



# United News Philippines

INFORM · INSPIRE · UNIFY

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## Members Rejoice During the Feast of Tabernacles

### Baguio Festival Report

Baguio City was once again one of three Feast sites for the United Church of God, *IA* here in the Philippines. For three consecutive years now, the services for the Feast of Tabernacles were held at the conference hall of Ang Ating Tahanan grounds of the Girl Scout of the Philippines. The hall has a capacity limit of about 150.

The Feast started out with an opening night service on the evening of October 10. We were expecting a maximum attendance of about 110, but we already hit that number in the afternoon of the first day. The attendance grew

each day so much so that by the Last Great Day, we almost reached the capacity limit when our highest attendance hit 147! This attendance was even greater than what we had two years ago when Baguio City

became the combined Feast site for both our Luzon and our Visayan brethren here in the Philippines (our highest attendance then was 139).

God did not just bless us with good attendance this year, but more so, with equally inspiring messages that focused the feastgoers on seriously making this Feast their most spiritual Feast ever. We were all likewise inspired by the message and the fresh new approach in the Festival video sent from the Home Office. Featuring the experiences of our Mexican brethren in that video

really helped us better appreciate how much we share the same sentiments and vision.

Mr. David Baker, our senior

pastor for Asia spent the second half of the Feast with us together with his wife, Mrs. Dorrie Baker, and their two children: Hannah and Jonathan. His messages and their presence greatly helped to encourage and inspire all of

us in this Feast site.

Various activities were held for the young and old alike as well as for the whole family, where everyone had the opportunity to enjoy fun, food, fellowship and games. Among the activities were the youth



**Above:** Chad Mortier leads his pack in the 'pull-for-peace' game during the beach outing activity in Davao; **Left:** Baguio members perform a Filipino folk ballad

day activities for the teens and the preteens, family day, city tour and the seniors dinner. For those who loved to sing, we had a videoke night. The brethren were likewise treated to a Festival Show, where native Filipino songs, folk dances, and a comedy skit were performed by many of the brethren themselves to the delight and enjoyment of everyone present.

The Feast ended with all the brethren feeling inspired, spiritually rejuvenated and eagerly looking forward to the next Feast of Tabernacles—but more so, to what it truly pictures: the establishment of the Kingdom of God here on earth. ■

—Contributed by Rey Evasco

### Davao Festival Report

The Davao festival site was attended by more than 300 members and affiliates from the 15 congregations in Mindanao and a few other families from Luzon. We also had guests from the U.S.—the Mortiers from Oshkosh, Wisconsin; Daniel Frayer from Albuquerque, New Mexico; and David Rogers from Denver, Colorado.

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## Editorial

by David Baker, *Philippine Senior Pastor*

It is hard to believe that it has been one month since the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles. Time passes quickly and before we know it the Spring Holy Days will be here! I hope everyone had a very enjoyable Feast and a safe trip home.

My family and I had a wonderful Feast and we deeply appreciated observing it with many of you. This was one of our more memorable Feasts in large part due to the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with our Filipino brethren. We would like to express our gratitude for the wonderful hospitality that we experienced during our visit.

I would also like to thank all of our brethren for their part in the Feast. In order for the Feast to be enjoyable and successful, many hours of prayers and service are expended. Thank you for the beautiful attitudes that we observed and experienced during our visit. I am looking forward to reading the reports of the Feast sites and viewing some of the photos! Once again, thank you for your generosity and service during the Feast. ■

## What Is The Ultimate Reason To Be Thankful?

by Edmond Macaraeg

The main focus for the month of November—especially in America—is Thanksgiving Day. Seeing the value of such celebration, Canada has also adopted its own Thanksgiving Day, though in the month of October. I also know of families outside of these nations which have adopted a day of thanksgiving on their own.

How did this celebration first come about?

At the anniversary of the Pilgrim's first year in the new colony, and surviving the bitter winter for which they were quite unprepared due to delays in their crossing to the new world (America), then Pilgrim Plymouth Governor William Bradford in 1621 initiated a three-day Thanksgiving celebration. About 242 years later, Abraham Lincoln in 1863, grateful for the unique blessings still nationally enjoyed by America proclaimed that Thanksgiving Day will be celebrated as a national holiday.

