrived at the Malita Tagakaulo Mission (MATAMIS), located in the municipality of Malita, Davao Occidental, Philippines. It was 2014 when I last visited this place, back when I was the Vocation Director of the South District. Eleven years had passed, and some



*Many of the mission stations Christian communities are accessible only on foot, with residents relying on horses to transport their produce.*



*There are so many streams in the mountains of Malita that one almost always has to cross one or two when one goes to visit the communities.*

# Have you already included the **MISSIONARIES OF JESUS** in your living will?



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*Fr. Arsen crosses the Dimuluk River after a heavy downpour. Philippine government officials have consistently promised to build a bridge over this part of the river for decades but nothing has ever materialized.*

visible development projects had been implemented. One of these projects is a paved road leading to the mission area. I remember that during my last visit to MATAMIS, I had to take a motorcycle and cross the rivers more than five times because there were no bridges. Because of the poorly maintained and unpaved roads, it was difficult for a four-wheeled vehicle to traverse the path up the mountain. However, in 2022, a road project was completed and began operation. It was a big relief for those living in the mountains, as they could travel to and from the town proper with less time, difficulty, and fear of accidents. Interestingly, despite all of these projects, there is one part of the river that people cross every day which was left without a bridge. The Dimuluk River passes through this mountainous region of Malita. There is a section of the Dimuluk that we cross to reach the mission station called Buwalan by locals, named after an elder whose house lies near that section of the river. This is the penultimate crossing before arriving at the mission house. Obviously, this should have been part of the larger project, but for unknown reasons, a bridge was not constructed. Thus, while the bridge remains non-existent, we are bound to cross this river every single day.



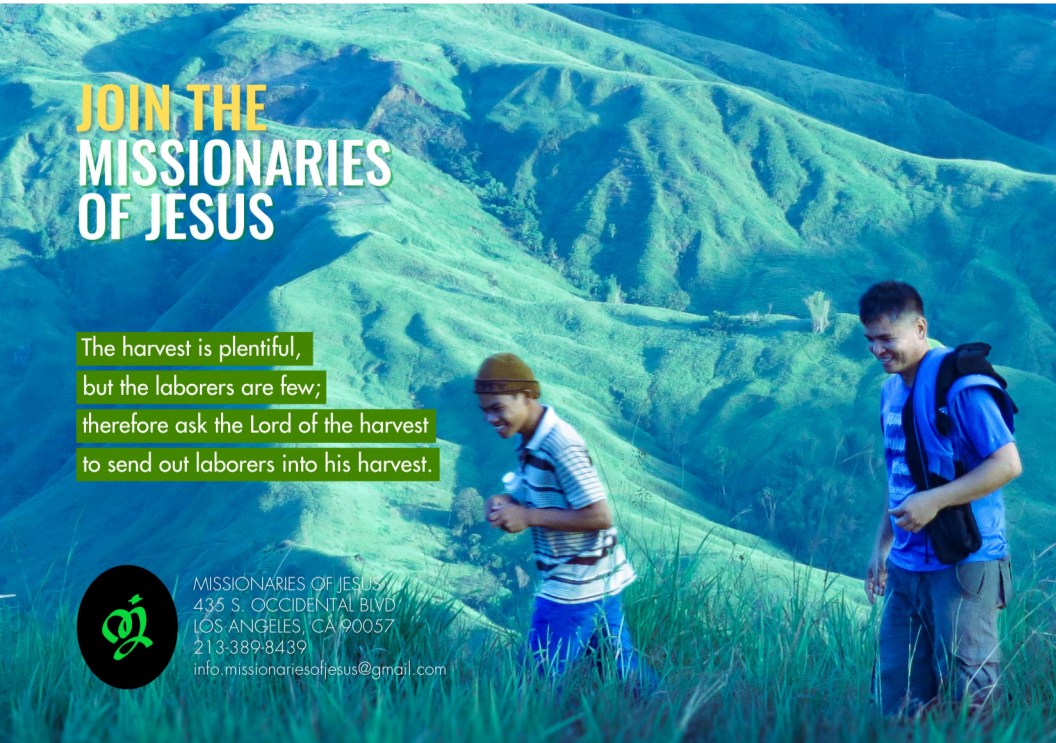
*The Malita Tagakaulo Mission supports the Indigenous Peoples schools of the communities. These schools thrive because of the help of the local communities, various NGOs and generous benefactors.*

