



Friends & Disciples

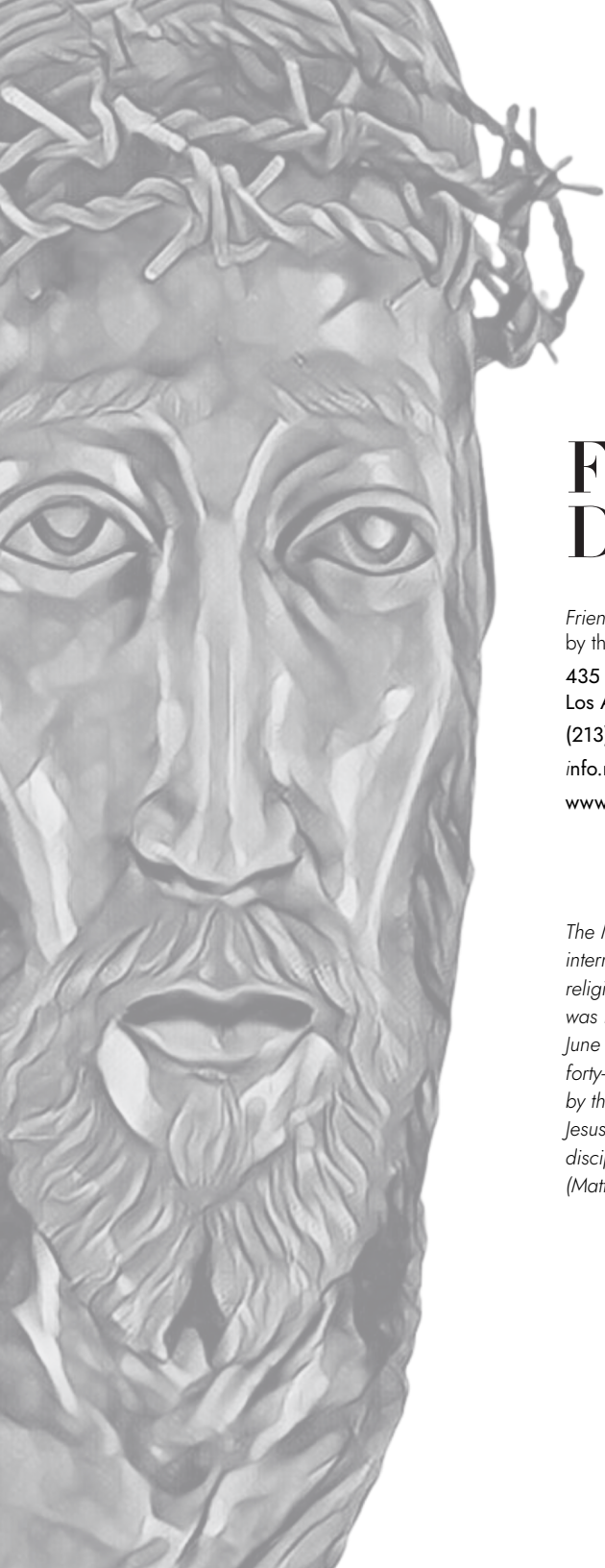
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LIFE





Friends & Disciples

Friends & Disciples is published quarterly
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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

The world continues to change, and despite our best efforts, many of our brothers and sisters are still left behind. Following the example of Jesus, the Church never fails to call our attention to the needs of “the little ones”—a call she continues to sound today. In this issue, we share the stories of missionaries who strive each day to answer that call.

Jaime Doctolero has been working with the Q’eqchi’ indigenous community of Guatemala for two years. To respond effectively to their needs, he observes respectfully and participates fully in the life of the community. Though he was unable to return home when his mother passed away, he later spent time with his family during his vacation to offer a Mass for her, celebrating her life together with his loved ones. Meanwhile, after serving the Parish of St. Anne in the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas, for thirteen years, the Missionaries of Jesus are bidding the parish goodbye.

Melchor Villero, the last MJ assigned to this border parish, did his best to respond to the needs of the community by first listening to them. In the Philippines, **Efren “Peng” Reyes** shares the stories of three families in the Parish of Sto. Niño, where he serves as pastor. Faithful to Jesus’ call to care for “the little ones,” the parish ceaselessly supports families facing great economic challenges, helping them improve their lives. Ultimately, these are stories of parishioners in need being empowered to help themselves.

