

# QC WORD NEWS

The Newsletter of the Verbum Dei Missionary Family of Quezon City



Photos by Johnny Guevara and Emy Abaya

## A Retreat Inspired by Rembrandt’s “The Return of the Prodigal Son”

By Johnny Guevara & the Word News Team

A silent retreat? Yes! This is what my wife Ayen and I did to start 2024 on the right foot. We went up to Tagaytay from February 9 to 12, together with more than 30 others, a mix of adults and young people. Amid the beautiful and serene surroundings of the Verbum Retreat Center, retreat master Fr. Filipe Vaz Pardal encouraged us to savor deeply the Word of God, to bring what we know and learn in our head down to the heart.

Rembrandt’s renowned painting The Return of the Prodigal Son (c. 1667 – 1668) provided a wonderful foundation for our reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32): on what separates us from the Lord’s embrace and on the three stages of the Prodigal Son’s transformation journey.



The three stages are : 1) leaving the house, 2) getting lost, and 3) coming home. The painting also opened our eyes to the role of the Elder Son and more importantly, that of the good Father. We learned that we need to be careful not just about a “a life of dissipation” that can lead us far away from the Father’s embrace but also about interior attitudes such as envy, resentment, selfishness, pride and being judgmental, attitudes that are “invisible,” but can hinder our coming into the Father’s embrace.

Attending the silent retreat greatly enriched our perspective as we reflected on our more than 3-decade journey as a married couple in the eyes of God. Because of this, we hope and pray that this insightful retreat can be offered more regularly so that more can experience the powerful transformational graces from Jesus.

## Some fruits of the retreat

“So moving to me was identifying our false images of God, (and to discover Him) as a merciful, loving providing father who will continue to love me and listen to my prayers no matter what... Amazing also was my realization that I can never be all-deserving of his love and grace which he gives to me freely. Then I was reminded (that) to stay reconciled and embraced by our Father, I too must reconcile and embrace and care for my brother regardless of him being deserving.” - *Ardie*

“Sometimes you feel like you are just a speck in this whole world... But in this retreat, he really assured me that God sees us, sees me, and that to meet God..to seek God, you don’t need wings. You don’t need to be angelic, you just need to be YOU.” - *Jacqui*

“In my prayer, I was really expecting God to tell me that these two sons (in the parable) are guilty after everything that they did.. but no, his answer to me was... they are still my sons. So his answer to me... You’re still my daughter....whatever has happened.. *ano man yung pinuntahan, saan ka man naglalagag... pag-uwi mo.. anak kita..* (No matter where or how far you have gone, when you come home, you are my child.)” - *Elaine*

*“I’m so proud of myself. Sa gitna ng limang talk, hindi ako inantok! Parang pag nakinig ka pala talaga kay God, hindi ka aantukin (In the midst of 5 talks, I didn’t get sleepy! I discovered that when you really listen to God, you don’t get sleepy!)”- MJ*

*“It was really powerful to be able to feel him and hear him and not only to pray to him...to actually be beside him and to see that he is always with us.” - Toots*

*“Paano ko ba papatawarin (ang taong itong nakasakit sa akin?) ... Doon ulit umikot yung prayer ko ng 4 na araw. Paano ko siya mapapatawad? Pero ngayon lang sinagot ni Lord yung prayer ko.... Sabi ni Lord.. bumalik ka, patawarin mo siya. Kung gusto mong sumunod sa akin, magpapatawad ka.. (How do I forgive this person who hurt me? For the past 4 days, my prayer revolved around that. But the Lord answered me: return and forgive that person. If you want to follow Me, forgive.” ) - Andre*

*Documentation and photos by Emy Abaya*



## QC Apostolic Council

The QC Apostolic Council (AC) has been meeting every quarter to coordinate activities of Verbum Dei’s local community of QC. New members include: Br. Gelo Balsita and John Luis Valencia representing the youth, Gabriel Lañada, Elaine Solomon and Darlene Badilla representing the young professionals and the kids’ apostolate. ‘Original’ members are local responsible Fr. Vincent “Bong” Guino, ecclesial zone responsible Fr. Filipe Vaz Pardal, Fr. Iwao Ikegami who guides the young professionals and represents the formation house, Fr. Joseph “Jojo” David who guides the Tagalog adult School of the Word (SOW), AC secretary Marichelle Infante, Emy Abaya who oversees local fundraising projects, and Stella Deriquito who oversees the newsletter. The last three also represent the adult SOW at Christ the King Parish.



