

Day 1, 16th March 07 Friday - Arrival at Cebu by Cebu Air Pacific Flight # 5J548 at 4.05am

On flight to Cebu, I was reminded of my last trip to Philippines (ie Tacloban) two years ago. I asked God to open our hearts to receive whatever He has prepared for the team, Teen Challenge and also the people whom we will interact with. The team prayed for an open-mind and sensitivity to God's leading. We are going to learn and not to teach. Once we touched down, I could see the immense joy in Pastor Jacob when he saw us.

At the center, we were taught the Filipino culture to help us understand and interact with the locals better. We learnt the common Filipino body language and to eat with our hands. Though this manner of eating is not new to us, I realized we have to get out of our comfort zone and make adjustments so that the locals can feel comfortable with us. Just like Jesus - He broke bread and ate with the commoners although He was the Son of God.

In the afternoon, we set off for our cultural exchange programme with the 'City as a Classroom'. I was so excited to submerge in their culture and lifestyle which is so different back home. We visited slum areas, downtown and uptown districts and tried the various mode of transportation like Tricycle, Motor tricycle, Horse-carriage and their famous Jeepney. We found out that the average daily income of the drivers could barely breakeven but Pastor Jacob educated us that for the Filipinos, it is better than doing nothing at all as they do not have any other viable job offers.

Next we went to the cemetery and were greeted by human bones and skulls that were strewn all over the ground. Rows after rows of flimsy wall graves are lined up. Yearly rental for the "Wall grave" is 3,000 Peso (about S\$100). The bones will be thrown out to the ground if the family is not able to pay rental for the following year. I had mixed emotions when I saw this as it struck me how callously the people and authorities have valued life. I felt that it was unfair that only the rich can buy a place of rest for the deceased but for those in abject poverty, it's just 'too bad'. Pastor Jacob brought to our attention that there are families living in the cemetery as they are too poor to afford a home. Children would hide inside open wall graves to seek shelter and warmth from rainy or cold nights.

Our next destination was the market cum slump areas. Those who live there are the extreme poor. Their living conditions are horrendous. I had a culture shock and did not know how to react. There was no proper sewage system and everything was shared with about 100 people to 1 tap. Children were running around, mostly half naked and teenagers were just hanging out. I remembered a baby sleeping beside a skinned cow on a parapet while the parents were scrapping meat off the bones for sale. I wondered: 'Is the baby or the meat for sale?' I was caught off-guard by such a sight. Yet, God still loves them as much as He loves us.

Following that, we visited the Church of Mechellan. It was not my first time there, so I managed to help some of my teammates understand what is going on in the Catholic church. We all witnessed the fervent devotion displayed by the believers over the images of baby Jesus, Santo Nino. This is a time of reflection for us as Christians to review our passion and worship to God our Father, which was not even half of theirs.

Day 2, 17th March 07 Saturday – Ministry at Assembly of God Church, Minglanilla City

Our day started with morning devotion with the Philippines Teen Challengers and workers. It was an inspiring time of worship. I was greatly touched when the children lifted their voices to the song 'I worship You Almighty God'. They were once out there in the streets taking drugs, hanging out with street gangsters, etc. God saved them from the miry clay and gave them hope.

We proceeded to the city of Minglanilla for children's ministry which was divided into two day sessions. Each session has about 150 children. The team had to serve and mingle with the kids with songs, dance, story, and games. We were caught off guard when told that each session is

more than 2 1/2 hours. We almost ran out of materials but the team learnt to rely on the Holy Spirit and came up with entertaining programs that occupied the kids.

We proceeded to have lunch (using our hands) with the church workers of Minglanilla. Dishes included 'Hanging rice' (ketupat), 'Mongos' (smashed green bean and pumpkin soup), 'Maling' (luncheon meat) and 'Tuloy' (local fried salted fish which we are expected finish completely including the head). I was fellowshipping with a girl who was serving in a church as a co-teacher. She mentioned that she had to give up tertiary education because her family could not afford her course fees. Compared to youths in our society, she is selfless and mature in her thoughts.

Day 3, 18th March 07 Sunday – Ministry at Minglanilla and Lapu Lapu City

Pastor Alfred Yeo was the guest speaker for both church's services. He first ministered in the church we visited yesterday and shared on Nehemiah building the walls of Jerusalem. It was amazing how God used His servant to encourage the church, which was going through a crisis. We prayed for the church members, church leadership and Pastor Edgar. It was a fresh touch from God for these people. Following that, the team members were divided into 4 groups to share to the Men/Women/Teens/Children fellowships. I was assigned to the Women's Fellowship. I felt awkward as I am a teenager and have hardly any experience to share on womanhood but God never leaves us alone. Along with me were two great sisters, Sister Dolly and Sister Teri whose testimonies greatly blessed the women in the village.

In the afternoon, we attended the Celebration of God's Goodness Fellowship's (CGGF) 2nd Anniversary at Lapu Lapu City. Again, God did a marvelous work through Pastor Alfred's sharing. The members were ministered to and we had an altar call for salvation where about 40 persons responded. Praise The Lord!

Day 4, 19th March 07 Monday – Dumpsite Immersion

We were all filled with anticipation on the way to visit the Dumpsite People's Church, which was an extension work of CGGF's ministry. It was by God's grace that the authorities allowed Pastor Ray and Pastor Rose to set up a church there. What a great testimony for all those living in the dumpsite to come for bible study 1 hour each morning before they go scavenging through the rubbish dumps. The dumpsite people used recycled materials to build the church and it was amazing to see their ingenuity and creativity. Our team members joined in their bible study class and distributed food/drinks to the dumpsite people who attended.

