

## The Church in the Philippines

My brother Peter and I were privileged to take two weeks to travel around the Philippines and Singapore. All of it was an experience that we will never be able to forget, and I would love to share some of what we did and learned with you. I hope that as you read this, you will understand not only what life is like in these parts of the world, but also how important a role the people play in the body of Christ and as part of his beautiful church. There is a significant contrast between the Philippines and Singapore, and yet the people share a strong love and zeal for God that brings them together and that goes beyond their contrasting earthly circumstances.

After 23 hours of traveling, going through customs and getting our bags, we were ready to experience the Philippines for the first time. Walking out of the airport, we were struck by the crowd of people trying to find each other, shouting, running to meet family and friends, laughing, singing, and in general, making plenty of noise. Humid heavy air enveloped us, and immediately we began to sweat. We pushed through the crowds and were relieved to see the familiar faces of our aunt and uncle, Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn, who stood tall and blond in a sea of short, dark Filipinos. Once we were out of the airport and on the road, we were struck by the traffic, horns honking, brakes squeaking, people running in between the traffic without getting hit. Motorcycles weaved in and out of the chaos, and it seemed few vehicles paid any attention to the lines on the road, or the traffic lights. We were in some shock. No pictures or videos prepared us for this different culture.

This was not the end of the surprises that would greet our eyes and ears. The day after we arrived, we took a train to Manila, the capital city of the Philippines, and really not too far from where Rev. and Sharon Kleyn live. The population of the greater Manila area is a mere 20 million people, and if you think you can imagine what it is like, you had better try harder. The

poverty of the people was one of the most striking things to us. Many of these 20 million are crammed into tiny little tin and cloth huts that probably measure no more than 12 x 12 square feet and that share walls with neighboring huts. There is no privacy and no quiet spot; children run around in their bare feet, playing with each other and their pets. And the most beautiful thing is that even in their lack of earthly possessions, they wear smiles on their faces and laughter in their eyes.

Sin and the work of Satan was evident in this country, as it is in ours and even in our lives, but in contrast, Christ's beautiful work also takes place in the Philippines. Peter and I spent Sunday in First Reformed Church of Bulacan, a church that shows a great interest in the Reformed teachings of the PRCA, and is working toward joining with the Berean PRC to form a denomination in the Philippines. There are 50 or so members in this group, and they meet in a small building that also serves for a family's home during the week.

Let me describe a chaotic and yet at the same time very peaceful scene for you. Imagine you are sitting in hard plastic chairs, the heat and humidity envelopes you, even though fans blow, trying to cool your sweat-drenched skin. The laughter of three little girls floats in the open window behind you as they play their games in the alley. Roosters crow. Dogs bark and yip at each other. Horns blare. Cars and trucks rumble past, and you hear the voices of people visiting on the streets. But in the midst of all these distractions, you notice that the Filipinos around you are focused very intently and quietly on the minister, who is bringing them God's word. And then you feel guilty for letting these things get in the way of your worship.

That is the kind of place those people have to worship in. No nice church building with air condition and comfy pews, or closed doors and windows to block out the noise. They don't have much, but they are content and thankful. They still can worship God the way that he wants

us to worship him – in love and out of thankfulness. That is the beauty that we experienced in Bulacan that day.

We were also privileged to visit the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines that day. They meet on the third floor of an office building, which serves nicely as a sanctuary and catechism room for them. Rev. Ibe, whom some of you might know from when he and his family lived here, was just recently called and ordained to be pastor there. Before that, Rev. Smit worked mostly with the Bereans, preaching and teaching catechism to them. Now Rev. Smit and his family are free to visit some of the other contacts and churches in the Philippines.

All the people that we met in each of these churches were very friendly and made us feel comfortable, even though we were in a totally different country and culture. The food they fed us was tasty, even if we didn't always know what we were eating! But it wasn't the outward hospitality that we enjoyed the most. These people are united with us in Christ, and his beauty shone brightly through them. We were blessed not only by going to the Philippines, but also by witnessing these people's love for God and devotion to him, even though they have few earthly possessions.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12 we read, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." This passage and many others speak of the diversity of the body, yet the beautiful unity that the members of that body share. We experienced that in so many ways as we got to know the people of the Philippines. Their culture, language, way of life, and skin color, are all so different from ours, yet Christ is their head, as he is ours, and that is the beautiful truth that binds us together in brotherly love.

Our prayer is that through reading this your eyes too may be opened to see the world around you, even if you may never travel out of the United States. God's people are gathered from every nation, tribe, and tongue, and that is something we so easily forget as we live in our close community of Christians and fellow believers. Pray for the people of the Philippines. They covet your prayers as they learn more and more about the Reformed faith. And pray for the missionary families there, that they may continue to wisely and carefully bring these people the truths of God's word.