



# Expanding the Kingdom of God



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# EXPANDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AMIDST THE PANDEMIC

As we bid the year 2020 goodbye, we remember the anxiety, uncertainty and disappointments caused by the pandemic. We feel saddened by the cancelled plans, closed establishments, and the need to distance ourselves away from relatives and friends. As we endure the pain of looking back, we are also troubled in planning for our future given that events, celebrations and travel plans are put on hold due to the unpredictable trend in COVID-19 cases.

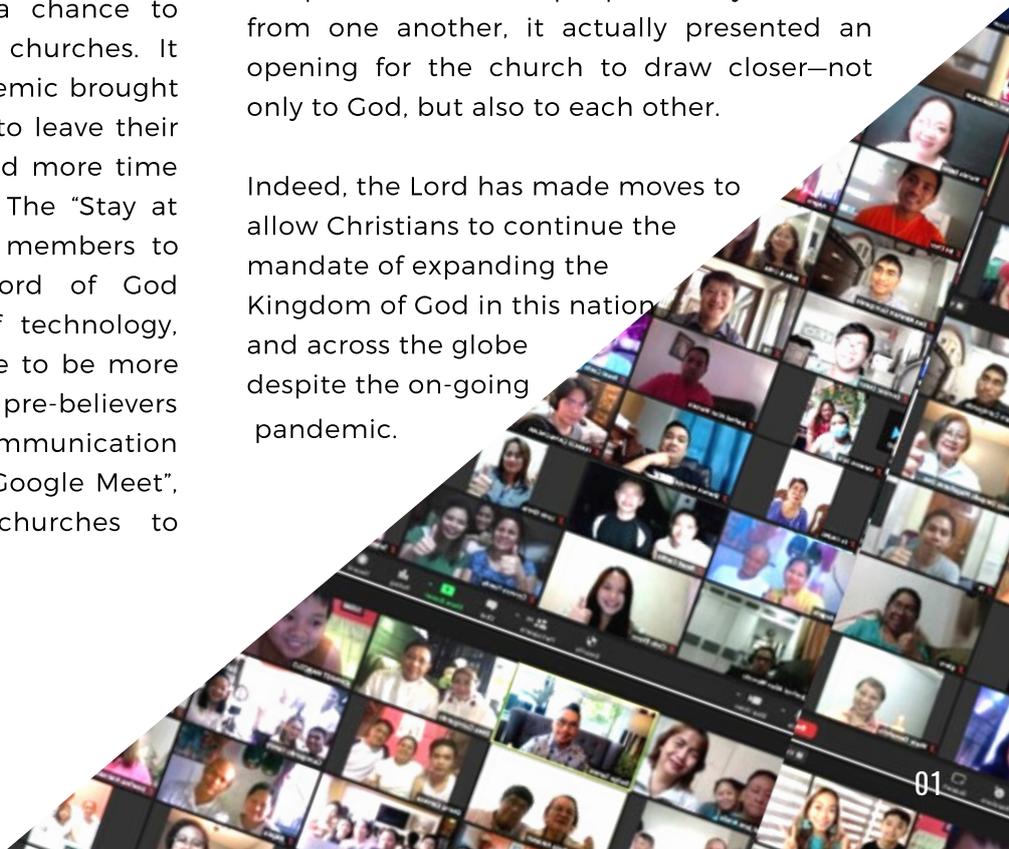
Each time we are reminded of the year 2020, it is difficult to avoid being troubled and frustrated. However, if we take time to truly reflect on the past year having God in mind, we may have overlooked the opportunities and blessings from the Lord. While the pandemic suspended the Church gatherings every Sunday, it provided us a chance to develop and strengthen home churches. It cannot be denied that the pandemic brought sadness by not allowing people to leave their homes, but families suddenly had more time for fellowship than ever before. The “Stay at Home” directive allowed family members to study and reflect on the Word of God together. Through God’s gift of technology, Christians were given the chance to be more resourceful in reaching out to pre-believers through online video communication applications such as “Zoom” or “Google Meet”, which even allowed home churches to expand.

## EDITORIAL

*By Woodrow Wilson C. Young*

In the case of FOCIM, the number of participants during our virtual midnight prayer meeting every Friday steadily increased. The number of viewers from our Online Sunday Service expanded, not just here in the Philippines but from all over the world. FOCIM Home Churches grew as members’ loved ones from afar were able to join via online. Furthermore, our FOCIM ministry leaders and elders started to converge every night for online devotions and prayer to cover each of us with God’s protection. While our FOCIM young professionals began to hold frequent “Online Prayer Meetings” along with online discipleship sessions. Even the Menorah had a far wider reach of readers and followers than ever before, thanks to real-time posting of articles in the FOCIM website and frequent promotions via social media. Ironically, while the pandemic forced people to key distance from one another, it actually presented an opening for the church to draw closer—not only to God, but also to each other.

Indeed, the Lord has made moves to allow Christians to continue the mandate of expanding the Kingdom of God in this nation and across the globe despite the on-going pandemic.





## Building The Temple While Building the Heart: FOCIM Conducts Evangelism to FOCIM Sanctuary Workers

By Woodrow Wilson C. Young



AS WE BUILD the new FOCIM Sanctuary, we are also building the Temple of God in the hearts of our construction workers. Leading this great mandate during the construction of the FOCIM building along Mayon St. is Bro. Angel Dionisio, a longtime member of the FOCIM Ministry Team. Bro. Angel is also the head of the Storehouse Ministry and a member of MCCA (Mandaluyong Christian Churches Association). Through Bro. Angel's passion for evangelism and love for God, he was able to touch and transform the lives of our church construction workers by sharing the Word of God. In this feature article, Bro. Angel shares details of his evangelism sessions with the church construction workers, the power of God's Word in transforming lives for the better, and how we can become better evangelists who can help expand the Kingdom of God:



**When did you start evangelizing our new FOCIM Sanctuary construction workers? How often are the evangelism sessions? How many attendees were there? How long does a session usually last?**

Our evangelism of our new FOCIM Sanctuary construction workers started last September 1, 2020. Sessions were held every Tuesday (7:30 AM) and Sunday (5:00 PM). There are 50 workers in attendance and each session lasts for about 30 minutes.

**How was the first evangelism session? Were the workers excited to hear the Word of God?**

During the very first session, the workers seemed to be surprised and felt a bit uncomfortable with the activity as it was new to them. There was some sort of resistance as they were coming from diverse religious backgrounds (Catholic, INC, Muslim, etc.). Nevertheless, I introduced myself as a servant of God and eventually connected with them. I was able to make them realize the importance of the Word of God and taught them to use it as the perfect guide and true builder of our souls.

**As the evangelism progressed through the next sessions, were the workers more receptive? Did you notice any change in them as they received the Word of God?**

Through proper motivation and respect to their respective religious backgrounds without strongly imposing beliefs, the workers eventually became more receptive especially when they received printed teaching materials that allowed them to review and study what they learned at home. I also observed that the workers truly respected the Word of God. Some of them actually submitted to God's Word as they started to turn away from their vices. Praying became a daily habit for them and they experienced joy in the Lord's presence through worship.

**During the evangelism sessions, was there any personal testimony shared by a worker?**

There were actually three workers (by the name of Danilo, Cocoy, and Jay) who have confided to me that they have quit their vices completely as a sign of conviction. Cocoy's grandmother also received healing from the Lord.

**Once the building of the new Sanctuary is complete, are there any plans for the workers like water baptism or becoming new members of FOCIM?**

Danilo plans to undergo water baptism once our new sanctuary is completed for he has received and accepted the Lord Jesus as his personal savior. We are also hopeful that all 50 workers would accept the Lord Jesus as their personal savior and undergo water baptism and eventually become FOCIM members.

**Aside from the workers of the new FOCIM sanctuary, are there other groups of people that you evangelized even before the pandemic?**

I also did evangelism for 30 policemen under the Moral and Spiritual Recovery Program as EPD Life Coach member for PNP Squadding (Police Community Precint-Mauway Mandaluyong). In addition, I am currently evangelizing two families residing in my residence condominium, the Glennie and Ebcas Family.

**For those who plan on carrying God's mandate and start their own evangelical works involving different groups of people including pre-believers, what advise can you give for them to be effective in expanding the Kingdom of God?**

Evangelism can be likened to an everyday activity like driving a vehicle – knowing the gas and brake pedals are not enough. One needs training and experience to gain expertise and reach the destination safely.

Evangelism is also similar to war as it needs preparation, tools, and weapons to achieve victory. Therefore, one must first study the basic foundation of key concepts such as Salvation and Baptism. Always keep in mind that it was Jesus who initiated this ministry as he started with 12 disciples spreading the Word of God and His love. Today, we have millions who evangelize across the world. Also remember that pre-believers will always look at your life, so it is important to keep our life as a powerful testimony of God's love. To further encourage our readers to evangelize and expand the Kingdom of God, I want to share this powerful verse from 2 Timothy 1:7 "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but give us power, love and self-discipline." Lastly, we must develop friendship and camaraderie first before we are able to connect to pre-believers and establish the Kingdom of God in their hearts.





# STRENGTHENING OUR POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

By Elso U. Cabangon

***“Give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name,  
make known His deeds among the peoples,  
proclaim that His name is exalted.”  
(Isaiah 12:4)***

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, FOCIM under the umbrella of Mandaluyong Christian Churches Assembly had been actively involved in the discipleship campaign for the policemen in Mandaluyong City. The idea of the Body of Christ helping in the reform efforts of the police force dated back to the administration of President Fidel V. Ramos, when he launched the Philippine National Police Moral Recovery Program. It became an intermittent undertaking through the years, and was revived by the PNP leadership two years back. Christian pastors and elders took part as Life Coaches in PNP Squadding, a weekly two-hour session conducted in police precincts. Emphasized in these sessions was the spiritual component in the reform drive, along the overarching theme of “God-centered, Service Oriented and Family Based PNP Personnel”. Bible verses became the bases of discussions on moral and spiritual issues and family values.