Four months have passed since I arrived here in MATAMIS, and I have crossed the river countless times. Sometimes the river is calm, and sometimes it flows with a raging strength that threatens to carry away every object in its path. Yet, like the rivers and streams of Guatemala, this river does not exist without a story to tell. It is a witness to the history and stories of the Tagakolu people. It is a vivid reflection of their struggles and aspirations. It is part of their identity and self-determination. For me to become part of their history, stories, struggles, and aspirations, I must cross the river. Projects for progress and development are essential for improving the quality of life, fostering economic growth, and building resilient and sustainable neighborhoods. Infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and schools is necessary for the betterment of the community's life. Yet, developmental projects here in MATAMIS did not come without a price or scandal. The roads and bridges that were constructed were marred

by corruption and controversy. It seems the primary intention of these projects was to pocket money, not to alleviate the suffering of the people. In effect, only three years after opening, the road started to show signs of poor engineering. Roadsides have begun to collapse, exposing the low quality of the construction.

This short narrative is just the tip of the iceberg of a larger reality of corruption involving infrastructure projects in the Philippines. Our mission here in MATAMIS belongs to that same reality. Reflecting on these things brings me back to my experiences in Guatemala, where communities seemed abandoned by the government due to poor social services, and children continued to suffer from illiteracy because of a failing educational system. MATAMIS is not far from this reality; people in the communities will continue to suffer from unfinished and poorly implemented projects. They will continue to suffer from the abandoned promises of progress and development. The roads and bridges will remain political promises that are never fully fulfilled. A bright future for the indigenous youth feels far from reality, as quality education is never a priority for those in power.

It is also a sad reality that some people from the communities—*barangay* leaders,



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The harvest is plentiful,  
but the laborers are few;  
therefore ask the Lord of the harvest  
to send out laborers into his harvest.



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*One of the Christian communities gather for the Sunday celebration of the Mass. Fr. Arsen has to travel for hours on motorbike in order to these communities in the mountains.*

elders, and even church workers—choose to align themselves with corrupt political figures. They choose to receive bribes and abandon their own people, enriching themselves alongside politicians who use them for political ambition. They become accomplices to corrupt officials, abandoning the resistance against destructive projects and the genuine struggle against corruption. Yet, as a missionary, I am called to cross this political reality and remain critically engaged.



*The IP schools encourage the children to appreciate and be proud of their indigenous culture by integrating it into the teaching methodology of the teachers.*



*There are no proper roads to the communities where the IP schools are located. The parents and other community members help build the classrooms of the school. Funding for the construction comes from grants, local and international donations.*

Generally, our work as Missionaries of Jesus here in MATAMIS is focused on two realities: first, the pastoral accompaniment of the different communities, called Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC); and second, the Indigenous Peoples Education Ministry. At present, the MATAMIS mission station has 44 communities. We visit them at least three to five times a year to celebrate the sacraments and facilitate formations. This is one of our ways of accompanying them in their continuous renewal as Tagakolu people and as Christian communities. At the same time, we attend to three small community-based schools designed to respond to illiteracy, which is significantly high among Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines. Education is our way of strengthening self-determination among indigenous children and youth. We know that Indigenous Peoples communities face severe marginalization, resulting in high dropout rates and limited access to formal education.

Our pastoral and school ministry has never been easy. Geographically, most of the communities and schools belonging to the mission station are located in far-flung areas. It requires a lot of walking, river crossing, and motorcycle riding just to reach them. I enjoy walking for hours and riding motorcycles to visit communities; it is an adventure and, for me, a spiritual exercise. Yet, I am aware that these are the same rivers and mountains people must trek and cross every day just to make a living, and



the same paths every child must walk just to receive an education.

