



TEAM MISSION 15 PHILIPPINES MISSION REFLECTIONS 6th-22nd January, 2015

Our team of seventeen enthusiastic and energetic individuals consisted of members from the St James Parish (Hoppers Crossing North), St Bernadette's Parish (North Sunshine) and teachers from St James the Apostle Primary School (Hoppers Crossing North) and St Francis of Assisi Primary School (Tarneit).



*Team Mission 15 all ready to go at Melbourne Airport.
(L-R: Jeremy Xuereb, Justin Gatt, Fr Jude Pirota mssp, Cassandra Xuereb, Marco Cardinali, Miranda Dyt, Taryn Darlow, Asalemo Tofete, Bianca Gomez, Helene Allen, Mark Barlow, Sheryn Mallillin, Nathan Porter, Allan Aclan, Myla Mallillin and Anthony Muscatello)*

Along with supervision and guidance of the Paulist Missionaries in the Philippines we embarked on a two week journey that exposed us to global issues and gave us an opportunity to live out our call as Catholics and serving the poor and marginalised.

Below are some of Team Mission 15's reflections:

MYLA MALLILLIN: Life changing, life giving, inspiring. These are just a few words that come to mind when reflecting upon my experience as a member of Team Mission 15. Seventeen young adults travelled to the Philippines united by our faith and by one goal: to embrace the charism of the Paulist Missionaries and to make a positive difference in the lives of others through our ministry and to enrich ourselves on our own faith journey. Our mission trip served as the perfect platform to enable us to learn and experience the true meaning of all this.

The Paulist Missionaries represent the true meaning of service when they reach out to those less fortunate, give their time and share their gifts to spread the love and work of God. It was inspiring to witness them in action, doing everything out of love and giving hope to those in the poor and marginalised communities. For two weeks, we were blessed to live with the Paulist Missionary

community and enjoy their continuous and kind hearted encouragement and guidance, joining them as they reached out to those in need.

At the end of the trip, I returned home knowing that I belonged to something bigger than myself. I realised that my friendships, that previously included only the members of the team and members of the parish, now opened up to include the Paulist Missionaries and the communities in the Philippines. I took home with me a renewed sense of nourishment, the spirit and the charism of the Paulist Missionaries well and truly alive.

ASALEMO TOFETE: Before I left my father asked me what was the point of the trip; honestly, I had no answer. I began to develop a hero complex; thinking that I was going to save the world; I was going to be Superman! The turning point for me came when we visited the Missionaries of Charity. There I felt an unexplained joy amongst the abandoned and the forgotten people, catching me off guard! In the laundry area I was struck by the strong smell of chlorine, bleach, soiled garments and chemicals that filled the air, amidst the laughter of the workers. Stories of the residents were not ones of sadness but of joy, hope and love. It was here that I realised that I was not called to "save" but to "serve." The ministry carried out by the Paulist Missionaries in the Philippines is a great example of this.

In Bataan Province the Paulist Missionaries offer the children the opportunity to grow through music while in Manila the Mass is taken out onto the streets to cater for the community of God, amongst other initiatives. Their mission to "serve" is far greater than the idea to "save." At the Mass celebrated by Pope Francis, while I stood in the mud, soaked to the skin from the never-ending rain and worshipping next to a pile of rubbish, I realised that God was there, in the place of the forgotten and the abandoned, in the unconventional places! God is there!



A joyous moment for some members of Team Mission 15, a glimpse of Pope Francis as he leaves Mass in Rizal Park.

MIRANDA DYT: Before we left I was unsure what to expect from the trip, so I went with an open mind and upon arriving it took me a few days to wrap my head around a place that to me seemed so full of contradictions and juxtapositions.

Simply walking the length of a block of houses took us from an area of huge residential compounds with guarded entrances and expensive cars to an area where

squatters lived. A whole family lived in a space the size of an average bedroom! However those living there, like all the people we met throughout the trip, were not ashamed or burdened by their poverty. Rather they were the most welcoming, happy and hardworking people I ever met. Everyone we met were happy to be with friends and community and by living their faith. I was greatly struck by this uncomplicated happiness of these people and I hope to carry it with me in my life back home.