Today, the United States as a nation continues to enjoy the kind of economic, political, and military power unequaled in status among the international community of nations. It also still leads in scientific and technological development and advancement. (To further

understand the reasons for these great national blessings until now, please request for your free copy of *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*; or you can download this publication from our web site.)

Yes, America (and other wealthy nations) has a lot of reasons to celebrate, and rightly so. But should this attitude of thankfulness be exclusive only to the rich? Would God not want this to be a universal attitude? How about those living in third-world countries and conditions? How can these less fortunate nations and peoples be also thankful?

In our world, nations are categorized according to their level of economic productivity or output, which is designated by an index known as "GDP" (Gross Domestic Product), while the index of the average general living conditions of its citizens is expressed by "Per Capita GDP." This data is helpful for administrative planning and action.

While these data have good uses, comparisons on the physical aspects of reality can either make some thankful or perhaps even resentful. The Bible has a word of wisdom to offer when it comes to comparing. "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

Why is this so?

We know that there will always be someone in a better state than us based on a certain comparisons. For example, one may be judged as the most handsome or beautiful person in a contest, but he or she may still not be contented because he or she may not be as wealthy as someone else. And the comparison will be endless.

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“**Davao,**” continued from page 1

The highest attendance was 305. Services were held at the Region 11 RELC (Regional Educational Learning Center) compound of the Department of Education in Davao City, where the Davao congregation meets for weekly Sabbath services. The main meeting room was the Diamond Hall (with a seating capacity of 250), while the Pearl room (with a seating capacity of 100) had a video hook-up and a big-screen TV for the rest of the membership who needed to have the services translated into Cebuano, the local dialect.

We had the blessing of good weather, inspiring messages, beautiful flowers, uplifting special music, eight baptisms, two weddings, a 62 percent increase in the holy day offering, and 54 people who attended for the first time during a *Good News* public Bible lecture held on the second day of the Feast! We also had a colorful variety show, the first Ladies’ Night for the newly-revived Spokesman and Graduate Club, a family day at the beach, and various activities for the kids, teens, singles, and seniors. (Those baptized were: Annaliza Arceo, Josepilar Jr. and Nelia Bermudez, Simplicio Cambare, Eliza Curato, Lorna Dagani, and Ely and Virginia Fernandez. The two couples married were Jeb and Laurie [Macaraeg] Mortier and Daniel and Paulette [Cebrian] Frayer.)

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Home Office and certain of our brethren in the US for their generosity in the form of financial assistance, donated Bibles, used clothing, books, toys, and other gifts. Thank you very much! ■

—Contributed by Daniel Roy Macaraeg

## Iloilo Festival Report

Once again, the beautiful Punta Villa Resort in Iloilo City became a temporary dwelling place for 103 Feastgoers from the central part of the Philippines. Foreign guests this year included five from the United States, four from Canada and six from Sabah, Malaysia.

The Feast started out with the traditional welcome on the opening night with Florante Siopan giving the opening message about what to expect for the eight days. It clearly emphasized the rejoicing, enthusiasm, love and service necessary to experience the best Feast in which God would be the great and loving Host.

The brethren were very grateful to the Home Office for sending David Baker, the senior pastor of UCG in the Philippines. Together with his wife and two children, he inspired the brethren spiritually.

The Festival video, “Being About Our Father’s Business,” generated positive comments, seeing that everyone has his or her share in the work of God in preaching the truth of the gospel to the whole world.

Feast activities this year included the Family Day outing at the beach, Youth Day and Seniors’ Night. The highlight was the Family Entertainment and Dance Night, where brethren presented different numbers.

The brethren and the children were also treated with the love gift sent by our concerned brethren from the United States. These consisted of assorted toys and school materials, as well as reading glasses donated by a generous couple from Japan through LifeNets International.

The Church received very positive comments from the resort personnel. One was heard telling his fellow employee that the United Church of God is a well-behaved group, with neat and happy people including their children. He said he had not experienced this with other groups who also used the resort’s facilities.

