

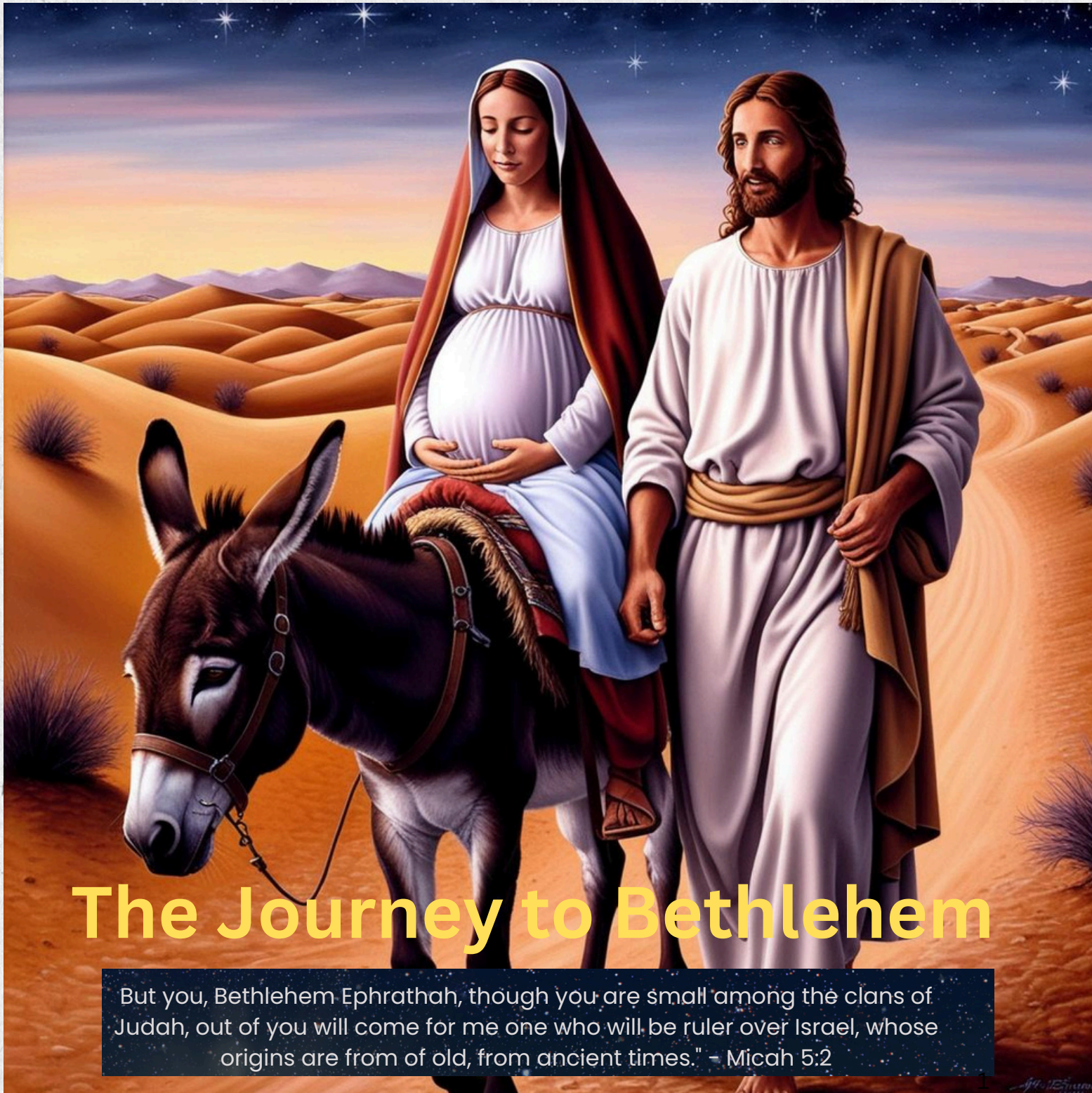
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ADVENT  
2024

# SHINING LIGHT



The official newsletter of BLD Vancouver district



## The Journey to Bethlehem

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." - Micah 5:2

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BLD Vancouver DCS**

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**The Journey to Bethlehem**



**Merry Christmas!**

**From the Word Ministry and Formation Apostolate**



Archdiocese of Vancouver  
ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE



First Sunday of Advent  
December 1, 2024

Bukás-Loób sa Diyós  
District of Vancouver

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

During this Advent season, the Church invites us to set out on a spiritual journey, to contemplate the humility of the God who became man to encounter every man and woman. So great is his love for us that he became one of us, so that we might become one with him.