Photos by Angelo Balsita and John Luis Valencia



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## Verbum Dei QC Joins the 10th Philippine Conference on New Evangelization

With Fr. Iwao Ikegami, FMVD

From January 19 to 21, a Verbum Dei QC delegation made up of priests and young people joined hundreds at the University of Santo Tomas for the 10th Philippine Conference on New Evangelization (PCNE). PCNE is an annual nationwide gathering of clergy, religious and laity convened to explore various themes relevant to the Catholic Church.

“Verbum Dei has always been participating in PCNE,” says Fr. Iwao Ikegami. “This year, we were especially interested to join because the theme was synodality. This was the topic of our permanent formation last December. Our resource person, seeing how we were already practicing synodality in many ways within the Verbum De Family, really encouraged us to take part in this year’s PCNE.” Fr. Iwao found the PCNE talks, workshops and other activities enriching. “I had a deeper appreciation of the joys and challenges of practicing synodality in the church today,” he said.



PCNE session with Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle and CBCP President Bishop Pablo Virgilio David

The PCNE was also a rare opportunity to be with and to interact with priests, nuns and church volunteers from across the country. For the young especially, this opportunity could not be missed. Fr Iwao says: “We really wanted our young people and young men in formation to experience not just being with Verbum Dei or the parish but with the whole church.”



Fr. Iwao with priests from the Missionary Society of St. Paul (left) and Verbum Dei participants (middle and right) (All photos by Fr. Michael Cheong except photo on the upper left c/o Fr. Iwao)



Photo from the official FB page of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cubao



Photo by Angelo Balsita

## Light in the Watches of the Night

*Fr. Filipe Vaz Pardal writes about his experience on February 2, 2024, when the Verbum Dei misioneros took part in the Diocese of Cubao’s celebration of World Day of Consecrated Life at the Real Monasterio de Sta. Clara.*

It came as a surprise: the comfort and peace I felt while taking part in this celebration of the local church. I was exhausted, and it was like water in the desert, like a taste of Heaven on Mt. Tabor, like someone putting a hand on my shoulder and saying “I am with you!”

Trying to understand why, I found Luke 12:35-40. The Lord found us “awake” and with our ‘lamps (our candles) lit’: despite our weariness, we participated fully in the mass, saying our vows aloud, and joining in the fellowship afterwards. And the Lord came to refresh us through the mass, the stirring music, the warm company of consecrated men and women around us, and the Bishop himself—who, despite a long day, celebrated the mass with vigor and full dedication, inspiring us with a moving homily about Simeon taking Jesus in his arms. Thank you, Bishop Ongtioco. I understood that when we keep our lamps lit, no matter what “night” we may find ourselves in—and no matter

the watch of that night, the Lord comes “at an hour we do not expect” to surprise us with refreshment. Actually, to be surprised by the Lord refreshed my faith.

Later, at home, during night prayer, snatches of a song came to me, playing like “background music” to my prayer: *Ring the bell that still can ring/forget your perfect offering/there is a crack in everything/that’s how the light gets in. (Anthem, Leonard Cohen).*

Moved by the music, I felt the urge to say to everyone, to light their candles that still can be lit, for the “night” (“cracks”) with which we are hit, cannot stop the light from getting in.

God hides in places deeper than our feelings or senses, deeper than our own skin. From these hidden places, God, the source of light, calls out to creatures to come to Him with all their longings, that they may be satisfied.

“Staying awake in faith”—not our senses or feelings—makes it possible to see with our own eyes through the darkness of the “night.” I realized that this is what happened to me at the Monasterio: I was able to see with the eyes of faith.



