

## E-BULLETIN #69

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*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

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item 130

### commitment to vowed religious life relevant?



I write these musings from the Philippines. I am in Bacolod on Negros Island, to receive the commitment of our Sister of the Good Samaritan, Germia Tocama, to the Benedictine vows of conversion, stability and obedience for the rest of her life. In religious life we call this commitment the act of perpetual profession, the lifelong choice to live religious life within a particular community.

I ask myself again: What relevance does such a commitment to vowed life have in our twenty-first century world of globalisation, consumerism and secularisation? Isn't the prevailing paradigm one of self-advancement, immediate gratification and attention to the here and now, on what can life give me now?

For many in our world, even in Catholic Philippines, where a recent survey showed that 1 in 11 Catholics is leaving the Church, God is dead – or at least ailing badly – and God is not deemed to be so relevant in the daily activities that fill up the airspace between people. The din of the world around them blocks out any capacity to know God. In my own country of Australia, the faith of many people is sorely tested by the sexual abuse crisis.

My reflected response to this question of relevance is that perhaps such a commitment is more significant than ever before. There is still an underlying yearning in people for an authentic spirituality. On a universal scale this has been evident in the global interest in the election of Pope Francis. The desire for spiritual leadership has been articulated strongly.

On a personal level, as a perpetually professed Sister of the Good Samaritan, Germia is dedicating her life to the ongoing seeking of God, as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. For her, God is not dead. God is indeed alive and active in her life and in the lives of all people. In fact, she sees that God is alive in all of creation. Her daily search for God is evident in the living out of the values found in the Gospel stories. She encounters God in her daily prayer, in *lectio*, the sacred reading of Scripture, in participating in the prayer of the Church – the Work of God – by allowing the psalms, God's poetry, to wash over her morning and evening, every day.

Germia witnesses to the perennial values of life-long *conversion*. It is a journey of spiritual and personal growth. She places her trust in God's forgiveness and compassion so that she can grow more fully as a human person. Her life is a counterbalance to those who believe that one can only achieve happiness by self-assertion and dominance of others.

Her vow of *stability* seems anomalous in a world that is changing by the minute. How can one be stable in such a dynamic universe? Yet, this is not a vow by which one stands still. It invites her to remain in relationship – in relationship with her sisters and her God within this unstable world. She is called to ‘hang in there’ when it would be easier to run away from herself and from others.

And finally, there is that very unfashionable and misunderstood word – *obedience*. In popular parlance, to be obedient is to be weak, incapable of deciding for oneself, to be subservient to another. However, this is far from its true meaning. This vow of obedience invites Geremia to listen – to listen deeply with a unity of heart, mind and spirit. It is to listen wholeheartedly to all of life and to make decisions from a thoughtful and discerned position. Obedience is a counterbalance to individualism. It invites one to decide in collaboration with others for the good of all – for the common good. Such an approach to life requires a depth of maturity and of humility.

This act of perpetual profession is an act of faith, of love and of trust. It is an act which recognises God as the author of life. It is an act which identifies one’s own human strengths and limitations as gift from God. It is an act which affirms God as God. It states that God does matter. It is a ‘yes’ to God with all the inherent risks that life will bring, with all the uncertainties about one’s future. It is an act of courage, because it declares that one can live a life full of meaning and that one can be happy living a life contrary to the prevailing paradigm.



**Clare Condon sgs**  
**Congregational Leader**  
**Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict**  
**16.04.13**

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**Item 131**

## **Filipino overseas workers have to pray in secret**



An estimated 12 million Filipinos are working abroad in over 200 countries

Celeste Macaldo says she's a "devout" Catholic who attended Mass every week until she landed a job as a caregiver in Lebanon five years ago.

"For five years, I remember going to church to attend Mass only five times, and only on Christmas Eve," she told ucanews.com. Many times Muslim friends tried to persuade her to embrace Islam, but she simply asked them to respect her beliefs.

One day, she asked a Catholic priest if she had committed a sin for not attending Mass. "Jesus will understand your situation," the priest told her.

Ronald Telen, who works in Kuwait, says he is "lucky" because he can practice his faith in public. "[Kuwaitis] are more tolerant than other Middle Eastern countries when it comes to other religions," he says, adding that there are three Catholic churches in Kuwait City.

