



# THE MENORAH

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FULLNESS OF CHRIST  
INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES  
AT

**34**

# A TIME TO EXPAND

"NOW MY EYES WILL BE OPEN AND MY EARS ATTENTIVE TO THE PRAYER THAT IS MADE IN THIS PLACE. FOR NOW I HAVE CHOSEN AND CONSECRATED THIS HOUSE THAT MY NAME MAY BE THERE FOREVER."

2 CHRONICLES 7:15-16

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OCTOBER  
2020

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# EDITORIAL

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*God's eyes open, ears attentive to every prayer in FOCIM Sanctuary*

No one could have anticipated that a few months after celebrating New Year, making all our resolutions for the year, being excited about our next travel destination, and after all the careful planning of church activities, our world would never be the same again. No one anticipated the COVID-19 pandemic to reach global proportion. None of us would have expected to see businesses grinding to a halt, employees losing their jobs, or millions of people all over the world grieving the loss of their loved ones.

The coronavirus is like a thief in the night who has stolen valuable things from us.

The pandemic caused deaths of both life and hope. The virus spread itself quickly, infected people regardless of nationality and gender. Both the young and the old were most vulnerable, the poor had very little capacity to follow the health protocols because face masks and face shields cost a lot of money, physical distancing is not possible in a small housing unit and getting treatment for COVID-19 costs nearly a million pesos for a two-week regimen.

Losing jobs during the pandemic also hit the poor and the unskilled. They have to be physically around the workplace to deliver their services. But lockdowns prevented them from doing so. Prohibiting public transport also made this impossible. But the executives, lawyers, accountants, BPO staff and even journalists could afford working from home. Outside this group, indeed, hope is lost especially when cash transfers and government ayuda were not given, or if given, were done in trickles.

Beyond these misfortunes, the pandemic has presented us with life-changing questions. Will I ever get back to work? Is it the right time to venture into business? Should we cancel our wedding this year? Should I cancel my tithing for the time being? Is it the right time to build our Church sanctuary?

From its founding in 1986 and for 34 years now it has been the Church's burden to build its own sanctuary. Over the last 20 years, the Church has relocated twice after receiving the prophetic words "relocate, build and expand."

The year 2020, the year of fulfilment, is very significant for FOCIM. After acquiring a 647-square-meter lot along Mayon Street near Boni Avenue in Mandaluyong, Metro Manila, FOCIM broke the ground on September 20, 2019 but started the construction of the 6-storey FOCIM Lampstand Sanctuary during the lockdown starting March 15, 2020.

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## What does FOCIM's construction of its sanctuary remind us of?

Our project to build God's sanctuary reminds us of King David's deepest conviction to build God a sanctuary. He was convicted that while the ark of the covenant remained in a tent, he was in his great palace. Of course, it was not King David who was to build the Lord's sanctuary but his own son, King Solomon.

He built it for the glory and honor of God. He wanted to execute what his father purposed in his heart. In 1 Kings 5:5, the Lord said to David, "Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the house for My name". David submitted to the choice that God made of Jerusalem, being pleased to make it the city in which He would record his name. The Lord declared in 2 Chronicles 6:6 that "Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel." Solomon understood that it was not to be a house to contain God, because "heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" (2 Chronicles 6:18). As he dedicated the temple to the Lord, his great supplication was that the Lord would hear every prayer that would be proclaimed in that temple.

In the same way that God was magnified and honored in the quick rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, the Lord will be honored once FOCIM's sanctuary is built and completed in the time of COVID-19. Despite the lockdown and the concomitant hard times that followed, God allowed FOCIM to build as FOCIM strongly depended on God alone. He continues to provide, He continues to keep the oil and the flour flowing. Proverbs 3:5 encouraged us "To trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding." For this reason, as Luke 18:27 clarified "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

The ground has been broken, the foundations laid, the building will be erected and God's kingdom will reside in FOCIM's The Lampstand. Just as He assured Solomon about the first temple, God's eyes will always be open and His ears will always be attentive to every prayer and every declaration that will be made in our place of worship because God has decided to place His name on it forever.



*"To trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding."*

*Proverbs 3:5*



# TRANSCENDING LIMITATIONS: FOCIM MINISTRIES NAVIGATE THE NEW NORMAL

Compiled by Daniel Alberto G. Guinigundo



**Roanna Lynn G. Santos (RS)**  
*Head, FOCIM Worship Team*



**Mariela Reyes (MR)**  
*Head Teacher, FOCIM Children's  
Sunday School*

In these extraordinary times, ministry leaders are challenged to step up and find non-traditional paths to doing ministry that do not involve face-to-face meetings. While this may be seen as a struggle, the FOCIM Worship Team and the Children's Sunday School Ministry consider this as an opportunity to pioneer new and effective methods by harnessing technology to approximate the same experience to the members' homes.

Below are the responses we gathered from Sis. Roanna Lynn G. Santos (RS), the head of the FOCIM Worship Team, and Sis. Mariela Reyes (MR), the head teacher in charge of the Academics Committee of the FOCIM Children's Sunday School, regarding their experiences in navigating through the "new normal":

## **What challenges did you encounter (technical, logistical, spiritual, etc.) while preparing for your ministry online?**

**RS:** Not much on spiritual I guess, because worship for us has become a lifestyle. We worship the Lord through singing and praying daily through our own quiet times with the Lord. The challenges were more logistical due to quarantine restrictions and technical since our equipment (and time) is very limited.

**MR:** The Children's Sunday School ministry has always been used to meeting physically; this has been the first time we have been away from our students. Several questions arose as to how we could translate our ministry into online platform – whether all our students have an internet connection, how we could catch their attention, how we could involve the parents and other family members to help out. In short, more on logistics and technical.



## Are there any perceived advantages to online worship versus physical worship?

**RS:** Online worship can be shared to more people, across the globe.

## What was it like during the ECQ compared to the time when more people were able to participate?

**RS:** So, so difficult. We were all physically exhausted at the end of the day. Every minute was valuable and we couldn't afford to waste time. Not only were our equipment and time limited (hello 3pm curfew!), but also our movements - we had to sanitize everything and maintain proper physical distancing. When more people came in to join, work was divided na. Nung kami lang ni Nico and Keith, kami taga awit, tugtog, buhat, linis, kabit, tanggal, kalas, linis, REPEAT!



**MR:** During our physical services, the teachers would usually have a revolving schedule whereby we would only be teaching once or twice a month, except for special church occasions or celebrations. During this time, we also had a chance to fellowship not only with each other but also with our students inside and outside of the class. While this was the most ideal set-up, we had to come up with a different approach by which our lessons would still be available online for our students. So we came up with KIDS CONNECT, a platform on which students could simply download weekly lessons, artwork, and other activities that they could do in the comfort of their homes. To involve their families for them to take ownership of the ministry as well, we have allowed this avenue for them to teach their children with special instructions from us, too. The site is still being developed but we have slowly started building momentum. Check the site out! Go to Facebook or Instagram and type in "@kidsconnect.focimph"



## Song/verse that you held on to during those times?

**RS:** Romans 12:11-12, Psalms 46 and Psalms 91

**MR:** John 14:27, Isaiah 46:4, and the songs "It is so" and "Here Again" by Elevation Worship.

## Important lessons that you will take with you and will still continue to be valuable once physical services restart?

**RS:** Romans 12:11-12, Psalms 46 and Psalms 91

**MR:** John 14:27, Isaiah 46:4, and the songs "It is so" and "Here Again" by Elevation Worship.

## Important lessons that you will take with you and will still continue to be valuable once physical services restart?

**RS:** (1) Worship is not bound by circumstance. Walang makakapigil sa pag-woworship kay God! ; (2) Appreciate the tech team more - they are as valuable as everyone else; (3) Mag-invest pakonti-konti sa mga kagamitan na pwede ring gamitin sa gawain ng Panginoon; (4) Continue enhancing one's talents and developing intimacy with the Lord, kahit na nasa bahay lang. Once physical services resume, we should have an increase in our skills and would have developed a more mature character; (5) The need to maintain cleanliness and orderliness in oneself and especially with the things of God; and (6) Dapat laging handa. One had to play a role na hindi niya main task kasi may kulang at the very last minute. Also helps to be versatile—learn to do more than one function.

**MR:** (1) Where there is a will, there is a way; (2) Think outside the box and never be limited to what has been done; (3) Taking care of our spiritual, physical, and mental health is a priority.

# ACHIEVING GOD'S VICTORY THROUGH GRADUATION AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

By Woodrow Wilson C. Young

**D**uring this time of uncertainty caused by the pandemic, it is important to remind ourselves of God's faithfulness. One way to do this is to acknowledge and celebrate graduations in college and post-graduate of our brothers and sisters in FOCIM. Having graduated in this time of pandemic crisis is a unique milestone for students. For this reason, FOCIM congratulates this year's graduates for achieving this singular victory, a clear case of God's blessings and favor.

