

Philippines Mission Immersion Trip

3-21 January 2024

Reflections



It took some prompting by one family member to encourage me to participate in the Mission Immersion experience in the Philippines, otherwise I would have ignored the invitation on the parish leaflet and let a great opportunity slip by. The amazing experience of being immersed with the Paulist Missionaries in Manila and Bataan has reminded me that real poverty can exist anywhere, including in large and developing cities. Poverty in the Philippines can be found outside banks, shopping centres, outside luxury car dealerships, on footpaths outside gated communities and even on traffic islands at major intersections. This experience has allowed me to spend time with Paulist priests, seminarians and lay missionaries, getting to know them and to see how they connect and minister to the poor in their own individual ways. I can now understand that there is no script to follow when being charitable and showing kindness, and it is fine and important to be yourself, since that is a big part of the gift we are giving.



Participants of Mission Immersion 2024

The visits to hospices and orphanages were heartbreaking, but also full of hope and joy. We were always greeted enthusiastically by young children who proudly showed us where they lived with total acceptance of each other, regardless of any physical disabilities. Siblings looking after each other, old women quietly passing the time together, old men thanking us for spending time with them and carers who were more like family members. I know this experience will teach me to see Jesus in the people I meet. In the more testing situations I find myself in, it will always be a help for me to see Jesus in the other person.

Meeting and spending time with the young men and women of the *Jose De Piro Kabataan Orkestra* and participating in their performances, was extremely rewarding and inspiring. These young people are very grateful for the opportunities given to them and always seek to excel in whatever they do. These people will continue to inspire me to do more with the talents I have been given. They present a successful face to the efforts of the Paulist Missionaries and of all those who support them from afar.

Charles Borg (St Bernadette's Parish, North Sunshine)

My mission experience can be summed up in these words: *'Fill me with gratitude for your blessings and give me a generous heart that I may freely share with others what you have given me.'* In each place we visited, we were always greeted with smiles and excitement. The hospitality and love shown us by the Paulist Missionary priests, seminarians and Lay, and the families we visited, were big and unmeasurable. A large part of the ministry done goes unnoticed, from small ministries like providing computers for students to complete studies, to larger works such as giving out food and building houses. The willingness to support Paulist Missionaries and their works made me feel proud to be part of this family.



Jesus supporting the weak

Our group bonded well together as we reflected on how fortunate we were to be able to participate in this experience in the Philippines. I have many memories that will stay with me forever. Thank you to everyone who has helped to make this experience and unforgettable one.

Terese Smith (St James the Apostle Parish, Hoppers Crossing North)

For a long time I have wondered whether being a missionary was something my wife Maria and I were being called to; the Missionary Immersion Experience in the Philippines has helped me learn more about what this really means for me. The visits to the various charitable initiatives, carried out by different groups, gave me a broader picture of what to expect and what to look for. I look forward to similar experiences.

Michael Vella (St Bernadette's Parish, North Sunshine)

My husband Michael and I have been looking for ways to volunteer and do missionary work. Now I understand that I live my mission in my daily life.

During our Mission Immersion trip in the Philippines, I have learnt to meet Jesus in the people I encountered, and I felt an inner peace. I can now better appreciate the ministry carried out by Paulist Missionaries, priests, seminarians and Lay, and was able to observe the difference it makes to the people they work with.

I hope and pray that I may have the opportunity to continue on this journey and experience the life of the missionary, especially with the Paulist Missionaries.

Maria Vella (St Bernadette's Parish, North Sunshine)

I thought that I would be assisting others and help improve their lives through my Mission Immersion experience in the Philippines. Whilst this did happen, I believe the people we visited and interacted with had a greater impact on me.



Houses built and given to homeless families



Some of the houses visited

The people, though poor, were happy and always willing to chat with us with a smile on their faces. Fr Joe Cremona mssp, the parish priest at St Catherine of Alexandria parish, Dinalupihan, Bataan, was a true inspiration to us all. He assists his community in various ways. The most outstanding being the opportunities he avails to the children who wish to learn music. The children's orchestra he has established is a credit to his unselfish will to improve the lives of others.

From walking through a tunnel where people have dug out a home for themselves, visiting an orphanage and elderly care centre, interacting with the physically impaired and feeding the homeless, to listening to the children playing their music, this was a truly humbling experience.

Miriam Grech (St Andrew's Parish, Werribee)

It was with a keen sense of nostalgia and curiosity that I stepped and boarded flight number PR210 to Manila on 3rd January 2024. It has been forty years since I visited Manila. Then I was a young, newly married, somewhat naïve, 20-year-old. This time around I was eager to revisit the range of emotions that had been evoked in me in that initial awakening and it was not long before I was transported back in time to a place that reminded me of what it truly meant to appreciate and find enjoyment in the small things of life. Nowhere else in my travels have I come across a nation filled with so much resilience and generosity in the face of hardship, and yet, despite this, so much joy.

The sense of joy and hope for a better life of the people we met in the Philippines is fuelled by their faith, and to experience this with them one must see them, not through the eyes of the world, but as Jesus sees them. As such, one must learn to interact with humanity not from a place of worldly privilege, but from a place of love, Jesus' love. Upon further reflection I realised that it wasn't until I truly opened myself up to that love that a divine exchange in the form of a spiritual heart transplant could take place allowing me in turn to receive that peace, joy, and love also.

