



Arnold Janssen

Kalinga



Quarterly Newsletter of the Arnold Janssen
Kalinga Foundation Inc.



LIGHT SHINING THROUGH THE BEST & THE WORST OF TIMES

by Fr. Flavie Villanueva, SVD

“Only if people change will the world change; and in order to change, people need the light that comes from God, the light which so unexpectedly [on the night of Christmas] entered into our night.”

- Pope Benedict XVI

As 2023 draws to a close, we look back at both the pinpoints of light and the shadows of the year. Like in the *Tale of Two Cities*, we can say that the year had the best of times and the worst of times. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

‘CHANGED & CHANGING’: VINZ NARISMA

by Nirva Delacruz



VINZ (2ND FROM LEFT) POSES WITH HIS FELLOW SEMINARIANS.

Vinz’ full name could probably come across as a bit feminine, an interesting screen name for a star from the 90s perhaps.

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‘DAMBANA NG PAGHILOM’ 1ST EJK MEMORIAL SITE GROUNDBREAKING HELD

by Nirva Delacruz



GUESTS, WHICH INCLUDED FORMER VP LENI ROBREDO, FORMER SEN. LEILA DE LIMA, & MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS PAUSE TO PRAY FOR THE EJK VICTIMS ON DEC. 11, 2023 AT THE LA LOMA CATHOLIC CEMETERY IN CALOOCAN CITY.

The groundbreaking of the first EJK memorial site at the La Loma Catholic Cemetery in Caloocan City on December 11, 2023 shows that EJK families continue to call for justice and miss their loved ones whom they lost so suddenly and violently, especially this Christmas season.

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LIGHT SHINING THROUGH THE BEST & THE WORST OF TIMES

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This year saw the continuing injustice of extra-judicial killings, frustrating the hopes of some who believed the new administration would retract executive orders which gave the police blanket authority to carry out the drug war killings. Our festive mood this holiday season remains under the shadow of statistics that point to reasons for mourning. According to research from the Third World Studies Center at the University of the Philippines, since June 30, 2022, 397 people have been killed in anti-drug operations. In a message given in September 2023 to the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, Human Rights Watch senior researcher Carlos Conde noted that this is an average of 1 killing per day.

'Newly poor'

For many Filipino families, 2023 had not been kind. According to a Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey in November, 6.6% of families considered themselves "newly poor." This means they would not have categorized themselves as poor 1-4 years ago. That's roughly 1.8 million families who feel a drastic shift in their quality of life. With such figures, we can only imagine the state of homelessness in the country.

While we are never short of challenges, God continues to bless our little efforts to help those He continues to send us. On October 2, through the graciousness of Bishop Pablo David, we signed a memorandum of agreement with the Diocese of Kalookan to build an EJK memorial site at the La Loma Cemetery in Caloocan, the first of its kind. This signals institutional recognition of the injustices suffered by EJK victims and their families. On December 11, Program Paghilom, together with its partners, celebrated a groundbreaking ceremony to officially kickstart construction on the site. Finally, some 82 families will be able to lay the remains of their loved ones to rest in a dignified and permanent resting place. A first for us, it is more for future generations than it is for us.

Deepening formation

This year saw us deepening our formation for our beneficiary-volunteers (b-volts) at the Arnold Janssen Kalinga Center. Eight formerly homeless b-volts, of batch 8, underwent formation that included topics on the sacraments; the KALINGA values; the growth mindset; and Bible sharing. Efforts were made to more intentionally align the formation given at Arnold Janssen Bahay Kalinga and the Arnold Janssen Kalinga Center, for



FR. FLAVIE VILLANUEVA, SVD GIVES AN ADVENT RECOLLECTION TO THE BENEFICIARY VOLUNTEERS & GRADUATES OF THE FORMATION PROGRAM.

what we hope to be a seamless pastoral experience for all our beneficiaries.

If I could ask our EJK families and our dear homeless, I'm sure many consider Christmas their favorite time of the year.

Quite a few had their loved ones killed around Christmas time, so these days are bittersweet. They feel the loss of their loved ones more sharply during Christmas. In the same vein, many of our dear street dwellers who are estranged from their families can only look back at the many Christmases they had chosen to celebrate away from home.