The Missionaries of Jesus remain deeply committed to the mission of God. Following the example of Christ, we reach out to those who are often neglected or forgotten. Yet, we do not do this work alone. We are blessed with you—our friends and benefactors—who incessantly pray for us and provide financial support. Because of your generosity, we are able to reach more people, and for this, we are truly grateful.

Please continue to include us in your prayers, and may you never tire of helping us help “the little ones” of the world.

Joey Ganio Evangelista, MJ

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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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THE GIFT OF SELF

Rev. Jaime Doctolero, MJ

I was happy to have a vacation from November 2025 to February 2026 in my home in the Philippines. I had been working in Guatemala for two years. It was a joy to be with my family and visit my relatives on my mother's side. This time, my family's visit paved the way for another encounter with my indigenous Kankanaey culture—an encounter that went deeper. It helped me gain a greater awareness of my cultural roots and identity.

This encounter started when my family and I went to my mother's hometown in Banaao, Tadian, Mt. Province. Our relatives had requested that we visit them and celebrate mass in their place a month after our mother's passing. They invited us to





The solibao, a traditional Kankanaey drum, being played during a community dance.

share food and moments together, and I presided over a Sunday mass in remembrance of our deceased mother. After the mass, the community and the family shared a banquet prepared by the community. With an invitation from the locals, we



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

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A touching scene of a grandmother appreciating her grandson's effort to play the solibao.



planned a send-off mass just over a month later. We stayed for one night and went back home the following morning.

We then returned to the place for the send-off mass. This thanksgiving mass and get-together were so meaningful to me. The mass was a combination of a solemn celebration and a joyful atmosphere. Again, there was a community banquet where each family brought some food to share. We shared thoughts and stories while enjoying the food, some of which was original to the place. However, one amazing thing happened that caught my attention: some members of the

community brought out the gongs and solibao. Gongs and solibao are traditional musical instruments of the Kankanaey people in that part of the mountainous region. The solibao is a long wooden drum.

Before the dancing, a little boy tried to beat the solibao while his grandmother, who was looking after him, performed some dance steps to encourage him to keep beating the drum. This moment was delightful and beautiful to witness.

My uncles and aunties took turns preparing groups to dance and play the gongs and solibao. Each group would dance and play their musical instruments. I became fascinated with the sound being created and the movements of the dancers. I observed keenly the dance steps of each member and the movement of the whole



group. I paid careful and attentive attention to their body postures and gestures, saying to myself, "What a wonderful performance of dance and music together."

Upon reflection, I realized I was doing exactly what I learned on the mission: observing and participating actively. This time, I was observing and consciously participating in my own culture's dance and music. I became more aware that I have a profound love for my culture and a passion to know more about it. It is the same love and passion that I feel for the Indigenous peoples in Guatemala and among the Q'eqchi'. I feel grateful to God for my identity and giftedness, as these help me encounter "the Other"—persons, cultures, religiosity, or spirituality—with humility and respect. I believe that this conscious learning plays an important role in my encounter with the Q'eqchi' people. There are moments when I am overjoyed, realizing that I have come to perceive the Q'eqchi' cultural and religious worldview. I am happy being one with and journeying with these simple people. ■



