

Cabrini Companions



The official newsletter of the **Circles of Discernment**

Volume 11 Issue #3

In this Issue, we offer you four stories from the women members of COD namely— Sr. Isalia, Sr. Tatiana who is currently in the Philippines for a 6— month mission, Chee Malonga and Deborah Muenia. Each of them have unique stories and is a source of inspiration to all of us. Their stories are a testimony of God’s love and goodness.

Also we have included new members of our COD family.

Rebecca C. Costales

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Story of a Journey by Sr. Isalia Maria Carvalho, MSC

You did not choose me, no, I chose you;

and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last...

John 15,16

I was born in Portugal, in a small seaside town, Mosteiros, on the island of St. Michael, in the Azores. I spent my childhood and teenage years there with my parents and younger siblings: Jose, Manuela, Emanuel and Isaura. One of my fondest memories was gathering every Sunday afternoon at my maternal grandparent’s house. We would play games with all our cousins and sometimes get in trouble, trespassing in my grandfather’s orchard and making a mess of his new planted seedlings. I have fond memories of picking raspberries with my mother on Sunday afternoon to make our winter preserves.

Most of my early years were spent between school, house chores, and babysitting for my siblings and some younger cousins. On Sunday afternoons, I would go with my friends to

our local beach, but I would always drag a book with me which used to annoy my friends who wanted to play, but I was more fascinated with the



adventures I would find in the books. Most often, I would be found in a secluded place reading good adventure books or mysteries of which I am still very fond. To this day, reading is still one of my favorite hobbies.

After years of struggling, with the loss of many livestock that was my parents livelihood, they decided to immigrate

to the US where my mother had four siblings who were already living there for many years. We arrived on December 13, 1966 and moved to the city of Fall River, Massachusetts, in the East coast of the US. I was eighteen years old.

My years in the US were spent working, and going to evening classes to learn English. It was not until many years later that I pursued a college education at night, while working full-time, and ended up graduating from the University of Massachusetts in 1996 with a Bachelor’s Degree in History.

All this time, I was searching for God’s will in my life. In 1995 I met Fr. Francisco Senra from Evora, Portugal, who was giving a retreat in my home town in Mass. After learning of my desire for religious life, he invited me to come to his parish in Evora and meet the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who were just opening a new mission there. I stayed three weeks with the MSCs and this experience left me with the desire and

Story of a Journey Continued..

the taste for more. Upon my return to the US, I was contacted by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and eventually joined Cabrini Mission Corps from 1997-98 as a lay volunteer. In 1998, I petitioned the MSCs to become a sister but was told that I was already over the age limit. So I took a further step and became a Cabrini Lay Missionary until March of 2003, but the desire to become a vowed MSC never left me. So, when I was missioned to Baguio City from August 2002 to July 2003, I asked again to become a

Cabrini sister. Finally I was accepted as a candidate to the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus! After returning to New York City, I started my Pre-Novitiate Formation, and in June of 2004, left for Rome for our International Novitiate. After two and half years in Rome, I pronounced my first vows on December 22, 2006.

In June 2007, I returned to Baguio where now I am the house coordinator of Casa Cabrini, as well as working with SOSCFI to revive the livelihood programs of the parents of our chil-

dren. I am happy to be back in the Philippines and to be of service in any way possible.

For the future, I hope to continue to be attentive to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit and to answer God’s call with a generous and willing heart. As an MSC, I am called to bring the love of Christ to the world. May His Love shine through my actions and words to those that I encounter in His Name!

Of service and SOSCFI by Deborah Muenia

In Acts 20:35, St. Paul says, "In everything I did, I showed you that with this kind of hard work, we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Two months before the September 2007 Bar Exam, my mind was juggling on whether to work in Manila or here in Baguio City after taking the exam. Then in one of my visits with Sister Patricia Spillane, she asked me, "What are your plans after taking the exam?" I blurted out, "I will volunteer in SOSCFI." And so, as of November 2007, I began my volunteer work with SOSCFI.

Save Our Street Children Foundation, Inc. (SOSCFI) is a non-government organization which col-

laborates with the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (MSCs). It gives educational assistance and scholarship grants to 130 deserving and destitute children of Baguio City and Benguet Province. It also gives social, medical, financial, and legal assistance to its clients and their families. Through its livelihood programs, it seeks to help families become self-sufficient for the growth and development of their children. Likewise, SOSCFI is an active member of different social program networks in the city, province of Benguet and in the Philippines, serving as a partner organization, either as consultant and/or advisory agency.