The bitter turns sweet

There are many reasons to focus on the gaping abyss of loneliness, pain, and hopelessness. But the God-Child Jesus, the Niño Dios, is the Light that dispels the darkness of sin and despair. Our Lord is the Light, the Word made Flesh.

The AJKFI family realizes that 2023 is a play of light and shadow, but the Light shines through it all. Our Lord Jesus is the One who makes even what is bitter and hard somehow sweet and something easy to embrace. We have so much to be thankful for, not least of which is the realization that even the shadows are points of light in disguise. Darkness will never have the last say. Jesus, the Eternal Light of Christmas, always prevails. A blessed Christmas to you and all your loved ones from the Arnold Janssen Kalinga family! ■



VINZ' TRAINING GROUND WAS THE PARISH YOUTH MINISTRY WHERE HE SERVED SINCE HE WAS 12. VINZ IS IN THE BACKGROUND IN A WHITE SHIRT.

'CHANGED & CHANGING': VINZ NARISMA *by Nirva Delacruz*

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So it's no wonder that people are surprised to see that "Venice" is actually a stocky guy in his 30s who looks like he had been in the Philippine Army but who just happened to let go of the daily regimen of weight training.

He has been the resident formator of Arnold Janssen Bahay Kalinga (BK) in Bagong Silang, Caloocan City since 2020, keeping operations running smoothly for anywhere between 8 to 60 formerly homeless residents, who have since decided to leave the life on the streets and to commit themselves to the grueling work of pastoral formation, skills training, counseling, psycho-spiritual interventions for substance abuse dependency and other personal issues. The title has pastoral undertones that also points to the almost 24/7 on-call aspect of the job. It's not uncommon for Vinz to suddenly find himself wandering the Lawton area in order to find a resident who suddenly went AWOL; breaking up drunken brawls among residents;

or traveling several miles to reunite a long-lost son with his family after three decades of estrangement. Suffice it to say that early on, Vinz has had to learn how to face the whole gamut of emotions and messy realities that come with being invested in the personal transformation of people who have only began to hope again. Vinz has seen the homeless go through moments of pure innocence, epiphanies, and joy but also intrigue, deception, bad blood, and a return to a life of crime and drug abuse.

The age-old question

When the uninitiated think about what it is that BK really hopes to accomplish, they can probably only shake their heads. It seems practically impossible. The question revolves around an age-old question: "What does it take to change the heart of man?" From Alcoholics Anonymous to marriage counselors, people have grappled with this question. In BK, the matter of the deeper conversion and

formation of the heart is the hub around which life in BK revolves.

As if to undo the oftentimes dissipated life they had led on the streets, BK residents now have to be up before 6AM to pray the Angelus, followed by a rousing session of thrice-a-week Zumba—never mind if they feel like it or not. After breakfast, residents then go about their assigned tasks: cleaning different areas of the residence, watering the plants, preparing the meals, cooking.

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Those who have signed up for the Alternative Learning System classes also have their sessions during the day: read, study, and work on their homework. Some find time to paint or draw and exercise. There is also weekly Mass, monthly confession, and praying of the rosary. If life at BK seems like seminary life, this is probably due to the influence of Vinz, who at one point, was a Society of the Divine Word (SVD) seminarian.

'Narisma charisma'

Looking at the unique demands of running BK operations, it would need a person with an equally unique background to muster the spiritual and emotional stamina for a job that is more mission than an 8-5 commitment. Interestingly for Vinz, service and a missionary mindset came to him early on. "Since I was a kid, I remember that I was really passionate about serving people, particularly in our chapel, Señor Sto. Niño," Vinz said, sharing that he was a member of the Parish Youth Ministry since he was 12. This experience also signaled the beginning of a deepening relationship with God.

Vinz' service in the church setting cut his teeth for what would be an unexpected chapter in his life: public service. If his real name "Venice" is interesting enough, it was "Narisma charisma" that became his personal branding for a stint as a Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) councilor in Butuan City in Agusan del Norte. People in the

strength and service to God and to the Church," he explained. There are a thousand ways to skin a cat, they say, and Vinz knew he would be more at peace serving under a 2,000-year old institution.