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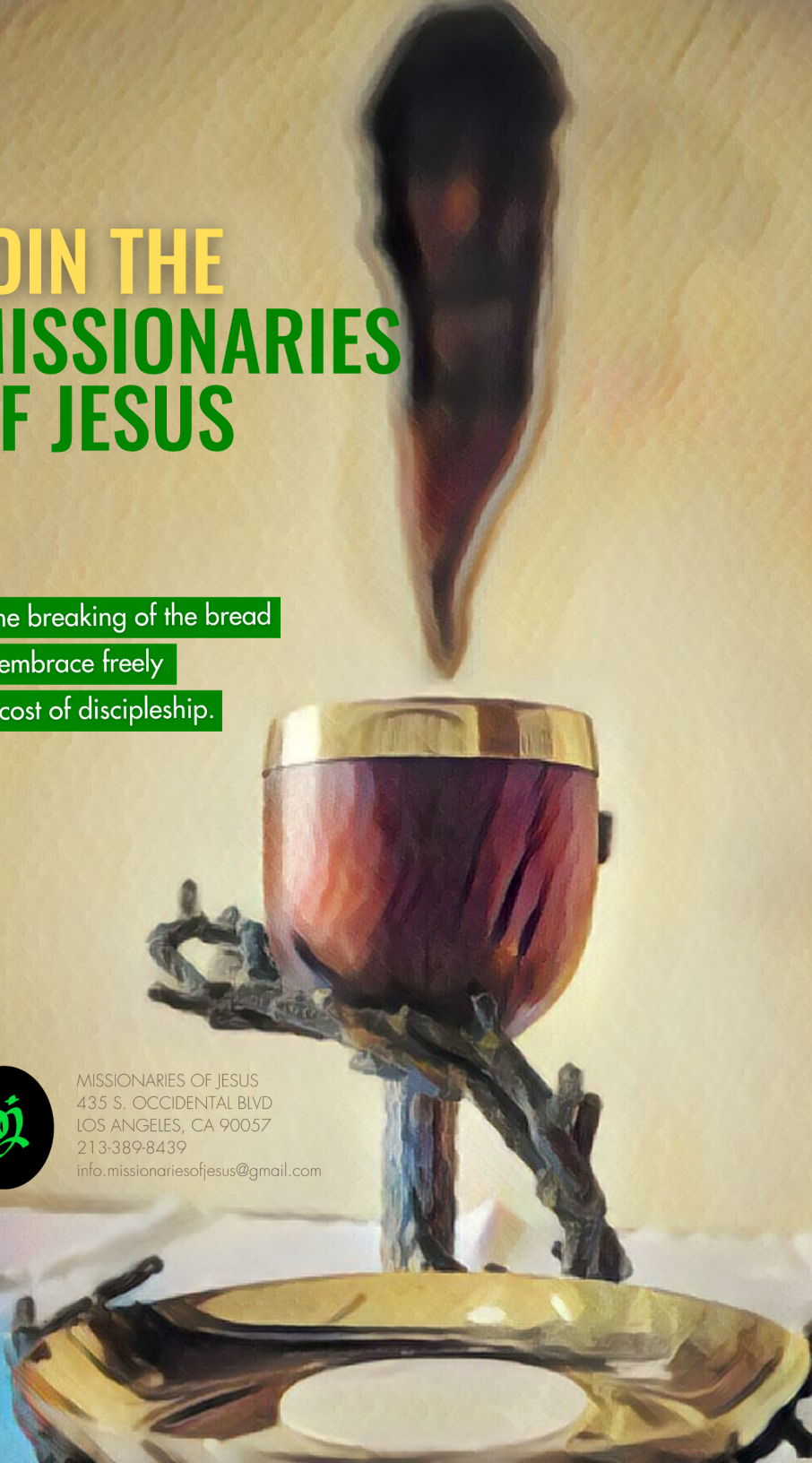
The deer dance, a traditional dance of the Q'eqchi' in Guatemala, that has a special place in Fr. Jaime's heart.

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



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LISTENING AS MISSION

Rev. Melchor Villero, MJ

St. Anne Catholic Parish in Peñitas of the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas has been administered by the Missionaries of Jesus since 2013. The parish has three other mission churches: San Juan Diego in Mission, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Sullivan City, and St. Michael in Los Ebanos, located about 2.8 miles south on El Faro Road.

I was appointed Parish Administrator in February 2025. From the very start, I was acutely aware that my working visa would expire in June of the following year. I had barely 16 months to walk alongside the people in these four church communities.

Following the Synodal sessions, the Diocese of Brownsville listened closely to the voices of the people, who were seeking more effective and compassionate action focused on three main areas: effective evangelization in marginalized areas, promoting active youth participation in the life of the church, and responding to the





The youth of St. Anne Parish dressed as Catholic saints animate the community.

growing demand for mental health support.

Together with the members of the parish council and the various ministries of the four church communities, I studied and reflected on paragraph 24 of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel). A Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, become involved, offer support, bear fruit, and rejoice. As a parish community, we strive to proclaim the Good News as both friends and disciples.



Community members process in costumes during the feast of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.

The parish is blessed with several young people—both students and professionals—who were eager to form the core group of our Youth Ministry. In a short time, they organized a wonderful day of encounter, reflection, prayer, games, and learning activities for youth across all four communities. The event concluded with a beautiful celebration of the Eucharist for the participants and their parents. Additionally, for the Solemnity of All Saints, the group organized a creative “Trunk or Treat” activity after Mass.