Menorah interviewed our graduates to encourage FOCIM members that overcoming challenges is a distinct blessing from the Lord because He would always put those whom He loves through the threshing floor to make them tougher and resilient, always depending on the Lord for strength and wisdom.

Four FOCIM young people have their endearing stories to tell. We shall allow them to answer similar questions to get a glimpse of how the Lord figured big in their challenging experiences.

**Bro. Daniel  
Guinigundo (DG)**

graduated with the degree of Master of Laws (LLM) in General Studies plus a Certificate in International Arbitration and Dispute Resolution with Honors and Distinction from Georgetown Law School.



**Bro. Abe  
Guinigundo (AG)**

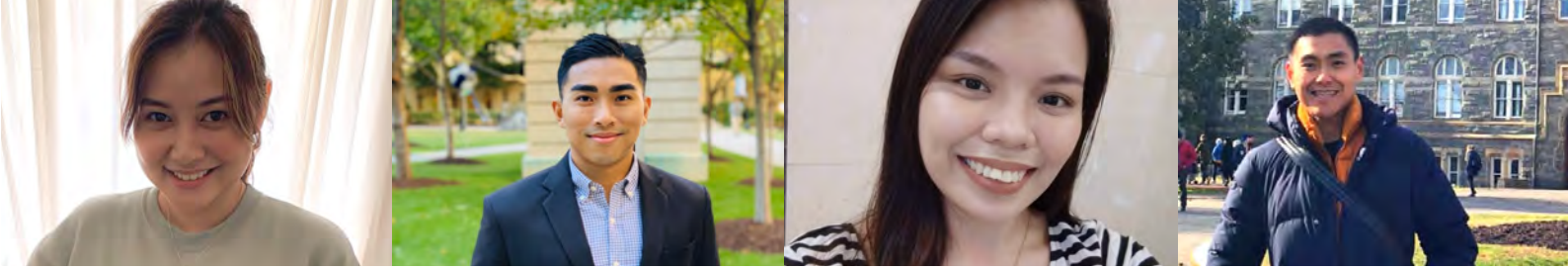
also graduated from Georgetown Law School with the degree of Master of Laws (LLM) in General Studies plus a Certificate in International Arbitration and Dispute Resolution with honors.



**Sis. Erika Paras (EP)** graduated with the degree of Juris Doctor (JD) from Ateneo Law School, second honors.

**Sis. Denise Cerveza (DC)** graduated with the degree of BS Accountancy from the Philippine School of Business Administration, Manila.





**1.) In your experience prior to graduation, what was the most memorable trial/struggle that you had to overcome? How did your relationship with God help you overcome such trial/struggle?**

**DG:** Ironically, the struggle that was particularly difficult to overcome was to keep safe and stay indoors from the virus, and the sense of loss from all the implications that came along with it. We realized that we would no longer be surrounded by family when we complete our studies—that was very sad. We were disheartened at the prospect of cancelling our trips with friends and having face-to-face interactions with the professors to maximize our remaining classes. It was so uncertain how examinations would be administered, and perhaps most of all, the anxiety that comes with being away from family and friends far longer than we thought, and in coming home.

It was so easy to be discouraged and to be angry with the things beyond my control. It was so easy to get frustrated with the ever-changing government regulations and the impractical solutions offered that only served to frustrate our plans and timelines. The experience made me relearn an aspect of God that I still carry with me today—that God has never lost sight of what will be good for His children, regardless of the situations we may be facing even today.

**AG:** Nothing about the pandemic was easy, to say the least. Every little change in plan or schedule took a fair amount of adjustment on my part. Perhaps what stood out the most was the postponement of our Commencement Exercises. Even before beginning my program, graduation and every festivity associated with it was already on my mind; the image of culmination and celebration helped power me through many difficult moments. So, as you can imagine, when that was taken away and replaced with a virtual (and quite unceremonious) event, it took a lot out of me mentally. I ended up attending the online “graduation” in my sweat pants.

**EP:** The most formidable struggle I faced prior to graduation was making sure I was still learning and absorbing everything I had to learn amidst the pandemic. When onsite classes were called off and we were told we were going to have online classes instead, I got so disoriented and distraught. During my time in law school, I would be out of my condo by 6 am and study in a coffee shop until my class which would be at around 10 am. Breaks were spent in the library. My day would end at 7 pm. That would be the only time I would head home to rest and sleep. I was not at all used to staying home

because knowing myself, I would only hang around and sleep instead of study. I also benefitted much from my onsite classes because I have an incredibly short attention span. When I’m in class, I’m alert and I’m forced to focus on what my professor is saying and what my classmates are reciting. The element of fear in law school kept me on my toes, so I was all ears all the time. Staying at home and attending online classes were really difficult considering how I am as a student. It was an everyday battle against my short attention span and my tendency to lounge around when at home. I felt like no matter how hard I tried, I was not absorbing anything because I was forced to change my academic lifestyle a few months before graduation. It was a very unwelcome interruption that came at the worst time.

Or so I thought. The pandemic and the quarantine period made me feel so lost and hopeless at the beginning, but it also gave me a golden opportunity to strengthen my faith and be closer to God. I started a daily devotion with Sis. Apple. We studied how God moved in the lives of Ruth, Esther, and David. Talking about these events in history reminded me that I had absolutely nothing to worry about because I am a child of God. Hearing God’s voice and talking to a woman of God every single day heavily increased my faith and heavily decreased my doubt. I knew then that where I lacked, God gladly filled to the brim. I knew then that I only had to have self-discipline to comply with the tasks God delegated to me and He will take care of the rest. And true enough – just as God gave Ruth a kinsman-redeemer, Esther the right opportunity at the right time, David the crown and the victory, God gave me the blessing of graduating second honors from my dream law school amidst a seemingly hopeless situation.



DC: The most memorable trial that I experienced was the time that I had to take my comprehensive review subject three times due to my failure to reach the quota. Instead of finishing the course in one and a half years, it took me three years to do it. It was frustrating and draining. There were times that I would even compare myself to other people and their achievement. It slipped my mind that my journey with God is unique. This extended schooling aggravated my family's finances for me to be able to graduate and take the CPA Licensure Examination.



Through those trials, I witnessed God's goodness and faithfulness not only to me but also to my family. During the times that we struggled financially due to my tuition fee, God provided. When I was about to give up, God reminded me to keep persevering. Whenever I felt down, He lifted me. He never allowed the enemy to take over my life just because I failed. God made me stronger. Indeed, if we seek God first and His righteousness, all these things will be added to us (Matthew 6:33). My life verse in Jeremiah 29:11 becomes all the more relevant, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." This promise is not an immediate rescue from those hardships, but rather a promise that God has a great plan for me. Regardless of my situation, He will work through it to prosper me and give me hope. By God's grace, I finished my course and I am now preparing for my CPA Licensure Examination.

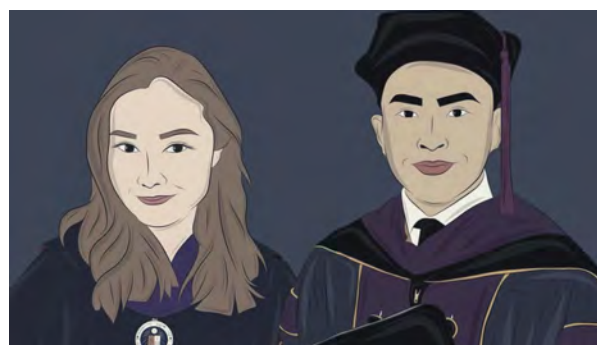
**2) In what way/s did the pandemic negatively impact your graduation experience? How does having God as your guide give you hope and comfort despite the negative impact of the pandemic on your graduation?**

DG: Well, the downside was indeed the uncertainty of how we would graduate—the remaining classes on-line and how the final exams would be administered and graded to evaluate our performance as basis for allowing us to graduate. But we know God was always in control of every situation including this health crisis, and we felt His hand guiding us all the way. God helped us, we graduated even with double honors. God is good!

AG: Of course, throughout those pockets of disappointment, God never left me. He provided me foremost with my family, friends, and Erika as my emotional anchor. Every morning was spent staring outside the window and greeting the new day while praising God for every blessing that I still had—and there were plenty of those. As a result of the pandemic, I even had opportunity to do daily zoom devotions with Erika and nightly prayers with my NIV family. I was even chosen to speak for Mother's Day. Even without an end to the pandemic in sight, I already saw and accepted God's purpose for this season.

DC: In my case, there was no negative impact other than the fact that I was not able to wear the black toga and experience the traditional march for graduation. God has been so good to me since I started taking my second degree. His guidance and comfort made me stronger and prepared me to face more challenges ahead. For me, that is enough blessing!

EP: I have always dreamt of graduating from law school since I was a little girl, even back when I didn't even know what lawyers did. I just knew from the very start that I wanted to be a lawyer because my dad was one. You can just imagine how heartbroken I was when I found out graduation would have to be postponed and we were told we were going to have an online conferment ceremony instead. Past me would have cried day and night at this unfortunate situation. But because I am a new creation and I have God with me, I learned to submit to His will and His timing. If He doesn't want us to have a graduation ceremony now, then He must have a reason. I don't know what the reason is nor do I have to know it right now, but I trust Him because He sees everything - the beginning to the end. And if He says this is the best outcome out of all outcomes, then I trust that this is the best outcome. Knowing God and having Him in my life made submission so much easier (especially for a stubborn person like myself). Difficult circumstances became lighter to bear.