TARYN DARLOW: Underneath my smile and expressions of joy, was a heart full of guilt and anger! As I met and interacted with many people along the journey, the homeless, the abandoned, the disabled and those who were less “fortunate” than us, I felt a deep sense of anger and guilt as I struggled to accept this is reality; that I could enjoy so much, material goods and love while others had so little.

However, amongst these negative feelings, I found a sense of hope; a hope that even though these people lived in such poverty and had so little, they had genuine happiness and a true appreciation for life itself. A hope that even though there is so much suffering, there are people who have been affected by what they have experienced to help make a change in their lives. People like Fr Joe, the other Paulist Missionaries and the Missionaries of Charity who truly make a difference to the lives of others. Despite the little they have, someone, somewhere is giving them opportunities to grow, dream and become something great.

To see and experience all this helped me to discover my purpose in life and that is to be a person who serves others, especially the “poorest of poor.” God has provided me with abundant blessings and I hope that I will be able to share these with others who need it the most. This is what I plan to do from now on!

MARK BARLOW: The 2015 Mission trip to the Philippines was one of the most unique and extraordinary experiences of my life. Our journey started with the pursuit of happiness as we reached the Philippines looking for how we could help make other peoples’ lives better. I was completely unaware of what I was going to experience while I was there. The most amazing thing was the simple joy that I could give a child and that they could reciprocate simply by listening, speaking their language, playing with them or teaching them new games. The lack of materials available, the language barrier or the incredible heat did not matter in the least. The company we shared brought a smile to everyone’s face. We started off with the impression that we were going to go and change the world in two short weeks, instead the Paulist Missionaries and the Filipino children changed our lives by sharing with us that happiness can be found everywhere.

My experience in Bataan Province was one that I will never forget; Fr Joe’s vision for the children and young adults as he built around them a community of friendship, safety, religion, hope and family. This he achieved by teaching them music, sport and religion and giving them all the opportunity to play and socialise with a number of different children of different ages in a safe

environment. The impact this community was having on the parents of these children was more difficult to measure, but was certainly there: providing the children a place to learn, play and make friends gives the parents the opportunity to work and raise money for living expenses.

As I returned to my normal way of life, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of myself. Happiness is not something that happens to me but a state I choose for myself; I am happiest when I am with people I care about most and the people who share in my happiness. Happiness can be as simple as learning, teaching, playing and socialising, or simply a child’s smile.



All smiles after the sports circuit workshop conducted by Team Mission 15 with the children in Bataan.

BIANCA GOMEZ: Throughout our mission experience we have been told that the hardest thing to answer when we get back will be ‘How was the mission trip?’ I thought it would be easy to sum up my experience but once we returned to Melbourne I found it difficult to provide an answer. It is hard to put in words my thoughts, emotions and experiences over the two weeks we stayed in the Philippines.

Since I was born in a third world country I thought I knew what to expect so I did not expect it to be so surprising or confronting, and yet for me the mission experience was an emotional rollercoaster. There were times when I felt happy, sad, angry, disappointed, grateful, inspired and hopeless as I visited the orphanages, the homes of the elderly and the sick members of the parish. When I went on this mission trip I wanted to have some kind of impact on their lives. I am not sure whether I did that or not, what I do know is that every single person I have met in the Philippines has definitely had a huge impact on me! The children made the biggest impact as they helped me realise that I not only wanted to study primary teaching but also early childhood.

On the way back from the first orphanage visit I remember talking to Fr Stephen and wondering whether it was good for us to provide the children with happiness for that short time, knowing that we had to leave them feeling sad a few moments later, or not visiting them at all. The experience of visiting the orphanage revealed that every little action counts, whether it be a smile, a hug, a cuddle, holding someone’s hand or even feeding the children. That short time we spent with the children we were able to provide them with happiness. And the

best feeling of happiness is when I am happy because I have made someone else happy. As members of the Mission 15 team we were able to bring happiness and laughter to the children in the orphanages, the elderly, the sick, the children in the schools and to the local children in Fr Joe's parish in Bataan Province.