The young people decorated their car trunks, provided information about the saints they represented, and took the time to share these holy stories with visitors. They beautifully portrayed St. Joan of Arc, St. Anne, St. Joseph, Padre Pio, St. Jose Sanchez del Rio, St. Lucy, and St. Rose of Lima, to name a few. Each station offered a game for visitors, taught them about the featured saint's life, and answered community questions. It was a wonderfully creative way to celebrate the feast, and we ultimately chose the St. Joan of Arc presentation as the best costume of the occasion.

The patronal feasts of San Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe are deeply popular and vital celebrations for our Spanish-speaking communities. Preparations and meetings with the various ministries began well in advance. The people clearly



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TRAINING PROGRAM.



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



expressed which traditions they wished to include: the celebration of the Eucharist, novena prayers, a solemn procession, and fellowship after Mass. To enrich the experience, a drama group reenacted the apparition of the Blessed Virgin to Juan Diego, accompanied by several local dance groups. The Guadalupe fiesta team even gathered on Thanksgiving Day to share a roasted turkey, much to the delight of all its members.

During each celebration, parishioners expressed immense joy. This success was entirely due to the community's generous spirit—taking ownership of different aspects of the feasts and pooling resources to finance elements like food, mariachis, and fireworks. Indeed, it was wonderful to come together, welcome visitors from neighboring churches, and celebrate the feasts of San Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe as one family.

For almost two years now, the parish has been an active member of Valley Interfaith, a broad-based organization dedicated to strengthening democracy by building relationships across boundaries and creating space for marginalized communities to have their voices heard where decisions are made. Several leaders from our different



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!

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After thirteen years of mission ministry in St. Anne, Fr. Melchor is the last MJ to walk with the members of the various communities by the border.

churches have participated in leadership training to learn how to hold intentional listening sessions. These sessions reach those on the periphery, inviting them to participate more fully in the life of both the church and the broader society.

This year, 2026, I celebrated my 75th birthday and the 50th anniversary of my ordination. I feel deeply grateful and blessed to have been given the opportunity to celebrate these milestones with our parish community, alongside Bishop Daniel Flores and members of the Missionaries of Jesus from the District of the Americas, who serve in Los Angeles, Brownsville, Matamoros in Mexico, and El Petén in Guatemala.

Regrettably, this is also the year the Missionaries of Jesus are leaving the Diocese of Brownsville. However, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate community will step in to guide our parishioners into the future—hopefully continuing to listen to one another, walking alongside each other through life's current challenges, and despite all odds, always finding a reason to celebrate life and faith together. ■



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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THE PILGRIM CHURCH OF STO. NIÑO

Rev. Efren "Peng" Reyes, MJ

The Diocese of Antipolo is celebrating two milestones in 2026 in the life of the Church in the Philippines: the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the sacred image of Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje (Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage), brought from Acapulco to Manila and entrusted to a deeply devoted people; and the 100th anniversary of her canonical coronation—the first such coronation granted outside the Western Hemisphere.

Two questions immediately come to the fore: What is the significance of this double jubilee for our parish? And what does this election now demand of our local communities and leaders? To be completely frank, the announcement took us entirely



by surprise! Our Parish of Sto. Niño was chosen from among the 85 parishes within the Diocese of Antipolo to be one of the 24 Pilgrim Voyage Churches. Furthermore, our parish was named part of the North Road of Faith, together with four parishes and two major shrines of the Diocese. Pilgrims from other dioceses, both local and international, have been flocking to our small, hidden, young, yet vibrant parish throughout this year until November 28. As of this writing, 3,205 pilgrims have already trodden this road of faith on our sacred ground of Sto. Niño.

This humble parish originated from a small chapel called “Sto. Niño Aguador,” located inside Modesta Village. There was no running water in the area before—only hand pumps and deep wells. Some residents relied on rainwater during the wet



season, while others depended on delivery trucks loaded with expensive water from the outside. So, the people prayed hard to Sto. Niño Aguador (aguador meaning one who fetches water for a living). And He did not fail them. Water came! This work of wonder was attributed to Sto. Niño as the first marvelous miracle made possible by our beloved patron. Another major miracle happened when the community decided to purchase a lot they could call their own and build a parish church on it in 2009. Within two and a half years, the church structure was finished completely debt-free. I was amazed at the sight of a beautiful church nestled on a hill; I honestly thought this grand project could not be finished in such a short time! But lo and behold, the parish church was completed and dedicated on May 27, 2012, by His Excellency Gabriel Reyes on the Feast of Pentecost.

