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Kidapawan Church Holds First Outing

by Merlito Tonog

February 22, Sunday, was a red-letter day for 31 individuals who attend the outlying Bible Study in Kidapawan City. Together with the Davao church pastor Mr. Edmond Macaraeg, his wife Lorna, two of their children—Laurie and Charles, as well as local elder Mr. Rodrigo Florencondia and his wife Reynalda, the group went for an outing at the Le Rêve Swimming Resort in Makilala, Cotabato.

The outing was actually the realization of a plan hatched sometime in December last year, when the Davao church, to which the scattered brethren in Cotabato affiliate themselves, had its yearly campout at Eden Nature Park last December 27-28. But due to financial constraints most of the brethren in Kidapawan were not able to join the activity. In one of their meetings in January, they decided to have an outing among themselves to give opportunity for the group, which has increased in number from just three families to six, to gather and enjoy the beauty of God's nature right in the immediate vicinity of Makilala. The plan was presented to Mr. Macaraeg, who approved it and set the activity during the third weekend of February.



Oscar Osing (center) being baptized by Pastor Edmond Macaraeg and Mr. Rodrigo Florencondia during the February outing in Kidapawan (photo by Charles Macaraeg)

What was planned early on as a plain social outing turned out to also be a meaningful spiritual experience. Three new attendees, Oscar Osing, his wife Evelyn, and Perla Moscoso, submitted themselves for baptism counseling. These three were members of a local group of Sabbath-keepers who trace their teachings to Herbert W. Armstrong in the 80s and adopted these teachings as their own. As a matter of fact, they previously submitted to water baptism performed by the emergent local leader in their group.

Thus, on the Sabbath of February 21, right after the morning Bible Study conducted by Mr. Macaraeg, a series of counseling sessions was held. The Osings, having shown adequate understanding of God's calling and plan of salvation manifested their desire to be baptized. Judging from

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News and Updates From the Visayas

by Florante Siopan

The United Church of God in the Visayas area continues to see more new people attending Sabbath services, observing how UCG does its work of preaching the gospel, and watching how its members conduct their lives as individuals and as a group. A contributing factor to this has been the previous

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Dates to Remember

April 5	Passover (Passover service observed evening of April 4)
April 6	First Day of Unleavened Bread (Night to be Much Observed will be on evening of April 5)
April 12	Last Day of Unleavened Bread
May 16-27	United Youth Camp 2004
May 30	Day of Pentecost

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Editorial

by David Baker, *Philippine Senior Pastor*

Passover and Unity

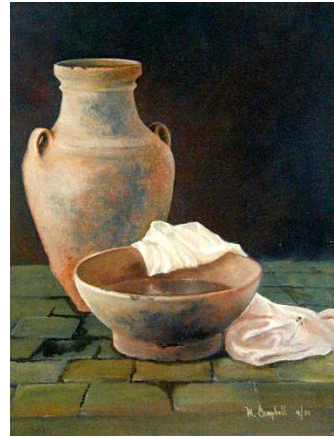
Each year as we observe the Passover we are reminded of many important lessons. As we participate in the foot-washing ceremony we are reminded of Christ's humility and we are also reminded of the humility required of each Christian. Christ told His disciples, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). As we partake of the bread and wine, we are reminded of Christ's suffering and death to pay the penalty for our sins. Luke recorded, "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you' (Luke 22:19-20). Each year at Passover we are reminded that Jesus Christ suffered and died so that you and I could be justified before God and have an opportunity to inherit eternal life.

The apostle Paul pointed out another important lesson that we are to be reminded of during the Passover service. In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul noted that Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their examples of provoking God's wrath were recorded for our instruction. As he continued in chapter 10, he wrote, "I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (I Corinthians 10:15-17). Paul instructed the church that the bread that we partake of during Passover reminds us that we are a part of the body of Christ. Even though the body is composed of many members, there is only one body. So each year at Passover we are reminded of the unity that should exist in the church—the body of Christ. The Passover is a wonderful time to be reminded of the unity that God desires.