Photo by Angelo Balsita



Photos in the middle and on the right: from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cubao FB page





Photos by Emy Abaya, Johnny Guevara and Judy Tan

## Conversion to Christ, Our Missionary King

By Michelle Dayrit-Soliven

**Did you ever think of Lent as a time of mission?** Fr. Michael Cheong invited us to look at Lent in this new way during an Ash Wednesday recollection organized by Verbum Dei’s School of the Word at Christ the King Parish. During this special “date” with God (since Ash Wednesday fell on Valentine’s Day this year), Fr. Michael invited us to look at Christ as our missionary king, and shared Pope Francis’ dream of “a missionary church, advancing along the path of missionary conversion.” He invited us to listen closely to Jesus’ love and thirst for us, a thirst that is quenched when we spend time with Him in prayer, and start to walk His way of missionary conversion.

**Did you ever think of yourself as Christ’s missionary?** Yvonne Dayrit-Romualdez surprised us with this question, going on to say that Jesus was a busy missionary, and that we, his followers, are missionaries too. Yvonne invited us to reflect on and write down the special mission God entrusts to us from His heart, and to embrace this mission fully as the joy and purpose of our lives.

With prayer time, confessions, insightful sharing in small groups, a full house Eucharistic celebration with Fr. Joseph David presiding, **February 14 was a life-changing date with God.** So many of us went home feeling grateful, and eager to live our lives on a mission.



The recollection participants with facilitators Fr. Jojo David (center) and Marabel Viernes (in photo on the right).



## Ninety-Nine Sheep

With Fr. Joseph David, FMVD and Pansol Recollection Participants

“Trust that the people will come, stay, and pray.” This was what Fr. Joseph “Jojo” David heard the Lord say to him in prayer, amidst his many worries about the March 9 recollection for residents of the Pansol neighborhood. True enough, the people came, stayed and prayed—99 of them!

Here are fruits shared by four participants:

**“I realized how, with the word of God, I can change for the better.”**

**“It was my first time to attend a Verbum Dei recollection. I didn’t realize how enjoyable it could be. I learned a lot about God and what I learned made me happy. I went home and shared the joy in my heart with my husband and children. I decided to attend Verbum Dei activities from now on.”**

**“I realize how important the Word of God is for our lives: how it gives us light... God asks us to forgive, but it is really very hard to do especially with those who offend me again and again- But during the recollection, I felt much lighter. I have problems with my family, but I pray to God for strength.**

**“I lost hope, and sometimes didn’t want to live anymore, but I found my hope again in the Lord.”**

## What is the Point of Being a Christian?



Photos in this article courtesy of Lolly Roxas, recollection participants and the Sta. Maria Della Strada Parish Council

**“Turning to the Cross with Open Hearts as One Church.”** This was the theme of the Lenten Recollection at Sta. Maria Della Strada Parish last March 16. Recollection facilitator Fr. Filipe Vaz Pardal was led to explore the questions: “Why turn to the Cross? **What is the point of becoming a Christian?** What is the point of faith, when it is possible to become a good person without faith?”

He shared with the recollection’s 260 participants a simple overview of the book “Compassion: a History.” Here the author traced **the development of “iniquity”** (or human cruelty and violence) throughout the history of the world, a brutality so relentless as to make the periods of peace in the world brief and fragile. And yet, he said, in these dark periods, **a history of compassion as a response to iniquity also grew and flourished**, represented by the teaching and radiant lives of numerous advocates and leading figures.

Jesus can be said to be the highest point in the history of compassion, Fr. Filipe said, as Jesus took the teaching and example of others and raised it to a new level. Christian compassion, he said, is not simply benevolence or “being good.” It includes **empathy**—where the suffering of another becomes one’s own. Christian compassion also includes love in the face of hatred, he continued, **love that goes as far as forgiving an enemy.** Fr. Filipe showed videos of a special meeting that Pope Francis had with victims of violence in Congo. Here, Catholic victims of torture related their terrible experiences and—in front of the Pope—expressed their forgiveness of their oppressors. This is the point, Fr. Filipe said, of being a Christian. This is what Christianity offers the world so bent on its own destruction: Christian compassion, the only kind of love that can stop evil from turning all of humanity into victims and beasts.

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5:43-48)*

### Some fruits



**After the recollection, one participant wrote:** “Thank you for the recollection. It answered a question which I often discuss with my kids. My daughter says she will just be a good person because she can’t know if there is really a God. More than that, I realised that I myself try only to be a good person and not a Christian.”