The Feast ended with all the brethren feeling nourished and strengthened spiritually. It was a great and fruitful one. ■

—Contributed by Florante Siopan



**Top:** Young adults and children perform Filipino folk dances during the Family Night at the Iloilo Festival site; **Above:** Children enjoy a friendly game of ‘tug-of-war’ during the Family Day activity in Iloilo

## *A Walk to Remember*

by Audrey Ruth Angcos

Technology. This is a major interest in the world right now. Indeed, for technology gives us the convenience we want. One example is in the field of transportation. In times past, our ancestors walked from one place to another. At other times, they rode on animals or sailed in boats. But many times, they just walked—long hours of walk.

How about you? Have you ever tried walking instead of riding a vehicle? You might answer, “Since technology gave us automobiles to take us to our destination faster, what’s the point of walking?” Yes, most of us prefer to ride a vehicle rather than walk. Why? Perhaps to avoid the dangers associated with walking, to avoid a lot of the air pollution, and of course, to avoid wasting valuable time.

Yes, technology can be a great blessing. It plays a big role in our society. With technology, we can do many things—we can go and visit different countries around the world—and with unmanned satellites, even explore different planets!

But did you know that there’s a certain place that can’t be reached by even the most innovative, the most technologically-advanced vehicle ever invented? Even the best minds in our planet utilizing the best technology can’t invent an automobile or machinery that can reach that place.

And here’s a very intriguing fact: You can reach that place by walking! Yes, you read that right—walking. I’m talking about our *spiritual* walk with God. We are on a journey toward the best destination possible—the glorious Kingdom of God!

However, we are walking in a polluted and dangerous environment. A path where problems and temptations endlessly occur—a long road where our adversary is eager to grab us and do all kinds of evil things to us. Scary! Exhausting! But we must never quit!

We can reach the Kingdom by *walking with God*. He is our great Father who is willing to accompany us all



the way. He will guard us against the evil environment. He will help us overcome the problems and temptations that hinder our way. He will cover our senses from the pollution in the world.

God is our Father. We are all His beloved children. He is exposing us to this kind of environment because He wants us to build His holy character. He is teaching us how to stand firm—just like a father who is teaching His son how to walk. Imagine the father putting his son in a corner. He then walks to the opposite corner and with open arms, calls out to his son saying, “Come to Daddy!” As children, we want to go to our Father and embrace Him tightly. But it is difficult to walk in a straight path. Sometimes we stumble. Sometimes we get hurt. But we should stand again and continue to walk. What matters is where we are headed—towards our Father.

As we walk along the road of life, we’re learning and we’re building our character. At the end of the road, we will be firm in our stature, knowledgeable in all wisdom and character. And there we will see God our Father and Christ our elder Brother waiting for us, smiling with open arms!

As Christians, our walk is difficult. Our journey is exhausting. But our reward is indescribable! We will reign with God in His Royal Family! We will be the happiest Family ever!

Let us be patient—let us persevere and make each step of our journey a walk with God. And let us strive to make that walk... a walk to remember! ■

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## *Warm and Warmer*

by David Rogers

As I stepped out onto the tarmac of the Davao City International Airport in Southern Mindanao, Philippines, I became immersed in an ocean of penetrating heat and humidity. The warmth of the weather, however, could not be compared to the warmth I was yet to experience in the week ahead.

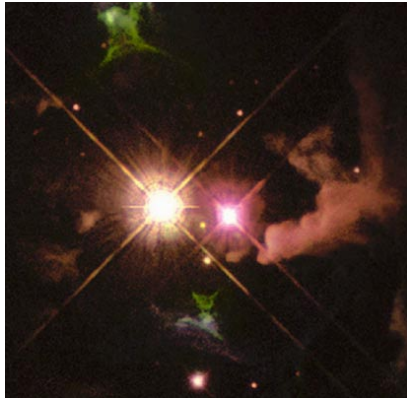
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# Dazzle For the Kingdom!

by Cheryl Lynn Macaraeg

We live in a world where everything seems to be a haze, going back to a society of clouded morals. It is a society where black and white is being mixed up and smudged together and we could very well be caught up in that grayish haze, our light being diminished, and our vision, blurred.

The Feast has gone, a week has passed and another Sabbath approaches. On the Sabbaths, we are reminded of the future rest that we could have once Jesus Christ returns to reign on this earth to restore all things. There is a saying that goes: "Hustle while you wait." But let me say, "Dazzle while we wait."



