



Heart's Home USA

Sponsor Letter

Spread Compassion

**Letter from Judy Snyder**  
**Sponsor letter # 2**

**Heart's Home in Manila, Philippines**

**October 20,2008**

My Dear Sponsors,

Hello again! And again there seems much to be told, and I'm not sure where to start. Since my memory fails me at times, I'll relate to you some events here...but they more than likely aren't in order. So, I'm sorry about that.

I just want to take this moment to say thank you again for your support. I also want to give a special thanks to the members of St. John's Catholic Church for all their prayers, support and donations. Thank you! :-)

Let me begin with a little more details about my community members here of HH. Olivier is a 31 year old seminarian (for HH) from India. He comes from a family of 9. And he's been here for 2 years already and will be here 1 more year (so he'll leave just before I do).

Anne-Sophie is a newly-turned 25 year old from France. She comes from a family of 7 (you gotta love those big families! ;-). She's been here for 11 months and leaves back for France in January.

Also, we just received 3 new members of HH 3 days ago. Marie-Anne is a 26 year old from France and will be here for 20 months. Thomas is a 23 year old from Poland (the first Polish HH missionary here) who will be here for 14 months. And another Ann-Sophie from Belgium. She's also 23 and will be here for 14 months.

So we doubled our numbers in just one day!

Heart's Home visit to Mindanao.

At the end of this letter you will find a more detailed description of the native festival we attended in Mindanao (a southern Philippine island) written by Olivier. We left on Sept. 19 and returned Sept.22. One of the first things that hit me when I got off the plane was the fresh air. So fresh. It was one of the most beautiful places I've ever been to. And the people were friendly, too. I'll just let you read below for the details...although I will admit one of my favorite parts was going at about 4a.m. to the top of the hill/mountain. There Olivier and Sophie and I watched (it was still dark) as the people first went down the hill, and then came back up a while later. There was a little mist in the air and we watched as the sun rose over the mountains. There was also a silence in the air. And then the people came back up the hill carrying torches. So we saw this trail of fire coming up the hill as day broke. It was one of the most amazing things I've ever experienced.

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About a recent feast celebrated here. Our parish- St. Lorenzo- celebrated at the end of Sept. his Feast Day. Since he's the first canonized saint of the Philippines, there was an especially big celebration here. They had parades and bands and lots of joy. Sophie and I got to ride in one of the parades. We were handed candy to through out to the people as we past by and we waved at them also. I enjoyed this very much (and I think the people did, too...especially receiving the candy....).

And I must say this. The Filipinos like to celebrate Christmas early. How early? Try the end of Sept. No kidding. Christmas music could be heard in the stores the last few days of Sept. Now the music has increased a bit and some decorations have been put up. I'm loving it! :-)

Manila traffic is one of the most amazing things I have experienced. There were times when my companions and I crossed the road and I seriously thought I was going to die. But the drivers have this amazing talent for maneuvering through traffic and not crashing somehow. I mean, there are accidents, but to my amazement, there doesn't seem to be as many as I thought there would be... One of the people on the road I most admire here are the jeepney drivers. Jeepneys I believe was used for the military back in the days. Now here they're used for public transportation. They're like really long jeeps that you just jump on if you need a ride. The drivers (sometimes they have a helper), not only collect the money as people (sometimes a few at a time) call out "Bayad Po" (I pay, sir), but they stop every time someone calls out "Para Po" (Stop, sir). And I believe a lot of the jeepneys are stick shift. All this they do while they are driving. And Navotas/Manila traffic can be quite crazy. So they have to be alert as also they have to multi-task very well so that they don't crash. Amazing, simply amazing.

I want to say some more about the poverty here. It definitely is like nothing I've ever experienced. The way some people live. Survive. And even though they may live in places that some of us can't even imagine unless we see it for ourselves, they seem to still live on. Yes, they have their troubles, and they know they do. But they somehow deal with it as they raise their children (and sometimes other people's children) in what some of us would call hopeless conditions. But when you talk to them...they usually seem to fit a smile in from time to time. So they may have a physical poverty, but their spiritually/mentally rich. Like when we bring a cake and pop to them for a birthday, they always insist on sharing with us. And there are times when even the elderly (this happened in Mindadao also) would offer me their seat or the front row seat to see a dance....even though they were shorter than me. The hospitality of these people just simply amazes me.

One time while we were visiting a friend whose son we celebrated his birthday (they live in a one-room very small house) I was reflecting as I watched her son (about 2 years old or so) and his friend play with this huge stuffed pig. Their innocence struck me in the midst of their obvious poverty. Even though they were physically very poor, they still played and carried on with no worries. It was quite funny to watch as they tried to fit themselves (with the pig) on a hammock. And I wondered why some adults seemed to want their children to grow up so fast. I think adults could use a lesson from children.