Their journey has evolved from receiving simple but precious water—a basic human need—as a GIFT, to praying for a House of God on a lot they could call their own, a TASK they completed. Now, they are harvesting the fruits of their hard work and fervent prayer, a PROMISE they continuously fulfill through the help of Sto. Niño. Today, the parish enjoys twenty-four years of faithfulness.



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With only 13% of his kidney functioning, Simeon works non-stop to support his family and help send his children to school.

The parish presently comprises ten chapels, 56 BEC cells, and 849 active members and leaders from basic ecclesial communities, various ministries, and mandated religious organizations. Through the Student Assistance Program (SAP), the parish has sent 37 graduates to various colleges and universities, and is currently supporting 47 more young scholars from elementary school through college. This is all thanks to the help of countless benefactors—both rich and poor—and the 10 elders who started this scholarship program in 2002.

Three scholars, three families, three faith experiences.

First is the Operario Family of Pulang Lupa, where a promising future teacher, Shine, was born. She is a third-year student at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines in Sta. Mesa, Manila, pursuing a Bachelor of Secondary Education, major in Physical Education. She is consistently on the President's List, maintaining a flat 1.0 grade in almost all her subjects. Her mother, Grace, is a homemaker, while her father, Simeon, works as a JoyRide driver at night and a fish vendor by day. Simeon suffers from Stage 4 kidney impairment, with only 13% of his kidney function remaining. Yet, he appears perfectly healthy, working nonstop every day for his family's sustenance as



Simeon (in red) pose for a picture with his family. Standing to his left is his daughter Shine.



A member of the family helps put together the fabric scraps before it is sewn together to form a rag.

if he were completely well. He has surrendered everything into God's hands. This is faith in action—a faith that knows no limits, always trusting that God will provide.

Second is the Tejolan Family of Riverside, from which Frytz hails. He is twenty-one years old and a third-year Civil Engineering student. Frytz is a proud SAP scholar who has benefited from the parish scholarship for 11 years, ever since elementary school. For him, being a part of this program is like belonging to a loving, caring family that supports those who lack the means to send their children to school. To help support the household, his mother previously worked as a street sweeper. Now, Frytz's entire family makes rags out of *retaso* (excess fabric scraps) that Bruce, his father, freely acquires from the fabric factory where he used to work as a helper. Bruce is a 45-year-old PWD (Person with Disability). Despite his physical challenges, he delivers their finished products to the market on his old but trusted electric bike. Bruce gives his son Frytz all-out support, which has helped Frytz consistently win academic awards since childhood. The Tejolan family is another beautiful example of a family of faith that strives and thrives.

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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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The mother of Frytz sews together the fabric scraps put together by his daughter to finally form a rag.

Third is the Balderas Family of Marvi Hills. Jona is the second youngest of eight siblings. She is a graduating student pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, major in Marketing Management, in the upcoming second semester at San Mateo Municipal College. Her father is a tricycle driver, and her mother is a homemaker who is currently recuperating from two strokes. Jona serves as a choir member of the MPC-Marvi Hill Youth Choir and is deeply involved in her chapel's Youth Ministry. As a young teen, Jona was incredibly shy and sensitive, often crying whenever someone touched on difficult life issues that resonated with her. However, her involvement with SAP and the Parish Youth Ministry (PYM) brought her into contact with people from all walks of life. This fellowship gave her a wonderful opportunity to share her life and be enriched by the experiences of others. The



Bruce and his wife proudly show the fruit of their labor. They transform otherwise useless scrap fabrics into rags that they can sell and help support the family.



various formation programs she received from SAP and PYM transformed her from a quiet, introverted person into a confident young woman who now embraces responsibility and community engagement. Her leadership skills and commitment to her service inspire many other youth to get involved in the parish, especially in the Youth Ministry.

These three families exemplify what it means to be chosen as a Pilgrim Voyage Church. They perfectly demonstrate the essential qualities and purpose of being selected from among the domestic churches. They have engaged themselves in a “pilgrim voyage”—an ecclesial community on a spiritual journey through life, guided by faith, despite being on the peripheries and often overwhelmed by social ills, sickness, and death.

To be “chosen” is a gift, a task, and a promise. It means to be called and set apart for a specific role and identity within our Pilgrim Voyage Church. By observing how these families live, relate, and journey together in faith, others can clearly see what it truly means to belong to and embody that pilgrim church on the road of faith. ■



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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.