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Members Experience Joy and Challenges in Sabah

by Florante Siopan

The recent trip we made to Sabah to attend to the spiritual needs of our brethren there gave us a mixed emotion of joy and challenges. We started our trip from Bacolod early in the morning of July 15 to catch the boat trip from Dumaguete to Zamboanga. We arrived Dumaguete at about 10:00 a.m.

We bought our ticket and waited three hours for the boat to take us to Zamboanga. Leaving Dumaguete at 1:00 p.m., we reached Zamboanga the following morning without hitches. The boat that was supposed to leave for Sabah in the afternoon had their schedule previously changed for the next day. We were forced to spend another day in Zamboanga.

The following day, July 17—after our passport was approved for travel by the immigration office—we sailed for Sandakan, Sabah. We reached the port of Sandakan the following day. After another processing of passports by the Malaysian immigration, we journeyed to Semporna, a 335-kilometer land trip. We reached Semporna—the place where most of our brethren live—at 6:00 p.m., July 18, after four days of travel. We then made a stop at the home of Ruperta Beto, which is along the highway about two kilometers from the town.

We were met by Mrs. Beto, Artemio Bernal, and Mercy Chu, the wife of Chu Von Cheok, a Chinese who is a prospective member. After formal greetings, we settled down to discuss a lot of things—from the present status of the church, the Home Office, Council of Elders, the brethren in the Philippines, and the remaining Feast days of God, including the Feast of Tabernacles this year.

The brethren asked if we could come back for the Feast of Trumpets or Atonement, but the subject of coming to the Feast of Tabernacles took more time in our discussion. After our dinner hosted by the Beto family, Hope Beto, one of the sons of Ruperta Beto, brought us to a hotel in the town.

The following day (Sabbath), our service was attended by 18 people including children. A number of people were not able to come on account of distance and other unknown reasons.



In the morning, I gave the message in Cebuano, a dialect which all can understand. The title of the subject was, “They Choose to Follow Their Idols.”

Before and after our eating together that Sabbath, I noticed two of the small children trying to get my attention by always getting close to me, sometimes wanting to sit on my lap, distracting our discussions. I remembered the Bible incident where Jesus blessed the children who were trying to stay close to Him (Mark 10:13-16). I then opened the subject of the blessing of children and asked the parents if their children had already been blessed. They answered no, because their previous church had no such practice.

In the afternoon, before our Bible study, we held the ceremony of the blessings of children. This ceremony is new to the brethren in Sabah as this was not done in their former church. They asked me to go into the ceremony after I thoroughly explained this practice of the Church of God that was started by Jesus Christ, quoting the Scriptures. There were five children, ages four months to four years old that were blessed.

Sabah is a Muslim country and Islam is their established religion. Although there are some small and scattered Christian churches, the great majority of the population belongs to Islam. Filipinos in Sabah experience difficulties living in this country. They cannot be given citizenship status as they are not born in the land, nor have they embraced Islam as their religion.

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Editorial

by David Baker, *Philippine Senior Pastor*

Joy

Perhaps you have participated in a word association exercise in the past. Someone says a word and you are asked to say the first word that comes to mind. As an example, the person conducting the exercise may say “smile” and perhaps you would answer “happy or cheerful.” If the person conducting the exercise said “Christian,” what words would come to mind? Perhaps you would think of “disciple, faithful, obedience, overcoming, enduring, etc.” All these words are associated with our calling. But how long would it take you to think of the word “joy”?

Joy is one of the fundamental aspects of a true Christian. But unfortunately, joy is not often immediately associated with Christianity. Oliver Wendell Holmes once remarked, “I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers.” Joy can be described as a strong feeling of pleasure, gladness, cheerfulness, or celebration.

