

## **Growing churches in the Philippines**

**Peter Taylor**

After 12 years absence from the Philippines Val and I were delighted to touch down at Manila Airport. Immediately on landing there was a big cheer and vigorous clapping from the Filipinos on board, who made up 90% of the passengers! Where else could we be but the Philippines!

We were met by Mike and Betty Harrison (former co-workers) who drove us through the chaos of Manila traffic to their home. Traffic was worse than we remembered and the Light Rail Transit now towered over us from the middle reservation of EDSA Highway (a multi-lane highway that connects the North and South of Manila). New flyovers made intersections better but we felt closed in by a lot of concrete.

Next morning we took the aircon bus to Batangas Pier (2½ hrs) where we caught the Supercat ferry to Calapan, Mindoro. The well disciplined crew took us by surprise and the 45min trip was far more relaxed than previous trips on the old ferry boats. On the bus we had listened to a Filipino preach the Gospel before getting off and on the Supercat we were led in a prayer for a safe voyage through the video system. Religion is very much an open subject in the Philippines!

Our main purpose in Mindoro was to visit the Chang family, former members of our church in Legaspi City who had moved to Pinamalayan (a large provincial town). The 3 brothers (now married with their own families) are leaders in local churches. The 3 sisters (also married and with children) take an active part in church life. We were able to visit the Mindoro Bible College and meet the staff there. It is an excellent facility with it's own hostels, library and farm to support the work. Sadly, it was not operating at full capacity, there being only a dozen students.

Back to Manila to catch the aircon bus overnight to Tabaco City in the Bicol Region of Luzon Island. After a 12hr journey we arrived in Tabaco at 5.30am Sunday morning where we were met by two young men (YP in our day!). After breakfast and a rest we attended the service of Word of Life Christian Ministries where we were warmly greeted. Our old friends looked just the same but their children had grown! Many of them were involved in music ministry. Former YP were now on the Leadership Team together with other of the earlier leaders (mostly professional). The church is planning for a P1m (£10,000) Church Centre with a vision for outreach to surrounding towns and islands and becoming a resource and training centre. Such is their faith in the God who provides.

We spent several days visiting friends and workers in the District. We discovered a number of pastoral issues that need ongoing prayer. On the positive side we had left Bicol with only 4 main churches (all in Albay Province) while today there are 8 (two being in neighbouring Sorsogon Province). A

church planting team working in a town of Sorsogon held their first baptisms on 25 September followed by the formation of a church. Previously, there had been more expat missionaries than Filipino workers. Today the majority are Filipinos with only 3 OMFers working alongside. Of the District Workers 5 pastors and 3 lady workers have come from the original churches. One other local pastor is presently studying for his M.Th in the Asian Theological Seminary, Manila, with a view to returning to Bicol and heading up the local leadership training programme. Local leaders can take a series of modules in 3 areas – Doctrinal, Biblical and Practical. The practical modules determine the final kind of accreditation – in Pastoral Studies, Church Planting or Christian Education. Training in the local church (or group of churches) has many advantages benefiting both the students and the local churches. The 8 District Workers mentioned above from the original churches have all completed these courses or been to Bible School. Ongoing training also includes courses organised by the Church Multiplication Movement (see [www.philchal.org](http://www.philchal.org) ).

We spent our second Sunday at a beach resort to celebrate the 24<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Legaspi Christian Church, where we had worked previously. It was a joy to see members from the 3 daughter churches which started 20 years ago after the eruption of Mt. Mayon on Sept 23 1984. They now have their own chapels and two of their young men are now pastors in Albay while one of their ladies pastors one of these churches. The worship was very moving and the young people put on some challenging skits. The pot-luck meal was a real feast and afterwards, many went swimming. The church building in Legaspi is a large two storey edifice in a good location close to a new shopping mall.

About 15 yrs ago we were able to buy land for a cemetery (the Catholic Cemetery being closed to non-RCs). This had been a major problem for those wanting to leave the Catholic Church. Now, it has been a real comfort to believers and, with the growing numbers of graves, is being well cared for.

We spent two days in Sorsogon Province visiting three OMF missionaries who can feel very isolated at times. From Irosin, our former Filipino co-workers took us to Bulan (30mins away) where they would like to plant a new church. Although there are a number of Protestant groups there already their numbers are small. In a town of 70,000+ there would be plenty of scope for another ministry. There are other towns that the District would also like to open so there seems to be much opportunity for further OMF involvement including help in training and mentoring. Pray to the Lord of the harvest!

We were so grateful to the Lord for this opportunity to return and see first-hand the ongoing work and growth of the church in the Philippines. Revival continues and we praise God for all He has done and all He is yet to do.