As a paralegal of the foundation, I

attend meetings, give legal assistance, manage cases and share my knowledge in the Juvenile Justice Network, Anti-Child Abuse Network and Anti-human Trafficking Network, to name a few. Moreover, I extend legal advice to clients and their families. Sometimes I assist them in court. Then and there, I am exposed to the different life stories of children who are in jail (as young as 15 years old); those who are neglected, abused and abandoned children. I try to help spouses and their children who were abandoned by their spouse and/or either parents; teenage mothers; depressed people; and families of salvaged children-victims.

As I spent every minute of my time observing, listening and serving them, my perspective in my life widens. I



Deborah Muenia and one of the mothers at the SOSCFI Center.

Of service and SOSCFI continued..

continue counting my blessings. I aim for higher goals and create plans one after another basing from what I am experiencing.

As part of this social action, I appreciate and value more the people of different status in life, those who belong to the different government agencies, my co-workers, other NGO's, and benefactors (domestic and overseas). I see how those who work together contribute their resources--time, effort, money, skill and talent-- to alleviate the sufferings of the underprivi-

leged. Despite this cruel and complex world, each one is making a difference in the lives of children and their families, imprinting a significant mark in history that is replicable.

I am proud to be with this team. Since I am with them in sharing the burden of the less fortunate, my life journey has become enriching and wonderful. Some think and say, "You're just wasting your time. They are not your blood relative! Forget about them." However for me, this is service. This is the highest purpose of

living. Service is synonymous to giving. Let me quote an inscription in a tombstone found in one of the graveyards in Westminster Abbey, England: "What I gave, I have. What I spent, I had. What I kept, I lost."

God, our loving father, has provided us gifts within and around us. As his children, He gives us the privilege and the gift of wisdom to use. It all depend on us

I saw a small girl on the street, cold and shivering in a thin dress and very evidently hungry. I became angry with God and said, 'Why did you permit this? Why don't you do something about it?'

That night I heard a small voice inside me, and said, 'I did do something about it--I made YOU. What have you done about it?'

Anthony De Mello

News and Notes: three babies added to the COD Family

COD is proud to present the newest members of three of our families:

Johanna Mariam Villaluz, born to Karen and Oscar January 5 and baptized in SLU chapel Feb 9.



Jose Batay-an, born to Gemma Diapason and Frank Joseph Batay-an, baptized in San Jose parish, La Trinidad, Jan 27.



Ryan Christian Cruz, born to Becca and Claud Cruz Jan 16, who will be baptized in SLU Chapel, Easter Sunday, March 23.

Congratulations to all the parents and families for the gift of new life!

Congratulations also to the Arias Family on the marriage of their son Arnold to Marie Lourdes Calera on Saturday Feb 9 in the Cathedral of

Baguio. Blessings on the newly-weds for a happy and holy married life!

Attention! Don't miss the March edition of Misyon Magazine. There is an article about COD by Sr. Patricia, entitled "Wisdom is for Everyone."

From Russia with Love by Sr. Tatiana Avdokushina!

I'm Sr. Tatiana Avdokushina! I was born in Russia 32 years ago in a little city called Prokopievsk, several hundred kilometers from Mongolia and the Chinese border. Prokopievsk is a mining town whose citizens work mainly in the mines or in the factories. It's hard work in a hard climate.

I was born into and grew up in an ordinary Russian family: my mother Elena, my father Viktor, me as the first child and my sister Olga who is two years younger. No one was a hero or saint, but simple people who worked hard. Russian families are smaller than Filipina families, but just like here, the extended family—grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and in-laws—comes together for important occasions such as birthdays, marriages, baptisms, anniversaries—as

well as funerals and anniversaries of departed members.

I lived with my family in Prokopievsk until I was 21 years old. I enjoyed each year the classic four seasons: winter with its ice and snow; spring with the first thaw followed by the springing up of green grass and little flowers; a hot summer and finally, autumn with its brilliant foliage. I attended the Russian version of elementary and high school, and then a college specializing in electrical engineering. When I was 17, I began to attend my parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the same great devotion that is so popular here in the Philippines. Little by little, I became more active in the parish and began to discover my vocation.

The Missionary Sisters of the Sacred

Heart were also in my parish—an MSC and a Cabrini Lay Missionary. That's how I knew about missionary life and began to think seriously of my own consecration to the Lord. My pastor Fr. Yaroslav was a great help to me; even our Bishop Monsignor Werth. I am still in contact with them to this day. As I approached graduation from college, I began to ask myself: *"What does the Lord want of me? What's my path of life?"* So, after my discernment, at the age of 21, I left my land, my city, the close circle of my family and friends—in short, I left my little world!

