



Official Newsletter

The Voice of the Spirit

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RECONSTRUCTING THE IMAGES OF THE FILIPINO POOR:
A PERSONAL REFLECTION

By Rev. Joel Tejado, VLCCM Director

“A Father to the fatherless, a Defender of widows, is God in His holy dwellings. Your people settled in it, and from Your bounty, O God, You provided for the poor.”

Psalm 68:5, 8

Greetings from the Philippines!

It was said that the true demonstration of one’s faith is in visiting and caring for the needs of the orphans and widows. In this simple reflection, I am about to present the different images of poverty in Baguio City and Isabela province. For almost a year while we were studying in Baguio City, I observed various images of the life of the poor. Some of them are the people I closely work with, and others are the everyday faces we see in the streets of Baguio City. In Baguio City, the poor are the less privileged people who do not have access to economic resources.

These are people who do all kinds of things just to survive and try to eat maybe at least once a day. Two children that I see every time I go to the Beckel terminal are Jason and Freddie. Both are minors who are not in school. They tend to work in the evening just to survive. Jason and Freddie are two children who have dreams in life. But they were not given the privilege to study. So they remain as among the millions of youth who are out of school. They are selling “one day old” and “balot” to help their family earn a living.



As one of their customers, I sometimes tease them about how much they earn in the evening. They reply with a smile, “mayroon na rin konti kuya,” (We earn a little bit”). When I first met them, I looked at their eyes and asked myself what they will become after five or ten years. Will they be released from the web of poverty that has entangled them or will they be one of those caught by the police because of illegal activities? Leaving them in the terminal, I would only whisper a prayer that God will help them.

The second group of people I met last March were a group of women in the streets selling vegetables and fruits. These vendors operate illegally in Baguio City. Sometimes they are caught by the policemen for selling their commodities in a place forbidden by the local officer of the market. When I asked them if I could take a picture of them, they were too shy and refused to be photographed. These women were always selling their commodities whenever I passed by after teaching in the afternoons.



I thought they were just residing and living near Baguio. But once when I took a bus, I learned that one of them came from a nearby province. I thought to myself, how come that Manang Facita is selling vegetables here in Baguio City when she could sell it in Binalonan? I learned later that she was more than willing to travel for two hours just to increase her gain by selling vegetables in Baguio City. Manang Pacita would travel back to her village late in the evening. She sacrificed to earn a living. When one passenger asked why she was willing to travel for two hours just to sell her one basket of vegetables, she replied, “I have a daughter studying in college.”

Another group of poor people I met were the children in my home province who were living in hunger and vulnerability. During my vacation, what caught my attention were dozens of children who were walking in the heat of the day without slippers. When I asked my sister about them, I was told that they were orphans and the place where they were residing was owned by the relative of a powerful politician in the city. My sister’s family sacrificed to buy property where these children were playing because the owner of the property had forced the people to vacate his property.

These children were just there playing in the heat of the day without any concern about becoming ill. I was really broken when I saw their condition, so I stayed for two days during Holy Week to sponsor a series of feeding programs. I was actually reminded again of my calling to minister to the children. God saved me so I could invest my life in the welfare of poverty-stricken children.



Today, I am looking for the possibility of building a new church building and a learning center on the property my sister owns. My cousin's wife who is serving as a counsellor in the village called me this past week and expressed her willingness to donate property in the village if I could find someone to sponsor the church and learning center. Will you join me in prayer for the well-being of these children and the necessary provisions?



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