Our involvement in PNP Squadding sparked the idea of extending the exercise to a group of (also) uniformed men and women that comprise the Security Force in our condominium community, the California Garden Square in Mandaluyong city with its 8 clusters of 3 buildings each. Before the pandemic restrictions hit the community, we were regularly holding Monday bible study/fellowship session every 6am that lasted an hour or so before the guards proceeded to their respective posts or went home from their night duty. And while in the PNP Squadding, we were rather constrained from actively promoting our Christian Church affiliation (in deference to Catholics and Muslim policemen), no such limitations was imposed by the condo Security

Force. Thus, we were able to pick and discuss certain topics relevant to rules enforcement from the Police Squadding Manual, and at the same time fully make use of our FOCIM Roots Manual.

Jimmy Trijo, an officer in-charge of the Security Force, has been one of the most active in organizing our Bible study sessions. He said he’s happy to have known more deeply the truth in and about Jesus; that such knowledge affected his soul and caused him to love the Lord much more. He took the initiative of organizing a Facebook group chat, where we post Christian topics and where we shared the Sunday online worship services of FOCIM.

Glen Mailwas used to be assigned to our condo cluster more than a dozen years ago as our security guard. He is now the CGS chief security and was mainly instrumental in organizing the participation of his subordinates in our sessions, and their attendance to our FOCIM Sunday Worship Services. When we first talked to Glen about the idea of a group bible study among his security guards, he was clearly enthusiastic. “Gusto rin naming mapalawak ang aming kaalaman tungkol sa Panginoon at mapalapit sa Kanya”. He was not disappointed. “Napakaganda at mapalad kami na makarinig at mapaunawaan ng mga salita ng Diyos, laluna sa katulad namin na halos lahat ng oras ay nagugol sa trabaho, at kung day off naman ay sa pamilya”. Glen saw positive changes in those who were able to attend regularly our activities. “Napansin ko ang pag improve ng pananaw nila sa kanilang sarili at sa kanilang pamiya. Higit sa lahat, napakalaki ng kabutihang ipinapakita nila sa kanilang trabaho”. Glen resides with his family in Trece Martires City in Cavite with wife and three children. He wishes to continue with the Bible study and the fellowship sessions, as soon as the situation permits. God willing, it will happen.



# FOCIM'S OPM FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the need for quarantine and social distancing. Both actually lead to further isolation of people from one another. Due to these restrictions, we felt the need to connect more with other members of our church for support and encouragement. It was during the first lockdown in 2020 when the three of us Sis. Michelle Sarmiento, Sis. Emma Belle Cerveza, and I decided to virtually meet up for a fellowship. At first, what we wanted was just to make wise use of our time since we are just at home. And what better way to make use of our time than to come together and pray.

By Rosalie C. Faune

We felt very moved and blessed after our first virtual fellowship that we thought it would be wonderful to open the fellowship to other young professional women in our church. So from 3, we grew into 13 members (Kat Distor-Guinigundo, Erika Paras, Rhodora Faune, Denise Cerveza, Danika Bello, Cielo Elipse, Hannah Luching-Cabasag, May So-Rodriguez, Jocelyn Gelogo and Jamesha De Guzman). At first when the group began, we didn't have a very clear vision of what direction we wanted to lead the fellowship to, but with every meeting God made our vision clearer as to where we would lead the group. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

God has impressed into our hearts that the Day is drawing near and so we need to rise up and level up our game in sharing the good news of His salvation. The aim of this fellowship is to help equip these young women of our church for this mission, especially now that our church is building a bigger and better sanctuary to win more souls for God's greater glory. The Lord allowed this pandemic to happen for His purpose. We believe that forming this group of professional young women of Fullness of Christ International Ministries in this time of uncertainty is not coincidental.

We consulted with Bro. Daniel Guinigundo and Ptr. Hilda Lactao on how we can better improve our system as an all-female fellowship group of our church. Considering the future when there will be a more sense of normalcy, we decided to set the meeting times to more suitable hours bearing in mind that people will eventually go back to their regular work schedule. We went from meeting almost every day to now meeting once a week on Saturday evenings, also discussing who will be leading during each session.

Since we want to equip everyone in the group, we agreed that all members will be assigned one chapter from the Bible. Sis. Michelle, Sis. Emma Belle, and I study the chapters ahead before assigning them to members of the group making sure that we assigned the right chapter to each member. After learning so much about God and His relationship with us from the book of Genesis, we are now furthering our study on the book of Exodus.

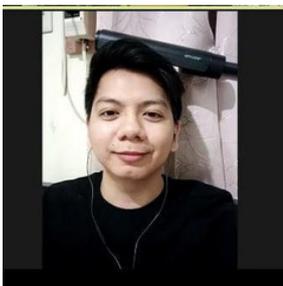
No matter how our sense of normalcy changes, the goal remains the same, which is to lead people to Christ alongside discipling fellow believers to be more Christ-like. I have found our OPM, Online Prayer Meetings to be a setting for biblical community and a devoted time to study the Word of God.



# IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON

By Daniel Alberto G. Guinigundo

## THE CHALLENGES OF ONLINE DISCIPLESHIP AND KEYS TO BETTER DISCIPLESHIP SESSIONS



As a seminary student and aspiring pastoral counselor, I admittedly struggle with trying to balance all these needs. To take part in the church's vision to disciple men and women, but at the same time, meeting my needs and attending to both my physical, spiritual, and mental health. While each experience is unique, there are three things that have been crucial in my journey as a discipler and counselor—tips that I realize have been helpful during the pandemic, and for sure, even beyond this time.

The onset of pandemic not only brought challenges to the medical and economic communities—it has also caused several activities to come to a halt, one of which was the face to face church gatherings and activities. One such activity that has proven to be a challenge is the conduct of discipleship sessions. Without doubt, the implications of this pandemic has changed the way discipleships are done. For one, disciplers and counselors must learn to navigate and maximize the use of technology. In a season where physical distancing is not only recommended, but also mandated, we should find creative ways to maintain our connection with our disciples and discipleship groups or home churches.

What seemed to be a month-long lockdown has turned into a year-long struggle with the virus. While vaccinations are starting to roll out, our return to normal does not seem to be any nearer. Despite this, the church must continue to act. In the midst of uncertainty, it is FOCIM's responsibility to sustain disciplings and providing people with the only certain truth they need—Jesus Christ and His message.

**1. COMMITMENT.** A discipler and counselor's best tool is himself/herself; being committed to become self-aware of our own biases, pre-understandings and misconceptions allow us to be more empathetic and compassionate to our disciples and counsees who probably have a different past or upbringing as us. I have learned that prioritizing myself and putting everything in order before I proceed to any counseling or discipling session allows me to be more present to the disciple or counselee. Disciples and counsees can feel when their discipler or counselor is distracted, which would greatly affect how productive each session will be; worse, the disciple or counselee may even lose faith or trust with the discipler or counselee. Becoming more attentive to myself allows me to resonate more with people, allowing me to share my own stories and reflections. Committing to discipleship or counseling also means preparing well—taking note of the verbal and non-verbal signals by the disciple or counselee, and remembering their individual experiences to help them come up with answers that they seek. Above all, disciplers and counselors, in doing spiritual direction, must be grounded in the Word so as not to distort or misinterpret the Bible's message. In the seminary, we were always reminded that the number one rule must be: "do no harm".

**2. COMMUNICATION.** Disciplers and counselors must be aware that they should be doing more listening than talking—this is key to effective communication during a discipleship or counseling session. We do not insist answers or impose the solutions we found helpful in our problems. Disciplers and counselors are not problem-solvers or messiahs—we are simply guides to point them to the right direction. We should not be too quick to slap our own interpretation of a Bible verse nor should we cherry pick whichever Christian truth we believe would be most applicable to our disciple's or counselee's issue. Communication also involves timing, manner, and even approach. Counsees and potential disciples are very discerning and they can tell on how we interact if we are truly genuine in our approach and in how far we can go to journey with them. Above all, communication takes place even beyond the session—in fact, most communication must be done and maintained outside of the session. Introduce homework, small activities, and even simple questions to answer before the start of each session to allow the disciple or counselee to process and expand his or her thinking. This could also be a way for the relationship to grow.

**3. COMMUNITY.** While discipleship or spiritually directed counseling is content-based, we should also remember that it is also person-based. While being grounded in the Word and in Christ's teaching should be at the forefront of each session, we should always remember to try and point each person to the truth that there is a community ready to accept them and journey with them; as Christ has loved each person regardless of their shortcomings, so too will the church. As a discipler or counselor, it is our task for each person to feel a sense of community and belonging; allow each disciple and counselee to feel comfortable; that each session will be a safe space for them to speak out and express. Before we focus on talking about resolutions, take the opportunity to see the world through their eyes, understand their context, and discover what resources they may have to help them through their issues. Withhold judgment and pay more attention in building a relationship, rather than seeing the discipleship or counseling as a transaction, where the relationship ends once an issue has been resolved.