We were divided into 2 groups - the sisters visited the homes of the dumpsite people whilst the brothers visited the actual dumpsite and observe the scavengers at work. We were introduced into their world where rubbish is a source of income to them. We mingled and ministered to the children and their families living in the dumpsite area. Through this, we began to see another 'wonder' of the world. Though they lived in such conditions, the people are contented. I remembered seeing a little girl walking with an empty bucket almost as big as her and a small scoop. She was drenched and naked. I asked Nora (Teen Challenge staff) and was told she had gone for a bath on her own. She's merely a 2 year old toddler! Though they are poor and ostracized from mainstream society, God has not forgotten them. They continue to find joy and happiness in their lives. This is the kind of assurance I would always remember even for myself, that God cares.

We went back to the center to wait for instructions for the evening's feeding program for the street children. I was assigned, together with Sister Dolly and Brother Samuel Yeo, to be part of the advance crew with Nora. We were supposed to go to several districts and invite children to come for the evening's feeding program. It was the second time for us in the market cum slump areas and once we entered the district, we were greeted by children tugging our pants and shirts, eagerly seeking our attention. We spoke with a few older girls and when we asked them about their future plans, a handful said they never thought about it. They would most probably be like their parents, get married and set up a family. We encouraged them to think about it, and if opportunities arise, to

pursue an education. One girl mentioned she wants to be an engineer and we prayed for her. Sister Dolly and I had much fun teaching nursery rhymes, Mandarin and sharing about Singapore.

It was dark by the time we got back to the feeding site. Quiet as it may seem, the four of us were suddenly greeted by excited children all over. Dear me! I nearly fell over. For these children, it was a testimony of God's mighty love that we returned. Each of us had nearly 10 children hanging all over us. Some were in our arms while others held on to our legs, hands and shirts. We were breathless by the time we reached the site. We played games and had a fun time. I was shocked when a kid rammed into me and hit my head. It was painful but I told myself not to cry and scare the children who showed concern for me. Sister Dolly and Brother Samuel handled the children very well, although all of us were praying for the rest of the team to arrive fast. We were physically exhausted. The rest finally arrived. The main team set up washing and feeding points while some of the youths gathered the children for an enjoyable time of songs and dances. Feeding started with children queuing up to wash their hands and collecting their food. We mingled with the children and all of them were so friendly that they were crowding around every one of us just for a chance to be shown some love. After that, the brothers accompanied them back to their quarters.

We moved uptown and it was a whole new culture, although it was only a few minutes drive from downtown. Things were a little more organized and people more affluent compared to the downtown. However, the children and teenagers are plagued with drug addiction and gang associations. Pastor Jacob only allowed the brothers to help out at the feeding point as the young boys were hooked on drugs and may become abusive to the sisters. Hence, the sisters stayed in the van and peered out of the windows. At one point, we ran out of food but God performed a mighty miracle. Two passers-by asked Brother Samuel Yeo what we were doing and when they heard about the feeding program, they immediately donated two bags of rice and food. Who would have expected people to be carrying bags of food along the streets at night! Before Pastor Jacob could have a word with them, they left. God is amazing!

Day 5, 20th March 07 Tuesday – Philippines Teen Challenge

I was down with gastritis this morning and could not join the rest of the team to the community immersion at the mountaintop. This had been the day I was looking forward to. Pastor Alfred assured me that they will be back as soon as they are done and my stay-in could be a blessing to the children instead.

I joined the younger children for lessons in their classroom. Sister Doris asked if I could help to teach numbers and alphabets to the younger girls ranging from 3-7 years old. This sounded easy but I was wrong. With only crayons as my only resource, I tried to use creative ways to engage them. However, due to their background and language, communication was difficult. By God's grace and wisdom, we managed a great time of interaction and bonding. We even had a short time of learning songs and dance together. The children enjoyed it so much that they copied down every verse and chorus of the song. It really touched my heart to see them copying letter by letter because they could not read the words. It showed just how much all these simple things meant to them while we often take them for granted.

Day 6, 21st March 07 Wednesday – Island hopping

Today was rest and relax. We island hopped and explored part of the Pacific Ocean. It was a good time of fellowship amongst ourselves and getting to know one another better.

Day 7, 22nd March 07 Thursday – Immanuel BC / Thanksgiving Night

We attended morning service together with the students at Immanuel Bible College. Pastor Alfred shared words of exaltation, especially for the graduating batch of students. May God greatly use them in His kingdom, and persevere on this journey of faith.

Evening was our thanksgiving dinner. We invited both Pastor Edgar and Pastor Ray in our midst to remember what God has done for all of us during this short missions expedition. Instead of being served by the Teen Challengers, it was our turn to serve them. It was a moment of mixed emotions. There was much pleasure and joy working with PTC and the children yet our time together will be ending in less than a day's time. I know the joy far outweighs the sadness because this physical separation is not an eternal parting. God unites His people through prayers.

Day 8, 23rd March 07 Friday – Departure from Cebu by Cebu Air Pacific Flight # 5J547 at 7.55pm

We were brought to the “Beverly Hills” area where we saw the drastic difference of what we've been exposed to during the entire trip. The affluent families are staying in posh homes but this group is only a minority in the Philippines.

Our trip ended with goodbyes as we parted.

Up till now, I believe those who have been on this trip had a fruitful experience. Nostalgic moments of PTC and the work we have begun will always be in my heart. I really hope we can return and continue with what we have sown. I look forward to see God moving in this nation and beyond.