

Hello & Thanks : Excerpts from 2005 Philippine Mission

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In my four weeks with Father Fernando, we constantly traveled and literally meet thousands of people. In speaking with either the most blessed or those simply struggling to survive, I was impressed upon the hospitality and generosity we continually received. In all my years of visiting places never did I feel more at home, more loved, or more welcomed than in the Philippines!

Butong Elementary School – Feeding Programme Update

As a teacher, one of the highlights was visiting the local elementary school in Butong. I was amazed at class sizes, which varied from 50 to 60 in rooms smaller than my own. There were no televisions, computers, overheads, or even an air conditioner; things I take for granted as essentials. Texts, school supplies and even desks are considered luxuries.

Nevertheless the discipline, respect and genuine love of learning the students demonstrated struck me. I spoke of Canada, snow storms, my own class, and our multiculturalism and answered whatever questions they felt like asking. The students were like sponges absorbing everything and their sheer excitement words cannot describe. The younger kids (grade 3s) whom never before saw a Caucasian were wide eyed and some pinched my arm thinking I was a ghost!

On the website there is a saying "Your change is my Life". I now can fully appreciate the difference those of you have made through your donations! The teachers told me that since the feeding programme was established, attendance has improved, the average student's weight has increased by 8 pounds and so too have provincial test scores. Butong elementary was once ranked 7th in the district and is now in 1st place!

For the daily equivalent of one Tim Horton large Coffee, a student can receive a warm meal for a week! Most of them have parents who work as farmers making 100 to 200 pesos a day (\$ 2 U.S)

Infanta – After the Floods

In traveling to Infanta, the Beatles song "a long and windy road" kept replaying in my mind as although its only 100-km away from Manila, the ride takes 2 to 3.5 hours owing to the steep mountain ranges. In some parts we literally encountered washed out sections of road.

The ten days we stayed in Infanta were some of the most memorable. This is a place where chickens really do cross the road and please don't ask me why! In Infanta, we were moved to tears hearing first-hand accounts by students at Our Lady of Mount Carmel. In front of us, they were sharing their stories of losing dear family members yet at the same time, praising God and even managing to crack jokes about themselves.

In light of the tragedy, MMP (Mary Mother of the Poor foundation) awarded 30 scholarships to those students who demonstrate academic excellence and community spirit. MMP also financed the construction of a two-floor extension to an elementary school in Gumian. This will give them a place to house a library and additional classrooms. We also tried to physically help, spending several days assisting the locals carrying packages of cement and other supplies to the site as well as preparing the groundwork. Lifting 50 pounds of cement on my shoulders gave me an immediate appreciation of that line of work!

MMP also conducted, a medical/dental mission providing free medical and dental care to impoverished patients in the landslide-ravaged region of Infanta. The Canadian medical team worked alongside doctors and nurses from the Philippines.



Other Highlights

In Butong, MMP has established a non-profit daycare centre that currently employs 2 teachers and has 50 students.

We have also helped build and finance the construction of another home for a family with 7 kids who were living in a place with no enclosed walls but only a roof supported by 4 pillars made out of bamboo.

From July 13 - 15th, Father Fernando help facilitate a workshop attended by 200 people with the aim of teaching them how to cook more nutritious foods as well as creating products that could generate greater income for the farmers.

Concluding Remarks

We all can make a difference in this world and even a dollar or one soccer ball can change someone's life. The Philippines is a country filled with young people that are bright and eager to learn. I pray that as Catholics, you will find it in your hearts to help them any which way.

For more information please visit our website at:
www.marymotherofthepoor.org



"To continuously seek holiness, and help the poor"

Mary Mother of the Poor

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