**“preach the Word, be ready in season and out of season, to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all patience and instruction.”  
(2 Timothy 4:2)**

Lastly, during these hard times, I am all the more reminded of Paul's words in Timothy; notwithstanding the circumstances, and even if we step outside our comfort zone and go beyond our convenience, we must try to “preach the Word, be ready in season and out of season, to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all patience and instruction.”  
(2 Timothy 4:2)



## New York, New York: Conquering the Bar in the Middle of the Pandemic

By Dan Abraham G. Guinigundo

*March 2020.*

*It was the best of times,  
it was the worst of times.*

I was close to finishing my Master's Degree in the US—a dream that I've had since my childhood days. It truly felt like I was at the pinnacle of the work that I had put in since the start of my legal career. I was also set to take the New York Bar in July, a few months after graduation, which would cap off the last leg of my stay in the US. Yet, Charles Dickens's immortal lines in "A Tale of Two Cities" was more relevant than ever. Even as I was celebrating, the world was falling apart. In a matter of days, the world as I knew it disappeared because of COVID-19. Everything from schools, restaurants, and museums closed up. Learning suddenly shifted to virtual and going out had become a matter of necessity rather than leisure.

Soon, it would be announced that graduation would be cancelled and that the NY Bar would be postponed indefinitely. The news was devastating for someone who had looked forward to graduating since day 1 of this academic journey.

June 2020. My stay at the US had finally (and abruptly) come to an end. There was no graduation, no festivities, and worse, no loved ones to celebrate with. My Kuya and I were headed home after three unexpected flight cancellations, which led to around three weeks of sleeping on the floor without furniture and living out of a box of clothes. Still, we were beyond blessed to be flying home, having completed our program and carrying with us beautiful memories of Washington DC. Even if I loved life in the US, I still missed home and the people that made it home.

As for the bar, a few days before flying, miraculously, foreign attorneys were allowed to register after initially being disqualified. This time, the bar was tentatively scheduled to be administered in New York in September. The plan was to fly back home to the Philippines then somehow fly back right before the exam. However, it's been an unpredictable year so far and planning just about anything seemed unrealistic.

August 2020. An announcement came that the Bar would again be postponed to October, but this time, it would be administered remotely.

This posed several challenges for me.

First, we were still in the middle of a pandemic. There was no escaping the fact that the world changed overnight and it seemed that things were getting exponentially worse by the day. No vaccine was yet in the horizon and every day was a mental struggle. Coming from the original July exam date, it was disorienting to prepare for an exam with an end date that kept on changing. With everything up in the air, it was tiring to study with the thought that the exam could be postponed anytime because of the pandemic.



Second, since the test would be fully online, live proctoring was impractical. Thus, bar takers would be recorded for the entire duration of the exam. Any unnecessary movements away from the view of the webcam could mean instant forfeiture or disqualification. This was particularly difficult for me to comprehend as I fidget a lot during exams and sitting up straight without moving too much seemed impossible to do for three or so hours. It also didn't help that there were reports circulating from states other than New York that students were not allowed to take the exam anymore just because of an interruption in their internet connection.

Third, we were advised that the October remote exam would be half the length of the regular, pre-pandemic face-to-face exam. While some people viewed this positively, a vast majority felt that this greatly decreased our margin of error; the less questions asked, the less room there was to make mistakes, and the less chance there would be to redeem your score once mistakes are made.



Lastly, the exam time was based on Eastern Time in the US, which meant that I had to be awake at 12 AM to take the exam until 3:30 AM. This would be for two days straight. By far, this was the biggest challenge for me. Adjusting my body clock to be awake at the designated time was not as easy as, say, pulling an “all-nighter” – something that I had gotten used to in law school. Aside from merely staying up, I had to make sure that that window was when my mind would be at its peak performance and that even with the adrenaline rush after the exam, I would somehow find a way to fall asleep so that I could recharge for day two of the test.

Other than these peripheral issues, there was also the main task of studying 16 different subjects, most of which I would be reading about for the first time during bar review. Each subject was a separate body of law consisting of multiple subtopics and its own sets of rules; to describe the subject matter as voluminous would be an understatement.

August – September 2020. Bar review flew by quicker than expected. My study days were basically the same: wake up at around 10 AM, study for an hour, have lunch, study until 6 PM, have dinner or attend home church until around 8 PM, devotion with Erika until 9 PM or so, study some more until 12 AM, take practice exams until 4 AM, then sleep.

However, studying wasn't the only thing that happened.

By God's grace, I was able to attend Erika's virtual graduation, where she was recognized for finishing with honors. This wouldn't have been possible were it not for the pandemic that forced us to go home. It was a simple ceremony but meaningful nonetheless. To be present with her and the entire family was one of the highlights of my year. As a bonus, I was also able to be with Erika for her birthday. We spent the morning giving out care packages to the less fortunate and we threw her a simple birthday lunch.

My spiritual life also took an unexpected boost during the pandemic. Our home church was able to meet almost every day, unlike before where we would physically meet only once a week. I was also able to do regular devotions with Erika, which led to deeper conversations about our life and how everything was falling into place despite the circumstances in the outside world.

What I was most thankful for were the conversations and moments that would not have happened without the pandemic. The small things, when taken together, truly brought about a change in perspective and appreciation of what was really important and what wasn't.

October 2020. The day has finally come. Because the internet connection at home was intermittent and black outs have become more frequent, I decided to take the exam at a hotel. Kuya would be sleeping in the next room while I take the exam in the living room. The anticipation was nerve-racking. My exam routine was simple: an hour before, I would pray with Erika and my family, and I would listen to “Won’t Stop Now” by Elevation Worship on repeat, which was the same song I would listen to every 12 AM before I would take my practice exams during review. I felt God in the room with me during those quiet moments when I would be awake and the rest of the people in my side of the world would be fast asleep. There was an overwhelming sense of peace, that I was being watched and cared for by the creator of the universe.

In hindsight, taking the exam in the comfort of my home country, surrounded by loved ones, provided the best conditions for me to perform well. If not for the pandemic, I would be taking the exam in New York, with a thousand other hopefuls, in unfamiliar surroundings.

As expected, the exam was tough. At the halfway point, I was just too exhausted to think because I was too preoccupied with sitting still and making sure my eyes were glued to the screen to avoid any impression of misconduct. I got word after the exam that some people were not able to take the exam at all because of technical issues. They would have to take the February 2021 exam. Considering that I was taking the bar from the Philippines—which is notorious for our subpar internet—just to be able to take the exam to its completion was a blessing in itself. It was over before I knew it.

December 2020.

After a long wait and just days before Kuya’s wedding, it was speculated that the results would be released on December 16. The wait was upsetting because there was no notice whatsoever on the exact date of release, only that the results would be released “mid to late December.” In other states, the announcements were released just hours before the exam results were posted. During this time, I simultaneously got moral support and information from an online forum composed of bar takers like from all over the US.

Finally, rumors from a reliable source in New York came in that the results would be released that morning (which meant before the end of the day in Manila). I was floored, and thankfully Erika and I had a regular video call during that time. For fear of an undesirable test result, I was not supposed to inform my family that the results were bound for release literally any minute. Somehow, they wound up finding out online and moments later we were all gathered around my laptop, waiting for the results to drop.

Next thing I knew, an email had arrived from New York, which led me to a download link of a letter from the Board of Law Examiners. After reading the first two lines, my eyes zoomed in on a word resembling “congratulations,” and everything just went blank. I had passed the New York Bar. I cried and I cried. God heard my prayers.





Dear Candidate:

The New York State Board of Law Examiners congratulates you on passing the New York State bar examination held on **October 5-6, 2020**.

Pursuant to § 520.7 of the Rules of the Court of Appeals, the Board of Law Examiners may not certify an applicant to the Supreme Court, Appellate Division until the applicant has (1) passed the New York State bar examination or the UBE in another jurisdiction; (2) timely and successfully completed the New York Law Course; (3) timely passed the New York Law Exam; and (4) timely passed the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam. Additional information regarding these requirements is available on the Board's website at [www.nybarexam.org](http://www.nybarexam.org). The Board is unable to certify you at this time to the Appellate Division because you have not timely taken and passed the New York Law Course, the New York Law Exam and/or the MPRE.

Section 520.12(d)(1) of the Rules of the New York State Court of Appeals for the Admission of Attorneys and Counselors at Law requires you to file the complete Application for Admission to the Bar with the Supreme Court, Appellate Division within three years from the date when you sat for the second day of the bar examination.

Your total score on the New York remote bar exam is **318** and your scaled multiple choice score is **168.9**. This remote bar exam score does not qualify as a UBE Score. The score may be transferred only to remote bar exam jurisdictions that entered into reciprocity agreements with New York. Please consult the Board's homepage at [www.nybarexam.org](http://www.nybarexam.org) for a list of jurisdictions that have agreed to accept the transfer of scores from the remote bar exam administered in October 2020.

Sincerely,

Conclusion. I would be lying if I said that I wasn't disappointed in 2020 just like the rest of the world. After all, I was still human, a person with his own ambitions and expectations of how life should be for me. But, looking back, there were a lot of things that I received in exchange for what I lost. Or thought I had lost. I can't imagine how life would look like if COVID-19 never struck. The progression of my relationships in 2020 largely relied on the conversations I shared with people through and because of the pandemic. Were you to take those away, it would have been an entirely different trajectory of my life, my career, and my relationships.

Truly God's ways are higher than mine. When I thought the world was falling apart, He reminded me that He is the firm foundation. He can still meet our prayers even if the circumstances seem to be against us. He did it for me. He still allowed me to take the exam and pass it even if I didn't see it ever happening. Even in the darkest hour, He stood by me, rescued me, and empowered me.