Oftentimes a lack of unity is due to offenses and an unwillingness to extend forgiveness to our brother in Christ. So at Passover members of God's church reflect on the forgiveness they have received through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But Christ also instructed His disciples, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father


forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). Therefore we must approach the Passover service with an attitude of forgiveness to other members of the body of Christ. If we do not approach the Passover with a willingness to forgive others, are we partaking of the Passover in an unworthy manner (I Corinthians 11:27-29)?

How can we experience the unity that God desires as we partake of the bread during Passover? The apostle Paul gives us the answer in Ephesians 4:1-6, "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*" The apostle Paul ends the chapter by



writing, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:30-32).

I hope these thoughts are helpful as we prepare for Passover. I am looking forward to observing the upcoming Passover with our brethren in Butuan City. I hope you have a wonderful and meaningful Passover and a joyous Feast of Unleavened Bread. ■



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the looks on their happy faces right after the counseling sessions, the brethren knew that a dual baptism will soon take place. This was later confirmed by Mr. Macaraeg, who announced that the baptism will take place during the outing at the Le Rêve Resort the following morning.

Due to ailment, Mrs. Moscoso was not able to attend the Bible Study and counseling. [Note: She was later baptized in Davao City, March 21.] Of course, the brethren with their respective families had lunch together at the Conference Hall of the Cooperative Rural Bank of Cotabato, the venue for the Bible Study sessions of the Kidapawan brethren.

Late in the afternoon, Mr. Macaraeg and his family proceeded to Mlang, Cotabato to spend the night in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Merlito Tonog, while Mr. and Mrs. Florencondia stayed in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bobby Cuizon in Kidapawan. This was the first time ministers of the United Church of God stayed overnight in Cotabato. In our former association, during the late 80s and the early 90s, the ministers stayed overnight only during the Passover. It is strikingly noteworthy that Mr. Macaraeg was the one who laid the foundations of both Worldwide Church of God in the mid-70s and United Church of God in Kidapawan City 30 years later.

As planned, Mr. Macaraeg and family left Mlang early to fetch Mr. Osing and family in Poblacion, Makilala and from there proceeded to the Le Rêve Resort. Upon arrival, the first order of the day was the baptism of Oscar and Evelyn Osing. This took place in the children’s pool of the swimming resort. Our group later occupied three huts near the pool side, immediately in front of the slide, the mini-swimming pool, and the diving board. The huts were reserved two weeks before the outing to afford some privacy and security and just in case the day would be too sunny and warm, seats could be brought along and placed under the cool shade of the pine trees. It turned out that the weather was just fine and fair, very much conducive to a long swim and stroll in the park. Nearby was a wide pond that catered to the boating needs of the adventurous. The ladies, Mesdames Macaraeg, Florencondia, Tonog, and Cuizon, took to the gardens planted with varied ornamental plants. In fact, the cargo section of Mr. Macaraeg’s vehicle was nearly filled with plants bought by Mrs. Macaraeg.

Food was abundant: *caldereta* at *kilawin na kambing*, *inihaw na tilapia* at *bangus*, and *adobong manok*. There were *singkamas*, *buko*, *lakatan* bananas and *puto*.



While the young ones had photo sessions with Charles, the adults gathered together to exchange stories related to their conversion and baptism. The Osings narrated their experience with their local leader along Sabbath keeping—how in the early years they refrained from cooking food during the Sabbath and putting up shelters made of leaves during the observance of the Feast of Booths. For want of a true minister, they submitted to water baptism performed by the most senior among them. Unfortunately that emergent leader left their “church” to join politics. They also related how they attempted to “speak in tongues.” One of the new attendees who was personally fetched by Mr. Macaraeg from Kidapawan, spoke about her being baptized by her own husband.