Loving neighbor = loving God

Entering the seminary in 2015, he became one of the first batch of seminarians to serve at the newly-opened Arnold Janssen Kalinga Center (KC)'s 'Kain-Ligo-Ng-Ayos' program ran by Fr. Flavie Villanueva, SVD for the homeless in Tayuman, Manila. On weekends, he would help give free meals and showers to Manila's street dwellers. He shared: "Every time I saw homeless individuals, I felt that my heart was being squeezed because of mercy that I felt towards them." It wouldn't take long before KC's founder Fr. Flavie would take notice of the young seminarian who just quietly kept on serving. In 2018, Fr. Flavie saw Vinz again who was a pastoral worker at the Parish of the Risen Christ in Smokey Mountain, Tondo, Manila. The priest asked Vinz to join him at the foundation but he declined. It took 2 more years and another chance encounter for Vinz to finally agree.

By this time, it was clear to Vinz that his life mission was summed up by this Bible verse: "If any man say, I love God, and hates his brother; he is a liar. For he that loves not his brother, whom he sees, how can he love God,



SEMINARIAN VINZ GOT TO STAY IN TAGAYTAY DURING HIS POSTULANCY CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN 2017.

community, who had probably been observing him busily serving his fellow youth in the church, thought the local government could use some of that pure-hearted dedication to the good and convinced him to run for the position in 2002. The 15-year old maximized his stint as councilor, but after the 3-year term, he knew it would be his last. Vinz saw for himself the dark underbelly of local politics with its corruption and power plays. It was then that he realized where he should focus his energy and talents for looking out for the weak and the needy. "The Church needs more servants and I am willing to offer my

whom he sees not? (1 John 4:20)." For Vinz, joining the foundation dedicated to helping the homeless seemed like an inspired next step.

Changing often

By no stretch of the imagination is it easy. No two days are alike serving in BK. On some days, Vinz is busy manning a team to produce 350 pieces of banana cupcakes for an event for EJK families, on other days, he is washing clothes at a charity home for the elderly, together with graduates of BK's formation, formerly

homeless BK residents who are now employed and ready to give back.

Vinz has been accompanying the homeless on their own paths towards healing, growth, and change. It's unlikely that he himself stays the same. "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often," said Blessed John Henry Newman, and so this is what Vinz has taken to. He has started eating healthy, sometimes skipping a full dinner, having some fruit or some vegetables instead. Vinz has also learned how to grow sunflowers and lettuce in BK and, for

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a time, had contemplated taking up law. It's his more unseen and interior changes though that have made the BK mission truly personal to Vinz. Since serving in BK, he has become more humble, more willing to self-reflect, and more open to people—with all the good and bad in them. He said, "I know that being in this foundation is life-changing, a [re-aligning] of my life's direction. As a son, friend and believer, my faith to God and dedication to follow Christ's mission becomes more deep and unfathomable." Truly, the journey of helping transform others begins with the self. ■

ONLY THE MIRACULOUS CAN TOUCH THE MOST DIFFICULT PEOPLE

by Vinz Narisma

Serving in the foundation, it's normal to see the transformation of our dear homeless from morose and troublesome to beaming, grateful, and trusting. Then again, there are always exceptions. One of those is Toni, who stands out among so many who have been through formation at the Arnold Janssen Bahay Kalinga (BK).

The sad life behind the difficult person

Easily, he's one of the most misunderstood characters we've seen. The way he carries himself and talks will more likely ruffle feathers than soothe the listener. A loner and a pessimist, Toni is the longest staying resident of BK. He had seen so many people come and go, and yet he remained. Despite all sorts of criticisms against him, he was debatably the most skilled resident in BK during his time there. Highly focused and hardworking, Toni seemed to want to offset his lack of relational skills with sheer talent and an impeccable work ethic. Behind the gruff demeanor is, of course, a sad story. Talking to him, we discovered that it was a life of nameless neglect, abandonment, and—most probably—abuse that had hardened him into the Toni we have come to know.



TONI RECEIVES A GIFT FROM AJKFI FOUNDER FR. FLAVIE VILLANUEVA, SVD DURING A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION IN BK.

Toni Laharto had lived on the streets for as long as he could remember. He does not even remember who his parents were or if he even met them at all, neither does he have any recollection of the people who took care of him when he was young. All he knows is that life on the streets is the only life he has ever known. Toni had experienced working at a gas station in Taft, Manila and at several construction companies. He had also earned a living collecting scrap materials.