*I give you glory  
For all you've brought me through  
And now I'm ready  
For whatever you want to do*

*I'm moving forward  
To follow after you  
And now I'm ready  
For whatever you want to do*

*Your presence  
Is an open door  
We want you Lord like never before*

*Your presence  
Is an open door  
So come now Lord, like never before*

*In every season  
Your grace has been enough  
And I'm believing  
The best is yet to come*

*The cross before me  
My hope on things above  
And in you Jesus  
The best is yet to come*

*I know breakthrough is coming  
By faith I see a miracle  
My God made me a promise  
And it won't stop now*

*"Won't Stop Now"*



# *Experiencing God's Favor:* **DANIEL AND KAT'S VICTORIOUS WEDDING IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC**

By Daniel Alberto G. Guingundo  
Katrin Jessica D. Guinigundo

2020 will mostly be remembered as a troubled year due to the Coronavirus pandemic. However, through God's favor, certain members of FOCIM experienced great victory last year. One such victory is the successful wedding of our dear Bro. Daniel and Sis. Kat Guinigundo held last December 20. Through constant prayer and unwavering faith in the Lord, Daniel and Kat received God's favor towards the ultimate celebration of their love despite hindrances caused by the pandemic. In this article, Bro. Daniel and Sis. Kat share the details on how they were able to experience God's favor in having a victorious wedding during this challenging time:

**A number of significant events were cancelled or postponed last year due to the pandemic, what factors did you consider in deciding to still push through with your December 2020 wedding? How did the Lord guide you in making that decision?**

Our first and most crucial consideration was the health and safety of everyone—our family, our guests, and even our suppliers. Thus, we monitored the infected cases daily, including the IATF guidelines on gatherings. We even considered the cases and the travel restrictions of passengers from abroad, as my mother in law would be flying from California and my sister in law is from Denmark.



Along with the health and safety concern came the cost—we had to spend get our family tested in order to spend the night at the hotel. My mother in law and sister in law also had to get themselves swabbed upon arrival, while staying in a quarantine hotel until their results came out. Most of our suppliers also had themselves tested before the event. The health protocols restricted the number of attendees to only 10% of the venue's full capacity. It was this factor that led us to downsize our wedding—from an event of 350, we reduced it to 30 people.

Our second consideration was the date itself—Kat and I went out on our first date exactly two years ago from our wedding date and it was really important for us to be married on that day.

Another consideration was the logistical concerns. We had hotel and even venue changes as close as one month before the event due to the LGU requirements on mass gatherings, which varied per locality and even per location where the event will be held, e.g. different rules if the event will be held in an events space or a hotel. We even had to get clearance from the LGU itself just to hold an event for 5-6 hours.

Thankfully, there was a convergence of favor. Everything seemed to align for us to continue our event on that day, which could only be attributed to God. Kat and I prayed, fasted, and also sought advice not only from our suppliers but from our inner circle who have not ceased praying and declaring favor for the event. Our wedding was also upheld in prayer during the Ministry Team daily prayers and our weekly prayer meetings. Ultimately, it was the words of the Lord in Isaiah that encouraged us to make the decision of pushing through with the event—"I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert."



**Given the unfortunate impact of the pandemic, what major changes were made in terms of planning for your wedding? In what ways did the Lord help you in coming up with those changes in your wedding plans?**

The most crucial change that occurred during the planning was deciding to split our wedding into two events—the intimate ceremony in December and the full reception this April 2021, which we are still deciding on whether to push through, given continuous rise of cases this month.



We wanted to push through with a bigger celebration because our wedding was supposed to be a reunion of sorts— the Guinigundos, my father’s side of the family, from the States were supposed to fly in this December to attend the wedding, and we had not been together for an event since my parents celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary back in 2007.

Given this sudden split, we had to decide how many guests we could accommodate during the intimate ceremony in December. We ultimately had to decide on 30 guests, which is the allowable number of people allowed for mass gatherings in the LGU. While we could have accommodated more by transferring to another LGU, we thought it best to stick with this number, as we did not want to feel stressed with having a large group, due to the significant risk that it poses. While we had covered the safety aspect, we still wanted to have all our loved ones witness our declaration of vows—thus, we had to get a livestream supplier to cover the ceremony.

Given the IATF guidelines and how it changes from time to time, we had to rebook our hotel a month before the wedding as the one we originally chose for preparations canceled our booking as they were unable to receive a DOT certification in order to accept guests for vacation purposes. Worse, we were close to changing venues, from Paranaque to Taguig, as the former LGU had a more stringent requirement in terms of mass gatherings, denying our venue’s request to hold events.

Lastly, cost has always been a factor in our decision. Thus, we had to change our caterer a few months before the event, and we had to negotiate with our different suppliers in order to get the best price possible, which would not skimp on their expertise, and that which would not be too tight on our pockets. Thankfully, they were gracious enough to be flexible in their pricing.

The gamechanger in all these was God. Normally, struggles can be taken as signs to not push through and to give up. In light of all the prayers and the sudden favors in the midst of these setbacks gave us the resolve that the Lord would honor our desire to still have our wedding on the first day we met two years ago. He taught us that nothing is impossible with Him and that He is above any of our worries and our fears about what tomorrow may bring.

**Besides your victorious wedding, what else can you thank the Lord for while looking back to 2020? What do you look forward to this year as a married couple given that 2021 has been declared as the year of completion?**

God really works in mysterious and ironic ways—despite being far apart, we felt closer than before because the lockdown allowed us to have couple’s devotion almost every day. We started in Genesis and we are currently in Esther. God has given us fresh perspectives and insights as we learned about Him together. It was also in the year 2020 that we experienced several milestones as a couple—Kat got promoted to Senior Associate in January, I was able to graduate with double honors and travel home safely last May and June respectively, our families were able to meet and bond for the first time this December, and our family home also began its construction this year.

Moving forward, we know that 2021 will bring forth more manifestations of His power. We are expectant to see our home get completed, my completion of my studies at the Asian Theological Seminary, the bigger wedding in April, and hopefully, a third member of the family soon, God-willing!

**What advice can you give to couples who are planning to have a wedding in the midst of the pandemic?**

**KNOW YOUR PRIORITIES.** Your dream wedding of 300-500 pax may not happen anytime soon. You have to cut corners. There will be times when your expectations do not match reality, especially given the cost, with the limited number of suppliers available, and the health protocols and tests that you have to comply with. Frustration will creep in due to the many requirements and preparations that need to be done given the present pandemic. There will be last minute changes—at the end of the day, however, what matters is that you and your partner will be getting married, with guests or not, with a big wedding cake or not, with a grand reception or not. Never forget that what matters is the both of you and that God be honored in your union.

**IMMERSE IN PRAYER.** Pandemic or not, prayer must always be on top of your list. We are thankful that our church community did not stop in declaring the success of our wedding as early as when the year began. There will be times that worry will creep in, especially with the rising cases and the risk that your event would pose. Counter that feeling with prayer and worship, and allow God to move.

**LEAN ON YOUR SUPPORT GROUP.** Kat and I have always been used to helping rather than being helped—during this time, we learned that we could rely on others as well. We had church members design our logo, choreograph our dance, provide our meals, and even assist family members while having their make-up done. While we did not have an official coordinator, my friends from the seminary gladly pitched in. Our family and best friends were also in charge of the whole program, which made our celebration even more meaningful. We had people to lean on when things were becoming challenging and we held on all their words of encouragement, which helped a lot in calming our nerves and in making sure that everything was prepared for the wedding.



# THE LAMPSTAND IS RISING

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*By Rev. Diwa C. Guinigundo, D D*

The Fullness of Christ International Ministries (FOCIM) started building The Lampstand Sanctuary of the Lord in the middle of the pandemic last year 2020 and is about to finish by the middle of this year 2021.

The whole construction is nothing less than a miracle.

## THE WORD

First, the word was given to FOCIM to “relocate, build and expand more than 20 years ago. At the time, FOCIM was in Manila. Twice, FOCIM relocated to Mandaluyong, first in East Gate Building along EDSA in 2004 and second in PBJ Building along Shaw Boulevard in Mandaluyong in 2008. God moved mightily in FOCIM, empowering the Church to spearhead the “Touching Heaven Changing Earth,” a national transformation movement in 2005 and in the succeeding months and years until 2019 before the pandemic.

Second, the Lord provided great resources for the Church through the successful careers and businesses of His people. In September 2019, FOCIM purchased the 647 square-meter lot along Mayon Street corner Boni Avenue in Mandaluyong. This is about 100 meters northwest of EDSA.



## THE GROUNDBREAKING

The Ministry Team, together with other members of the FOCIM family, broke the ground in the early morning of September 7, 2019.



## CONSTRUCTION GUIDED BY GOD

In the middle of the pandemic, the work on the Ministry started and continued. Every day, FOCIM prayed and interceded for the contractors and their workers as well as the project management team. Arch Bing Guerrero, Engr. Matthew Unite, Engr. JD Dionisio and lately, Arch Roli Pinangat, continue to work hard to provide tight supervision of the project.

Bro Angel Dionisio ministers to the workers by sharing the Word of God every Tuesday morning. The Lord has been good to the Project; no one got sick or hurt during the construction. No accident has been reported.

## PROGRESS HAS BEEN QUICK

The work has been rapid. All the first four out of six floors have been completed. Finishing work has also started on the lower floors. As of the last week of March 2021, construction has started on the fifth floor. The offices and divisions are now being constructed. The slabs have been completed while the I-beams and pillars for the sixth and last floor are now being laid out.

The first four floors as they stand today, with the foundation for the last two floors being prepared for completion.

Below is the vision of FOCIM for the great Sanctuary of the Lord along Mayon Street in Mandaluyong.



# GET TO KNOW FOCIM'S CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR – SIS. MARIE DEMAFELIS

By Woodrow Wilson C. Young

The Church Administrator plays a vital role in ensuring that FOCIM is on track in reaching its ultimate goal as a church. Hence, we need to realize how blessed we are to have a God-loving, determined, hard-working, sincere, and passionate woman as FOCIM's Church Administrator. Let us get to know more about our church administrator, Ms. Maria Tadeo Demafelis or as she is often called, Sis. Marie:



## 1) Prior to being a key member of FOCIM, were you involved in other churches?

Yes, I was involved with other churches prior to joining FOCIM.

