

MISSION EXPERIENCE IN BICOL, PHILIPPINES

by Sr Angeline Lim FMDM



From 8-17 December 2011, 22 students from the Church of the Holy Spirit set off on a Mission Trip to Bicol in Philippines accompanied by our Mission Leader, Al Dizon - a native of Bicol. There were only 5 boys and 17 girls and so I went as a nurse and one of female adults to 'watch over' our precious students who have not been exposed to mission life.

The theme for the trip is: ***We Walk The Faith (WWTF)*** and how apt, because we experienced our first hurdle when the flight from Manila to Legazpi airport was cancelled. On 9 December, 17 of us were 'stranded' at Manila airport when the plane could not land in Legazpi because of poor visibility and bad weather. We were very fortunate to get the flight to Legazpi airport the next day considering that there were other plane cancellations as well.

We managed to find a 2-star hotel called 'Rogers' which is about 10 minutes drive from the airport. Undeterred by the sudden adjustment of plans, the students and adults settled very happily into cramped hotel rooms. It was a *Bethlehem experience* for us, having to make do with whatever accommodation was available.

Our accommodation in Bicol has a magnificent view of a near perfect cone shape mountain called Mount Mayon, which is one of the most active volcanoes in the Philippines. We stayed in Bicol University dormitories and the adults in hostels, both of which are quite run down. Surprisingly, the students did not complain about the accommodation in spite of choked toilets, cold water, no

laundry facilities and frequent black outs (brown outs). They took it all in their strides. Having to live in very cramped rooms (bunk beds) and with no television or internet accessibilities provided opportunities for all of us to bond and to get to know each other better.

Our first trial came when 3 students fell ill on the second day. One had a high fever of 39.9 degrees and we had to transport him to hospital late in the night. The next day, I had three students to 'look after' whilst the other students went out on their mission trips to schools. Then another two students got ill. The spirit was dampened when the student leader who was ill, made the decision to go home. Fortunately she was able to get the same flight as our Mission Leader to accompany her home.

Undeterred by these setbacks, the students set out to the various outstations each day - to teach catechism, paint a classroom, brought food to the villagers in the remote areas, sang Christmas carols and entertained the children with games and songs.

The students were not used to having rice three times a day! On the 3rd day, they requested for bread, cheese spread and jam for lunch! So, we had bread for breakfast and lunch for two days!

The people are very friendly and hospitable and we enjoyed the short trips to the supermarkets on tricycles. It was a thrill for our students to sit precariously on the back of the tricycles and I am sure their parents would have a heart attack if they had known!

On a number of our treks to the villages, thunderstorm loomed and our anxieties were punctuated with fears about floods and being stranded. On another day, we were told about typhoons and we wondered if we could get home! WWTF... and God sent us signs to encourage us along the way.....! We saw rainbows, smiles on the faces of children, the ever ready tricycle riders and most of all, our cheerful energetic youths who played, prayed throughout.

I am happy that I was able to make it for this Mission Trip as December is a busy month. It is apt that it was Advent when we engage in the discipline of true waiting with a sense of promise. Just as this season becomes what we make of it, this Mission trip invites me to be patient when things do not go according to clock work plan. It gave me time to *be present* to the situation and to the people whom I encounter each day. Most of all, to trust in the Lord totally.

I would like to end with a quote from Henri Nouwen.

*"Waiting is never a movement
from nothing to something.
It is always a movement
from something to something more."*