For me the mission experience was made up of difficult moments and many joyful moments. I do not always realise how lucky and grateful I should be to be living in a country like Australia. I returned home inspired and very grateful. I hope that someday soon I will be able to return back to the Philippines or perhaps to another third world country to do my bit in helping the marginalised.



"Hey Macarena!" – First Holy Communion celebrations with the children in Batiawan.

ANTHONY MUSCATELLO: Being involved in regularly supporting the Paulist Missionary overseas fund through Carmen and Bev at St Bernadette's Parish in Sunshine, I have always had an interest in participating in a missionary experience. I was very excited when I received the call from Fr Jude inviting me to join this missionary experience.

In the Philippines we were warmly welcomed by the Paulist Missionaries and the Filipino people. After the encounter with the squatters in the streets of Manila and visiting the orphanage run by the Missionaries of Charity, I felt a deep peace within me.

The visit to the parish in Bataan Province broadened my vision and inspired me in many ways. Here I enjoyed the wonderful and peaceful countryside of the Philippines, but after visiting the schools and meeting the children and observing their way of life and how happy they were with the little they had, I noticed a deep of change happening in my heart. These people had really taught me what is most important in life!

I must admit that some scenes and stories that I experienced were quite confronting and I had to somehow take it all in. The regular briefings with Fr Jude and the support from everyone in our group had really helped me and empowered me in many ways.

Attending the Mass celebrated by Pope Francis in Manila topped off my experience. During the Pope's uplifting Mass and his message to the Filipino people made me feel blessed for having come to the Philippines and has nourished in me a stronger love and faith in

God. I have learnt that by coming on this trip I am not only giving back and helping others but, more importantly, they were helping me. This I found to be very rewarding. I also realised that the real saints are those who help the poor children and communities; the priests, brothers and sisters who have dedicated their lives to help these people running the orphanages, schools and formation centres, sending a message of hope to all.



Visiting the children in the orphanage and the elderly at Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in Manila.

NATHAN PORTER: The mission immersion trip in the Philippines was one of the best experiences of my life. Although there were no real surprises in it for me, here I experienced the poor and the forgotten and I developed a far deeper appreciation for the lives of women and men who devote their lives for the spiritual and physical needs of others.

On this trip we joined the ministry of Paulist Missionaries working among the squatters in Manila; the sisters of Mother Teresa looking after those who are dying; and Fr Joe, a Paulist Missionary working in Bataan Province north of Manila, giving special attention to the education of children born in the poor villages of his parish. I will certainly always remember the dirty feet of sisters and the ministry of Paulist Missionaries, whose humble existence often goes unnoticed.

On a personal level, this experience has revealed to me the inadequacies of the way I live my faith. Very often I am worried about petty things that occupy my daily life and forget the challenges that people living in poorer counties are facing on a daily basis.

The messages given to us by Fr Ivano that we "will meet Christ on this trip," and Fr Martin saying "Not only does God reveal Himself to us, He reveals us to ourselves," fully summarise my experience in the Philippines.

CASSANDRA XUEREB: Before I left for the Philippines, I can proudly say that I was a naïve, spoilt and selfish 19 year old adult! I thought I was going to change the lives of every person I met and be the reason for them to want to change their way of life. Looking back now I realise that I did not change any lives but the people that I was surrounded with changed me to be a better person.

I am still the same naïve, spoilt and selfish person... I am human; but now I have an understanding and a different perspective of the little things that surround me and make me the person I am today. I would not have been able to see this if I had not been part of the Mission 15 group and helped by the Paulist Missionaries who guided us every step of the way. On my return back from the mission trip Fr Jude asked a couple of us what did we take from the trip. My response was that I went away with my sibling brother Jeremy and I came back home with a family! This is something very special that I will hold close to my heart.