This Advent, I urge you to put away all anxiety for the present and fear for the future, because God's light shows you the path to Bethlehem. With haste and enthusiasm, set out to see the Saviour lying in a manger and adored by Mary, Joseph, the Angels, and the shepherds. This is the profound reason for your joy and gladness as you prepare to celebrate the Child who has been born for us and the Son who has been given to us, as the Prophet Isaiah proclaims (cf. 9:5).

Despite all the suffering in our troubled world, Christians have hope because they have the certainty of being on a journey with Jesus toward the Father who awaits us in Heaven. This hope, whose birth the Child of Bethlehem offers, holds out the sure goal of salvation, the blessedness to those who trust in the Lord's merciful love.

As you accompany the Holy Family this Advent, I pray that Mary, Mother of Hope, will guide all of you on your journey to Bethlehem, where you will meet Jesus, the One who alone gives hope to your families, communities and the whole world.

With the assurance of my prayers for a fruitful Advent and blessed Christmas, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*+ J. Michael Miller CSB*

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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# The Roman Catholic Bishop of Imus

DIOCESE OF IMUS  
IMUS CITY, 4103 CAVITE, PHILIPPINES

## CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2024

Greetings of peace and love to everyone!

As we approach Christmas wherein we will celebrate the Birth of our Savior, we are given the Advent Season as a preparation for the coming of Christ.

Through the Themes and Promises for December, every BLD member is invited to pray constantly and conduct one's life pleasing to God. The season is also an opportunity to repent and seek forgiveness for whatever sins we have committed. We should also fulfill our obligation to share the good news of justice and righteousness to others. We can benefit from all these spiritual exercises by imitating the Blessed Virgin Mary especially in her total surrender to God's will.

This coming December 24, 2024, Pope Francis will inaugurate at St. Peter's Basilica the JUBILEE YEAR 2025 with the theme PILGRIMS OF HOPE. On the following Sunday, December 29, 2024, in every cathedral worldwide, diocesan bishops are to celebrate Holy Mass as the solemn opening of the Jubilee Year.

I encourage you dear BLD members to participate in the celebrations not only during the opening Mass but in all other celebrations in 2025. You can organize yourselves to go to pilgrim churches of your diocese or in any diocese all over the world. You will gain plenary indulgence by joining a pilgrimage provided you will fulfill all necessary requirements particularly Sacrament of Reconciliation, Holy Communion, and prayers for the intention of our dear Holy Father Pope Francis.

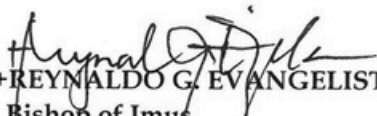
Incidentally, the year 2025 is also the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Bukás Loób sa Diyós* (BLD) Catholic Charismatic Covenant Community. It was on June 19, 1985 that the first covenants were sealed by almost 100 couples in a Community Assembly. This has become the reckoning date for the BLD Anniversary.

May the BLD Community not only grow in years but more so in God's grace. In the spirit of synodality or journeying together which is the prevailing invitation for everyone in the Universal Church, may you all grow in your commitment to the covenant that you embraced as Christ's disciples.

*"Strengthen your hearts to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones"* (1 Thes. 3:13).

A blessed CHRISTMAS and a joyful NEW YEAR to all!

Sincerely in Christ,

  
+REYNALDO G. EVANGELISTA, D.D.  
Bishop of Imus  
BLD Community Spiritual Director





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# St. Nicholas

Roman Catholic Church

Dear BLD members,

I am happy to learn that you have chosen the theme, 'A Journey to Bethlehem' for the Christmas issue of the 'Shining Light' 2024.

***Micah 5:4 - "Out of Bethlehem will come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel. His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth."***

Often when we speak of Christmas, we think of holidays, taking a break from our normal activities/ life, coming back home to where we belong/ came from. We associate things/ people that matter most to us; like being with loved ones, reuniting with the ones who are closest to us, for good reasons. All these and many other things around us are associated with the spirit of Christmas. **God coming home to us!!** And an invitation for us to come home to Him and be part of His family.

**Christmas is HOME COMING!!!** It is a journey of hope. Jesus who is born to us is inviting us to journey to him and allow Him to nest in our hearts at Christmas and always.

As prophesied by prophet Micah: "Out of Bethlehem will come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel. His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth", the emperor passes a decree that everyone had to go to their hometown to be registered. God is allowing him to issue this decree so that the scriptures can be fulfilled. So, Joseph along with Mary journeys to Bethlehem where Jesus is born.