Joy is a fruit of God’s Spirit and therefore should be a fundamental characteristic of all Christians. It is interesting to note that the Greek word that is translated “joy” (*chara*) and the Greek word that is translated “grace” (*charis*) share the same common root word. As Christians, we experience a great deal of joy through the grace of God. Prior to baptism we were condemned to die for our sins (Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23). But we received a pardon; we received grace from God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, an appropriate response should be gratefulness and joy.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). We are filled with joy through the power of the Holy Spirit. One of the words used to describe God and His kingdom is joy. King David wrote, “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence *is* fullness of joy; at Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). David indicates that there is fullness of joy in the presence of God, and therefore God’s kingdom will be a kingdom of joy. The apostle Paul echoes this thought in his letter to the church in Rome, “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

But what about individuals who don’t have God’s Spirit—don’t they experience joy? Yes, they do to an extent. Perhaps a better word to describe their experience would be “happiness,” which can be described as a reaction to pleasant things that happen to them. But this joy or happiness is fleeting and temporary. When pleasant events occur, the individual experiences happiness. But do they

experience joy when unpleasant events occur? No, they do not. Perhaps they experience sadness or sorrow.

Christians are admonished to be joyful even during times of trial. James wrote to members of God’s Church, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4). Later James adds, “Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). During a time of trial, Christians can experience joy by looking beyond the trial or obstacle, realizing that God is in the process of perfecting their faith. Jesus Christ endured the crucifixion and the shame associated with it by focusing on the joy of being reunited with His Father (Hebrews 12:2).

What are some of the ways that Christians can experience joy? One way is to simply slow down and relish the moment—enjoy the life that God has granted us. We live in such a fast-paced world that we can become quite irritated over the slightest interruption. (Which just occurred with me as my 3-year-old son interrupted my concentration on this article.) As Christians we should slow down and enjoy the journey toward the Kingdom of God. Solomon wrote, “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil. Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that *is* your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9). As Christians we should experience joy in the many blessings that God has given us.

We should rejoice for the preaching of the gospel. Luke recorded in the book of Acts that the city of Samaria

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Mindanao Churches Revive Spokesman-Graduate Club

by Edmond Macaraeg

In an initial effort to meet the challenges of growth in the area, the time-tested Spokesman and Graduate Club training programs traditionally used in the Church of God to develop and polish church leaders have been reintroduced in Mindanao. Three combined Spokesman-Graduate Clubs were started right after the Feast of Tabernacles last year. Most of the members of the combined clubs are now half-way in their respective lesson assignments. There seems to be happy and significant growth in the abilities and performance of the men attending club.

While the club format generally follows the Spokesman and Graduate Club manuals, they are organized with a slight modification to accommodate the limited number of both the regular and graduate club members within each church regional area.

Here is an example. Since the Davao City Spokesman-Graduate Club (which includes men from the Pantukan and Santo Tomas congregations) has both regular and graduate club members, they simply combine in the activities from the beginning up through Tabletopics. After the break, however, those who are regular Spokesman Club members follow the requirements for the speeches in their manual (and are evaluated by fellow members), while those in the Graduate Club follow the more advanced speech assignments in their own manual (and are evaluated by fellow graduate members). The club director as usual gives the overall evaluations and any necessary lectures. There are usually two club sessions each month.

Presently, there are 16 members in the Davao City Spokesman-Graduate Club, meeting on the first and third Saturday nights of each month. On the other hand, there are ten members in the Kiara-Maramag-Banisilan (KMB) Spokesman & Graduate Club, meeting every second Saturday night of each month in Kiara, Bukidnon. The third group is the Butuan City (Caraga Region) Spokesman-Graduate Club, which also has 16 active members. Since most of the members from this group come from very far distances, they meet twice (one session in the morning, another in the afternoon) on the Sunday after the fourth



Davao church members participate in the Spokesman-Graduate Club session (Photo by Charles Phillip Macaraeg)

“Challenges,” continued from Page 1

Even the children who were born to parents that are not natives of the land cannot be given legal status as citizens. Filipinos who work in Sabah can travel freely if the company they work for would give them travel papers approved by the authorities. Others would just devise ways and means so they could continue to work without being caught. Occasionally, campaigns by the authorities are being done for those who stay illegally and whose passports have expired, subjecting them for deportation.

We have made a number of trips to Sabah and each trip we see hundreds of deportees sent home. Our brethren and their families are no exception to this problem. They don't enjoy the freedom we have here in the Philippines. We have been discussing possible travel to the Philippines to attend the Feast of Tabernacles this year. There are about a dozen who are seriously planning to come to the Feast. They are excited to experience how the Feast is to be observed. But for now, I cannot say how this plan will come about for all of them. I just encouraged them to do the best they can to get their legal papers such as passports, and to pray more,

asking our loving God to intervene in their behalf.