## 2) Who invited you to FOCIM? When was the first FOCIM worship service you attended?

Bro. Bing Guerrero invited me to attend the church anniversary in 2016 and then in 2017. Then he invited me to attend the three-day Touching Heaven conference at the Folk Arts Theater in October 2017, which blessed and encouraged me. After that conference, Bro. Bing invited me to attend the Sunday service where Bro. Don Crum was the speaker. He gave a prophetic message about FOCIM, which touched and spoke to me. During the Testimony Time before the service, Bro. Daniel shared his testimony about the Supreme Court case of a student from another religion. I was blessed by his humility and for his act of giving honor to God in his experience. And after that Sunday, I have been attending the Sunday Worship Service along with the Friday Prayer Meetings.

## 3) What was your initial impression of FOCIM?

The Praise and Worship was really Spirit-filled. I found myself crying every time especially during the first few months that I was attending the Sunday service. There are still times, even during the online Sunday service, that I still find myself crying during the Praise and Worship.

The Sunday service speakers study and prepare their messages so they share the Word with confidence and with the power of the Holy Spirit. The testimonies shared during Testimony Time on Sundays and during Prayer Meetings demonstrate and witness to the presence, work,

faithfulness and power of God in the lives of FOCIM leaders and members. The involvement and commitment of young people/young professionals in various ministries i.e. praise and worship, Gen-C, Adult Sunday School, Discipleship manual preparation, dissemination and training, show that there is a next generation of leaders that will continue God's work through FOCIM.

## 4) What made you decide to become a member of FOCIM?

FOCIM is a Christ-centered church. I believe and support its vision, mission, core values and statement of faith. God used FOCIM to minister to me and help me grow in my faith and walk with the Lord. In FOCIM, I have a spiritual family and a home church that pray and care for not only for my spiritual life but for my well-being. I am part of a community of believers where there is fellowship, caring, sharing and growing together in the Word and in the love of the Lord so as to honor Him and be His witnesses to others. I am blessed by the spirituality, servant- leadership and integrity of the leadership under Pastor Diwa and Sis. Apple.

**5) Who encouraged you to assume the Church Administrator role for FOCIM?**

Sis. Apple and Pastor Diwa encouraged me to take on the role of FOCIM's Church Administrator.

**6) What finally made you decide to accept the role of FOCIM Church Administrator?**

I believe that it is a calling from the Lord to serve Him in the church in this capacity at this point in time in my life. And if it is God who calls, it is He who prepares and equips me for the work He has called me to do. I am willing to be of help in whatever way I can, and the encouragement, prayer and support of everyone, especially Sis. Apple, have given me the assurance that I can serve the Lord through this ministry.

**7) When did you become FOCIM's Church Administrator?**

I began my role as FOCIM's Church Administrator in September 2019.

**8) What was your first project as FOCIM's Church Administrator?**

My very first project as FOCIM's Church Administrator was the updating and monitoring of the pledge boxes for the "Project Sanctuary" lot and building fund.

**9) As FOCIM's Church Administrator, what is your vision for FOCIM? What are the future projects that you would like to implement for FOCIM?**

Our vision in FOCIM is to be fully mature, Christ-led followers of God equipped with spiritual gifts that are able to transform and unite lives, communities, and nations.

The year 2021's theme is the Year of Completion. As Pastor Diwa stated in the FOCIM Vision 2020-2040 document, we are about to complete two out of the three mandates ("relocate, build and expand") upon our church from God.

We are completing the Sanctuary this year. We are getting ready to expand, first the saints of God in FOCIM and second, the kingdom of God by taking dominion of the marketplace.

Church Administration shall be a strategic support to those who preach the Word through efficient and effective stewardship of financial, human and technological resources entrusted by God to the church.

**10) Are there any members of the FOCIM Ministry Team that you look up to and would like to emulate? Who among them and why?**

I look up to all the FOCIM Ministry Team members. I am inspired and I thank God for making them models of commitment to God and ministry. They all have their own strengths and gifts that they use to honor God in their lives and ministries. If you would like me to identify specific people, they are as follows:

Sis. Apple - For her love and concern not just as a sister in the Lord but a true sister in the real sense of the word. For her gifts of prophecy, discernment, wisdom and healing that she uses to honor God and bless others. For her strong prayer life, discipleship/ mentoring of people, sensitivity and generosity to everyone.

Bro. Bing - For his faithfulness to God and always giving the glory to God for all the good that he does or is seen in him. For his deep faith in God and strong prayer life, for always being available to listen and pray for others. For his passion to evangelize and disciple others for Christ.

Pastor Diwa - for his deep faith and passion for God, knowledge and practice of the Word of God, strong prayer life, integrity, wisdom and leadership. He is an excellent communicator, verbally and in the written word. He is a gift from God to FOCIM and to our nation - To God be the glory!

For the lighter/ informal questions:

**1) What is your proudest accomplishment?**

Being able to take care of my sick mother till she passed away.

**2) What is your biggest fear?**

Not being able to give my best to what God has called me to be and to do.

**3) What did you want to be when you were a child?**

I wanted to be a good baker of pastries and to have my own pastry shop.

**4) What is your hidden talent?**

Can it remain to be hidden? 😊

**5) What is your favorite hobby?**

Reading and listening to music

**6) If you could choose to do anything for a day? What will it be?**

Listening and singing along to praise and worship songs.

**7) What is your favorite book?**

The Bible

**8) What is your favorite movie?**

Amazing Grace The Movie

**9) What is your favorite song?**

Because You Loved Me by Celine Dion

**10) If you could live anywhere, where would it be?**

I wish to live in Bohol

# WANTED: HOME CHURCH LEADER

## *An Interview with Bro. Milton Amayun*

By Dan Abraham G. Guinigundo

To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Amidst the pandemic, Bro. Milton Amayun was elected as the new leader of the Luke Home Church, a daunting task even for a long-time Christian. In this up close and personal interview, Bro. Milton talks to us about his new role and how his past experiences helped his present assignment, and his vision and plans moving forward.

### **1. Can you tell us about what has been keeping you preoccupied these days? How has life been for you since the beginning of the pandemic?**

The pandemic brought a time of relative quiet to my travel and meeting schedule. Pre-pandemic, I used to be in and out of airports and airplanes almost every week. And there were meetings of all kinds daily. The lockdowns have shifted the travel schedule to a virtual schedule on zoom.

My wife and I left International Care Ministries as President and Medical Director respectively at the end of the year, but I found myself free to do some of the things I love most. I now teach graduate students two nights a week three hours each time at De La Salle University's College of Liberal Arts. I am Board President of Kids Island Philippines, a small ministry to help impoverished children in Pampanga. I am currently Board Secretary of the UN Global Compact Network Philippines, an association of large corporations in the Philippines

that are committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. I mentor young Harvard alumni in the Harvard Alumni for Global Development network. I am an advisor to The Hunger Project, an effort to reduce malnutrition in the Philippines. I am active in the SE Asia Medical Missions Forum. These are all in addition to being in the Luke Home Church. Late at night, I read, play video games or watch a movie on Netflix.



**MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A CALL, YOUR COMPETENCE IS BUILT,  
AND YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO CHALLENGE WHAT IS NOT RIGHT.  
LET US STICK TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY  
AND DO OUR RESPONSIBILITY  
TO CONTINUE THE MISSION THAT CHRIST HAS GIVEN US.**

*Bro. Milton Amayun*



**2. Tell us how you started attending Luke Home Church. What stood out for you from that experience?**

In March 2020, Sis. Raija and I were asked to leave the hotel residence we were living in because it had to temporarily suspend operations. She returned home to the US, but for 70 days before I rejoined her, I was a house guest of Pastors Diwa and Apple Guinigundo, the hosts of the Luke Home Church. So I participated in a daily routine of fasting, prayer, Bible study, exercise, dinner and fellowship. That was how we got grafted to the Luke Home Church.

The experience allowed me significant opportunities to reflect on my eternal values. It re-lit my love for Scripture meditation, allowing the Holy Spirit to renew my mind.

**3. What was your reaction when you were elected as the new Home Church leader?**

I was surprised, of course! But I thank the Lord for the opportunity to serve.

**4. What past experiences or skills do you think prepared you the most for your assignment as the new Luke Home Church leader?**

Wherever we have lived, Sis. Raija and I always associated ourselves with the local church, and where there were none, we assembled our friends and started one. She comes from a Lutheran background, while I was raised a Baptist. We were married in a Christian Missionary Alliance Church in Bangkok. Our first assignment together was Costa Rica, where we joined the Evangelical Methodist Church. Next was Cambodia, where we were part of the church of the then expatriate community in Phnom Penh. At Harvard, we started a weekly Bible study with a few other students and worshipped on Sundays in the Ruggles Baptist Church two blocks from our student housing. After graduation, we were sent to Ethiopia, which was then under Marxist rule. We attended the only church open to expatriates. All other churches in the country worshipped secretly.

From East Africa, we were assigned to the edge of the desert in Senegal, West Africa. We drove 50 miles to the Lutheran Church in St. Louis in the morning and worshipped in the afternoon with the Baptist missionary family in Louga where we lived. From there, we were assigned to World Vision Headquarters just outside Los Angeles. We worshipped in the small century-old church in downtown San Dimas, California. Cotonou, Benin was our last assignment before coming to the Philippines. I started a daily Bible study in my office. On Sunday afternoons, we hosted the English-speaking Evangelical congregation in our living room. But the most significant legacy of our sojourn in Benin was the Bible study group of doctors and pharmacists that we hosted every Friday evening. Before we left Benin, we formed the group into the Association of Christian Physicians and Pharmacists of Benin. The group continues to grow, and has even hosted a Francophone West Africa regional meeting of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association.