We, as the people of God, are chosen for a role that would entail continuous effort and refinement in our lifetime, just as God is polishing us for His jewels in His Kingdom. And as a precious jewel must be refined and defined, we need to be under the supervision of the Master Craftsman and yield to whatever He wills. We must guard our character and keep it up-to-date based on God's standards, not letting it rust and be dulled from the pollutants that we find everywhere in this world. We have the hope of the Kingdom and we should brightly shine and keep our lights dazzling in a hazy world.

We saw the dazzling examples of service, generosity, unity, and camaraderie of our brethren, young and old alike, at the recently concluded Feast. We saw their dazzling smiles, their faces alive with the Spirit radiating forth its glowing light. It's that light—that dazzle—that we find in attending a spiritually pumped-up Feast! It's the Sabbaths and the Feasts that keep us reminded that we have a hope, a royal calling, and a very important role in God's Kingdom.

So, as we wait for next year's Feast, let us *dazzle* while we wait—let us *dazzle* for the Kingdom! See you next year! ■

*"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14, 16).*

"Warm," continued from page 4

My journey started at 5:30 p.m. from Denver International Airport, Colorado, USA. The 18+ hours of flying time (not including layovers in Los Angeles, Taipei, and Manila) allowed me to contemplate what lay ahead. Truly, I didn't know what to expect. When speaking to Filipinos en route to Manila their eyes would widen when I mentioned Davao as my destination.

Southern Mindanao had not been considered a safe area for Western travellers. I found the exact opposite to be true in Davao City. Arriving a few days before the Feast of Tabernacles 2003, I had the chance to make my way around a small portion of the city on my own. I was greeted with smiles everywhere I went. The saying is accurate in that the Philippines is the land where Asia wears a smile. The Philippine brethren more than exemplify this ideal.

I was overwhelmed with smiling faces and handshakes the first days of the Feast. I was staying at an off-site hotel close to the RELC compound (Regional Education Learning Center) where services were being held and where most of the brethren stayed and ate. I felt so welcomed by all that I requested to stay in the dorm style accommodations provided by the RELC center. This allowed me to truly experience a Filipino feast among the friendliest and most outgoing brethren I've ever had the privilege of meeting.

I had the opportunity to have dinner at several members' houses. Each time I felt like one of the family. Specifically, I remember an occasion at one member's house where after dinner was served, conversation went well into the night. Even though time was approaching 1:00 a.m., I was being urged to stay as they were hoping our conversation would last until morning. Also, I would be doing a disservice by not mentioning the hospitality of the Macaraeg family who have more than made me feel at home here in Davao City.

Truly, the heat and humidity of the Philippine climate cannot hold a candle to the warmth and hospitality of the Philippine brethren—all of whom I now consider lifelong friends. ■



David Rogers (right) and Mr-s. Rafael Uy with two of their sons, Jun and Arvin

# A Diamond Is Forever

by Daniel Roy Macaraeg

Have you ever seen a diamond? Nothing quite compares to its dazzling beauty, sheer elegance, and fiery brilliance! It is the hardest known substance on earth. It is, in fact, *40 times harder* than a sapphire or a ruby, the next hardest minerals known. Only another diamond can scratch a diamond. A diamond is the greatest conductor of heat, is transparent over the greatest number of wavelengths, has the highest melting point of any substance (4,090 degrees centigrade—2 ½ times greater than that of steel!), and has a refractive index greater than any naturally occurring gemstone—giving it its characteristic fire and brilliance. Diamonds are the rarest and costliest of gemstones.

But you may ask: what magical substance is a diamond made of? Ironically, just about the same substance found in one of the softest of all minerals—the graphite in the lead of your Mongol pencil! Diamonds are pure crystalline carbon formed 200 kilometers deep within the earth millions of years ago. It was discovered over 4,000 years ago in India. About 3.5 billion years ago, the elemental forces of heat and pressure transformed the carbon into diamond in the cauldron of boiling magma that lay deep below the surface of the earth. The volcanic mass in which this crystallization took place then thrust upwards and broke through the earth's surface to cool in kimberlite pipes. It is in these pipes that most diamonds are found today. The diamond derives its name from the Greek *adamao* or *adamas*—which means “unconquerable” or “invincible.”