3) Having God in your life, what message can you give to other graduates who had the same graduation experience to make them feel a sense of gratitude more than one of resentment or disappointment?

DG: There is never an accident to the people of God. The delay that we incurred before we were finally allowed to go home was actually a blessing in disguise, since all the regulations and safety measures had become more tested and robust. We cannot preempt God. The trip home was smoother than expected, since the country was already beginning to adjust to international travels. Things that used to frustrate us only served to help us. Truly, all things work together for good to them who love God according to His purpose!

AG: Graduation signifies completion and that is enough reason to rejoice. Disappointment, with enough passage of time, turns into direction. Of the many disappointments in my life that I recall, every one of them took me to a path that I would always walk through if given the chance to do everything again. It is not for us to make sense of everything because God will show us His purpose not all at once, but at His appointed time.

**"There is never an accident to the people of God. The delay that we incurred before we were finally allowed to go home was actually a blessing in disguise"**



**"BEHOLD, I AM DOING A NEW THING; NOW IT SPRINGS FORTH, DO YOU NOT PERCEIVE IT? I WILL MAKE A WAY IN THE WILDERNESS AND RIVERS IN THE DESERT."**

**ISAIAH 43:19**

EP: Delays are not denials! There is an appointed time for everything. There is a reason behind everything. Confidence in God means confidence in His time. Confidence in God and in His time means joyful submission to His will. And really, isn't it the most wonderful thing to have the Master of the Universe, who knows what is best for us, take control of our lives down to each second? While congratulatory greetings on graduating might take a little longer, congratulatory greetings on being within God's should be now rather than later!

**"Disappointment, with enough passage of time, turns into direction."**

DC: I thank God for allowing us to study and eventually graduate even in the comfort of our homes. The blessings extend to our personal health and safety. We can finally move on and start working towards our post-graduation goals. As God declared in Isaiah 43:19: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." God has something great in store for our future. Difficulties may arise but always know that the Lord is preparing us for His greater blessings. The Lord is preparing His children for the glory of His kingdom on earth.



# GOD > COVID

By Daniel Alberto G. Guinigundo

Valley experiences provide us with opportunities to see a different dimension of God we normally see during mountaintop moments. Admittedly, we are sometimes too quick to equate promotion and good health with blessings, while heartbreak and disappointment result from sin and abandonment.

The experience with COVID-19, however anxious and depressing it may seem, gave some FOCIM members who were infected but survived it a different perspective in life. With a new perspective, there is a renewed spirit and a deeper understanding and appreciation of God.

It would have been a lot easier to go into blaming and shaming, our interviewees now see their valley experiences as more of an opportunity to see how God works in and through the pain, and after it all, a more mature and resilient faith is developed.



## 1. What were the symptoms you experienced and what went through your mind when you tested positive?

BF: Bago mawala yung pang-amoy ko, nakaranas ako ng ubo at sipon, body malaise and lhm. Alam ko na sa sarili ko and tanggap ko na, na magiging positive ang resulta ng swab test ko dahil sa mga na-handle kong COVID patients na pareho ang sintomas na naranasan ko.

JD: The symptoms I experienced were one, difficulty in breathing; two, backpain; and last, I got tired easily. When I found out I tested positive the first thing that came to my mind was "why me?". I stayed at home since the lockdown and I observed the safety measures yet I still contracted the disease. However, God gave my heart peace in knowing that He will not leave me nor forsake me.

KD: I experienced low-grade fever nightly for a mere few hours. While this was not too alarming, I monitored myself. When I felt that I was slowly losing my sense of taste and smell, I took it upon myself to self-isolate. After a few days in quarantine, we decided to get myself tested. Initially, I saw it as an impossible situation—who would have thought that after observing all health protocols, I would still contract it. However, knowing the results made me feel more at peace than not knowing I had it. Finally, I knew what I was up against.

## 2. Three things that you believe were essential in your recovery?

BF: First is prayer; napaka essential nya para humingi ng guidance, healing at mawala din ang mga negative thoughts na pumapasok sa isip ko. Second is yung daily listening to worship songs, singing your worship. Doing this helps kasi naalis lahat ng negativity yung nagiging praning ka sa mga what ifs. Third, palakasin ang immune system, taking vitamins, eating healthy food and exercise, kahit habang naka confined ako, nagagawa kong makapag stretching

JD: Prayer, rest, and discipline!

KD: What I believe helped me a lot during that difficult time, which truthfully felt like what the Israelites felt during the exile, was knowing that I (or even my loved ones, and doctors) can only do so much; thankfully, I have a God who loves me, who has always protected me, and who made a promise that He will give and do to me what is best for me. This truth did not only give me peace, but made every single day in isolation bearable and worth looking forward to. Second, that health is wealth-- our immune system is both our magic serum and our kryptonite-- it can either save or fail us. During that time, I tried to get enough sleep, drink medicine, eat healthy, and drink lots of water. I also kept my mental health in check-- I finally had the time to do the things I always wanted to pursue without having the time to do it-- I tried my hand at calligraphy and watercolor! Lastly, You need a solid support system. This two-week battle was more psychological and emotional as it was physical. In times like these, you realize the value of family (including friends who turned into family). Hindi kailangang marami, hindi kailangang malapit. Ang importante ay present, will not look at you differently, and will pray for and with you unceasingly.



### **3. Did you learn anything about yourself as you went through this experience?**

BF: Sobrang learning po sya sa akin. As a frontliner, hindi porket naka PPE eh immune ka na sa virus which is hindi, after kong maka-recover sobra ang mga precautions ko sa bahay at sa trabaho.

JD: I guess the most important thing that I learned is the importance of rest. With the formidable tasks that I needed to do, it was hard to find time to rest. However, God taught me that rest will give me the strength to finish more tasks than usual.

KD: I learned to trust and surrender more. While we may not control some circumstances we face, how we respond to it is totally within our grasp – for me, I saw my encounter with this virus as a learning experience. My days were filled with trying to process my emotions and at the same time, trying to be present in my experience.

### **4. What misconceptions did you have about COVID-19 that were debunked when you were in isolation?**

BF: Wala naman ako masyadong misconception about COVID-19 kasi lagi naman kami updated about the current trend kahit naka-isolate ako sa hospital because of the help of our bosses and internet.

JD: That young people are susceptible to the virus. Anyone can contract it, especially those with weak immune system. Let us try our best to avoid staying up all night.

KD: Just because you are in full gear (mask, ppe, and face shield), doesn't guarantee that you won't get infected, especially if the person near you isn't observing proper precautions. I cannot overemphasize that every person has a role to play in keeping his surroundings safe. If we really want to have COVID-free "-ber" months, we should do our part conscientiously.

### **5. What activities/what was your daily routine that helped you cope with the isolation?**

BF: Daily routine, prayer, listening to worship songs while reading the devotion for the day, doing some stretching, and avoiding to watch the negative news about COVID-19 para di ako ma-stress.

JD: The amount of tasks to be accomplished in class kept me busy during isolation. However, messages from my friends and the word of God became my support system.

KD: Being in isolation for such a prolonged period of time will make one susceptible to sulk in self-pity—however, I tried to stick to a daily routine, while at the same time, prioritizing my own mental and physical health. Aside from continuing to work, I also immersed myself more in the Word. In hindsight, God used my isolation to do things I was not able to do, like taking time to pursue certain hobbies, like calligraphy and watercolor painting. I still joined our daily homechurch devotions, continued my online devotions, and even pushed through in honoring my commitment to the 34th Anniversary—it was indeed a blessing and a privilege to host the Anniversary during my quarantine and in the midst of battling the virus!

### **6. Verse that you clung to as you struggled with COVID-19?**

BF: Always lagi kong ni-re-remind sarili ko about the plans of the Lord sa buhay ko always kong inaalala yung Jeremiah 29:11.

JD: "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble on its own." Matthew 6:34

KD: "When you go through deep waters, I will be with you." Isaiah 43:2 (NLT)



# A TIME TO EXPAND: FOCIM CELEBRATES 34TH ANNIVERSARY ONLINE

By Woodrow Wilson C. Young

The year 2020 was prophesied to be the year of God's promises being fulfilled. For FOCIM, this prophecy came to pass when the Church started constructing the Lord's Sanctuary in the context of the prophecy given more than 15 years ago: "Relocate, Build and Expand." Building the Lord's Sanctuary is reminiscent of the rebuilding of Solomon's temple in the Old Testament. And just like the story of the rebuilding which experienced various forms of opposition, the building of God's temple at FOCIM faced formidable challenges posed by the corona virus pandemic.

Nevertheless, the greatness of our Lord was more than overpowering.