**5. Tell us about the first things you did as a Home Church leader?**

The first thing we did was to listen to the members and planned. We fixed the frequency of meetings, rules of engagement and possible topics of interest.

**6. What do you think sets your Home Church apart?**

We have so much talent and mature Christians in the group, including four pastors of FOCIM! We will make good use of their gifts in sharing, fellowship, worship and encouragement.

**7. What are some of the plans you have for the Home Church in the future?**

We will explore issues, share life experiences and learn new songs, skills and spiritual principles. But we will remain faithful to God's Word, making sure it penetrates our lives for service to the Kingdom, to others and to the nation.

# A TESTIMONY OF FINDING COMFORT AND REKINDLING HOPE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

By Benjamin Mina

Introduction (by Bro. Woods Young): Bro. Benjamin is a close friend of mine. Our friendship has spanned more than two decades as we were friends since high school. He has attended a few FOCIM Worship Sunday sessions and was also welcomed by the Luke Home Church. As a friend, I truly admire Benjamin for what he had to go through and the strength he found when he depended on the Lord Jesus Christ. Benjamin's life will always be an inspiration for me as he managed to seek God and found hope when life did not turn out as expected. For me, he is a modern day version of the Bible character "Job". We at the Menorah feel honored and grateful to have Benjamin as a guest writer. In this article, Bro. Benjamin shares his powerful testimony:



It has been 9 years since my brain started bleeding due to a condition called multiple symptomatic cavernous angiomas or cerebral cavernous malformations. The slow pressure and chronic bleeding has been causing numbness and weakness in my body. I have also been suffering from loss of balance, migraine, and seizure disorder. Because of this condition, my life turned full circle. The frequent hospital confinements, bleeding episodes, and seizure attacks with days of paralysis changed every aspect of my life. I've encountered a failed relationship and lost a career that I loved. With my finances consumed by medical bills, I have lost everything. At that moment, I started to lose myself – life became meaningless and found myself living with no purpose. That feeling of nothingness crept up and devoured every inch of hope to be better.

Despite the lingering feeling of emptiness, I prayed unceasingly. And slowly, I became more aware of my relationship with God. I may have been emptied to be filled with renewed faith, rekindled hope, and peace. Through God's grace, I was brought to moments and opportunities that paved the way and allowed me to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I am forever grateful for being invited by Luke Home Church and having Senior Pastor Diwa Guinigundo pray for my healing.



Truth be told, my circumstance in life did not change much after having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. However, I was able to acquire a renewed mindset - one that has brought me so much peace and love. This mindset gave me strength to keep going and live a life for Him. My capabilities may be limited due to my condition, but I am definitely headed in the right direction. I look forward to walk this path and continue to grow in faith for our Lord Jesus Christ. My spiritual journey towards our Lord Jesus Christ will also bring me towards complete healing.

Life throws so many curveballs at us. But I hope no one will ever feel alone dealing with every difficult circumstance. A life that is not difficult - no pain or suffering was never promised. But it is my prayer that everyone is reminded all the time that God never forsakes us. Life is great with Him. I hope that my testimony will inspire others who are in the same situation. Always keep in mind that surrendering one's life to the Lord is the best step towards complete healing. God is good all the time.

# A GUIDE IN CHOOSING THE RIGHT COLLEGE PATH FOR YOU!



*By Jamesha Daphnee J. de Guzman*

The pressure of making a life changing decision at a young age is unimaginable. As you fill out your application forms, you may still be uncertain on which program to take. Hence, you either end up choosing what your peers would take or the usual programs that they say are practical – without having the sufficient information you need. To avoid such circumstances, you must prepare in order to spare yourself the time to figure out what you really want. With that, I prepared a guide that will help you overcome the uncertainty of your college path!

## **1. Assess yourself**

Reflect on your performance in Senior High School (SHS) and Junior High School (JHS).

Ask yourself which subjects you enjoy studying. Through this, you will know your strengths and weaknesses. If you are the type of person who likes adventures, take programs that you find challenging. On the other hand, if you like to widen your knowledge in the field you excel in, I suggest you take programs related to that subject matter. In my case, I thought I would fit best in psychology related programs but my SHS subjects proved me wrong. I discovered that I am far more interested in world history, politics, and governance. Thus, do not take your SHS subjects for granted because it may lead you to the college program you truly desire.

## **2. Take the time to research**

Now that you have your choices, it is wise to know more about your options through rigorously searching for the job opportunities related to the program and which universities offer them. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has accreditation levels per program and per university. These levels indicate that the university has obtained the standard quality as prescribed by CHED. Moreover, universities that are considered as Centers of Excellence (COE) are those who demonstrated a remarkable performance in a certain field of study. Hence, you may want to aim for these universities. For example, universities that are COE in the program Agricultural Engineering are Central Luzon State University, University of the Philippines Los Baños, and Visayas State University. However, schools' reputation or achievements should not be the sole basis of your decision-making. Remember that success is not determined by your university alone but by your work ethics and attitude.

### 3. Step out of your comfort zone

Do not hesitate to choose a different program and university from your peers. The circumstances that feel uncertain, oftentimes, is a place of growth! Moreover, do not be afraid to take any program you are passionate about, regardless if it is under the Bachelor of Arts (AB/BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS). The belief that people taking BS programs are more intelligent than those taking AB/BA programs

is false! God made us unique with different sets of skills, interest, and passion. Therefore, no one is above another because we make society function as a collective. So do not belittle the path that you will be taking because you can significantly contribute to the betterment of the country.

Pre-pandemic college applications require the applicant to take an entrance exam. However, due to the constraints of

the pandemic, several universities including University of the Philippines (UP), Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU), De La Salle University (DLSU), and University of Santo Tomas (UST), have postponed entrance exams. These are some of the schools that now refer to your high school grades, recommendation letters, and other requirements as the basis of your admission. This encourages us to be active in organizations to gain skills and experience. You must also strive to do well in academics as early as JHS to have a higher chance of admission and most importantly, to take advantage of your school tasks as part of the preparation for the tertiary level.



### 4. Make room for God's plan

You may have done all these steps but in the end, God's plan will prevail in your life. While it is good to have a goal, it is best to keep your options open because God can completely change your plans. Constantly pray for guidance as you embark on this journey. Moreover, be assured that He will not leave you astray. Hold on to Jeremiah 29:11 " For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." You will be where God has intended you to be. Oftentimes, it may be the complete opposite of what you expected but remember that God has a plan and purpose for you.

Even if I tell you that it will not always end up the way you planned it to be, you must still exert every effort and do your best in everything that you do, and let God amaze you. The journey I had was not what I expected, but I saw how God worked in my life. I did not get into my dream school but I got admitted to my dream program in a different university. Oftentimes, we are too preoccupied with what we want that we fail to consider what suits us. As I prayed, I asked God to give me the strength to accept whatever will happen but afterwards, I would incessantly ask Him to give me what I want. By God's grace, I am currently in my 1st year in college taking up AB International Studies Major in European Studies in De La Salle University. As a loving Father, God did not give me what I wanted, instead He gave me what I needed. Keep in mind that God's redirection will lead you to your destination. If He can do it to me, He can surely do it to you too. You will get there, just keep persevering and praying.



# LEGALLY EASY: WHO SAYS WE CAN'T GO TO COURT WITHOUT LAWYERS?

(Enforcing money claims  
through small claims action)



Many of the cases pending before the Philippine courts involve money claims; and I am sure that many of us still have unsettled claims, which we opt to no longer pursue as to do so could entail more expense, e.g., attorney's fees, cost of litigation, time, effort, and unnecessary stress, than benefit, especially when the amount being claimed is of small value. The good news is, the Supreme Court has provided us with a way under A.M. No. 08-8-7-SC, otherwise known as The Revised Rules of Procedure for Small Claims Cases, ("Rules") on how we can conveniently, speedily, and inexpensively claim (for payment or reimbursement of) a sum of money without the necessity of engaging the services of a counsel or having to go through the pains of litigation. Here are some of the things that you need to know about filing an action for small claims.

By **Katrin Jessica D. Guinigundo**

## **SCOPE:**

Money claims where the value of the claim (excluding interests and costs) does not exceed Four Hundred Thousand Pesos (P 400,000.00) for actions falling within the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Trial Court (MeTC) (within Metro Manila); and Three Hundred Thousand Pesos (P 300,000.00) for actions falling within the jurisdiction of the Municipal Trial Court in Cities (MTCC), Municipal Trial Court (MTC), and Municipal Circuit Trial Court (MCTC) (outside Metro Manila). [OCA Circular No. 45-2019]

## **APPLICABILITY:**

All actions purely civil in nature where the claim or relief prayed for by the plaintiff is solely for payment or reimbursement of sum of money. The claim or demand may be: (1) For money owed under any of the following: (a) Contract of Lease; (b) Contract of Loan; (c) Contract of Services; 4. Contract of Sale; or (d) Contract of Mortgage; (2) For liquidated damages arising from contracts; and (3) The enforcement of a barangay amicable settlement or an arbitration award involving a money claim covered by this Rule pursuant to Sec. 417 of Republic Act 7160, otherwise known as The Local Government Code of 1991. [Sec. 5 of the Rules]

## **VENUE:**

You may file an action for small claims before the MeTC, or MTCC/MTC/MCTC, whichever is applicable, where the plaintiff (one filing the case) or defendant (the person against whom the case is filed) resides, at the option of the former.