But what determines the value of a diamond? In 1939, De Beers, the world's leading diamond company, introduced the “Four Cs”: Cut, Color, Clarity, and Carat.

*Cut*—refers to the angles and proportions of a diamond. A diamond's cut is what gives it sparkle and fire. The better the proportions, the better the diamond is able to handle light, creating more sparkle and brilliance.

*Color*—refers to the degree to which the diamond is colorless. The majority of diamonds range from those with barely perceptible yellow and brownish tints up to the very rare pinks, blues, and greens which are known as fancies. The best color for a diamond, however, is colorless.

*Clarity*—refers to the presence of inclusions in a diamond. Most diamonds contain tiny inclusions or

feather-like spots or imperfections, not discernible to the naked eye. The fewer and smaller they are, the less likely they are to interfere with the passage of light through the diamond, and therefore the more rare and beautiful it will be.

*Carat*—refers to the weight of a diamond. One carat is divided into 100 points so that a diamond of 75 points weighs .75 carats (1 carat = 200 milligrams). Two diamonds of equal weight can therefore have very different values, depending on their cut, clarity, and color.

In the Bible, God calls us His jewels (Malachi 3:17). In this article, I would like to share with you the 4Cs of a *spiritual* diamond—what we should be striving to be as true Christians. The Four Cs are Conviction, Commitment, Courage, and Character. They are all important—they all build upon each other.

***Conviction—the degree to which one knows and believes the Word of God.***



Conviction is being absolutely certain of what you believe. In Hebrews 11:6, we read: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God *must believe* that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” We *must* believe! We *must* be *fully* persuaded! We must not leave room for even a little doubt! That is conviction!

Such was the conviction Daniel's three friends had when they were confronted about their refusal to bow down before King Nebuchadnezzar's idol. They said, “If that is the case, our God whom we serve *is able* to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, *and He will* deliver us from your hand, O king” (Daniel 3:17).

They had *faith*—they knew their God and fully trusted in His power to save them!

Now where does this faith come from? Romans 10:17 tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing *by the word of God*.” We must anchor our beliefs solidly on the unchanging authoritative Word of God, the foundation and wellspring of truth (John 17:17). This is what will give us the same faith that the patriarch Abraham had. In Romans 4:20-21, we read that “he did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being *fully convinced* that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” *That* is what conviction is—being fully convinced!

Do you recall what Joseph did and said when he was being seduced by Potiphar's wife? What made him

strong enough to resist? Conviction! In Genesis 39:7-9, we read: “And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.” But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this *great wickedness*, and *sin* against God?” There it is! Joseph called a spade a spade. He *knew* what was right and what was wrong! And he took action!

To deepen our conviction, we need to study and meditate on the words of God. Without conviction, we cannot move on and possess the second quality of a spiritual diamond.

***Commitment—the degree to which one consistently acts on that knowledge and belief.***

Here’s another way of understanding commitment—commitment is making a firm decision *way in advance* of the circumstance you will be faced with. It means *binding* yourself to a certain course of action, based on the truth of your conviction.

Let’s look at an example from the Bible of one who had commitment. Read Daniel 1:8: “But Daniel *purposed in his heart* that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”

He *purposed in his heart*—he made up his mind—he made a firm decision and *bound himself to that certain course of action!* That is commitment!

Let’s also read what Daniel’s three friends answered King Nebuchadnezzar for their refusal to bow down to his idol: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, *we have no need to answer you in this matter*” (Daniel 3:16). Their minds were made up. Their commitment came from their conviction that God is alive and that He had the power to protect them. But still they were prepared for the worst: “But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that *we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up*” (Daniel 3:18).

What a classic example of commitment! In other words, “The die has been cast... there’s no room for negotiation. We won’t bow down, no matter what!”