FOCIM overcame the hindrance even as we celebrated FOCIM's 34th Anniversary. Through God's gift of technology, FOCIM members and guests were able to gather online to celebrate our founding anniversary as one family of God. The outstanding effort of the FOCIM Creative Team in putting together the entire video allowed church members and guests all over the world to view and celebrate FOCIM's 34th Anniversary online. The online anniversary celebration entitled "A Time to Expand" was held last August 30 at 9 am.

Sis. Kat Distor and Sis. Cielo Elipse hosted the online event. Sis. Sophia Guerrero, Church Treasurer, led the opening prayer and declared how great is God's faithfulness especially in this time of pandemic. Word Ministry Head Sis. April Eve (Apple) Guinigundo delivered the welcome remarks. Sis. Apple acknowledged all FOCIM home churches spread across several cities in Metro Manila - Quezon City, Mandaluyong, Manila, Pasig, and Valenzuela. She also greeted fellow FOCIM members from across the globe namely Canada, Dubai, U.S.A, and Japan.

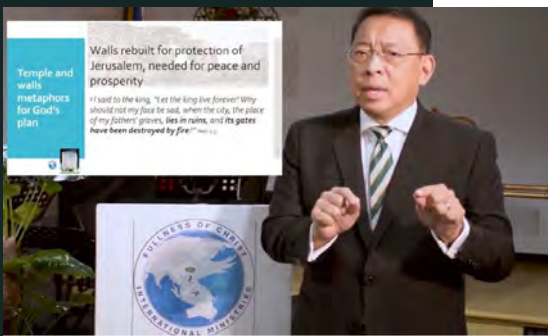


FOCIM worshipped the Lord with the FOCIM Praise and Worship Team leading the whole congregation, lifting up our spirits to the heavens through the songs “See a Victory”, “God is Fighting for Us”, and “Way Maker”. FOCIM showed to the congregation a video presentation on the History and Roots of FOCIM and how the church leadership has evolved. It covered the formation of home churches and significant events / milestones that transpired during the past year such as the Annual Water Baptism and the FOCIM Sanctuary Groundbreaking Ceremony. Another AVP was shown, this time showing God’s faithfulness in the time of pandemic. The AVP exhibited photos of church members’ activities during the lockdown – having Bible study sessions online, organizing group prayer and fellowship via “Zoom” video conferences, and doing “Praise and Worship” in their own homes. Not even the pandemic could stop the Church from praising and glorifying the Lord. The lockdown actually gave more time for God’s people to pray, fast, meditate on His Word, and have fellowship. The Lord’s supper was administered by Bro. Bing Guerrero, head of FOCIM World Ministry. Bro Elso Cabangon prayed for the love offering and offering for the FOCIM Sanctuary.

FOCIM Senior Pastor Bro. Diwa C. Guinigundo, D.D. delivered God’s 34th Anniversary celebratory message. In his message, Bro. Diwa shared the plan of God as revealed in the Scripture – from establishing Israel as a nation through Abraham, Moses’ liberation of Israelites from Egypt, until the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Bro. Diwa exhorted FOCIM that after the first temple was built, what God told Solomon is what we should do for God to heal our nation in this time of pandemic – “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14)”.

The temple was built to renew the covenant of blessings with Solomon and re-establish the Lord’s plan for Israel as a nation of God. Just like Israel, FOCIM has come a long way. Our Church has undergone birthing, learning, and maturing during its 17-year stay in Manila. In the next 17 years that followed upon relocating in Mandaluyong, we went from renting a temporary space to finally finding a permanent place where God can dwell with us and expand His kingdom. Similar to Solomon’s temple being built to fulfill God’s plan for Israel as His nation, FOCIM’s future Sanctuary will be used by the Lord to set us up as a lampstand to the Philippines. We will train young leaders in our new sanctuary. Further, we will stand as gatekeepers and watchmen for the nation as we intensify the study of God’s Word and utilize the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the fullest.





After the Lord's Sanctuary is built, the next task is to expand as we need more men and women of God to evangelize and disciple. Bro. Diwa encouraged FOCIM members to be ready for the next task - to go to the valley and fight the good fight of faith. In closing, the speaker prayed for the coming years as we continue to seek God through prayer. He also prayed for the timely completion of the Lord's Sanctuary that will serve as the place where the sick will be healed and the needy will be comforted.

After the 34th Anniversary Online Worship Service, FOCIM held a fellowship via "Zoom" video conference. Given that it had already been several months that the members have not seen each other due to the lockdown, this was the perfect time to reconnect and have fellowship while celebrating the Church's 34th Anniversary. The "Zoom" fellowship was hosted by Bro. Daniel Guinigundo and Sis. Mariela Reyes. The program started with a quick photoshoot followed by a loud and proud greeting with everyone saying "Happy 34th Anniversary FOCIM!". FOCIM Well Ministry pillar head Bro. Bodge Santos led the opening prayer. To make the fellowship more fun and exciting, a "Bring me" game with a twist and a trivia game was played courtesy of Sis. Michelle Sarmiento, head of Ushers Ministry. Several members then proceeded to share their personal testimonies that included stories on how the Lord protected them and brought healing during this time of pandemic.

Bro. Diwa prayed for those who shared their testimonies. Before concluding the "Zoom" fellowship, Bro. Diwa shared a narrative of God's faithfulness by showing photos of the Project Sanctuary construction timeline - from spying the land, to its procurement, groundbreaking, anointing of the place, and the actual start of construction. Bro. Diwa closed the fellowship in prayer by declaring that after our anniversary celebration, things will change for the better because God's favor has been declared and it shall surely come to pass.

August 30 was indeed a fruitful and victorious day for the people of God. And now we look forward to overcoming the pandemic and being with each other in celebrating our Church's 35th Anniversary in the newly-built Lord's Sanctuary in 2021.



# CASTING THE VISION 2021: TIME TO EXPAND

Bro Diwa C. Guinigundo\*

After we build and complete the physical Sanctuary of the Lord in the hallowed ground in Mandaluyong, and strengthening our spiritual Sanctuary through prayers and meditation and study of God's word, never allowing it to depart from our mouth, the next task for FOCIM is to expand.

What do we expand?

The Lord in Isaiah 54:2 commands us: "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes."

God wants us to prepare for that day when the people of God in FOCIM start to swell in number. FOCIM should stretch out its four walls and raise the Sanctuary from one single floor today to six times over. God wants us not to hold back on the resources that should be made available to ensure we have the space to hold a much bigger congregation. Nothing should be spared; only the best should be used for the work of the ministry. When the people of God give, and work together harder, we are strengthening our stake in the Church. There is no looking back, there is no turning back.

Why else does the Lord want FOCIM to build and expand?

God speaks to us further through Isaiah 54:3 "For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities." God's mandate to us is not just to move out and expand our influence in the affairs of the nation, He also wants us to go out to other nations and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will even inhabit desolate places, valleys of dry bones so that life and hope may be restored.

Therefore, our vision next year is to expand first, the saints of God in FOCIM and second, the kingdom of God by being most relevant in the secular world. We need more men and women who could work side by side with us in evangelism, discipleship and leadership training. We shall be planting churches across the archipelago. Some of our brethren are talking about the last days and the second advent of our Lord Jesus. At this time, we encourage everyone to be prepared because that event is like a thief in the night, unannounced and no one knows the day and the hour. But we have a pressing problem. We are still in this world, and the world is in ruins and confusion. It is imperative for the Church to give clarity to what is happening in the context of God's word. The world needs a lampstand, and FOCIM is that lampstand.

We need to occupy till the Lord comes, expanding His kingdom until all the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of God. That is the duty of the Church. To uphold truth, justice and righteousness—the foundation of God's kingdom.

FOCIM—be ready for the next task. We are about to complete two out of three mandates upon this Church by God. We have completed the Sanctuary. Now is the time to go to the valley and fight the fight of faith. We have just begun.

\* Based on FOCIM's 34th Founding Anniversary Message

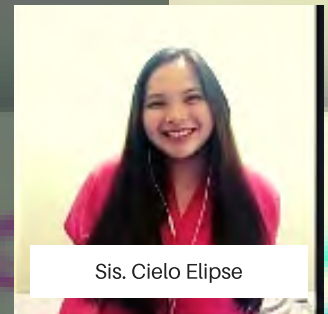
# NO SPIRITUAL DISTANCING

Compiled by Daniel Alberto G. Guinigundo

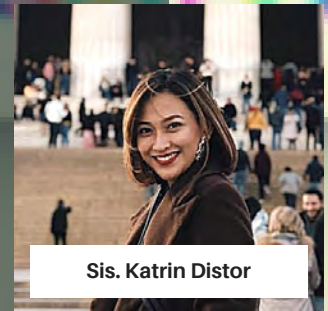
While church congregations were prohibited to avoid propagating corona virus, FOCIM decided to go online during Sunday worship. Home churches meet to celebrate Sunday together in smaller groups in compliance with public health protocols. What happened as a result of COVID-19 was that the one single congregational service was broken into different home churches as FOCIM faced the challenge of the times, adapted to online platforms and sustained its mission to reach out and provide spiritual care. Below gives us some idea on the personal experiences of some members, leaders and members with their own online groups!