Aside from the geographical challenges, we also face financial hurdles in sustaining our pastoral and educational ministries. This leads us to create partnerships with individuals, families, and institutions to secure funds and subsidies. We are aware that these partnerships are not permanent and could be terminated at any time, but

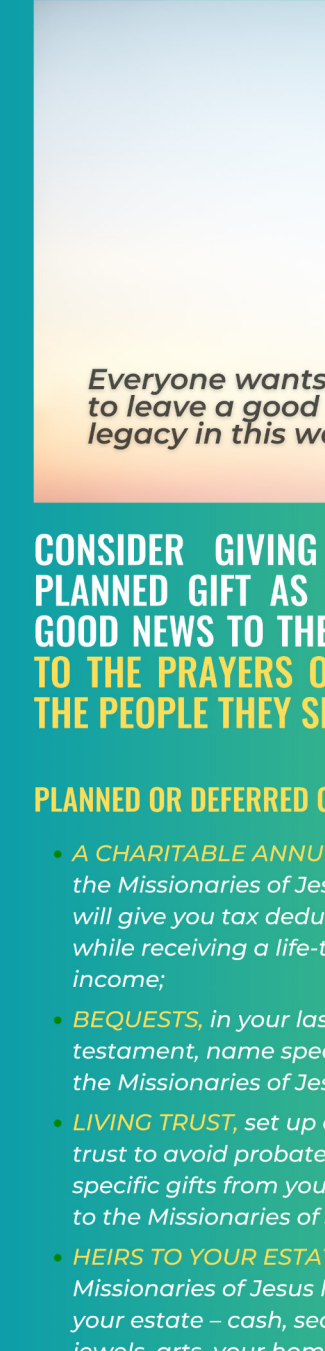


we continue to trust in God's providence through people's generosity.

My integration into the community and school allows me to connect with different people and listen to their stories. It allows me to understand the circumstances that surround them. In the end, it has made me realize that I am the traveler being accompanied by their presence. I realized that in their midst, I am the one searching for the significance of my life as a person and a missionary. This is a constant calling and conversion on my part. To cross the rivers of MATAMIS, overshadowed by political complexities, I have to allow myself to be accompanied by them, to be taught by them, and to learn from them.

In the end, I believe that even before I arrived here, God accompanied them through every river crossing. Before I trekked the mountains, God walked with them on every path created by their footprints. Before I started my integration, God journeyed with them through every aspect of their lives as Tagakolu people. And God will continue to be faithful to His promise to be with them until the end of time. ■





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

**CONSIDER GIVING THE MISSIONARIES OF JESUS A PLANNED GIFT AS YOUR LEGACY TO HELP BRING THE GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. YOU MAY BE GOD'S ANSWER TO THE PRAYERS OF THE MISSIONARIES OF JESUS AND THE PEOPLE THEY SERVE.**

### **PLANNED OR DEFERRED GIFTS MAY INCLUDE:**

- **A CHARITABLE ANNUITY** gift for the Missionaries of Jesus that will give you tax deduction while receiving a life-time income;
- **BEQUESTS**, in your last will and testament, name specifically the Missionaries of Jesus;
- **LIVING TRUST**, set up a living trust to avoid probate. Give specific gifts from your estate to the Missionaries of Jesus;
- **HEIRS TO YOUR ESTATE**, make Missionaries of Jesus heirs to your estate – cash, securities, jewels, arts, your home, or other real estate;
- **BENEFICIARY TO LIFE INSURANCE**, include the Missionaries of Jesus as one of the beneficiaries in your life insurance policy; and
- **BENEFICIARY TO IRA OR OTHER RETIREMENT ACCOUNTS**, name the Missionaries of Jesus as beneficiary to your IRA or other retirement accounts.



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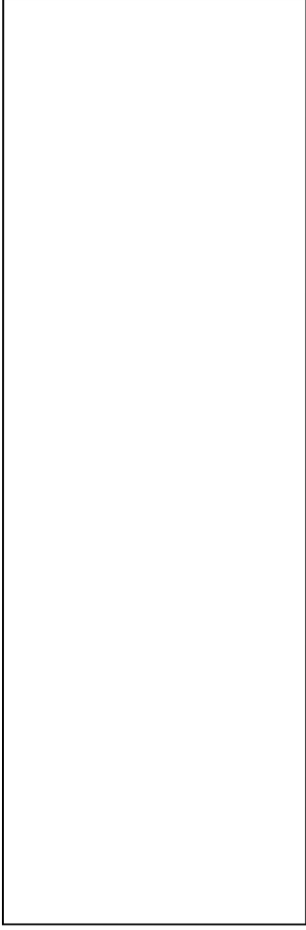


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THE MISSIONARIES  
OF JESUS IN THE  
COMBINED FEDERAL  
CAMPAIGN,  
IN YOUR WILL AND  
IN YOUR PRAYERS.**



*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.*