Other Filipino workers in the Middle East are, however, are not as lucky. They have to pray in secret in their homes or workplaces. John Leonard Monterona, from the Migrante group in Saudi Arabia, agrees that it is a challenge for Filipinos, most of whom are Catholic, to practice their faith in Muslim countries.

Official government figures say some 12 million Filipinos work abroad, 1.4 million of them in Saudi Arabia. "We have to adjust a lot," Monterona says, adding that many Filipinos admit they experience a lot of "internal struggle" for failing to practice their religion openly.

He admits that clandestine Masses take place in many parts of Saudi Arabia, but "it's very risky." Christians found attending services outside of embassies or consulates face arrest and severe punishment.

"Distance, the culture of another country, and even religion, cannot however change the Filipino way of life," Monterona says, adding that many Filipino Catholics still manage to be faithful "in thoughts and in deeds, and in silence." Some keep their faith strong through the internet. "Live streaming of Sunday Masses on the web helps a lot," Monterona says.

Monsignor Ben Sabillo of Leyte says online Masses are "better than none at all" although it is not complete because one cannot receive the Eucharist. Others find comfort in reading online prayers or homilies. "Just like other Filipino workers here, I never let Sunday pass without reading the reflections written by Fr Jerry Orbos," Monterona says.

"After reading Fr Orbos, you feel enlightened." Orbos is a Divine Word missionary who publishes his sermons and reflections online from Manila.

During Holy Week, some 250,000 Filipino Catholics, many of whom work abroad, visited the "Visita Iglesia" site of the Catholic bishops' conference. The site featured a virtual tour of churches in the Philippines, and a 360-degree view of at least 44 churches around the country. It has also featured extras such as Lenten catechesis, the Way of the Cross, the traditional reading of the Passion of Jesus Christ and the Lenten message of Pope Francis. Philippine Catholic Church leaders have declared Filipino Catholics abroad as "missionaries of the modern era" and urged them to be witnesses of their faith.

Beleaguered Filipinos abroad, meanwhile, have turned to the Church rather than to Philippine officials for refuge and assistance. Garry Martinez, spokesman for the group Church People and Workers Solidarity, said most Filipino workers in distress would rather seek the help of the Church because they cannot rely on official representatives of the government.

Overseas Filipino workers can be found in at least 214 countries and account for some \$18 billion worth of annual remittances back home.

**Ronald O Reyes – Tacloban City  
International  
08.04.13**

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**you commented...**

**on #68**

Many thanks for your words of wisdom Kevin, it is so important to hear the voice of the Brothers. While your numbers may be decreasing, your role is vital.

**CS 20.05.13**

Hello faather, Its wonderful to have a reflection on the church mission moved by the holy spirit.I can tell you from my own experience as a missionary in the remote areas of india what keeps a missionary going is the holy spirit who is a companion on the jopurney as pope Francis said.After working these 29 years in the mission one realises that god has done the right choice,after all one realises no work is better than to be the bringer of the good news.

**SN 20.05.13**

I am deeply grateful for the reflection of Bro. Kevin Clark on the 'contemplative dimension' of the life of the Pallottines, particularly of our Brothers. In fact, this has been a lingering thought in me as well. St. Vincent Pallotti was one of the great mystics in the Church and we are probably overlooking this dimension in favour of unceasing acitivities. The Brothers in our Society are traditionally considered as the 'St. Josephs', more often engaged in a great variety of manual labours. Bro. Kevin, almost prophetically, speaks about their contemplative mission. This is certainly a new thought and congrats to Kevin!

**JN 20.05.13**

A glorious Pentecost to you, the Pallottines and all

**CT 20.05.13**

Thanks for sending E-BULLETIN. Both the writings are truly inspiring.

**BB 20.05.13**

Being a student of Missiology, it was a pleasant surprise to see an article by Steven Bevens in the SAC ASIA OCEANIA (68).

And as usual his ideas were simply amazing. He concluded thus: "I think we need a spirituality more than a strategy. How we do mission is ultimately more important that what we do." How can we say better than that? Loved the article and congrats to SAC OCEANIA. [SAC student of Missiology in the Pontifical Urban University, Rome]

**MD 21.05.13**

Reflections by Fr. Stephen on mission reflects his own commitment and zeal. It is an impetus to everyone who is actively involved in the mission of Christ.

**LP 19.05.13**