Do you remember the showdown of the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel? Elijah called for commitment! He said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

We need to take a stand and be decisive. But we cannot do that if we do not have sufficient conviction. And conviction comes from faith, and faith comes from hearing—and heeding—the Word of God! Unless we have this kind of conviction, we will be compromising left and right. But if we drink in and meditate on what God says in His word, we will be able to say, along with Joshua: “As for me and my house, we *will* serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

***Courage—the degree to which one is able to persevere in the face of trial or difficulty.***

Unless we have conviction and commitment, we would not have courage—the strength and boldness to stand by our commitment no matter the cost. Why were Daniel’s three friends bold enough to risk death in a fiery furnace heated seven times? Conviction. Commitment. Courage. How about Joseph? For doing the right thing, he lost in one day his job, his freedom, and his “good reputation.” He was willing to go to prison and to suffer ridicule and abuse because he was convicted, committed, and courageous. Look at all the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 beginning in verse 30. Why were they able to risk so much? Why were they able to face danger without flinching? Why did Daniel still pray even after knowing that the law was signed authorizing the death of all who prayed to the God of Israel? Why did the apostles still preach Jesus as the Christ even after being arrested, beaten, and thrown into prison? Conviction. Commitment. Courage.

Today, we easily get afraid at the thought of losing our recognition in school, the acceptance of our peers, and perhaps our job security. We are not even threatened with death and torture like the heroes of faith were. Imagine being tortured and sawn in two! Notice what was said of them in Hebrews 11:38: “of whom the world was not worthy.” Why? Because they were *spiritual diamonds*. Only God knew their true worth.

***Character—the degree to which one is conformed to the image of God’s perfect Son, Jesus Christ.***

This is what God is forming in us all along. Picture the 4Cs as levels of a pyramid. The base is conviction, followed by commitment and courage. The capstone is character.

Character is the only thing we can take with us into eternity. Not our houses, our clothes, our appliances, or our cars. And character is so precious because even God cannot create it by fiat! Just imagine several robots and automatons walking around following and obeying God saying, “Yes, Master!” just because they

# Preparing for the Feast of Tabernacles 2004

by Grace Ballesteros

Why do the brethren who attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Davao City feel blessed and strengthened in their faith?

For starters, the Regional Educational Learning Center facilities were comfortable and clean. Add to that the service which was efficient and courteous. That took care of ambience, a conducive environment and setting.

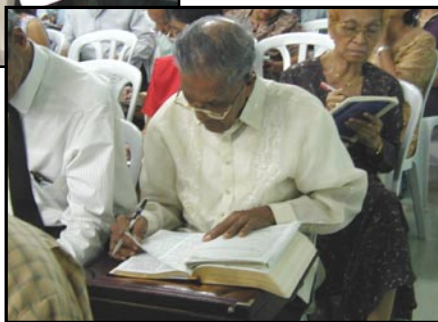
Moreover, the hearty lunches served every day of the Feast were gifts from caring brethren from the US. That took care of bodily sustenance.

We had encouraging sermons and sermonettes.

The Variety Show showed that a lot of practice, ingenuity, creativity, and heart were put into its preparation. The Family Day was a feast of God's bounty both for the eyes, the belly and the soul. And finally, new bonds among brethren were forged and old ones reinforced. That took care of spiritual sustenance.



**Top:** Members of the Davao Festival choir as they prepare for a special music rendition; **Right:** Senior members play a vital role in God's Church



How would the brethren like to receive an outpouring of blessing and confirming of faith for the Feast of Tabernacles 2004?

May I suggest a year-round preparation involving all brethren committing today to come, fully prepared spiritually, financially, and physically. Let us be reminded of the law: "you reap what you sow." The more each would sow in terms of personal preparation for the Feast, the more God will honor each with the greater harvest, not counting the synergistic result for all due to such concerted, focused effort.

Spiritually preparing ourselves involves daily study and meditation on God's Word. Let us make use of the bountiful resources God is providing the United Church of God.

Don't students who study before their classes profit more than those who merely attend and sit through

it? Can we not see how this enables a brother to better understand the importance of verses as used in messages?

Would this not also individually enable us to give an answer to anyone who asks about the faith we hold? And finally, how infinitely this practice can hold sway over how we think or what we do during the course of the year! Could there be a better way of molding our minds into that of our Saviour and Lord?