"In this time of pandemic, we are more connected with each other with the help of social media. Yet sometimes, I do feel that I am disconnected because of what is happening. (Anxiety, news, COVID-19). But with the online discipleship and prayer meetings, I got the chance to be connected again because of the sharing of God's words and experiences shared by each one of us. I'm so grateful that I have sisters in Christ who encourage me every time that I felt down, and I appreciate it a lot." – **Sis. Cielo Elipse, on discipleship sessions and her online prayer meeting group**

"The season of pandemic has also been a blessing because it allowed us time, which we didn't have during normal times, to spend with God. It has also made dialogue about God a lot easier and more welcoming among friends, especially those from different faith backgrounds and traditions, which used to be awkward before, since these times have made everyone focus and cling to God. Thus, conducting online meetings and discipleship held me grow during the pandemic in the sense that it deepened my knowledge about the Word. I get to read the Bible, discuss it with friends, and learned its practical application in my life." – **Sis. Katrin Distor, on discipleship sessions and leading a new discipleship group with pre-believers**



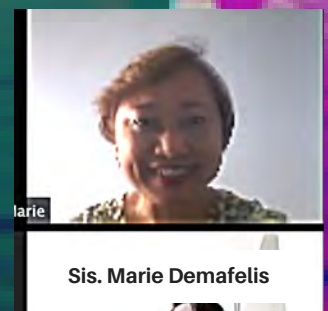
Sis. Cielo Elipse



Sis. Katrin Distor

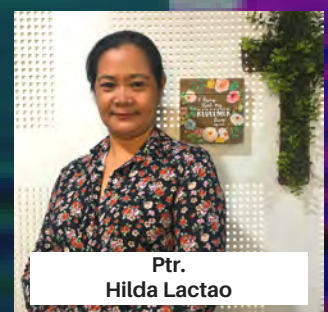


Bro.  
Abraham Guinigundo



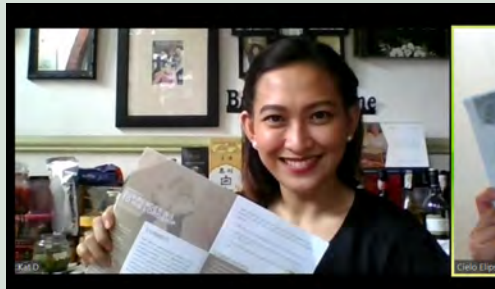
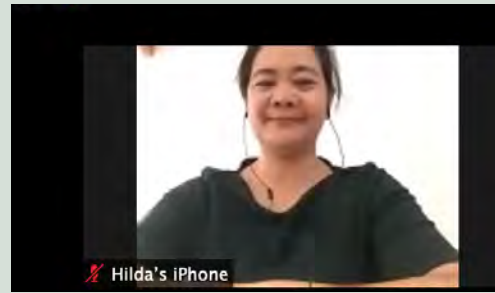
Marie

Sis. Marie Demafelis



Ptr.  
Hilda Lactao





"I am so grateful to God for His Word, for the daily times of Bible study, prayer and fellowship these past six months, and to the leadership of Pastor Diwa who led these times of deeper study of the Word and of prayer in the Ministry Team and in the home church. ***I believe I have grown spiritually and stronger in my faith having a deeper and better appreciation and understanding of the Word as I prepared and studied personally, and then listened and learned together with the Ministry Team and with the home church.*** I felt the study to be richer, deeper and relevant to the times compared with when I studied a few subjects in a graduate seminary many years back!

The daily prayer meetings helped strengthen the practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer and are a living testament to a prayer-answering God.

The fellowship albeit online, during the times of Bible study and prayer, was a real source of encouragement.

***I did not feel bored, idle or unproductive during these past months. There was so much to enjoy, do and learn because God is always present!*** He always assures me He is in control and He is sovereign. To God be all the glory!"- **Sis. Marie Demafelis, on the Ministry Team prayer meetings**

"Doing devotions online helped me grow significantly. ***I think the pandemic helped me realize that finding time for God isn't complicated as long as both of you are willing.*** Video calling has always been around and I think a lot of us haven't gotten to utilizing this technology for devotions until now. My relationship with Sis Erika improved a lot because we were able to inject the Word into our daily video calls until it became our new normal. We were able to finish the Roots Manual and are now delving into the Gospels. Praise God."- **Bro. Abraham Guinigundo, on conducting online devotions**

**"Mostly** spiritual: (1) Growing in Biblical knowledge everyday due to our home church; (2) Spiritual strength because we are in fellowship with our home church brethren; (3) Greater focus on God kahit maraming pinagdaraan; (5) Clearer demonstration of the importance of corporate prayer: daming answered prayers dahil sa sama-samang panalangin; (6) Importance of technology : may bagong natutunan sa bawat araw. Laging may itinuturo ang Diyos; (7) Moving out of our comfort zone: hindi lang yung traditional na pagbabahagi ng salita ng Diyos ang pwedeng gawin. Natutunan ko na mas maraming pwedeng maabot through technology, anytime anywhere."- **Ptr. Hilda Lactao, on conducting online homechurch sessions and attending the Ministry Team devotions.**

# LOVE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19: LETTING IN A THIRD PARTY

By Erika Bianca G. Paras



I had been in a relationship with Bro. Abe Guinigundo for a year when the pandemic started. At the time, a year in, we were happy. We made each other laugh, we found a best friend in each other, and we built dreams together. We enjoyed common interests – spending an inordinate amount of time in coffee shops talking about life, exploring new places and traveling with our family, and discussing current events and sharing our commentaries with each other over fusion food among others. Spiritually, I thought we were doing alright – we prayed together when we had the chance and we would have conversations about God here and there. We had misunderstandings, but they were not that big to tear us apart. We would cool down for a day or two, then we would talk again. Everything was good. I would even say I had nothing else to ask for.

Or so I thought.

When COVID-19 hit both the Philippines and the United States and quarantine protocols were set in place, Abe and I thought it to be a short but much-needed break from the routine of going to law school, attending classes, and preparing for nerve-racking recitations. Initially, we were expecting a couple of days of rest with normalcy impending, waiting just around the corner. But days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months. The number of days in quarantine and the number of infections became indirectly proportional to our happiness and our hope. Suddenly, important events we looked forward to were postponed, birthdays of family and friends were celebrated through Zoom, and Sunday worship and service were carried out in living rooms. The world as we knew it fell apart and we fell apart along with it. We became short-fused and irritable with each other. Our moods were in the extremes. Staying home and doing less suffocated the both of us that we ended up taking it out on each other.





As it turned out, I had nothing else to ask for before the pandemic hit because we were too busy and easily distracted. I was confronted by the fact that we owed much of our happiness to worldly things and experiences.

As quarantine protocols prevented people from going on their weekend dates, messages from friends poured in, asking for advice on how to handle long distance relationships. As you may know, Abe and I were in a long-distance relationship (made even more challenging by a twelve-hour time difference) for a year. I confidently talked to my friends about the power of regular video calls. Little did they know, I felt like an impostor giving advice because though Abe and I had regular video calls, we also heavily suffered because of the circumstances. Video calls helped, but in the grand scheme of things, there was not much it could do about the world's common hopelessness brought about by the pandemic.

Video calls were conversations through tears induced by the situation that seemed to be getting out of hand. The hopelessness of the world had gotten to the both of us. We felt trapped and lonely. The hardships of online learning further weighed us down because our dreams of graduating with honors seemed to be more difficult now more than ever to achieve. We needed to adapt quickly to the drastic shift of our method of learning that the level of comprehension we were used to had been compromised.

Then one day, we arrived at the mutual decision to let go and let God in. We needed God to be the third party in our relationship. In fact, we needed God to be the most important party in our relationship. We acknowledged that our worries, anxiety, and loneliness could no longer be cured by our own efforts. We started planning our schedules around personal quiet time, devotion time together, prayer time, study time, and class time. It was about the same time when Abe's mom, Sis. Apple Guinigundo, lovingly initiated to handhold me in my walk with Christ and for the two of us to have daily devotion every morning. Some weeks later, I also joined online prayer meetings with young women from the church.



Abe and I consciously immersed ourselves more in reading God's Word, in communication with Him, and in conversation about Him. We also found ourselves discovering new worship songs to share with one another, so we received the added blessing of singing about Him together on Zoom. I shared the lessons and insights I learned from my devotions with Sis. Apple and my online prayer meetings, while Abe shared his realizations and reflections from his experiences living abroad and his conversations with his kuya, Bro. Daniel. As we drew near to God, our anxieties melted away despite the worsening state of the world. This calls to mind that time when the disciples were on a boat navigating shaky seas and stormy weather. They woke up Jesus to ask him to save them, to which Jesus responded, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" As Jesus rose, He rebuked the sea and there was great calm. Truly, through this experience of distress, Abe and I learned how to surrender our problems to Him and to be in joyful expectation that He will give us calm according to his will.