It happened that the outing thought to end right after lunch actually extended up to the late afternoon. There were simply many stories to tell: the joy of having at long last a congregation in Kidapawan; the near-harrowing experiences of members attending services in Sultan Kudarat since they have to pass through Muslim-occupied areas; as well as the ambush story of the Cuizons, who lost their Sabbath clothes to “hold-uppers” in Buluan. The original members of the church are happy that after several decades of being alone by themselves, they are now enjoying fellowship with people who share and held fast to similar beliefs, acknowledging the same God and equally committed to do His commandments and laws. God is indeed our all-wise and ever-loving Father. The brethren in Kidapawan, long scattered, are now being gathered into a safe fold by God’s chosen shepherds. ■

Bukidnon-Banisilan Churches Hold Picnic at Spring Resort

by Annaliza Arceo

The members of the Maramag and Kiara, Bukidnon and Banisilan, North Cotabato churches gathered for a picnic at the cool and magnificent Waig Crystal Spring Resort last February 15 (Sunday). The resort, considered the first of its kind in the province, is located about five kilometers northeast of Poblacion, Maramag, Bukidnon.

One can reach the main pool and cottage site by one of three ways: enjoying an easy walk down a long path along the side of a hill; taking a shortcut passing through a breathtaking zigzag and steep rock-step stairway; or riding in cable cars known to be a first in Bukidnon.

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The Passion of the Christ

by Daniel Roy Macaraeg

As I write, there is a popular and controversial film playing in more than 3,000 screens in the US, Canada, Australia, and other countries. Perhaps you have already heard something about it. The film is entitled *The Passion of the Christ*, and was produced, financed, and directed by Mel Gibson, the Oscar-winning director of *Braveheart*.

It became controversial for three reasons: Firstly, it is a religious movie and its leading character, Jesus, was and is controversial. Secondly, some were concerned that the movie could intensify anti-Semitic feelings, and provoke violent actions toward the Jews. Thirdly, the R-rated film is pretty graphic in its portrayal of the last 12 hours of the life of Jesus Christ—including His scourging and crucifixion. But all this pre-release controversy has given the \$30 million film nothing but massive publicity in the United States and elsewhere, and has stirred a nagging curiosity among many people. In its opening five days, *The Passion of the Christ* has grossed \$125.2 million, surpassing *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (\$124.1 million) for the best debut ever for a film opening on a Wednesday.

According to Warner Brothers, the Philippine distributor of *The Passion of the Christ*, the film is set to open in Manila late this month and perhaps mid-April in other cities as well.

This film comes at a time when we are focusing on the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, picturing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the lesson of putting sin out of our lives.

How greatly do we value the sacrifice that Jesus Christ has made for us? Do we really understand what God the Father and Christ have done for us? Do we really comprehend the seriousness of sin, or the great price that was paid that we may be forgiven and possess eternal life?

Reading the movie reviews, the common reaction was stunned silence. Many were shocked at the brutal suffering and execution they had just witnessed. Some openly sobbed and cried, speechless and sobered by what they had just experienced. Many came out with a profound appreciation for what Christ has done. But will many make the connection between their breaking of God's laws and the resultant suffering, torture, and death that Christ willingly took on their behalf? More importantly, will they finally *repent* of their sins and forever change the direction of their lives?

How about us? Have we gotten too comfortable with ourselves? These are the days of self-examination. The Bible commands each and every one of us:

“Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. *Test yourselves*. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5, NKJV). ■

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visit of Mr. David Baker and Mr. Joel Meeker. One of those who now attend gave the following comment: “Real love and concern exists in the United Church of God because the leadership of the church spends their precious time with the brethren even in the remote areas of the world.”

In Tacloban, the church has started holding meetings for the Family Christian Club for the benefit of the whole congregation and the Spokesman Club for the male members of the church. The aim of these clubs is to develop the varied talents of the members and their families.

The Family Christian Club welcomes men and women, young and old. The purpose is to promote closeness through personal presentation, speech development, and learning the skills of Christian leadership. Likewise, the Spokesman Club, which is open to members and prospective male members in the church, is also a venue to develop the speaking ability of everyone leading to a more responsible Christian way of living. Both club meetings are beneficial to all who participate.

The coming Passover service for the baptized members in the three congregations in Leyte will be held in the annex building of the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Candido Merino in Conalum, Inopacan, Leyte. We can't hold the affair in the church building in Sabang during nighttime because there is no privacy and there will be a lack of transportation for the members who will go home after the occasion. This is the venue we used for two consecutive years in the past. We appreciate the kindness of the Merino family in serving the needs of the brethren whenever necessary. The place will also be our venue for the Night to Be Much Observed and the first day of the Days of Unleavened Bread services.