For me, the Mission Immersion experience was an amazing immersion into God's love and was truly life changing.

Maria Beraldo (St James the Apostle Parish, Hoppers Crossing North)



Catechism with children from 13th Street Community

During my time in the Philippines I was able to witness the activities carried out by the Paulist Missionaries in Manila (13th Street), and in St Catherine of Alexandria Parish, (Dinalupihan, Bataan).

I now realise that while money is important, it also depends on how it is used. Handing out money is not always the best way forward, one needs to be taught how to use it properly. I believe that helping out someone who wants to stand up and try to walk will make that person stronger and more proud of his own achievements.

I have witnessed many people looking out for that hand up, just to help them stand up. In a few days, I have seen many small miracles happen, which I feel will eventually become bigger ones, giving hope and comfort to those in need.

Vini Beraldo (St James the Apostle Parish, Hoppers Crossing North)



Family residences in a section of the parish in Bataan

The group, as a whole, has been a very positive experience and I have made many new friends. My husband Leon and I come from St John's parish in Heidelberg and now have made friends with people from Hoppers Crossing North, North Sunshine and Malta!



Jose De Piro Orchestra rehearsal

During our mission experience, each day had its own challenges and I believe I have become a stronger person through these experiences, although at times I felt really helpless as I followed on the footsteps of Christ.

Sharing this experience in a group is very meaningful. As we met for our debrief sessions we each shared our thoughts and feelings about our different encounters. I found that the thoughts expressed by others helped me deepen my own thinking and reflections.

Joan Whiting (St John's Parish, Heidelberg)

Experiencing the ministry carried out by the Paulist Missionaries with the community in 13th Street and in the parish at Dinalupihan, Bataan, strengthened my connection with the Missionary Society of St Paul. Due to our age and since we live in Heidelberg, a fair distance from the parishes under the pastoral care of the Paulist Missionaries, my participation in the activities of the Paulist Missionaries is very limited, but I will certainly continue to support their ministry through my prayers and financially.

I thoroughly enjoyed the informal conversations around the dinner table which alerted me to the challenges and trends that are not often discussed in public. My experience at Mission 2024 once again helped me see the work of committed Paulist Missionaries, a witness that I cannot often experience in the Church in Melbourne. Some members of the group commented that *'If Joan and Leon can participate in Mission 2024 at the tender age of 85, so can we.'* I hope that my presence on these Mission Immersion trips encourages others to join. I can guarantee that age is not an issue and the experience is very enlightening.

Leon Whiting (St John's Parish, Heidelberg)



Celebrating Eucharist with students from Madre Margherita De Brincat School in Bataan

Initially my experience during the different activities of the Mission Immersion Experience made me feel angry and guilty. I questioned why there has to be so much poverty; I started to question God and why he allows all this to happen. As the days went by, and as we, as a group, processed our experiences, I started to appreciate the gifts God has given me: my life, my family and everything I have. It also confirmed me in my willingness to share in the charism and ministry of the Paulist Missionaries as a lay person. I understand that my role is to offer more help and to give witness to God's love. Now I can see God's hand in the suffering and the smiles of the people we encountered. I cannot forget the faces of the children, in their faces I can see the face of God. I now understand that while there is poverty and injustice in the world, there is also a lot of love, and where there is love, there is God.

Stephen Abela (Oratory M SSP, Birkirkara, Malta)

As part of our Mission Immersion Experience we were invited to reflect on the gospel of Jesus feeding the five thousand (*Mk 6:34-44*). In this gospel narrative Jesus showed compassion towards the people, and taught us how to be compassionate towards those who are less fortunate than us. The Mission Experience has taught me how to be there for others. Jesus did not need the five loaves and two fish to feed the multitude, he could have easily fed them himself with a simple miracle, but he wanted the disciples to participate with him in this ministry. This teaches me that I too have to do my part in helping those in need. I have discovered that the simplest things, even a smile or a hug could make a change in a person's life.

Christopher Abela (Oratory M SSP, Birkirkara, Malta)

The Mission Immersion Experience has offered me an opportunity to dare to get in touch with my deepest feelings and to realise the joy that comes from within and from the simplest things. I know that I am a sinner, but I also understand that I can find the joy of being a child of God every day and everywhere. I have also come to understand better the importance of community and the need to share my emotions with those around me. The group participating in this experience has given me a wider sense to the Lay Paulist Missionary community and I am very proud to be an active part of it. There were times when I felt that I would not have been able to survive the experience until the end without the group. The daily Eucharist gave me the energy and the faith I needed. I look forward to share my learnings with other Lay Paulists back home and with the members of my family. I am happy to speak about the ministry of the Paulist Missionaries and how with simple things and a little commitment we can all make life better and help build a better world through Him.

Louise Abela (Oratory M SSP, Birkirkara, Malta)



A local wheeling his cart to work



The Jose De Piro Kabataan Orkestra in concert at a private function

For more information about Mission Immersion 2024, please visit the parish web-site: stjamesapostlehcn.com.au/ Applications are now open for Mission Immersion January 3-19 2025 for participants between the ages of 18 and 35 Please email missions@mssp.org.au or call Fr Jude on 0431984689.