Our circumstances did not change.

COVID-19 is still here. In fact, a number of our family and friends were infected. But we had joy in our hearts because amidst this pandemic, there is Someone – One who loves the both of us exceedingly more than we can love each other – who is in control of our lives. Our happiness was no longer dependent on what was happening in the world, but on who our Father was, is, and will be. Moments spent whining and crying were now spent on speaking of our blessings and on planning how to multiply these God-given gifts to share with our brothers and sisters, especially at this time of COVID-19 and to bring back the glory to Him.

And praise God that what used to be dreams of both graduating with honors became a reality, thanks to our renewed faith and confidence in God that redirected our focus on faithfully complying with the task in front of us rather than worrying about the result which, we were reminded, was not in our hands but in God's, according to His will..

As for our relationship, we are still not perfect. We still have the occasional tampuhan and misunderstandings, especially because we spend more time communicating via short and infrequent texts as Abe prepares to take his New York Bar Exam in October. But with God's grace, we are now quicker to resolve issues and to forgive. It is now easier to admit our faults and apologize. It is now easier to move on and focus on the bigger task: to make this horizontal relationship between two children of God be vertically-oriented, doing all things for the sake of our Father in heaven and to use our relationship as a means of worshipping and glorifying Him.

The "good relationship" we had that once revolved around worldly hobbies easily taken away by the pandemic is now a stronger relationship that revolves around glorifying our unchanging God. Our happiness can no longer be taken away by circumstances. Our joy remains because of God who is our reason for being.

Experiencing anxiety and loneliness together made us look up to the One who was only waiting for us, the One Third Party every couple needs. For the blessing of calling us to be a couple united by the goal to praise Him and speak of His goodness every day of our lives, we will always be grateful. For making our love rooted in Christ at a painful time of panic and distress, we give Him back all the glory.







# OF MOUNTAINS AND RICE FIELDS: *A YOUNG WOMAN'S LIFE IN THE VALLEY*

*By Hannah Cecilia L. Cabasag*

## 01 THE JOURNEY

*"In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out;"*

*– Exodus 40:36*

A four-hour flight from Manila to Narita and an hour and a half train ride from Tokyo to Niigata couldn't tire the young lady despite the summer heat. As she patiently waited from her window seat in the bullet train—the Shinkansen, as the locals call it—her heart was pounding fast with both excitement and joy. Just an hour ago, she was melancholic when she parted ways with her husband at the train station. She had so many questions in her head at the moment. Questions in which answers were uncertain for the meantime; she kept a mental list for now. This isn't the first time she would be living away from her family. This particular journey would, however, be long and excruciating.

Suddenly, the train entered a dark and long tunnel interrupting the young lady's speculations. "This must be the iconic tunnel written from a popular Japanese novel," she thought. She closed her eyes, imagining what this journey would be like for the next two years, and shortly after, she felt the light coming in from the window.

When she opened her eyes, she realized that the train had finally made it out of the tunnel. What she saw next was a marvel. She saw vast green farmlands left and right; mountains upon mountains stood, interlocking this foreign land from where she came from. She only managed to count a few houses and small buildings with her fingers. Before coming to Japan, she had already imagined living in the countryside, but she never expected that it would be this private and detached from the hustle and bustle of city life. Amid her confused state, she ignored the 'what-ifs' and looked forward to the end of her journey.

## 02 SNOW COUNTRY

*"It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter."*

– Psalm 74:17

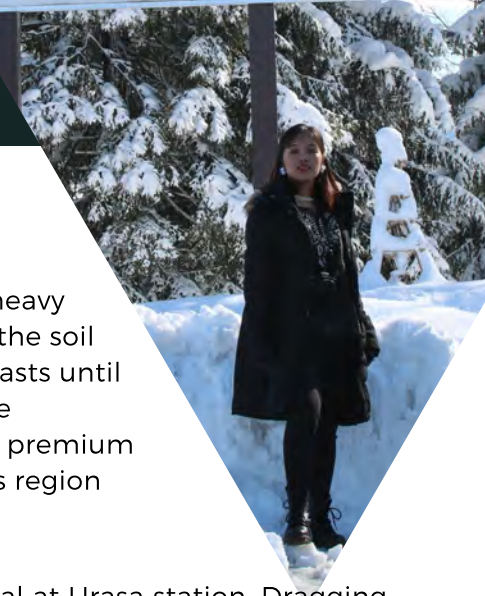
The young woman is headed to Niigata prefecture, an hour away north of Tokyo, lying along the coast facing Japan's Sea. The prefecture is famous for its high-quality rice, beautiful coastal and mountainous sceneries, and heavy snowfall. Niigata also boasts of highly productive agriculture. It is said that the soil in the land is fertile and rich. During the winter, the heavy snowfall, which lasts until May, makes every crop produce from the prefecture exceptionally tasty. The young woman is set to live in Minamiunoma, home to "Koshihikari" Japan's premium rice brand. Her University sits in the center of the valley in the mountainous region of Minamiunoma city.

The train came to a complete stop and the operator announced their arrival at Urasa station. Dragging her luggage in one hand and her phone in another, she felt an overwhelming fear of being lost. She uttered a little prayer, "Lord, there is no turning back. Please help me with what to do next." A man in his forties greeted her and introduced himself as one of her senior "senpai" just as she came out of the ticket gate. The man accompanied her to the bus ride from the station to the University which took less than a minute. She went exactly where the University's arrival kit instructed her to go and there she retired for the day.

For the first few months, she managed to cope with the surroundings, the culture, and the lifestyle differences from her home country with the help of her friends and senpais who kept her company. When she was free during the day, she would enjoy the mountains' beauty and solitude from her dorm room window. The young lady's room was opposite the hill and the University's field, where the tennis court and the barbeque area were located. On a clear day, she could see the passing of the shinkansen trains from afar and the ski resort, which sat on top of the mountain. In the morning, she would sing praises while facing the window, believing that the Lord was just right above the clouds, listening to the joyful noise of her spirit. She had also witnessed different sunsets from her window and the moon's various phases at night.

During the heavy rains, water flowed from the mountain to the plains below, making the riverbank overflow. Meanwhile, in the summer, the high temperature and humidity were quite an ordeal. In autumn, the young lady would wake-up in a colorful splendor and enjoy the chill outdoor atmosphere. However, during the winter, when the nights were long and roads were typically deserted, she would choose to stay indoors. Snow blanketed the mountains and everything was covered in white. She finds herself longing for her family every winter night.

Come spring, the flowers bloomed, the birds began chirping, the roads were again brought back to life, and the people would stay outdoors basking under the sun. One spring morning, while already dressed, she thought of opening her window for the first time after a long winter. She saw the once bare tree, which had to endure the cold winter's freezing temperature, now beaming with full colorful leaves. "So this is how it feels to live in the valley," she thought to herself. Being landlocked by mountains, it would be challenging to escape from enemies. She instantly remembered the psalm of King David, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me." The verse sheds a new understanding to her.





*Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few."*

*– Matthew 9:37*

The young lady woke up to the sound of kids having fun and people chatting. She picked up her phone underneath her pillow to check the time. The clock says 7 in the morning. "It is too early to get up," she murmured to herself. She then tossed and turned and worried about not having enough sleep. Since she arrived in Japan, she had acquired a weird sleeping pattern. She would have difficulty staying asleep. She positioned her pillow over her head to block the outside noise. She counted, - one, two, three, the voices are getting louder now. Four, five, six, she heard a baby crying. Seven, eight, nine. She got up from her bed and opened her curtains to check what was going on.

Outside, people were gathering at the tennis court. Men and women were dressed in long-sleeved garments and long pants. Women, in particular, wore a headscarf covering their hair and face. She noticed shoes lined up outside the court while the men lay down long garments into the ground. She remembered instantly that today was the end of Ramadan. With the absence of a Mosque, the Muslim students and their families chose to offer their prayers outside. As time passed, more and more people gathered in the open field with their families. Since she couldn't fall back asleep, the young lady chose to just watch silently from her dorm room window.

The majority of the student population in her University are Muslims, mostly coming from Central Asia and South Asian countries. Meanwhile, students from Southeast Asia and East Asia are either Buddhist or Hindus. The Philippines, where the young lady came from, is the only Christian country in the Southeast Asian region. Counting all the Christians in her academic institution, it would count as a third or even a quarter of the student population. On top of that, Shinto and Buddhism are two of Japan's major religions, making Christianity around 1 percent of the religion of the entire population.