We are anticipating a marked increase in the number of young people from the Visayas who will participate in the coming United Youth Camp in Davao for the year 2004, which will be held this coming May 16 to 27. Perhaps more than a dozen teens will be joining from the Visayas depending on the availability of the funds from our campers and the help of the church.

We ask the help and prayers of the brethren everywhere to make this Christian and wholesome once-a-year activity the catalyst to help our teens decide in favor of God's way of life as opposed to the way of life in our present society. ■

Letting Go

by Florante Siopan

Forgiveness is about releasing your negative emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. It's about letting go of the past so you can go forward to the future.

Sooner or later, everyone you know will disappoint you in some way. They'll say something or fail to say something that will hurt you. And they'll do something or fail to do something that will anger you. It's inevitable.

Unfortunately, you make things worse when you stew over someone's words and deeds. When you dwell on a rude remark or an insensitive action made by another person, you're headed for deeper problems. In fact, the more you dwell on these things, the more bitter you'll get. You'll find your joy, peace, and happiness slipping away. And you'll find your productivity slowing down as you spend more and more time thinking about the slight or telling others about it. Eventually, if you don't stop doing it, you could even get sick.

So, what should you do the next time someone betrays you? Take responsibility for your feelings. Even though the other person may be at fault, even though the other person wronged you, you are still responsible for your own feelings. In other words, other people do not cause your feelings. You choose them.

For example, two different people could be told that their suggestions made at the staff meeting were stupid and idiotic. One person may choose to feel so hurt that he never speaks up at any other meeting again. The other person may choose to feel sorry for the critic, sorry that the critic couldn't see the wisdom and necessity of her suggestions.

As long as you blame other people for your feelings, as long as you believe other people caused your feelings, you're stuck. You're a helpless victim.

But if you recognize the fact that you choose your feelings and you are responsible for your feelings, there's hope. You can take some time to think about your feelings. You can decide what the best thing to say or do is.

Then, you've got to learn to walk away from disappointment. It's difficult to do, but it's possible. Sometimes you've just got to shake it off and step up. It's like the farmer who had an old mule which fell into a deep dry well. As he assessed the situation, he knew it would be difficult, if not impossible, to lift the heavy mule out of the deep well.

So, the farmer decided to bury the mule in the well. After all, the mule was old and the well was dry, so he could put the old mule out of his misery and have his well filled.

The farmer asked his neighbors to help him with the shoveling. To work they went. As they threw first shovel-full of dirt on the mule's back, the mule

became frightened. All of a sudden an idea came to the mule. Each time they would throw a shovel-full of dirt on his back, he would shake it off and step up. Shovel-full after shovel-full, the mule would shake it off and step up. In not too long a time, the exhausted and dirty mule stepped over the top of the well and through the crowd. That's the same approach we all need to take. We need to shake it off and step up.

Finally, you need to forgive. It's difficult, especially when the other person doesn't deserve your forgiveness or doesn't even seek it. It's difficult when the other person is clearly in the wrong.

Part of the difficulty comes from a common misunderstanding of forgiveness. Forgiveness doesn't mean that the other person's behavior is okay. And forgiveness doesn't mean that the other person is off the hook. He's still responsible for his misbehavior. Forgiveness is about letting yourself off the emotional hook. It's about releasing your negative emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. It's about letting go of the past so you can go forward to the future.

Everyone in your life, everyone on and off the job, is going to disappoint you. If you know how to respond to those situations, you'll be way ahead of most people. You'll be able to live above and beyond your circumstances.

Identify two people that have disappointed, hurt, or angered you. If possible, select two people towards whom you still have some bitterness. Then ask yourself, "How does my bitterness serve me? Am I happier holding on to it? Do I sleep better? Is my life richer, fuller, and better because of my bitterness?"