Spiritually preparing ourselves is holding up in view daily the gospel of the kingdom of God so that all our actions during the course of the year are directed by this goal. This is how our Lord overcame the shame and horror of the crucifixion. Could it do less for us?

Spiritually preparing ourselves is being on constant guard against distractions Satan would throw in our paths. They come in the innocuous forms such as:

- Problems in our life
- Pleasures the world offers
- Pre-occupations (school activities, work, business, hobbies, watching TV/movies, etc.)

How do we know when these can become Satan's deceiving distractions? When doing or being pre-occupied with them keeps us away from God's word.

For God's elect, Satan's greatest enemy is for them to know and be kept reminded of truth because this is what will free them from his bondage and deception.

Financially preparing ourselves is the regular setting aside of our Festival tithe that will cover expenses for a festive observance of the Feast. The

command is to rejoice in the presence of the Lord, is it not? The Feast is not the occasion to rejoice in the midst of deprivation. The Lord wants us to have a foretaste of the incredibly bountiful life He has in store for us. But He wants us to put effort in obeying this and He will also graciously provide for what is beyond our capability.

Physically preparing ourselves requires healthy moderate daily living. We will benefit most when we take good care of our wonderfully and divinely designed bodies provided us by our Father. Sickness limits our ability to serve God and sickness takes some fullness out of our rejoicing.

Physical preparation also covers preparing for whatever responsibility one has. This includes preparing a program that will give everyone a truly good soaking in the Word of God. This includes also those assigned in giving the sermon/ette, leading Bible studies, leading the

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Comments from



## Our Good News Readers

I thank God for The Good News and your magazines and your booklets. I gain knowledge of God's word of truth. It strengthens my faith in God through Jesus Christ. God Bless! Thank you!

*Text Message*

I am blessed because you have given me free [*Good News*] magazines. I do hope that you may continue to be a blessing for those people who wish to have *The Good News* magazine. I pray that you may reach all their needs, especially on the spiritual aspect... Thank you very much, God Bless and more power!

*M.A., Batac, Ilocos Norte*

I want to say a million thanks to the people who spend their efforts and share their wisdom in order to let us know the truth through *The Good News Magazine*. I think this is the sort of magazine that I always desired and hungered for... I truly value every piece of it and keep them above everything else I have. Keep up the good work!

*J.W., Silago, Leyte*

I am so delighted to give my sister a copy of your magazine. That is why I wrote her name on the other coupon... She and her family have not joined any religious organizations. I believe that your magazine and other literature will help them teach about God and Jesus Christ and The Holy Bible... I thank God for people like you who teach the Bible, not only through words but through deeds as well.

*E.P., Bugias, Benguet*

I have been an avid reader of your magazine. It helped me a lot in reminding me of God's love, the reality from the past, and the relation of crisis happening today and guiding me in my daily endeavours.

*A.M.E., General Santos City*

Reading The Good News magazine helps me face the trials in my life... By reading this, it lightens me up because it reminds me that no matter how much suffering we face, God's promise to comfort and help us is always there...

I am very grateful that I belonged to the magazine that helped so many lives... In behalf of my family, I pray that you will continue to spread the truth through your magazine and in hopes, it will spread throughout the world. God Bless and more power to you all!

*M.E., Davao City*

**“Editorial,”** *continued from page 2*

Many of us may be familiar with the proverbial man who complained he had no shoes, until he met a man without feet. While the account stops there, it does not necessarily mean that such is the end of the story. What could have been the complaint of the man who has no feet? Can he still be thankful? Only if he stops comparing and begins to appreciate other things which he has. This brings us to a very important point.

Thankfulness is a state of mind and an attitude of the heart. It is a positive perspective which does not focus on what one does not have, but rather being content and valuing what one has, no matter how basic. The Apostle Paul expressed this godly concept in his letter to Timothy when he said:

“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” (1 Timothy 6:6-8). He continues to advise in the remaining verses that greediness creates lots of problems, and causes lots of discontentment and unhappiness.

To find contentment, thankfulness and happiness, let us remember that to begin with, none of us deserved any existence! Yes, none of us ever asked to be born. Yet by the love and grace of God, He has chosen to give us this free gift—the joy of a physical life—and all the other good things we enjoy in this life are to be counted as great bonuses to life!