Fortunately, the young lady was blessed to find a new church family under the care of two churches around the area: the Urasa Christian Church and the newly-founded Elevate Church. She also joined the Christian fellowship group at her University. She made friends with her brethren from America, Mexico, South America, Mongolia, and countries from the Pacific and Africa. The Urasa Christian Church, which frequently picks up students from the dormitories to attend the Sunday service, was headed by the Reverend Isamu Sato and her wife. She would go to this Church and make small talk with the old Pastor's wife. Mrs. Sato was sweet and warm and could speak little English. After every worship service, they would have a small lunch with the Church members, which was not more than ten people. Pastor Sato would sometimes ask the young lady to sing in the middle of a meal, and the young lady would gladly sing her heart out with worship songs in Nihongo and English. The Elevate Church, on the other hand, was ministered by Pastor Devon Glenn and her wife, Mie. They came from the United States to pursue the calling of planting a church in this area, leaving their families, possessions, and business back home. Elevate Church would team-up with Every Nation church from a different prefecture to hold the monthly Worship service and Bible study at the University where the young lady would serve as a worship minister.



Throughout all of this, something bothered the young lady's spirit. Wherever she would go in this foreign land, she would feel some kind of spiritual warfare happening. Japan and its people are bound by their religious rituals and traditions, especially their belief in many deities. There have been too many gods and goddesses in the form of beasts, animals, trees and mountains, human beings, and even natural phenomena. Everywhere she went, there would always be people paying their respect and offering prayers at shrines and temples. Their belief in fortune and luck was also evident. So, whenever she would go on a trip, she would prophesy. She would welcome Jesus and the Holy Spirit into these places and among these people. She would declare that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will be made known to this foreign land, liberating them from the bondage of oppressive beliefs. "Every place where you set your foot will be yours..." she would always recite in her head.



## 04 THE AMBASSADOR

*"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*

– Colossians 3:17

The pleasant smell of the evening air filled her room, bringing her to her bed after a long day. She straightened, stretched and grasped her blanket, which felt comfortable against her skin. She had four academic papers to accomplish and two written exams in a couple of days. Aside from her academic responsibilities, the young lady also had several roles in the University. She was a student council member, club coordinator, community leader, and a committee member to the religious group. As she had trouble sleeping again, she sat at the corner of her bed and picked up her journal to write something significant so she will not forget.

She wrote:

*"I am an ambassador. An Ambassador of Christ, a citizen of Heaven. Worshipper and warrior with the full knowledge of the Lord.*

*I will not let anyone look down on me because I belong to the minority or I am an alien in this land. I believe that wherever my foot sets, I walk with the authority of Christ in me, prophesying to nations that they would see the truth and that they would wake up from their false reverie.*

*Everyday all I can see are the fields surrounding me, but only a few workers are tilling the soil and sowing the seed. There are many souls to harvest and now is not the time to be complacent. Be bold and cast your light to the world so many people will see.*

*Equipped with my spiritual gifts, I declare that I can move the mountains surrounding me. The very mountains which hide all the lost sheep from their true Master, the Shepherd who has been longing for their return.*

*Remind me Father that I carry a full-time job representing Jesus Christ in this world. Allow me to keep my mind fixed on WHO I always represent.*

*Your Loving Daughter,  
Hannah"*

The young lady recognized that she carried a heavy responsibility on her shoulder on top of her other roles. Representing Jesus Christ in a foreign land is a task not meant for the weak at heart. By the time she finished writing, she had finally settled down, knowing that the word of the Lord was revealed to her.







# RESILIENCY, CREATIVITY, AND PASSION: ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE MIDDLE OF A PANDEMIC

By Dan Abraham G. Guinigundo

Nothing more has to be said about the difficulty of living in the middle of a global health crisis. Thousands of lives have been lost and hundreds of thousands of livelihoods have been affected. It is therefore hard to imagine becoming an entrepreneur in the face of shrinking savings and greater economic uncertainty. Nevertheless, the Filipino spirit has proved itself resilient throughout revolutions and natural calamities.

In FOCIM, we have no shortage of members who have taken up the challenge of founding a business despite its known risks. The Menorah interviewed our newly-minted entrepreneurs to find out about the dynamics of their ventures and their mindset going into the marketplace. Read on to get to know them more!

## BELLA Y BLANCA GIFT STUDIO

Resource Person: Sis. Erika Bianca G. Paras

Bella y Blanca Gift Studio was borne out of love.

For the longest time, my mom, Sis. Belle Gonzales, has been taking care of my dad and I. She gave up her own goals and passions because she wanted to be fully committed to raising me and making our home as warm with love as it could be. Now that my father has been called home by our Creator and I have graduated from law school, we decided that it was the perfect time to give my mom an outlet which would allow her to pursue her hobbies while earning some extra cash to help with the bills.

We saw the pandemic changing how people celebrated milestones. Instead of throwing parties and holding huge gatherings, people resorted to sending gifts via same-day couriers. My mom has a knack for anything that involves decorating and curating, so we thought of arranging specially designed gift boxes featuring handpicked items fit for different occasions. I became in charge of social media handling because my mom is not a techie. I also offered suggestions on how to be relevant to the millennial market. Bro. Abe Guinigundo, as a partner who is not only loving but also incredibly supportive, helped me improve our existing ideas.

I have always prayed for God to teach me how to make my mom feel my love even more – how to make her feel that I value her, respect her, and hold her in high regard. God answered my prayers when we came up with the idea of starting a gift studio. Now she has something to call her own, a business where she is the boss, a venture that allows her to use her God-given creativity and talent. Helping her set this up was the best part of this year. I praise God for allowing me to love her in this way. I praise God for allowing my mom to unleash her potential through these boxes that are hopefully a delight to those who receive it.




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### **THE BUTTER BAR**

Resource Person: Bro. Daniel Alberto G. Guinigundo

Actually, The Butter Bar was born in 2014, and it started long before the pandemic and it came about for several reasons— my brother Abe piqued my interest in baking, and being a self-proclaimed foodie, I tried it for myself. Sis. Mariela Reyes, who was also celebrating her birthday at that time, poked at my competitive side and challenged me to come up with the perfect red velvet cupcake. At the same time, I wanted a creative outlet to relax, as this was also the time I was going through a valley experience.



I came up with the business name as butter has and always will be my favorite ingredient — nothing bad comes out by using top quality butter! Just like my favorite baker back then, Christina Tosi, who named her bakery after her favorite ingredient, Milk, I decided to do the same! Hence, The Butter Bar— Good. Better. Butter.

The business began through referrals of friends and family— we did not have a formal website or social media accounts. We supplied souvenirs for weddings and corporate events, parties, baptisms. Eventually, we wanted to offer our baked goods to others and to have a platform to show things we wanted to try and offer as part of our menu— thus, we had to go ride the social media wave and made Instagram and Facebook accounts.



I remember feeling tired but accomplished after my first order. That first sale (and positive review!) felt like my business was sort of affirmed somehow and that the product of my passion had a space in this world to be appreciated by others. My advice to aspiring entrepreneurs is to draw inspiration from the success of others. Do get feedback from others and adjust along the way. Never underestimate the power of Pinterest and Canva; get help from others. My fiancée, Sis Kat Distor, is now part of the business and she is handling our social media pages. Focus on a few products and do them well. Sometimes, all it takes is one product. Your mood will definitely reflect on what you do— I find it difficult to bake when I am tired or frustrated.

### **DCBITES**

Resource Person: Sis. Cielo Elipse

Our name comes from our initials: DJ and Cielo = DC. And because we also believe that the cookies we bake give delight from every “bite,” we call our business “DC Bites.” We decided to start a small business in baking to have an additional source of income, especially for my further studies expenses and for our future home. We chose this line of business because this is what I love doing and I realized that doing what I love while helping us achieve our dreams is the best thing ever! So, I started baking cookies for a living!



Before we set up our small business, we asked for God’s guidance and protection for the success of our business. I also checked if I possessed the necessary baking skills. Then I searched for recipes and made my own tweaks until I got my desired texture and taste. I also researched on many other things: what brand of ingredients to use, suppliers of those ingredients, and even sustainable packaging.



I remember the feeling of making our first sale—it was so overwhelming. We actually didn't expect to receive so many orders because we didn't have a definite marketing strategy at that time. Yet, we knew that it was God's will that boosted our sale the first time we offered it. It continues to be His will up to this day that more and more people are patronizing our products.



With all of this, since I am currently a full-time employee taking up a Master's degree, I find that the most difficult aspect of running a business is time management. With a minimum of 8 to 12 hour-office workday, a 6 unit-subject in a term, running a business is definitely challenging. Thus, my tips for future entrepreneurs is to always do what you love, challenge yourself to learn more, take the risk, and never forget to cling to Him. Always allow God to lead you to the right path.



 **DC Bites**

 **dcbites**

 **09778460817**



## MONEY RULES CLOTHING

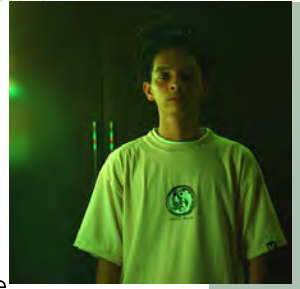
Resource Person: Bro. Joshua Custodio

Ang clothing business namin ay nagsimula dahil sa pagiging fan namin ng hip-hop culture dito sa Pilipinas o maging sa ibang bansa. Pinangalanan naming itong "Money Rules Clothing" dahil sa hilig naming mga kaibigan sa mga kanta tungkol sa "grinding" and "hustling" sa business kaya nag-isip kami ng brand name na ukol dito. Kasama ko sa negosyo ay yung kaibigan ako na nagbalak rin ng ganitong klase ng business, kaklase ko siya nung senior highschool. Pinagmasdan muna naming yung market bago namin pinasok ang clothing line business nung nakaipon na kami ng sapat na pera.