This is the challenge we are facing, and we put our trust in the One who works miracles for His people. I am asking the brethren to pray for our brethren in Sabah. I believe our collective heartfelt prayers will avail much, because it pleases God to see His people asking for His help in behalf of others.

We will continue to do the work God has given us—this is our challenge. With God's help through the power of His Holy Spirit, we will come out victorious for His glory. ■

Davao Starts Monthly Quiz Program

by Cheryl Lynn Macaraeg

In an effort to motivate and inspire the membership to read and keep abreast with our publications, the Davao City congregation has instituted a monthly quiz program at the start of the sacred year last April.

According to church pastor Edmond D. Macaraeg, we should exemplify being disciples (or students and followers) in word and deed. If we are to be “kings and priests” (rulers and teachers) in God's Kingdom, we should be serious about our Father's business now.

Based on the previous month's issues, the quiz consists of three questions each from *The Good News* magazine, Bible Reading Program, *United News* publication, *World*

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Wanted: Perfect Mother

by Audrey Ruth Angcos

“Lullaby, say goodnight... close your eyes and sleep tight....”

When I reminisce about the moments when my mother told me stories, sang me a lullaby, played with me, and comforted me with her warm touch and loving care, I stop and smile by myself. Those were the times when I had no responsibility, except to eat, play, and sleep. How I wish I had the ability to turn back time and be a child once again.

I close my eyes and meditate. Then, a small voice breaks the silence in my inner self. *What kind of mother would I be?* That question continues to linger in my mind. I cannot respond immediately. I think... think... and think. Then, an inspired answer was revealed: “I want to be a *perfect mother*—a mother God would be proud of!”

I go and observe the situation outside our house. My mixed emotions suddenly turn to sadness as I see the alarming reality in this world—children shout at, and fight with their mothers! The sad thing is those disrespectful acts seem to be accepted by modern society. Most of them criticize their mothers for the faulty and undesirable way of rearing them. Others are rebellious and they blame it on their mothers, since she failed to give them time and concern. She was so busy working and providing financial and material abundance for her children.

But these material things are not enough to satisfy the needs of her children. Money cannot buy love and responsibility. Children don't need a nanny to substitute for their mother. They don't need a beautiful mansion, expensive clothes, or other things. They desire the presence of their mother—a warm embrace, the care, and the bedtime stories. While these are simple acts, it contributes much to the development of the individual child. It is the simple acts that are often neglected.

So instead of becoming better individuals, they turn out to be the opposite. Children who experience this emotional problem become immoral and disrespectful—worst of all, they tend to reject God!

I appeal to my fellow youths: Even if our mothers commit faults and mistakes, we should continue to love them, honor them, and respect them. Let's not allow hatred and anger to control our hearts and minds. Our

mothers love us so much—though sometimes, they may fail to express it in the way we want or expect them to.

Our mothers are the ones who conceived us—she carried us in her womb, suffered deadly pain during labor and delivery, and it nearly took her life. That's the reason why we don't have the right to shout at our mothers or even fight with them.

Instead of doing these negative things that would hurt our mother so badly, why don't we make a difference? Instead of murmuring that there are no more perfect mothers in this world, why don't we start *being* one? If we want to see a change, let us start with ourselves! Start by striving hard to be a perfect daughter. In so doing, we would already be preparing ourselves to be a perfect mother. I know it is impossible for a carnal mind to grasp the idea of perfection within us, but it is not an excuse for not striving for it. Jesus said that we should be perfect just as our Father in heaven is perfect.

True, we are vulnerable to temptations that come our way. As real Christians, we experience trials and adversities. But we can overcome with our faith as our great weapon, knowing that the testing of our faith produces patience. And let patience have

its perfect work, so that we may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Therefore, it is not impossible for us to reach perfection if we only use the wisdom from God. Let God, who is perfect, be our Teacher—our Trainer to be a perfect mother—since everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his or her teacher.

These things are also applicable to the sons of today. If you want to be a perfect father someday, start by being a perfect son. In the future, you can support and help each other in molding and shaping productive and God-fearing individuals.