Christmas is about Christ coming to us as a child and He continues to come to us accompanying us on our journey. As we celebrate Christmas, let us recall to our minds this journey to Bethlehem. This journey brought hope to the whole of humanity. As we walk this life on earth let us remind ourselves of our journey with Christ our Shepherd.

I wish you all A Merry Christmas & A Happy New Year 2025.

Fr. Nixon D'Silva





Archdiocese  
of Vancouver

## The Promise of Bethlehem

The journey to Bethlehem began with faith. Mary and Joseph headed forth believing in God's promise, even if they did not completely realize what lies ahead. Bethlehem was a place of little importance, yet it was chosen by God to be the birthplace of the Savior. In this, we see the heart of the Christmas story. The Savior of the world was not born in a palace but in a stable, surrounded by animals and visited by shepherds. The little town reminds us that God's greatest work is often done in simple and unfamiliar ways. As we reflect on Jesus' birth, we are invited to embrace the humility of the Savior. When we look at the nativity scene, we see a world far from perfect. Yet in the midst of these humble surroundings, the Prince of Peace was born, bringing the promise of God's love.

For us today, we are invited to make our own journey to Bethlehem, to visit the manger and meet the Savior born for us. Like the shepherds who went to see the newborn King, we are invited to draw near to Jesus, to receive the gift of His love, grace, and salvation. This Christmas, may we be reminded that our own journeys, whether they are filled with happiness or doubt, are held in God's hands. Just as He led Mary and Joseph, He will lead us, and we can trust that His promises will be fulfilled in our lives.

During this Advent season, we are called not only to receive peace but to share it. Just as Bethlehem's humble setting became a symbol of hope, we too can bring light and peace to others. The Prince of Peace invites us to bring kindness, forgiveness, and compassion into a world in need. In our homes, workplaces, and communities, we can carry the peace of Christ wherever we go.

The promise of Bethlehem is a promise of peace for all people—a peace that is found in Jesus, our Savior. May we be filled with His peace and reminded that God's promises are true. May we draw near to the manger and receive the gift of peace that only He can give, and may we go forth, carrying His peace into our world.

Merry Christmas and may the promise of Bethlehem bring you closer to the heart of God this season and always.

Blessings,

  
*Deacon Rolly and Malou Sanares*



## **Bethlehem's Light: God's Promise for a Troubled World**

Micah 5.1-4 “But you, Bethlehem, least among the clans of Judah from you shall come forth one who is to be ruler in Israel... his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth: He shall be peace.”

This prophecy of the prophet Micah has the imagery of the ruler as a shepherd who will bring peace and harmony to the people of Israel. This is in contrast to the old rulers who always brought chaos to the people. Now, a ruler who will bring peace, harmony, and wholeness to the people is prophesied.

That the new ruler will be born in Bethlehem, “the least among the clans of Judah”, eloquently expresses our Lord’s undeniable preference for the poor, the humble, and the forgotten.

Our Lord did not come simply to bring light, or to make us children of God. He came in a particular way through his redemptive suffering and death. To those of us who accept Him, Jesus bestows the privilege of becoming children of God. This is the central point of the Incarnation, of the Word becoming flesh. God becomes man that humanity may be raised to the dignity of God’s children. This is the truth that believers have to discover at Christmas.

It behooves us as believers to remember that Christ died so we may live. He became like us that we might become like Him.

In a world wracked by turmoil and conflicts, may the coming of our Lord usher in hopes for peace, harmony and good will among us, our families, our beloved Community, and our world at large.

Merry Christmas to all !

Deacon Vic and Lyn Gallamos





## CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2024

As we recall Jesus' birth each year, let us remember that the reason He came was because of His sacrificial love and His salvific mission for all. More than the Christmas presents, let us share the real Gift of Love who is Jesus Christ Himself. Our heartfelt prayer is that all families come together this Christmas – whether physically or spiritually. And may this season bring comfort and consolation to our needy brothers and sisters with the peace, joy, hope, faith and love it brings. With gratefulness in our hearts, we share our warm greetings for a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all!

**Ross & Dina Manlapat**, Evangelization

As we come together in the spirit of love and unity, let us remember the true meaning of Christmas. "Christmas is doing a little something extra for someone." It is all about the love in our heart and the joy of sharing. The challenge for all of us members of *Bukas Loob sa Diyos* for the coming year is that we must collaborate to help everyone find a greater sense of belonging in our community, where all can explore our faith, confidently face the small and big demands of this challenging life, share our doubts and fears, and find joy and peace. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year BLD!