Led by curiosity

During the pandemic, Toni and other street dwellers, who were staying in Paco, Manila at that time, heard about BK, a house where the homeless could reportedly stay for free, learn skills, and undergo formation. Out of curiosity, Toni decided to check the place out and was officially accepted into BK in April 2020.

Toni confesses that he has never had any support system, claiming that he has been alone for most of his life. He prefers to keep to himself; even among the homeless, he has no one he would consider a friend. It's telling that even the memory of the people who had taken care of him has seemingly vanished. Painful memories can be either suppressed or repressed due to the harsh environment one grew up in or because the client had been too fixated on survival to form any secure or lasting attachments to others.



BK RESIDENT FORMATOR VINZ VISITS TONI AT THE SALESIANS' FARM IN BATANGAS, WHICH HE HELPS MANAGE TOGETHER WITH A COUPLE.

His face shows a clear indifference and a sort of resignation to the life he had led on the streets. Full of “suffering and desperation for survival” is how Toni describes his existence. Even after leaving the streets, Toni walks around with what seems like a gaping, open wound. He remarks often that “nothing can be done” to alleviate his situation. Observing Toni, who hardly shows any positive emotions or sentiments, it would seem that he lives just for the sake of being alive, with neither cherished goals, hopes nor dreams to look forward to.

Cynicism, indifference

Even BK, which is the only institution he had stayed in, is not exempt from his cool indifference. Although Toni had learned to call BK his home where his basic needs were consistently met, he was dead set on leaving once the pandemic was over so he could return to living on his own. When asked, he said the only reason he even set foot in BK was because of mere curiosity. He didn't need BK nor its services, not then and not now.

It's not surprising then that he shows a general distrust towards institutions, and the government in particular. “Wala namang ibibigay na tulong ang gobyerno (The government won't give any help)”, he stressed. This is also why while in BK he had a cavalier attitude even towards interviews. It's the cynicism of a man, who had been interviewed so many times but barely anything came out of it.

The saving grace of service

When BK started to partner with Tulong Lasalyano for a feeding program for PWD children, Toni was one of the most fired up about the initiative. He would work long hours as part of the kitchen team. For him, all the meal preparation work was his contribution to help vulnerable children living with physical and mental disabilities.

In June 2023, before the feeding program ended, Toni was referred for employment in Balete, Batangas. He would be in charge of a fruit farm ran by the Salesians of Don Bosco. True to form, at first, he was hesitant to stay at the farm.

He explicitly said he would stay only for a month because he preferred living in the city as a scavenger. But Toni surprised everyone because 6 months later, he hasn't left. Being close to nature has probably done him good as well. Toni is happy with what he is doing and is productive in his new mission as the person-in-charge of the farm.

He helps take care of the farm's many banana, dragon fruit, guava, pomelo trees.

For people who have been marred so deeply by trauma and pain, even normalcy is already miraculous. God smiles at people like Toni, and in His quiet ways, has planted seeds of healing unseen by the eye. ■

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‘DAMBANA NG PAGHILOM’ 1ST EJK MEMORIAL SITE GROUNDBREAKING HELD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“Nakakamiss ka po, Pa. ‘Pag umuuwi ka sa bahay tahimik ka lang pero tuwing nagbobonding tayo lumalabas ‘yung pagiging makulit mo, palabiro. Nakakamiss magkaroon ng Papa na katulad mo (We miss you a lot. When you get home, you're so quiet, but when we have bonding moments, your playful, funny side comes out. I miss having a father like you),” said Cristina Abliter, fighting back tears during one of the opening messages.

Call for a Truth Commission

Meanwhile, Randy delos Santos, the uncle of 17-year old Kian delos Santos, renewed the call for a truth commission to investigate the violent deaths linked to former President Duterte's war on drugs. He spoke on behalf of some 30 other EJK families under the care of the Arnold Janssen Kalinga Foundation (AJKFI)'s Program Paghilom.

Also present were special guests like former Vice President Leni Robredo; former Senator Leila De Lima; Kalookan Bishop Pablo Virgilio David; forensic pathologist Dr. Raquel Fortun; SVD - PHC Provincial Superior Fr. Jerome Marquez; and representatives from the embassies of Germany and the Netherlands, as well as UN Joint Programme on Human Rights Programme Coordinator Andrew Pearlman; Netherlands Deputy Ambassador Robert van der Hum; Senior Policy Officer Jaymie Reyes; and First Secretary for Political Affairs Alexander Schmidt of the German Embassy.