Let us continue to fight the battle of life! Let us stand firm and not lose hope! We, the daughters of today, will become the mothers of tomorrow. If we would only strive to become a perfect daughter, then we will be on our way to becoming a perfect mother. And when that will be realized, our future daughters will look up to us with the best compliment: They will decide to follow in our footsteps in becoming perfect mothers too!

At the end of the day, we would smile and say: “The mission God has given me is complete. I have reached the real happiness a woman could ever have... since I have become a perfect mother!” ■



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A Letter of Thanks to the Brethren

*Tago, Surigao del Sur
July 1, 2003*

Dear Church Brethren,

First of all, may I extend my warmest greetings to all the members of the United Church of God. May our Lord Almighty bless us all with abundance, health, happiness, and a peaceful life.

I have long been wanting to write this message, but it is only now that I got the chance to convey my sincere thanks to all church members for their heartfelt prayers; to those who sent me cards and encouraging letters; and most of all, to the brethren who have exerted a great effort in searching the Internet for the cure of my rare disease, scleroderma. A certain individual informed me that the medicine minocycline could aid in the healing of such a disease. He may also be the person who kind-heartedly donated the medicines for free. That donor is still unknown to me as he refused to reveal his identity. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to my donor. May God shower him more blessings in return. I am thankful to our Lord Almighty for making it possible for me to recover my health through His workings.

I have stopped taking medicines since September 2001, and now I have greatly improved. My joints are more flexible, making my body movement easier and more comfortable. My skin has softened and the complexion is lighter, unlike before when it was so tight and dark-colored. God is so merciful. Even if He allowed such debilitating disease (I understand His purpose was to let me slow down, as I tend to be a workaholic), He still made it possible for me to continue my work so that I can continue to support my family. He even blessed me so much that I was not burdened by the expenses of the medicines. Truly God hears prayers and is so gracious and merciful. My illness made my faith stronger and I became closer to God than ever. I would like to encourage all our brethren who are also suffering from diseases to have strong faith in Him for their healing, submitting and trusting God for His will.

Before ending this letter, I would also like to express my thanks and gratitude to our church pastor, Mr. Edmond D. Macaraeg, and to all the pastors abroad for their kind assistance.

May our Lord Almighty bless all the endeavors of the church in spreading the truth about the true God, His offer of salvation to mankind, and His coming kingdom—especially at this time when events are heading toward the end of the age as prophesied in the Bible.

With love to all,

Jessica Y. Pilapil

“Editorial,” *continued from Page 2*

experienced great joy when Philip came to them preaching the gospel (Acts 8:5-8). The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi that he rejoiced for the preaching of the gospel regardless of the motive (Philippians 1:12-18). Christ instructed the Pharisees and scribes through the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son to rejoice when someone repents (Luke 15). The Church continues to preach the gospel to the world and people are continuing to respond to that message and therefore we should rejoice! The apostle Paul informed the members in Philippi that he experienced joy in praying for them (Philippians 1:3-5). We can experience joy as we pray for one another. John wrote that he experienced great joy in hearing that members he knew continued to remain in the truth (3 John 1:4).

These are just some of the ways that Christians can experience lasting joy. You may have noticed that real joy involves touching the lives of others in a positive way. It's the way of giving, sharing, and out-flowing concern for others. Joy follows love as a fruit of God's Spirit and the expression of love brings real joy to our lives. ■

“Quiz,” *continued from Page 3*

News and Prophecy publication, and the *United News - Philippines* newsletter—bringing 15 test items in all. (There is a plan to include a specified booklet sometime later.)

Those who attain the top scores are rewarded with a beautiful laminated bookmark; plus they also get to be the ones to generate the test questions for the following month. Of course, they are “frozen” (exempted) from taking the next quiz. The bookmark contains the Ten Commandments as written in Exodus 20 on one side, and on the other side all the verses in the New Testament touching on each of the points of the Ten Commandments.

The monthly quizzes have constantly been one of the highlights and items of anticipation among the membership before the Bible study proper begins. This is held every first Sabbath of the month because during this time, there is a combined whole-day service and Bible study in Davao City, together with the neighboring church areas of Pantukan, Compostela Valley province; Kidapawan City; and Santo Tomas & Tagum City, Davao del Norte province.

