

UCG Mindanao Year-End Young Adults Camp-out 2021

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Held on the last week of December, the first-ever Young Adults Camp-out in Jive Highland Resort, Marilog, Davao City, was a truly memorable experience for everyone involved.

Jive Highland Resort was the perfect venue for such a rare opportunity. It was an out-of-the-way mountain resort nestled at an altitude of 1184 meters above sea level -- and it was cold. The temperature was enough to make an unprepared camper shiver even in the afternoon, and it was cold enough that wind-driven fog would roll by during random times of the day. Tall pine trees with evergreen, needle-like leaves thrived in the property.



Despite the cold, the buzz of excitement was undeniable. The activity was the first of its kind here in Mindanao. As such, it was a rare opportunity for the young adults in the church to bond and reconnect with each other -- all the more precious because of Covid-enforced physical isolation.

We already had high hopes for the activity, but time would tell that the actual events would succeed our expectations.

Arrivals. And Reintroductions.

The arrivals were marked with eager anticipation of what was to come.

We arrived at Jive on the afternoon of December 28, 2021 and were immediately assigned a simple wooden fourplex room.



The next event was to be dinner, and we had several hours to spare, so we were able to spend the time easily with each other's company, touring the grounds while excitedly contemplating what would happen in the next few days.

Dinner arrived, and so did the real cold. It was already chilly in the late afternoon – during dinner, this was intensified to far beyond what a typical electric fan-loving Filipino expected out of a mountain. Nevertheless, the dinner was hot, and the food was filling.

The next event set the tone for the rest of the activity: a short orientation was followed by a lively re-introduction. We already knew each other, to some degree, but it was fun to get to know each other once again.



The warmth of the atmosphere was comforting, despite what felt like near-freezing temperatures.

First Day. A New Dawn.

According to the previous night's orientation, the first day was a leisurely tour of the various sites around the area.

We woke up early before dawn for this tour: we were to go to a place called Hill's View, a high vantage point with a panoramic view of Davao's rolling hills and mountains. The sunrise on that place was apparently magical. Not the kind of people to miss such an opportunity, we were up at the crack of dawn and rode two vehicles to the area.

But things wouldn't turn out the way we planned. It was way ahead of the sunrise, so the road was still dark.



Add to that the fact that it was still foggy, and you wouldn't be surprised to discover that we overshot our destination and lost our way for several minutes.

We found our way back, but the sunrise was already long past. What's more – the whole area was blanketed by fog, muting the altitude's otherwise incredible vista.

Well, we didn't let that stop us; we still took great photos and enjoyed the short hike — the lack of incredible sights we made up for with great smiles. In short order, we were back to our campground with hundreds of happy photos on our phones.



One of the most enjoyable things about the Young Adults Camp-out was the lack of a strict schedule. Events such as the breakfast and the daily lessons still had to be on time, but in between these set events, we had plenty of time to spend on other things, which was promptly spent talking, playing, and everything in between. In addition to the regular lessons and fun activities, this great free time allowed all of us to rekindle our friendships in a comfortable environment.

The afternoon events went by without a hitch. We went to a few tourist spots and took many pictures.





We also had an enjoyable and relaxing time in the evening, when we set up a blazing campfire while enjoying our barbeque night dinner.

We were already back to being good friends with other young adults we hadn't seen for two years or more. So far, so good.

Second Day. Journeys, Destinations, and Prayers.

The second day was an actual adventure.

We were up before the sun rose to prepare for our wilderness hike. It was definitely too early for typical young adults, too early by far. However, the bone-deep chill of the high altitude woke us up as surely as the anticipation for our hike did. No one was sleepy

when we started out just as the first rays of pale sunrise brightened the sky.

After the prayer for the blessing of our activity, we set off in pairs of guys and girls.

Most of us carried something, whether they're backpacks filled with lunch, extra clothes, or (for one especially ready camper, a poncho set that would soon be very useful). We were prepared for a leisurely walk across the woods.

Before long, though, we would realize that it was anything but leisurely.

Of course, the trail started out deceptively easy, as these things go, but ten minutes into our walk, we departed the well-kept trail to blaze a path through the jungle.

Not thirty minutes more, and we were traversing knee-deep streams of ice-cold water, clinging mud, and slippery boulders the size of houses. Like most tropical jungles, the air was humid and heavy with the musky scent of the wild.



Plantlife ruled in these parts, and when we were not grabbing them for support, we were determinedly shoving them out of the way. We were so far out from civilization that all we could hear was the rush of water and our own labored breathing. If we were to face injury, we would be hours away from help.

What's more – some campers, expecting a leisurely trek, chose to forego hiking shoes and instead wore running shoes or flip-flops.