‘Dambana ng Paghilom’

After messages from several of the guests, the

groundbreaking ceremony signaled the beginning of construction for the “Dambana ng Paghilom” edifice that is set to be completed in April 2024, in time for Lent. AJKFI Founder and President Fr. Flavie Villanueva, SVD explained the different design elements of the memorial and placed a list of the names of EJK victims inside an urn to show that they are all remembered and prayed for at the event. The EJK families also placed white roses on top of the symbolic hole dug by the guests as a remembrance of their loved ones whose presence they will miss this Christmas.

Designed by the team of Ar. Anthony Nazareno, the memorial site, the first of its kind, will be a permanent resting place for the mortal remains of EJK victims and will be built on a plot donated by the Diocese of Kalookan through the goodness of Bishop David. ■



FORMER VP LENI ROBREDO LAYS A SYMBOLIC WHITE ROSE AT THE GROUNDBREAKING SITE AT THE LA LOMA CATHOLIC CEMETERY.

THE MESSAGES ON THE MIRROR

by Mark Xavier Lalaguna

Every 'Kain Ligo' beneficiary is familiar with the different "mottos" of the Center. From the first mirror at Station 2 (Profiling) to the second mirror at Station 5 (Grooming & Affirmation), they see familiar words on the shiny surface. These are messages of hope that when learned and reflected upon could lead to the initial steps towards personal transformations.

'Affirmation can change people'

"Ngayo'y madungis, mamaya maaring luminis. (I'm dirty now, but later, I could be clean)." When our dear homeless read these words at Station 3, they can't help but see their own reflection in the mirror. Literally they see how greasy and grimy they are, in urgent need of a shower. Reflecting on that statement, they are challenged and inspired to believe that there is always a chance to change. It is a matter of believing that as long as we live we can make active choices to change life as we know it.

"Malinis na ako. Papahalagahan ko ito, magbabago ang buhay ko. (I'm clean now. I will value this, my life will change.)" Stuck on the second mirror, this statement is proof that affirmation can change people. If a person receives affirmation, and it becomes a constant in his life, he will begin to see the world in a different way. This message encourages the Center's homeless beneficiaries to value the opportunity given to them to recreate and change their lives. Every person, who passes through the Center's doors, is encouraged to open himself up to the process of transformation. But the process must start within.

Coming full circle

Having bathed and eaten, the street dwellers come full circle at Station 7 (Send-off). Before leaving the Center, beneficiaries need to read the following aloud and with a smile:

"Kinalinga ako sa Kalinga, kaya mangangalinga din ako sa kapwa ng may galak. (I was cared for in Kalinga, that's why I will also care for others with joy.)"

Personally, this is one of my favorite quotes because it reminds me how beautiful it is to pass on the kindness experienced at the Center. This is probably the most concrete proof that the little acts of kindness shown through the 7 Stations truly change lives. Joel Dionisio, a former street dweller who is now a beneficiary-volunteer shares what it means to care for others the Kalinga way, "Kung anong meron ako tulad ng pagkain, damit o mga gamit na pwede kong ibigay na lam kong makakatulong ako sa kapwa, malugod ko siyang ibabahagi. (Whatever it is that I have like food, clothes or useful things that I have I share with others.)" Joel, who is part of Kalinga Class, Batch 8, said that what is taught at the Center is something his own mother taught him early on.

Each beneficiary is challenged to be channel of kindness and care to others. Every "Kain Ligo" day, the homeless beneficiaries are given not only food to feed their physical hunger but also to feed their spirit. ■



AT STATION 5 (GROOMING & AFFIRMATION), THE HOMELESS GET TO SEE THEMSELVES AFTER SHOWERING.

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Kung anong meron ako tulad ng pagkain, damit o mga gamit na pwede kong ibigay na lam kong makakatulong ako sa kapwa, malugod ko siyang ibabahagi.

Be a partner-in-mission!

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The 5Ps of how to help: **Pesos, Products, Presence, Promotions, & Prayers** help the most vulnerable sectors of society, the homeless & the wounded re-create themselves.