In this manner, the desire to read and to keep up with our church's literature is cultivated. Members become more aware of world trends. They are inspired by church events nationally and internationally. Finally, they are nourished with spiritual food which strengthens their calling at this time and age. ■

YOUR ARTICLES NEEDED!

Do you have an article you wish to share with your brethren around the country? If so, please submit it to your pastor. The next deadline is August 31, 2003.

Finishing Our Race With Joy

by Daniel Roy Macaraeg

There is only one true joy in life—DOING the will of God! It was the one all-consuming passion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Nothing else really mattered to Him! If we succeed in other pursuits but fail in this task, it would be the most tragic loss ever. Nothing else compares to the joy of being about our Father's business—glorifying Him on this earth and finishing the work He has given us to do—with JOY!

If there's one strategy Satan effectively uses to rob us of that joy, it is to divide us. The author of division wants us to focus on our differences and put us in different camps. He doesn't want us working together harmoniously.

Furthermore, he wants us to be spiritually careless—and far too busy with other pursuits. He wants us to neglect our daily quiet time with God in prayer, Bible study, and meditation. He wants us to coast along spiritually. He doesn't want us to be “on fire” for the things of God. Instead, he wants to lure us into the glitter and the glamour—the sights and the sounds—the mystery and the magic—of this present world. He wants to steal our time and our focus by immersing us in TV, music, fashion, movies, the Internet, computer games, and the 1,001 other distractions out there. Not that these are all wrong *per se*, but he wants us to get so busy

(Being Under Satan's Yoke) with these wrong priorities. This is perhaps the biggest trap Satan uses. We can get caught up in it without even knowing it. Suddenly, either we find ourselves too tired or we don't find joy in the spiritual things like we used to.

But God loves us—every single one of us. It's no accident that we are in His Church at this present time. God looked upon the billions of people on this planet and chose us! Not because we are inherently better than other people, but because of His grace and mercy, and because He has a wonderful plan and purpose for each and every one of us (and not only us, but the billions of people out there). God wants to develop in us His *holy, righteous* and *perfect* spiritual CHARACTER—and be with Him in His Kingdom forever! The angels and the whole cosmic creation are waiting for that exact, precise, and dramatic moment when—in the twinkling of an eye—we will all suddenly and finally be transformed into spirit sons and daughters of God in His divine and glorious Family! What an incredible and joyful time that will be! What a

wonderful, grand, stupendous future we have in store for us! Can you picture it in your mind?

We may already know this intellectually, but we need to let it sink deep down in our hearts to give us the courage, the security, and the faith we need when trials come. Perhaps some of you are going through some rather tough times right now. It's during these times, when the nights seem darkest, that we need to focus on the coming sunrise of God's Kingdom. For sure, we will face many obstacles, even persecutions, on our journey to the Kingdom of God. We don't know how many steps we will have to take, but there's one thing we need to do—continue to put one foot in front of the other, no matter how long it takes. We have made a commitment to follow God, and follow Him we must! Satan wants us to quit. He wants us



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“But none of these [chains and tribulations] move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” —Acts 20:24, NKJV

to go back to the world and follow its popular ways and customs. He will put all kinds of discouraging circumstances and roadblocks on our path. He will send the dark clouds of fear, doubt, anxious care, and human reasoning to mar our spiritual vision. He will pour down torrential rains

on our sunny days to try to rob us of our joy. But through it all, our Lord

and Savior Jesus Christ will be by our side, just as He promised before He ascended into heaven.

Let's make it a habit to inspire one another, lest some of us become discouraged. We need to keep the torch of God's soon-coming Kingdom—the Wonderful World Tomorrow—burning brightly before our eyes! We need to encourage one another to give God our very best—from the moment we open our eyes in the morning to the time our head touches the pillow at night. There will be a glorious, shining, and majestic crown waiting for all of us—IF we *finish* this race with JOY! ■

“Spokesman,” continued from Page 3

Sabbath of the month in order to maximize the time, effort, and expense already incurred in coming for the meetings.

These are just the initial steps we are taking. God willing, when they finish, we hope to move on to other more advanced leadership development programs. Your prayers for these programs will be much appreciated. ■