Sa simula, pinag-aralan namin kung papaano nga ba tumagal or makasabay sa ganitong klaseng business at kung medyo nakuha na namin yung tamang formula, doon na namin naisip na pasukin na yung ganitong klase ng negosyo. Tumingin din kami ng idea ng ibang clothing line na pwede naming kunan ng inspirasyon.

Sobrang saya nung una kaming nakabenta lalo na't sarili naming product at brand. Para sa akin, kailangan may laging bago para sa mata ng mga customer, mga ideas, designs, at concept. Kailangan mo laging galingan at lawakan ang imahinasyon kasi marami kang kakumpetensiya.

Consistency lang sa ginagawa dapat and maipapayo ko sa mga gusto mag negosyo. Laging mag-isip ng mga bago sa mata or mag-improve ng quality at dapat din may long-term goals at vision ka, kasi kung wala ka noon hindi mo alam kung saan patutungo yung ginagawa mo. Dapat din mahal mo ang ginagawa mo dahil pag mahal mo ang ginagawa mo, kahit gaano kahirap ang pagdaraan mo lagi kang handang lumaban at matuto dahil ang pagmamahal sa ginagawa mo di ka niyan ililigaw. Dadalhin ka niyan sa kung saan mo gustong makarating at makamit ang pangarap mo.



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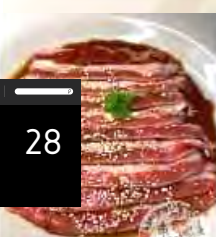
## SAMGYUPSABABEEF

Resource Person: Sis. Nashel Jirah G. Marcelo

I decided to go into this line of business with several partners to help those who crave for Korean barbecue but who can't go out due to the pandemic. Many are heavily into Korean dramas, K-pop and Korean cuisine. I myself am one of the K-bbq fans. The name was motivated by the need to make the business name catchy and with better recall. I believe that it would be patok sa masa, as they say.

Thankfully, my business partners are in the same field as I am and so we didn't have much problems setting it up. We canvassed all equipment like the slicer, stainless tables, and containers. As for the meat, we chose to use only the imported variety for better quality. We also made our own marinated recipes that—products of our combined passion and love for food. I thank God for the power of social media! We didn't have to go out for errands anymore because everything is now available online. I also thank God for colleagues in the food industry who gave us referrals for suppliers. Our business model also accommodates resellers and we deliver around NCR and even some provinces like Bulacan, Pampanga, Baguio, Cavite and as far as Bicol. We tap some exclusive villages and condominiums in NCR for bulk orders.

The most difficult part in starting a business in the middle of a pandemic is the scarcity of key supplies, especially because we import our main ingredients. For future entrepreneurs, my advice is to be prepared to go out of your comfort zone, pray and work hard.



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# ROSITA'S DELI

(FORMERLY ROSITA'S PASALUBONG)

## ROSITA'S DELI

Resource Person: Bro. Sherwin Rex G. Marcelo

Our business, Rosita's Deli, is food distribution. We want to deliver fresh Philippine delicacies to our clients, whether a reseller or retailer without the risk of going out and having to travel to their places of origin. We also started this business to help support local small-scale entrepreneurs and at the same time augment our income. We saw rise in the demand for food due to the pandemic. Food is essential, and as a matter of fact, my partners and I are foodies just like many of us. It was also a blessing because unlike in our other business ventures, here we get to travel to different parts of the Philippines to source our products.

We came up with the name "Rosita's Deli" because of our marketing approach. Rosita actually is the name of the mother of my partner. It's a typical Filipina name and it represents the local industry. As for Deli, it is shortened for Delicacies or "Pasalubong". Deli also brings to mind specialized food. We needed a brand name that is not too long and can easily be remembered and pronounced. In starting our business, we first identified our market and their needs and wants. Then we familiarized ourselves with the product that we were selling. We also determined our competitors. It was also important to setting goals to achieve on a regular basis. In our case, we immediately identified our long-term goal. Based on our current assessment, we are still at 2% of our goal—still a long way to go.



Rosita's Deli



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Our first sale, as I remember it, felt like hitting the Grand Prize in the yearly FOCIM Raffle. No matter the amount and the quantity, we found it to mean that the business was expanding. Of course, business in general has many challenges. At the beginning, we do trial and error. It is a non-stop learning experience. Another challenge is the people, whether client or supplier. People have different character; patience is therefore a must. The product is also another issue. Since we are also dealing with food manufacturers, our products may be considered as raw materials. We have to make sure they are of good quality. Lastly, the logistics. Since all our products are coming from different parts of the Philippines, sometimes delays are unavoidable, and they could affect the quality of some products.



I have a few tips for business-minded people. First, pray about the business and the idea. Ask God for wisdom. It's not about the passion, it's about your purpose. Second, make sure to execute the idea properly. Try to research for your proposed product or service and consumer demand. Target market is also important. As much as possible, simplify and identify your target market so you can focus on how to penetrate it effectively. Third, try to look for a reputable supplier. Tip: it doesn't mean that cheaper is better. Try to haggle and make sure you have a fallback. Fourth, get the right people: only trust those who are physically, mentally and emotionally ready for the job. Lastly, get good packaging. Remember, first impression is pivotal to business success and make sure you sustain it.

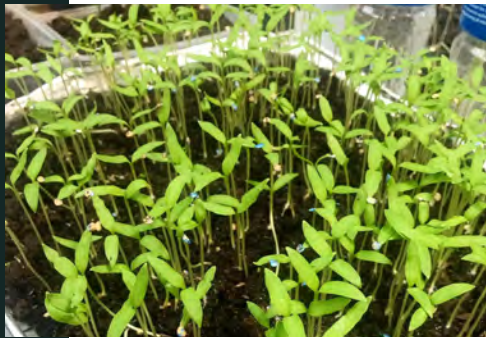




Even before the pandemic, I dreamt of growing my own food. In fact, as we were building our house, I was already planning the places I could use for my little urban farm. I researched, watched videos and joined gardening groups online. Anyone who really knows me would know that when I undertake a project I'm passionate about, I really go the extra mile. But since I was too busy with work, ministry and taking care of my family and our new home, I moved it to the bottom of my to-do list.

A few months since the start of the quarantine, however, we stopped eating at my in-laws' house on weekdays. And as I was preparing our meals at home, I felt the need to start planting more and more. Here are some of the reasons:

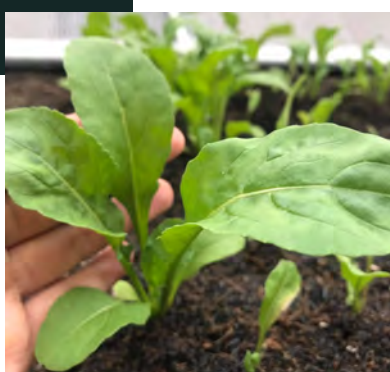
**1** Growing our own food will allow us to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. Vegetables and herbs that we need will be available when we need them and we won't have to rely on what we can buy at the grocery.



**2** I can be assured that no chemicals are used. Plus, vegetables that are picked fresh from the garden taste better and have more nutrients than store-bought ones.

Gardening will give me a fun excuse to go outside for some fresh air and exercise.

**3**



**5** It is better for the environment. We will be able to waste less food and also use the compost as fertilizer for our plants. We can lessen the use of single-use plastics and also contribute to minimizing gas emissions.



**4**

We can save a lot of money.

**6** Planting, caring for and harvesting a garden teaches us to appreciate our food. It can also teach Nate the value and benefits of hard work.



**7**

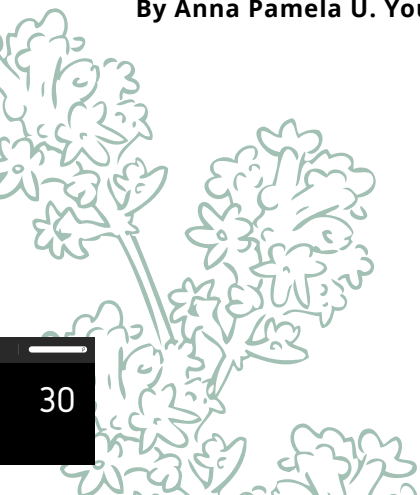
Gardening also brings a sense of joy of fulfillment. Especially at this time when we can't go outside, I can look forward to seeing my plants grow each day.



# TANIM PA MORE

By Anna Pamela U. Young

And so I dove in, and after a month, not only do I have hundreds of vegetable plants growing in my backyard (around 25 types), I also have a business in the works. I truly believe everyone can and should grow their own food, even if it's just one tomato plant. It's amazing how much fun gardening can be. And above all, we get to share the bounty with family and friends.



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