If you find that your bitterness is hurting you, make a decision. Actually decide to let go. Walk away from disappointment—which means you no longer dwell on it or talk about it. Period! ■

"Bukidnon," *continued from page 3*

The brethren, together with Mindanao area pastor Edmond Macaraeg and family enjoyed swimming in a number of pools of varying depths. There were also circular concrete slides available that added to the fun. The brethren also enjoyed eating together in a bigger cottage during lunchtime, a blessing that enabled more fellowship. Each family brought an assortment of delicious food; fruits and dessert were served and enjoyed. After spending a few hours together, some brethren especially those from far places, went home earlier to catch their scheduled bus trip, while Mr. Macaraeg conducted a leaders meeting to discuss various local church issues.

This activity was another church highlight in the area this year. ■

The Sunrise and Sunset of Life

by Audrey Ruth Angcos

As the dawn breaks into a beautiful sunrise, a gentle breeze touches your skin. You look up and see a clear azure sky. You look down and you find dew on the grass. You take a deep breath and imbibe the invigorating, yet relaxing scent of nature. It's morning once again!

The morning sunrise symbolizes the start of a new day, offering new hope and new life. Your mind and body are fresh, fully charged with energy, eager to face another day.

But as the hours pass by, the day becomes hotter and hotter and pollution gets into the air. The anticipation that we started out with begins to wane as we face numerous responsibilities and innumerable problems. Still, we face the reality of life and spend the rest of the day doing our daily responsibilities.

As I meditate on these things, I can't help but realize the pattern of life. The dawn that breaks into a beautiful sunrise represents us in our childhood days—gentle, teachable, meek, fresh, and innocent. But as years pass by, we grow and learn many new things. We are like doves which are sent out by their owners to discover life's mystery. At first, the dove is full of energy as it takes to the open sky. But as the sun heats up the day, it finds some shade or a place to rest. Most of the time, you can see it flying along with other doves. But at the end of the day, it will find its way home, back to its owner to rest.

We youths are in the sunrise of life. We have all the energy and opportunity to do the right things. Life is not that complicated for us. We don't have the burden to work and provide for a family. Instead, our parents provide for us. They send us to school, buy us books, provide food, clothing, shelter, and other things that we need. Let us enjoy our youthfulness in a right and proper way. We are still at the beginning of our life. It's better for us to start it right. Let's remember that whatever we do today will have an effect—for better or for worse—tomorrow, the next day, the day after that, and even for several years and decades to come.

We won't be young forever. Soon, the days of our life will not be the same as before. The day will be

hotter, the pollution will be thicker, and the problems will be harder. Therefore, we should prepare ourselves for it! We should start now to acquire the right perspective in life. Most of the time, we may even need to fly against the wind just to stick to our convictions and principles.

Because of that, people into this world would ridicule or even hate us. Some might even persecute us. But let's not ever quit! Let's just keep flying—flying with the right perspective, flying with the right focus—flying toward the right destination.

Our Owner sent us out in this dark and confused world to learn to become like Him and develop His perfect character. But character requires the free choice, decision, and full cooperation of the separate entity in whom it is to be created. Furthermore, it must be instilled by and from the Holy God who alone possesses such righteous character to endow.

Even if He sent us out, He still continues to watch over us. At times, when the whirlwind of life blows so hard against us, we fall, stumble, and get hurt. But still, our Owner is there to heal our wounds and to help us get up and fly again. While flying, we will meet our brethren—those with the same faith, principles, and convictions. As iron sharpens iron, we must help each other to have the mind and character of our Owner. The flight would be a little easier since we have the same goal. But still, we have to be careful and ask our Owner for wisdom, understanding, and guidance. We have to depend on Him, because if we will trust on carnal minds, we

might go astray and be lost—or worse, captured by a different owner, the god of this world.

Let us strive to do things correctly and according to the will of our Owner, who is the most righteous, loving and merciful of all. Let us do our best to please Him and do His will. The journey that we must take might be difficult, tiring, and exhausting. But with our Owner to watch over us—with His love and guidance for us and with our commitment to serve Him all our life—we can reach the right destination.

At the end of the day, when the sunset of our life comes, we will find our way home. And our loving Owner will put out His hand, take us, and draw us into His Kingdom. He will give us a new body, more powerful than our old, weary, and exhausted body. We will be like God, our Owner. And we will live with Him in real strength, abundance, and happiness forever! ■