# How to commence:

# 1

## Accomplish

Forms 1-SCC (Statement of Claim) and 1-A-SCC (Certification Against Forum Shopping, Splitting a Single Cause of Action, and Multiplicity of Suits). You may obtain this from the MeTC, or MTCC/MTC/MCTC.

While the Rules states that Form 1-SCC should be accomplished in duplicate, it is still better to accomplish more copies since you will have to provide the Notary Public with a copy.

# 3

## Pay

the docket and other legal fees, unless allowed to litigate as an indigent.

If more than five (5) small claims are filed by one party within the calendar year, regardless of the judicial station, an additional filing fee of 500.00 shall be paid for every claim filed after the fifth (5th) claim, and an additional 100.00 or a total of 600.00 for every claim filed after the tenth (10th) claim, and another 100.00 or a total of 700 for every claim filed after the fifteenth (15th) claim, progressively and cumulatively. [Sec. 10 of the Rules]

# 5

Parties must attend the hearing on the date and time set by the court. Note that lawyers are not allowed to attend on behalf of the parties. [Sec. 19 of the Rules]

What is good about small claims actions is that the hearing is only done in one day. So do not miss your chance to establish your claim!

# 2

## Attach

certified photocopies of the actionable document/s subject of the claim, and affidavits of witnesses and other evidence to support the claim, if any. [Sec. 6 of the Rules]

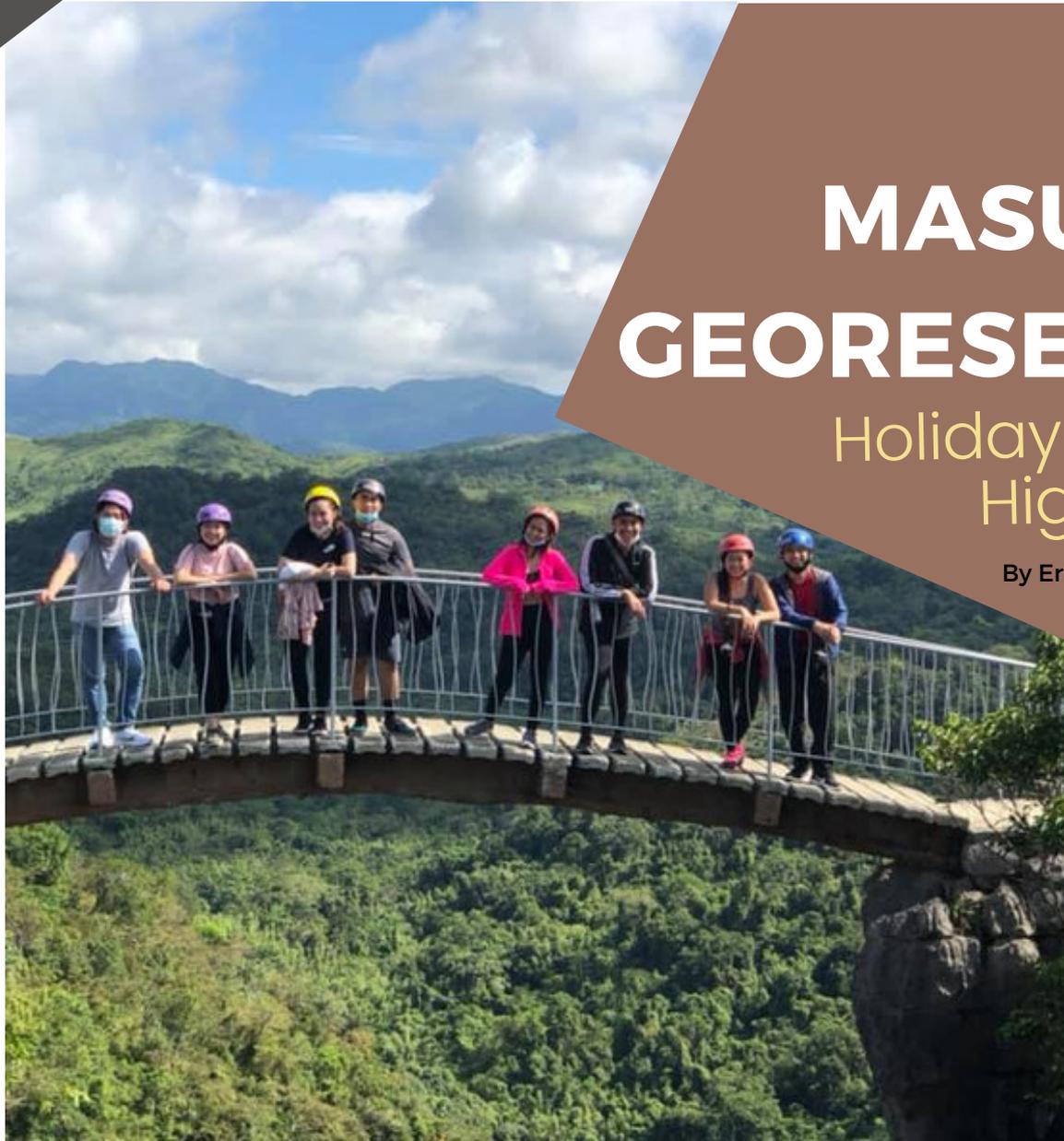
This only means that our claim should be well supported by evidence. Otherwise, the court will not allow the reception of evidence, which was not attached to or submitted together with the Statement of Claim, unless good cause is shown for the admission of additional evidence.

# 4

The court shall issue Form 2-SCC (Summons) on the day of receipt of the Statement of Claim/s, directing the defendant to submit a verified Response within a non-extendible period of ten (10) days from receipt of summons, and Form 4-SCC (Notice of Hearing) to both parties, directing them to appear before it on a specific date and time for hearing. [Sec. 12 of the Rules]

# 6

After the hearing, the court shall render its decision based on the facts established by the evidence (Form 11- SCC), within twenty-four (24) hours from termination of the hearing. [Sec. 24 of the Rules]



# MASUNGI GEORESERVE:

## Holidays in the Highlands

By Erika Bianca G. Paras

Last year's holiday season did not see the travel rush we always expect between the days of Christmas and New Year. On those days, families and barkadas would go out of town, sometimes even out of the country, just to take advantage of school breaks and work leaves to bond and make up for all those times everyone was busy throughout the year. Not to mention, travelling on those days where everyone is still high on the holiday cheer was an over-all fantastic experience; sights are doubly beautiful with all the Christmas decoration and lights.

Unfortunately, due to travel restrictions and difficulty in meeting travel requirements, there had to be a pause in holiday travel culture in 2020. A survey of our Facebook feeds would show that most people decided to stay home and enjoy the extra down time with their families. Some decided to explore accessible destinations nearby just to get that much-needed fresh air.

And that's what we did! I, together with Bro. Abe Guinigundo, Bro. Daniel Guinigundo, Sis. Kat Guinigundo, Bro. Woods Young, Sis. Pam Young, Bro. Chu Unite, and Sis. Mariela Reyes, went to Masungi Georeserve.

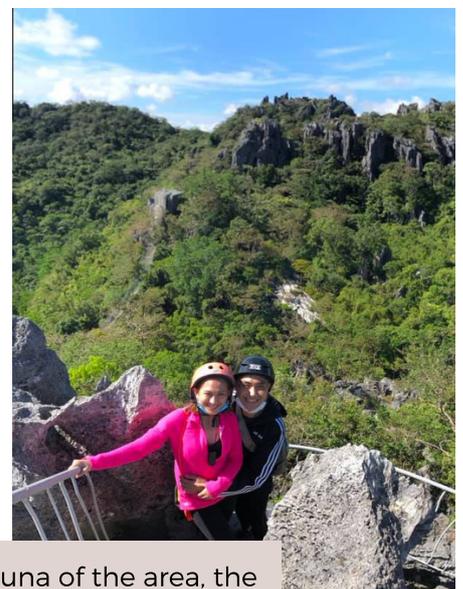
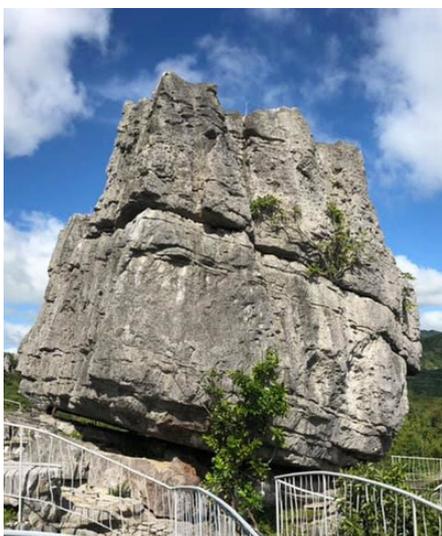
Masungi Georeserve is a wildlife sanctuary and nature conservation park about an hour to an hour and a half drive away from Metro Manila. It features hiking trails, caves, limestone formations and unique viewing platforms where one can enjoy the scenery of the majestic mountains of Rizal and the beautiful Laguna de Bay. Masungi derives its name from the local word *masungki*, meaning spiked, describing the spikey and jagged limestones one can see all around the area.



Visitors can choose from three trails to explore and go through Masungi's vast conservation area. The Discovery Trail features rock and concrete steps, making it a good option for beginners to cover the area. There are still, however, rope courses and hanging bridges here, so going on this trail will take more effort than just walking and hiking. The Legacy Trail offers a peek into the restoration work of the park rangers, giving visitors the opportunity to participate in tree planting and tree nurturing. The trail's terrain is mostly composed of grasslands with trees providing shade. The ascending trail also features rock and concrete steps. Lastly, the Family Trail is characterized by flatter terrains with less inclines and rope courses. The park offers this trail as a shorter and easier version of the Discovery Trail to accommodate a variety of ages.