HELENE ALLEN: The term 'Mission' is one with several meanings; the concept of going out into the world to encounter those less fortunate and endeavour to make a difference, is the definition with which I approached the trip to the Philippines. Manila, the concrete jungle with its dirty streets and bustling intersections, hit me like a brick; the overwhelming humidity, the smell of hard and thankless labour, the sight of shoeless, homeless children, and the sound of faceless jeepny drivers beeping their horns as their brightly lit vehicles sped by.

As we travelled I quickly discovered the term 'poverty' challenged my thinking as a person of faith. Poverty was all around me in the faces of the homeless and in the wide eyes of innocent children; and yet innocence itself was long gone. Shockingly, I realised, that despite all the 'poverty' surrounding me, the true poverty was mine!

I have regularly seen the image of Christ in my work as a teacher in our Catholic Schools, at University and in my work as a nurse; the weathered face, the dark eyes, the shaggy beard, this is surely what Christ looks like! This image has been severely challenged in my few days in the Philippines. In the deafening silence and stillness of the many nights I have since lain awake, listening to the sound of the rain and my own breathing, I have come to realise that the true face of Christ is of one of many and all at the same time. His face is both male and female, old and young; a face with eyes that see the potential in the smallest, withdrawn child, ears willing to hear the sad stories of the elderly and forgotten, with love and compassion. It is a face whose body gives more to others than it has itself, one with outstretched arms to welcome and embrace, arms that truly belong to Christ Himself.

The face of Christ does not exist only in the Philippines. The many faces of Christ are here among us now; those faces of Christ truly are yours and mine.

JUSTIN GATT: Before leaving for the Philippines, I felt that I was about to embark on a journey to change the lives of the people in the Paulist Missionary parishes in Manila and Bataan. Having been through this experience however, I now realise that it was the communities in Manila and Bataan which have profoundly changed my life. I am thankful for this experience as it has allowed me to appreciate the many riches with which I am blessed with in Australia, while also understanding that wealth is not measured in financial terms, as we tend to do.

While the people we met may not have owned much in terms of possessions, their wealth in faith and joy in the face of their struggles, made them truly rich. Through the expression of their faith, in spite of their poverty, I have been blessed with a deeper faith, a clearer understanding and greater appreciation of what is truly important in my life. While we may have only been with these people for a short time, it has truly been a life changing experience.

SHERYN MALLILLIN: Words cannot describe the joy I felt when I returned with Team Mission 15 to Bataan in January. It has been two years since my last mission trip and the development in the Jose DePiro Formation Centre has just been absolutely inspiring to witness. Fr Joe's commitment and love for the community, the facilities and programs offered are tangible proofs of his belief: "Give people opportunities and solutions, not hand-outs."

I was extremely proud of the children and young adults in the Jose Depiro Kabataan Orkestra! As I sat in on their Sunday afternoon session, I watched and listened in admiration. On my last visit, the music rooms were being built and the students were finding their way around the instruments. To see how the orchestra has grown, the commitment of their music leaders and the development of their music skills have been incredible.

Fr Joe and his work in Bataan Province is proof of mission, love, humility, service and commitment. As the Missionary Liaison Coordinator, I will use this experience as a continuous affirmation and inspiration on how we should be living everyday through mission and doing what we can - no matter how small - to help the poor and marginalised.



Jose Depiro Kabataan Orkestra at Sunday afternoon music practice.

THANK YOU! Team Mission 15 would like to thank the parishes of St James the Apostle (Hoppers Crossing North) and St Bernadette's (North Sunshine) for your donations, prayers, messages and well wishes. We would also like to thank Garwood & Turner Travel Associates (Carlton), Eiffel Tower Cakes (Tullamarine), Edition - Custom T-Shirt Designs (Maribyrnong), St James the Apostle Primary School (Hoppers Crossing North), St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School (Tarneit) and Thomas Carr College (Tarneit) for your prayerful and financial support.