

# Alive in the Philippines

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Dear Friends,

On November 18th, I saw on the CNN weather report that Winnipeg recorded a temperature of minus ten degrees Celsius. At the same time the local newspaper mentioned that Davao City recorded its lowest temperature ever for that date, which was plus twenty-four degrees Celsius. I laughed at the contrast and felt that I

would have a difficult time to handle such a low temperature in my short sleeve shirt if I was in my hometown at that moment.

Davao City will never reach such frigid temperature, unless you might climb the nearby Mount Apo, the highest mountain in the Philippines. But I really doubt it is possible to experience something close to -11 degrees. I can see Mount Apo from the balcony of our house, but I never saw any snow on its peak, even though the mountain is often hidden in the clouds. Despite not having snow or cold weather, still the first signs Christmas approaching started in the department stores when they were setting up decorations and one could hear caroling. One of the members of our community who is Filipino had made the reflection about the readings at one our Masses, saying that he wondered why that the liturgy emphasized 'the cross' when we are so close to Christmas. This was mid-September.

I don't think it is in my blood to get into spirit of preparing for Christmas so soon in the year, because so much continues to happen in the normal events in our lives in the Philippines. Therefore, as usual, I am late in getting Christmas greetings sent out. Since there has been so many activities, I really don't where to begin.

My time and effort is especially happily consumed with our ministry among street children. Everyone in the community is involved with Balay Pasilungan in one way or another. Our center for street children has grown from a residential program of 20 to 30 boys to include an outreach program which is in constant contact with around 125 street youths. Therefore we have developed a number of programs in the coming year to reach out to more youths, especially in association with Department of Social Welfare and Development, City

Planning, UNICEF and other non-government agents that deal with 'Children in Need of Special Protection' (CNSP) and 'Children in Conflict with the Law' (CICL). Thus, together we help them in their character and capacity building, integration and livelihood. This has meant many meetings for me with these agencies. Through them I have gained much knowledge and understanding with the plight of children in such great numbers. This collaborative effort has been excitingly stimulating for me and at the same time overwhelming by the challenge of helping more and more disadvantaged youths. One of the collaborative programs with 3 other agencies which we just launched is a two year advocacy for Anti-Child Pornography focusing especially cyber awareness. For this program we are being sponsored by UNICEF.

As a Marianist community, we have also grown, at least in number. Last Christmas there was only Pablo Rambaud, Oscar Kerketta and myself staying with the children at Balay Pasilungan. This year our community celebration will include an aspirant Noel Garcia from Manila, a second year novice from the Province of United States, Roberto Rivera, who is originally from the Philippines, and while living in Los Angeles joined the Marianists. With us for the holidays is Bro. Peter Kiama, from the Region of EastAfrica and who is having a sabbatical program in Manila. After finishing his studies, he will join our community in April.

This past year we also had to change residence. This is our third move as a community. The previous house was consistently getting flooded. It was the final straw when I woke up in the middle of the night and my desk and chair was floating beside my bed. We have no such problems now in our new home located in a quiet neighborhood and fairly near to our street children center, as well as the Archbishop's house.

Our community is small number and has been in constant transition. Yet, as we settle into our mission and community life, we have been fortunate with the appearance of a good number of Marianist lay and religious visitors. I will name hopefully most of them which include some in late 2005: from the United States: Fr. Joe Lackner SM & Fr. Pat Philbin SM (Pat was with us almost a month); from Japan: Sister Gabrielle FMI, Sister Fumiko FMI, Mrs. Gloria Sekita; from Spain: Mr. & Mrs. Rambaud, Mr. & Mrs. DeLora; from Manila Mrs. Naomi Arden and Richard Giner, and from the General Administration in Rome: Fr. David Fleming and Fr. George Cerniglia. Two days after Christmas we will have the visit of Fr. Rollie Bunda who is on sabbatical in Rome and Bro. Jose Degorio from Hawaii. I thought Davao City was really out the way place. We are very grateful that these Marianists have found their way and time to be with us. What a wonderful support from our Marianist Family!

Already we are looking forward to another expansion of our community this coming January. Bro. Raymond Toppo, from the Region of India, will be coming on Jan. 10<sup>th</sup>. Two aspirants, both having the name Archie, are also joining us during the second week of the month. Even our director, Pablo Rambaud, is

suppose to come back on the January 7<sup>th</sup> after spending almost a month in Nairobi assisting in the African-Asian temporary professed program.

I am sneaking in some time to write this letter while there is a Christmas party next to my office at Balay Pasilungan organized by a group of young adults for 50 street kids from the core area of the city. From this perspective, I know there so much more to tell you in the way I see people reach out to one another. Maybe 2007 will be a better year for the Marianists of Davao City to tell their stories regularly and that we be our way to reach out to you. That is why I am using the community newsletter to send my Christmas greetings and getting us going again in being in contact. Meantime, I will leave you with pictures to say more about our lives here in Davao City. Thank you ever so much for you're your friendship and prayers. I hope that the attachment expresses the value of your friendship. Be assured of my gratitude and my own prayers for you.

Richard Joyal SM