Silungan, where we were briefed and introduced to the park ranger accompanying us on our adventure. Masungi Georeserve's park rangers are locals from the indigenous Dumagat communities living in nearby barangays. Our park ranger instructed us to put on the freshly disinfected helmets they prepared and reminded us to keep our voices down on the trail so as not to rattle the animals inhabiting the park. Before setting out on the trail, we were informed that there are lockers available here for a minimal fee of P20, so we left our big bags to allow us to move quickly and freely.

Our group took on the challenge of going on the Discovery Trail. We took the 7:30 AM slot, the first one of the day. Upon entry and a short walk inward, our group arrived at the



As we hiked the trail, the park ranger educated us on the flora and fauna of the area, the different rocks and stones we encountered, and the efforts park management is undertaking to conserve and protect these natural treasures.

We met Lambat, a minor rope course early on in the trail. It was fairly easy because it was a short climb up a net of knotted ropes and the members of the group pulled each other up up the elevated terrain.



Upon making it to the elevated terrain, we encountered more rock and concrete blocks and eventually found our way to the Sapot, a spider web-like installation and viewing platform made of thick steel cables suspended above enormous karst formations. It offers views of Laguna de Bay and the Sierra Madre mountains. All of us in the group could not help lying down on this amazing spot to enjoy the fresh air and the spectacular view before us. The sun shone bright on us, and as someone who is not quite fond of intense hot sunny days I expected to be annoyed at the inconvenience, but at that point none of it seemed to matter. I was just happy and in awe. We all were.



We then grappled with walking a shaky, wobbly hanging bridge post-short sunbathing session.

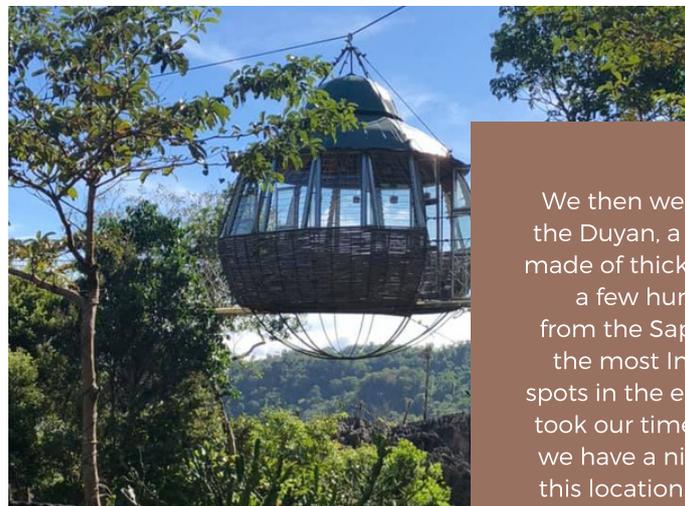


After some time under the heat of the sun, we found ourselves hiking towards a cooler spot. The park ranger led us to Yungib ni Ruben, a cave formation in the limestone landscape. This was discovered by its namesake, one of Masungi's park rangers. Yungib ni Ruben features light installations, a fountain in the middle, and stalactite and stalagmite formations.

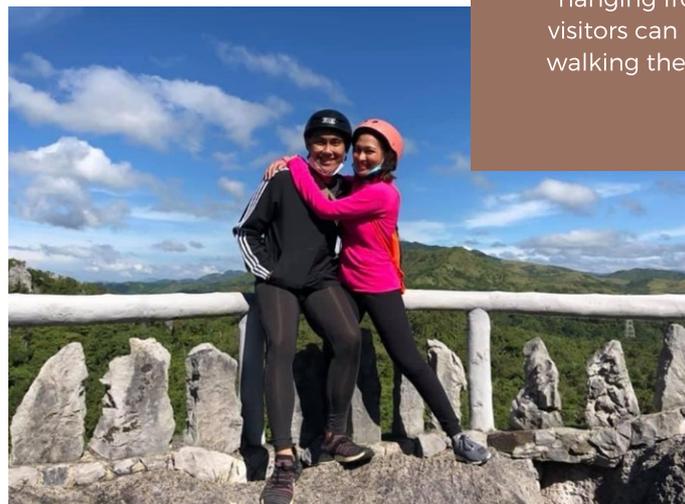


The extreme exhaustion in climbing ropes, finding our way into cave formations, and carefully hiking the rock blocks called for several pit stops for rest, hydration, and photo opportunities.

An interesting rest area worth mentioning is the Patak, a wooden cable car-like shelter in the middle of a hanging bridge. Inside this air house, there are seats designed like swings.



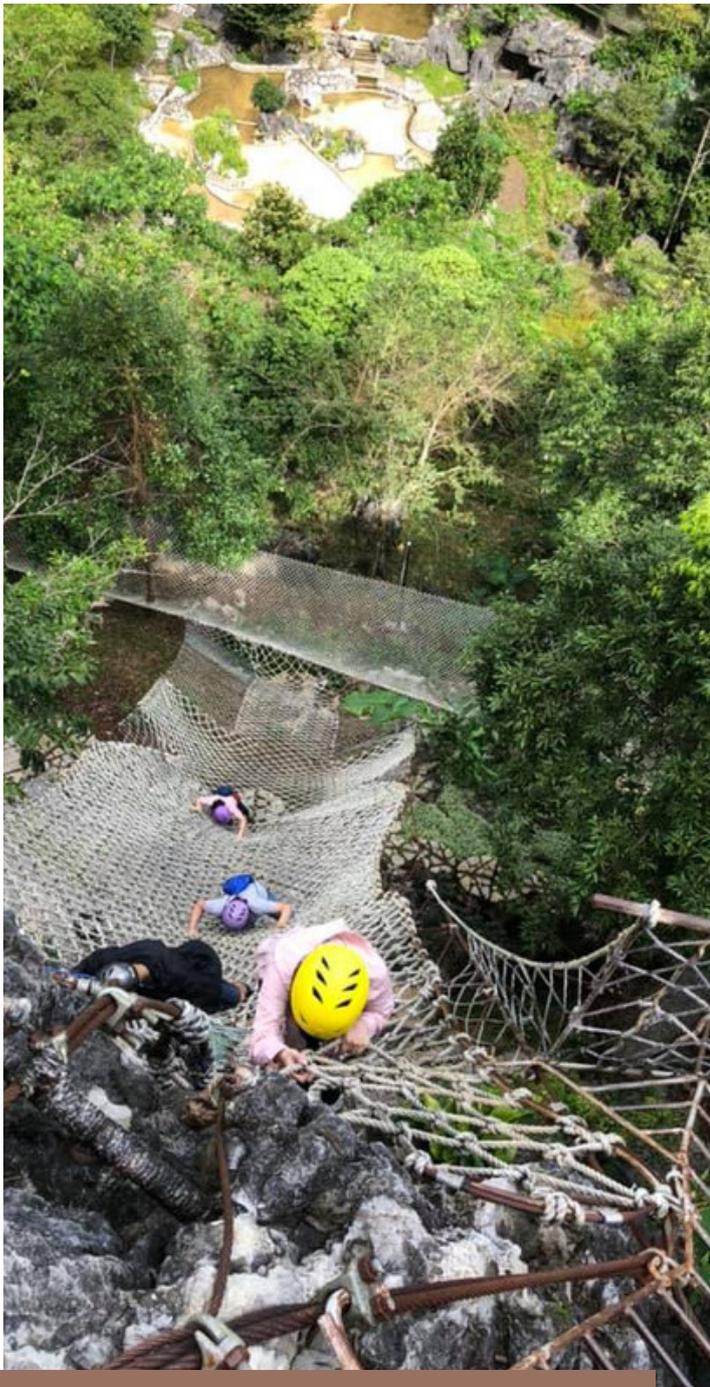
We then went on our way to the Duyan, a giant hammock made of thick ropes spanning a few hundred feet. Aside from the Sapot, this is one of the most Instagram-worthy spots in the entire park, so we took our time in making sure we have a nice group shot in this location. There are ropes hanging from above which visitors can hold on to while walking the Duyan, as it can get shaky.



Besides the challenging rope courses and photogenic installation viewing platforms, Masungi Georeserve also has rock formation peaks, the two tallest ones wonderfully called Tatay and Nanay. Climbing these peaks left us gasping for air, but the view from the top was truly well worth it as one can see entire vastness of the area.

When the park ranger informed us that we were nearing the end of the trail, we were already about four hours in. We all let out a collective sigh of relief. There was also a promise of ice cold calamansi juice and tuna sandwiches waiting for us at the finish line so we all dragged our feet to make it quickly to the end.

Just when we thought it was over, there it was.



## OUR LAST CRAZE

One last climb down. I could have sworn a tear fell from my eye when I saw it. The park ranger told us there was another way down if we wanted to take the easier route, but we all agreed to take this one last rope course to get the full experience.

And here we are on the hammock-like finish point of the last rope course.

The actual end point of the entire trail was a few more minutes of walk away which entailed passing through a

scenic hanging bridge in the shape of a snake thus its name, Sawa.

By the time we arrived at the restaurant area where the fresh calamansi juice and sandwiches were waiting, I felt an overwhelming sense of fulfillment because I could not believe I went through all of that with minimal complaints. I also felt an overwhelming sense of joy because even in the middle of a pandemic, I was able to go through this novel experience with friends who have turned into family.

I highly recommend our able-bodied brothers and sisters to schedule a trip to Masungi Georeserve with family and friends. It will be an experience to remember with fantastic pictures to boot. J

*For more information, please visit <http://masungigeoreserve.com>. This activity is not available for walk-ins, so plan your trip and book ahead.*

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