Boy were they wrong. Those who could do so took their slippers off and walked on foot, braving the mud and the rocks with the naked soles of their feet. Others simply tried to control their fall when they slipped.

Looking back, it was definitely a concerning situation. At that moment, though, we weren't so afraid.

Confident from our blessing of safety and protection, we joked and laughed with each other (when we were not huffing for air, of course). We assisted each other in good nature, and despite the unexpectedness of the situation, no one breathed a word of complaint.

The group was cautious, and we did our best not to get into any accidents. God did the rest. And how glad were we for it.

God's blessing was especially needed during the last obstacle to our first destination – a vertical rock cliff without any handholds. The ridge led deep down into the mountains; our destination was a relatively small ledge on its side.

We spent the most time climbing down that cliff without any harnesses or safety gear. It was slightly frightening, but it was too far to turn back from, and the destination was right there. Indeed, one of us suffered a minor accident, but with God's protection ended up to be nothing more than a small gash on the forehead.

And it was perfectly worth it; the ledge secreted a rushing waterfall and a small pool.

We had a wonderful time there, with its rush of freezing water falling from mossy boulders. Initially, not everyone planned to swim there, but most of us felt like we earned it after the strenuous trek. We had breakfast in that waterfall. Some of us, though, could not eat due to excessive shivering.



The trek after the waterfall still caused us to lose our breaths, but it was a walk in the park compared to what we went through.



It turns out there was a narrow footpath that locals use to navigate the forests, and that's where we spent the latter half of the hike. Sometimes, life just takes you on a harrowing journey to make you appreciate the small things. We certainly enjoyed the danger-free terrain, although we still made plenty of rest stops.

The next few hours involved a short but exciting cave spelunking trip and another larger waterfall pool.

Our mountain trekking experience reflects our spiritual journey in this life.

Like the path we traversed in the mountains, our spiritual paths are often narrow and difficult to find. But we pursue that path despite the hardships, knowing that it leads to a beautiful place hidden within a wilderness of uncertainty.

And it's true – our destination was wonderful. There's value to be taken from appreciating a beautiful ending to a difficult climb.

However, even if we didn't finish our hike in a unique and exciting place, we would still have been happy. The journey in itself is also unforgettable and equally extraordinary.

It might not seem like it when you're on the hike, filled as it is with one difficulty after another. But these trials easily convert into a sense of accomplishment in the end, depending on our mindset. Modern society is hyper-focused on results, and we easily forget that the journey itself can make it worthwhile.

Although, all good things come to an end, as they say. Journey, destination, and everything in between; all these things will remain in our memory, both as lived experiences and lessons that we will carry.



Our hike ended in the afternoon, with groups of shivering (but still photo-ready) young adults trudging back to the campsite with their mud-caked soles and dirty clothes. The excitement is slowly fading as the tiredness begins to settle in, and it wasn't long before we had lunch, and almost everyone took a restful nap. From there, we proceeded to our daily lesson and evening meal – not as exciting as the daily activities, but it was equally valuable and fulfilling.

Third day. On Beginnings and Endings.

The daily lessons also make every day special. We're not quite sure what to call it; Compass Checks and Christian Living Classes were thrown around, but they were names from when we were campers in the UYC. Strangely not as fitting, in this camp for young adults.



Nevertheless, the last lesson for the camp winded the week down.

The start of the camp taught us to view the church not just as a congregation of people that believes in God but as a Godly process designed to create families that go beyond blood.

The second day taught us the attitudes of a servant and how and why we should serve.

The third day impressed on us the importance of being of service now and taught us how to use our God-given abilities in our own



congregations. We even did an inventory of ourselves, of past activities, and how everything can be improved.

Whenever they happen – after breakfast for the first day, after dinner for the second, and before lunch for the third – our pastor made sure that each one was full of Godly insight into our lives as young adults.



Kuya Roy has a gift for making important topics feel near to our hearts; each of his lessons made us laugh and reflect in equal measure. The atmosphere during those lessons – of individuals eager to learn and grow and a lively teacher keen to impart his knowledge and wisdom – will remain with us.

But too soon, it was time for goodbyes. We ate our lunch, packed our bags, and slowly loaded everything into our waiting vehicles. It was a bittersweet hour. We'll all part, and with the current situation, who knows when we'll ever meet again.

We are reassured, though, of the quick friendships we re-formed and the easy camaraderie that we shared over just three days – so far from the awkwardness of when we were

teens, when it took us days to rekindle the fire of our friendships.

Now that we're at the cusp of adulthood, we're getting an idea of how fast the candle of our lives burns out, and how precious every moment is. Each one of us had it in our heart to live each second to the fullest, and that's precisely what we did.

In this life, things are only beautiful and meaningful because they can end. And because they can just as suddenly begin again.

Maybe next year?