The last 10 years of my journey have been spent in the various phases of initial formation (aspirancy, postulancy, novitiate and juniorate) with the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in

**A hundred years ago
where now the city lies,
There were pristine hills,
covered with green pines
and brilliant flowers.
Today everything is changed—
so many houses bursting with children.
If they ask me: what is
the most beautiful flower
of the Philippines?
I will answer:
Maybe the arthurium,
or the hibiscus, or rather the
orchid...**

**But no, the most beautiful flowers
in this small and welcoming land
are its sons and daughters
scattered here and there
throughout the world."**

**The children whose every tear is
known by the God
Who reveals himself
in a simple smile—
these are the most beautiful
"flowers of the Philippines"**

- Sr. Tatiana-

From Russia with Love cont'd

Rome, Italy.

For these last four years I have been studying at the Gregorian University in Rome, majoring in Religious Studies and Social Communication. My thesis was on *"The experience of vocation, human and Christian, in the world of film."* While I was attending the university, I was also teaching religion in one of our Cabrini elementary schools in Rome.

I'm still a junior MSC sister, presently in the Philippines for a 6 month period of missionary experience prior to my preparation for final vows. So



**Sr. Tatiana and the kids
at SCSFI**

here I am in Baguio City, ready for new experiences and most of all, to know and love the Filipino people, sharing many things with them: the mission which Jesus has given to the Church, the passionate love of the Heart of Jesus for humanity and our Cabrini Charism, called to be *"bearers of the love of Christ to the world."*

In closing let me express my impressions of the Philippines with a poem:

For God's Glory by Chee Malonga

The past can be a burden to a person who tries earnestly to change her/his bad habits. However, if we constantly **PRAY:**

Put all our trust in God and have patience;

RELEASE all our pride, anger, frustrations, anxieties, fears, malice, greed, desolation, and other negative thoughts that would ultimately lead to dire acts. Thereafter, we lift all of these up to the Lord;

ALWAYS have faith in God. Yearn for good thoughts and always do good

deeds without expecting anything in return.

Yield our lives to YAHWEH, our beloved Father and ask Him to help us always discern which road to take everyday. ...then, and only then can we have peace.

Nothing is ever impossible if we only let the Lord show us the way towards living a better Christian life. I used to say that it was difficult to be **GOOD** and not react towards any stimulus that would usually make me angry. After being detained for almost a year (only for the case to be dismissed), I

learned to curb my feelings, have patience and most of all, I learned to:

"TRUST in the Lord, with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways, acknowledge Him and He shall direct your path." (Proverbs 3: 5-6)

In today's Gospel (February 18, 2008), the Word asks us to be compassionate (Luke 6:36-38).

"Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Par-



For God's Glory.. Continued

don and you shall be pardoned.

Give and it shall be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will pour into the fold of your garment. For the measure you measure will be measured back to you...."

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**www.mothercabrini
.org**



COD Members

Aha, sounds incredible, for a person who has been maligned, holed up in jail for almost a year, lost nearly all my material possessions, my mother died without me at her deathbed, lost all my self-esteem (but with God's grace I am slowly regaining it...), now grappling and trying to start anew. One might think that it is implausible. But, yes, one can be compassionate even if and after all those trials. Why? Because the Lord is compassionate towards me and my family, the Lord loves all of us and sometime in the future (which I hope is soon), the Lord will put me back on track--His track--and He will let me accomplish the mission He has for me in this earth for His greater glory.

Remember, my friends, in the midst of the darkness, there is ALWAYS light, there is ALWAYS GOD. Just **PRAY**.

PATH OF LIFE RETREAT RUN IN LA UNION

On Sunday, February 10, 2008, Ditas Sabado (COD Leadership team) and Grace Degho (who attended the COD Annual Assembly at Jesuit Villa, July 2007) brought the COD "Path of Life" Retreat to La Union, with the help of the Power Power presentations of Sr. Patricia Spillane, given in Baguio, September 2007. Students of St. Louis College (where both Ditas and Grace are teachers) attended the seminar which was held at the Carmelite Monastery in San Fernando, La Union.

This marks the first "export" of COD outside of Baguio, with the help of the leadership team and modern technology. In addition to the presentations, there was a panel

given by Fr. Ronaldo Ruanto, OCD, the novice director of the Carmelite friars and Sr. Mary Elizabeth, OCD a nun at the San Fernando monastery. Fr. Ronaldo talked about his search for God's will in his life and how he discerned his calling and vocation as a priest. Sr. Elizabeth also shared her vocation story.

Here are some insights from the young people: "The talks helped me a lot. They inspired me and I now view life as more meaningful. I appreciate God's love for us. Our journey in life makes me stronger because I sometimes encounter many crossroads in my life. But God is definitely beside me, guiding me and leading to the right path. I realize that as we journey in life, faith, hope and love should also

be our virtues. The seminar was very inspiring and extremely worth it. I am excited for my love for Jesus and I became aware of my prayer life." As another participant summed it up:

"We are called to make a difference!"