

## OUR MISSION IN THE WORLD ON WORLD MISSION SUNDAY

It had been a long trip flying to Taipei then to Manila and finally to Tacloban, only to do some supply pick up before a long six hour ride to Borongan. While excitement filled our hearts and we took steps into the unknown, unaware of what to expect, we were surrounded by the wonderful Oikos Sisters and their joy. After picking up blue water jugs to be used for water purification we set out, excited and overjoyed. My heart was moved at the joy flowing from the faith of the community that welcomed us, but nothing could have prepared us for what was to take place that night. After the ride and settling into our hotel, the same one the diocese uses for their medical mission trips, we were told we would be picked up in the late afternoon so we could celebrate Mass at the start of our immersion into the Philippine mission experience. It would give us time to meet more of the staff that the Sisters have helping them, as well as the students. It was arranged for me to preside at Eucharist every day while we were there. After a good ride up roads we would never again find, we reached one of the community houses. The Sisters, the children, the house parents and the young volunteers were ready and anxious and so were we. Arriving unknown and without expectations we pulled up a gravel road until it ended. As we opened the doors of the vehicles that transported us, we were greeted with songs of welcome. Every child and volunteer was singing songs of joy as we arrived, which were unexpected and totally uplifting. It moved my heart and the hearts of all our parishioners who made this incredible trip. Their joy radiated through their voices. Their warm embrace surrounded us with a depth of faith. It was not about what we were bringing to them; it was what they were bringing to us. From the porch, walking up the steps to the house where I would celebrate Eucharist for the first time, the environment of joy in the Lord filled us. That is one of those moments that lives on in me forever. I still can't believe we took an adult mission trip to the Philippines.

As I reflect on that opening experience, I am still overwhelmed at times with the emotions of true gratitude to God who allowed me to travel to the other side of the world to receive more than I could ever give. Our mission in this world might not take us to far off places. Our mission in this world just might be about crossing the street to a neighbor or navigating a chasm created by sibling rivalry. What touched me the most about that opening experience was that joy overcame our fatigue that night, joy overcame our concerns about what we were supposed to do next and joy allowed us to let go of our expectations of what the trip should look like as well as all we were supposed to accomplish from our perspective. God had a plan to let us know we would be the ones who would receive a precious gift, faith lived, trust embraced with living witnesses to show the way.

This weekend we are called to create that kind of environment. Faith is to be lived, trust in God is to be embraced, and we are to be the living witnesses to it all. We do not have to buy a plane ticket to be a missionary. We just need to be willing to follow the Lord.



Father John Ouper