But an added dimension to attaining ultimate thankfulness is when we focus on that which transcends this temporary physical life, to that life which is spiritual and endures forever. Most people do not realize it, but there is something infinitely greater than anything we have ever known in this physical life but which is surely in store for us! This physical life is just the first stage in the process of joining the great family of God! (For more information on this very important and exciting subject, please request for your free copy of the booklet, *What is Your Destiny?* or you may simply download this publication from our web site.)

While we should indeed be thankful for everything (1 Timothy 5:18), thanksgiving is not just for a day, nor for the rich, but should be a part of everyone's character as we all seek to be part of that great Kingdom of God—our ultimate eternal destiny! ■

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## The Joys of Serving One Another

by Richard John Macaraeg

The Feast of Tabernacles reminds us with memories of how God's people, both old and new, gather together from various walks of life to share one common purpose. And that is to rejoice together before God and to learn of His ways.

Many of us have witnessed the efforts our members have put into making this year's Feast a success. What has made it so inspiring? An important factor to consider was the care and support members of God's Church have towards one another and towards making this Feast truly enjoyable and enriching for us. There was a sense in each of us that motivated us to do more for others. It could have been a sense of gratitude, a sense of responsibility, or a sense of wanting to be involved in church activities. These are actually some of the qualities that make serving others truly worthwhile, enjoyable, and fulfilling.

When we serve others, we do not primarily think of ourselves or what benefit serving could bring to us. We do this to please God because it actually is He whom we serve. It is one way of saying 'thank you' to God for making us a part of His Church, and for giving us the opportunity to become one with Him.

When we serve, we have to give it our best. We are told in Ecclesiastes 9:10 that "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it *with your might*." The New Living Translation renders it "that we do it well." Also, the apostle Paul admonishes us in Ephesians 6:6 that we must be obedient to those whom we serve "doing the will of God *from the heart*."

Our Maker and Creator God designed us that our conduct ought to be reflective of His ways and should become a positive and shining example for others to emulate. When we read of Christ's example of humility and service when He was on earth, we realize how integral it is in God's character to love and serve others especially with His people. That is what God wants us to develop and be perfected in us. It is through God's way of giving and serving that we can better understand and appreciate His true character.

If you and I believe that we are part of a higher calling, far greater than any other occupation in this



world, then let's not forget the words of Christ in Matthew 23:11-12 when He said, "but he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."

Remember that in whatever we do, we must do it with a humble attitude and for the glory of God. Then that glory will be revealed to us when He comes, and we shall reign with Him in His Kingdom. ■

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### "A Diamond," continued from page 7

were programmed to do so—and that they could not choose otherwise? God is not interested in robots, but in children—in sons and daughters—who follow and obey God because they love Him! No wonder God calls His people His jewels: "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them *My jewels*. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him" (Malachi 3:17).

There is a Russian proverb that says, "A gem is not polished except by friction." None of us enjoy the grinding and the heat and the pressure of the trials and difficulties of everyday life. But it's precisely those very things—the heat, the pressure, the grinding, the cutting, and the polishing—that transform ordinary carbon into a precious glittering diamond! The rest who despise the process remain the graphite to be made into cheap lead pencils.

We need to submit to God, the Master Craftsman, to develop in us the 4Cs of a spiritual diamond: conviction, commitment, courage, and character. When the process is complete, we will be more brilliant than a diamond. As Daniel 12:3 states, our destiny is to be more brilliant than even the stars shining in the heavens forever and ever! One day, we shall become *spiritual diamonds*—God's most precious jewel! God can then exclaim: "This is my beloved son [or daughter], in whom I am well pleased!"

Let's all strive to be spiritual diamonds of unshakable conviction, unwavering commitment, unflinching courage, and Christ-like character! For a diamond... is forever! ■

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### "Preparing," continued from page 8

singing, being a member of certain committees. Various responsibilities require different lead times. Can we in conscience offer to God a preparation done only in a day or a week or a month for such a great occasion as this?

We can appreciate the value of all this year-long sacrifice and forward planning as part of our training to become competent to handle the responsibilities God will give us in his kingdom.

See you all at the Feast of Tabernacles 2004, God willing. ■