**Another participant, Lolly, wrote:** “It is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come’ (Mark 7:21-22) and so it is not a surprise that we are easily tempted to retaliate when hurt or to give in to despair. But if we are to truly live as Christians, then the change must start from within each one of us, something that can only be achieved by turning to Jesus on the cross, humbling ourselves and loving as Jesus did. As we trust and surrender all at His feet, may we be empowered to ‘defeat the beast that lives inside of us,’ so that we may ‘be rays of light’ in the midst of the darkness and others, especially those who are marginalized, may know of His love and be transformed as well.”

**Gelo, another participant, said:** “I feel happy that in some way, I’m trying to be a Christian... I am here (in this apostolate) because I feel called to “love the stranger:” to be with the youth and the teens who are really experiencing woundedness...”

## The Gift of Mission

Verbum Dei offers yearly recollections for **Bukid Kabataan**, a shelter run by the Religious of the Good Shepherd for girls under special circumstances. “They always look forward to our coming and missed us when we could not make it in 2023,” said Fr. Vincent “Bong” Guinoo. “We made it up to them last January 27. I accompanied a team of 10 young professionals and older youth, who gave a recollection entitled “New Year, New Me.” We had talks, dynamics, prayer time, group sharing, confession and mass.”

“They were so eager to see us,” recalls Denise, a college student who joined the outreach for the first time. “I was amazed at how these young girls could be so happy and welcoming despite the painful experiences they have had.” Young professional Darlene relates, **“I really felt their longing for our company, their longing to share with people like us. I felt how much they appreciated our presence.”**

Confession was a big help, Denise said, and one girl she listened to said it felt like a huge burden had been lifted from her shoulders. “I also discovered during the sharing that what they really want is to be listened to without judgment,” Denise added.



Simply hearing the college students and young professionals talk about their courses or professions **inspired the girls to aspire for a better life.** “We didn’t do much—but later, we realized how much our mere presence and simple conversation meant to them,” Fr. Bong recalls the youth sharing afterwards.

The day ended with a joyful impromptu community dance. **“They really didn’t want us to leave,” recalls Denise. Darlene reflects: “I realized what a gift mission is.** Without this outreach, we would not have met, we would not have had the chance to enjoy each other’s company and learn from each other. I am so grateful for this experience.”

## The Art of Love

*By Darlene Badilla*

Last February 17, 2024, the Verbum Dei Youth organized a **Post-Valentine’s Mini-Concert** with the theme “The Art of Love” where we showcased different kinds of love and ways of revealing them.

The mini-concert featured love songs that filled the teens and youth attendees with “kilig” (excitement), an open stage wherein you could dance with your friend or special someone, and poems personally written and recited with love..

The main part of the event was a sharing about the four types of love encapsulated in four Greek words: *Storge* (Family Love), *Philia* (Friendship Love), *Eros* (Romantic Love), and *Agape* (God’s immeasurable and unconditional love for us). The speakers were the Roxas Family, a group of friends called “The John’s” and Sr. Lorna, FMVD. These talks showed how beautiful life can be when it is filled with different kinds of love. Overall, we are reminded that all forms of love come from God and we are invited to center all our relationships in God who is the true master of the art of love. Happy “Feb-ibig” (a play on the word *pag-ibig* meaning love) to all!

Photos by *Dan Robles and Clarise Zulueta*



# “Share the Love” Dinner-Concert



Photos courtesy of Friends of Verbum Dei

On February 18, Friends of Verbum Dei held a successful fundraising dinner-concert entitled “Share the Love.” There was a meaningful mass, delicious dinner, a video presentation and testimonies about Verbum Dei. Veteran entertainer Mitch Valdez and beloved singer Jose Mari Chan made the event more special, with wonderful songs and witty spiels. The missionaries and young men in formation also performed lively numbers. The *misioneras* danced the “Cumbia Colombiana,” and the *misioneros* brought to the stage Stevie Wonder, Bruce Springsteen and the Guns and Roses rock band. It was a memorable evening. For Michelle Dayrit-Soliven, it was all about “sharing love the Verbum Dei way.”

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To learn more about the Verbum Dei missionary community in the Philippines: visit [verbumdeiphilippines.com](http://verbumdeiphilippines.com) or follow us on Facebook.

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