And at the MC sisters...the children there...even though some may not talk, you learn other ways to

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communicate. One of the things I learned here...Love is a universal language we all need to learn, and one we all deserve to know.

Another important thing I learned...anything that you desire, only God can give you. He is the only One you can truly rely on...and no one else can give all you need. Only Him.

And I will conclude with another Apostolate of ours.... we go to this jail about 2-3 hours away. It's this huge, beautiful jail. Inside they have a garden-like place, and a market, churches, a basketball and tennis court, and some birds and a monkey.

When we walk in, immediately, some gentlemen rush to our side and cover us from the sun with an umbrella. The gentlemen we see there are very nice and seem to have a joy about them. This jail is one where they are in there for life (40 years, I think?). We celebrated birthdays there last month (Sept.) and they shared with us the treats that we brought for them. Also, just a few days ago we went (we go here once a month) and also they shared with us. One of them plays the guitar well, and some sing well, too. I love to hear them play and sing. One of them asked me in Tagalog how many brothers and sisters I had. And when I replied 18, he said "No, you got the wrong question, I didn't ask how old you were, I asked how many brothers and sisters you had.." :-)

There's also another jail in Navotas we go to sometimes...I've been there once to visit a 25 year old young man who's been accused of a serious crime he didn't commit.

Also we recently learned of a family who had lost 2 children within a month's period. Also the mother takes rugby (a popular drug here...whom even young teenagers have been known to take).

Please pray for all our friends and this mission that our community stays united and do God's Will.

Thank You! =-)

You remain in my prayers.

In Christ's Loving Peace,  
Judy

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## T'BOLIES BAK SOBONG FESTIVAL.

Bak Sobong Festival is the religious festival of T'bolies (Indigenous people) the native people of the Lake Sebu in South Cotabato, Mindanao in which they offer the rituals to the guardian spirits of the earth.

This BSF was organized in a grand manner after 18 years by the "GREAT WORK FOUNDATION" run by Fr. Rex Mannesmann, an American Passionist priest who had worked almost 30 years in the midst of the T'boli Tribe. It is said that the Passionist missionaries, especially Fr. Rex, is the pioneer who worked for the awareness of the T'bolies through Education, Health Programmes, Handicrafts (Marketing), Agriculture and Religion by operating SCMCI (Santa Cruz Mission School Incorporated) in his long stay of 30 years to let them be proud of their culture they belong to and to preserve its heritage which is the real gift of God for them.

After being away from the T'boli tribe for 18 years and being working for another tribe called B'lann in Topi, Fr. Rex observed the decline of the T'boli who were vulnerable and irresistible to the settlers due to financial inabilities. Fr. Rex has come back to save them like "TUD BULUL" (the hero of the T'boli) through this Great Work Foundation.

This Festival began with the huge parade under the leadership of DATU (leader of the Areas) having traditional musics and dances starting from Sulak Alu which is a few kilometers away from the festival place SIKAT. At the entrance of this Sikat, a huge Python with an opened mouth where all the participants of this festival have to pass through.

What is this act of passing through Python (sowu) all about for them? In the epic of this T'boli tribe, it seems that this Python vowed to swallow the hero of this tribe 'TUD BULUL', who was so good in leading and reigning. As it happened, people turned against the Python and went to kill it. Fearing of its own life in danger and knowing the anger of the T'boli people, Python vomited Tud Bulul after having a NEW LIFE. He led and reigned his people in prosperity. The symbolic expression of it is that everyone has to enter into NEW LIFE or NEW BEGINNING and it was strictly followed. After they had performed the traditional skills like Musics, Dances, Songs and Sports.

On the second day, there was a Dawn parade with burning torches at 4 am. When all reached to the festival place, they set a New Fire, then "Sacred tree of life" is planted where all the Datu come together to pray and lift to show their UNITY. After worship and ritual performance to the spirits take place. Again, the traditional skills are performed. Everyone was enjoying the feast at its best because this gathering takes place once a year. This is also an occasion to meet each other since they live far from each other. This year was something special since after 18 years of gap, it has been celebrated in its Originality.

For us, it was a joyous moment to discover this new Tribal community and Cultural practices through the providential help of Fr. George SVD who is also working with Fr. Rex. We thanked all of them in your name and in the name of the community.

NOTE: All these valuable informations that I share with you given by Ate Sarah N. Ladna and Ate Marlyn Blonto, the scholars of Fr. Rex and from Ate MERLA, the project Operator.

Thanking you all OLIVIER

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