**Rey and Voletth Florogo**, Formation

As we prepare for His coming, let us anchor our faith in Him and ready our hearts to celebrate this season of giving and hope. Let us reflect on His love and strive to share this love with others especially to the less privileged brothers and sisters through acts of kindness and compassion. As the Lord continues to shower us with His abundant grace, let us not forget to count our blessings and extend our gratitude for the gift of life and salvation. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas filled with His light and a Blessed New Year with His guidance and peace!

**Erick & Rona Mendoza**, Mission

Christmas is the birth of the Son of God, Jesus, who brought love, hope and peace to mankind. This is a season of great joy and unity in family inspired by Jesus, Mama Mary and St Joseph. Let us express our love for Jesus through our brethren by rendering service and giving gifts that their hearts most desire. In gratitude for the gifts we have received, we pray that everyone enjoy a Blessed Christmas and a Grace-filled New Year.

**Val & Fe Liwanag**, Management

Christmas is a celebration of hope and love—the boundless love of God revealed through the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Jesus is the light that illuminates our darkness and hope for our brokenness. May we, as disciples of Jesus, be heralds of the good news that Christmas brings. Let us share and spread His love, peace, and joy to everyone around us - to remind them of the true meaning of Christmas. A Blessed Christmas and a Spirit-filled New Year to one and all!

**Mar and Jo Tamayo**, Pastoral





## CS CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is that blessed time of the year when we spread love and good cheer to everyone. This Advent season is a time for all of us to reflect the spirit of unity in our community, that will bring us together in love and harmony through the bond of peace.

After Advent, we will enter the Christmas season and fill our hearts celebrating the wonderful birth of our Savior, Jesus. Let us remember that God came to live among us. The greatest gift we receive from our Lord Jesus is himself. Jesus is the true joy of this season. During this time, some will be happy; some will feel lonely; and some will be in grief or sadness, we hold firm that we will hope in the Lord. It is this hope and faith that gives us an opportunity to share with others the true power and meaning of Christmas.

We remain grateful to God for all He has provided for us, especially for the gifts of life, family, and community. Let us remember there are many families, even within our community, who need our love and assistance.

As we approach the end of the year, we take this opportunity to thank you most sincerely as you have been such a blessing to our community by being active and supporting us with your gifts of time, talent, and treasure. A special gratitude to all our members who contributed their time in different ministries and apostolates. You have done such a wonderful job in serving the various needs of our community with much enthusiasm and commitment. May Christ's love be renewed in your hearts this season.

In advancing into the new year, we request your continued support and prayers, so that our service and efforts will bring glory to God.

May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you, your families, and your loved ones during this season of grace. May our mother, Mary, the mother of the Child Jesus, watch over you and our beloved BLD community.

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year 2025.

Floren and Tita Jose  
Cluster 10 Shepherds





***Bukás Loób sa Diyós***  
**(Open in Spirit to God)**  
CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC COVENANT COMMUNITY  
DISTRICT OF VANCOUVER

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To: All Members of BLD Vancouver  
From: District Council of Stewards  
Subject: Christmas Message

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we gather to celebrate the joy and hope of Christmas, we are reminded of the light that Christ brings to our world—especially in times of darkness and uncertainty. This year, we reflect on the recently concluded Synod on Synodality at the Vatican, where the Church engaged in profound dialogue and discernment, listening to the voices of the faithful from around the world. The Synod reminded us of the call to walk together, with open hearts, as a community united in faith, love, and service.

This call saw its echo in the recently concluded BLD Pre-planning workshop participated in by covenanted and committed members, including the Solo Parent Ministry and the Youth Ministry, where successes, concerns and missed opportunities were openly discussed and shared.

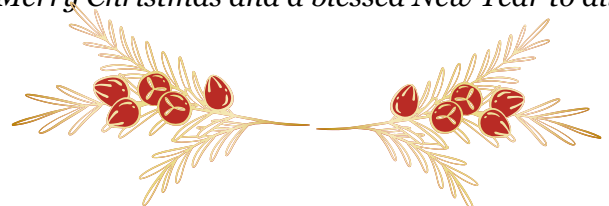
We know there are no coincidences. Divine Providence, at work in all things, even when His hand is not seen, inspired and led the Global Bukas Loob Community to be in lockstep with the Synodal process. Journeying together as the People of God (synodality process) is an opportunity for an encounter in faith that makes the bond with the Lord, fraternity between people and love for the Church, involving both the individual and the entire community.

This Christmas, may we be inspired by the spirit of the Synod, which calls us to be inclusive, compassionate, and courageous in our witness to the world. Let us remember that Christ's light shines brightest in the darkest places and may His peace reign in the hearts of all people, and in our own lives as we seek to be instruments of His love.



Wishing you all a blessed and peaceful Christmas. May the joy of Christ's birth renew our hope and strengthen our commitment to walk in His light, together, as one family.

*Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year to all.*



## God's Plan and His Mighty Hand at Work

*Due to the ongoing conflicts, a visit to the Holy Land is not possible at this moment. But this Advent Season, it is important for all Christians to reflect upon the goodness of God. The Son of God who became the Son of Man, that all of us can be the adopted sons and daughters of God. Great is the Father's Love for all of us. Jesus from divine origin became human to pave the way for our Salvation.*

*Here are some of the churches dedicated to Jesus, Joseph, and Mary:*

### Basilica of the Annunciation

Nazareth in Galilee is celebrated by Christians as the town where the Virgin Mary, aged around 14 years, agreed to become pregnant with the Son of God. It also became the hometown of Jesus, Mary, and her husband Joseph after the Holy Family returned from fleeing to Egypt to escape Herod the Great's soldiers.



The towering cupola of the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth stands over the cave that tradition holds to be the home of the Virgin Mary.

Here, it is believed that the archangel Gabriel told the young Mary, aged about 14, that she would become the mother of the Son of God. And here Mary uttered her consent: ***"Let it be done to me according to your word."*** The outcome of Mary's consent is carved in Latin across the façade over the triple-doorway entrance: ***"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).***



The massive two-storey basilica, in strikingly modern architectural style and colourfully decorated, became the largest Christian church in the Middle East when it was completed in 1969. It contains two churches, the upper one being the parish church for Nazareth's Catholic community.



Source Info from: [seetheholyland.net](http://seetheholyland.net)

Photo Credits to: Rene Abada

## Church of the Nativity

The West Bank city of Bethlehem, about 9km south of Jerusalem, is celebrated by Christians as the **birthplace** of Jesus Christ. Here Mary gave birth in a **cave** used for animals. Here the local shepherds came to worship the baby, and here the Three Wise Men from the East came to pay homage and present their gifts.

Here too, 1000 years before Christ, Bethlehem was the birthplace of **David**, Israel's second king. Here David was anointed as king by the prophet Samuel after being brought in from tending his father's sheep. The city of Bethlehem (in Hebrew its name means "house of bread") perches on a hill at the edge of the Judean desert.



Entering the church that marks the site of Christ's birthplace means having to stoop low. The only doorway in the fortress-like front wall is just 1.2 meters high.

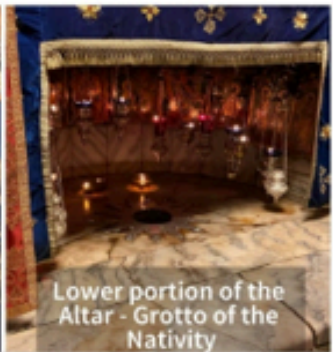
The previous entrance to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was lowered around the year 1500 to stop looters from driving their carts in. To Christians, it seems appropriate to bow low before entering the place where God humbled himself to become man.

Today's basilica, the oldest complete church in the Christian world, was built by the emperor Justinian in the 6th century. It replaced the original church of Constantine the Great, built over the cave venerated as Christ's birthplace, and dedicated in AD 339.

**Invading Persians spared the church:** The Gospels do not say that Jesus was born in a cave, but there are written references to the Nativity cave as far back as AD 160. Even today in the Judean hills, families live in primitive houses built in front of natural caves used for storage or to shelter animals. Persians invaded Palestine in 614 and destroyed many churches. They spared the Church of the Nativity when they saw a mosaic on an interior wall depicting the Three Wise Men in Persian dress.

## Grotto of the Nativity

Far from the Christmas card image, the place of Christ's birth is a dimly lit rock cave. Instead of a star above, a 14-point silver star on the marble floor of the Grotto of the Nativity bears the words "Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est" (Here Jesus Christ was born to the Virgin Mary).



Manger covered with marble: At a slightly lower level is the Grotto of the Manger. The rock shelf has been covered with marble, but the original rock may be seen around the manger. The dimensions match those of feeding troughs cut into the rock by Bedouins.

A small altar in the Grotto of the Manger is dedicated to the Adoration of the **Magi**, the Three Wise Men described in Matthew's Gospel as coming from the East (probably Persia) to worship the newborn Jesus. This is where the Catholics celebrate Mass.

As the ornamentation, icons and lamps in the front of the church suggest, the basilica is now almost wholly a Greek Orthodox place of worship. The Armenian Orthodox own the northern transept. The Catholics have the site of the manger and the adjoining altar next to the Nativity grotto.

Source Info from: [seetheholylnd.net](http://seetheholylnd.net)

Photo Credits to: Rene Abada and Alex Ebarvia

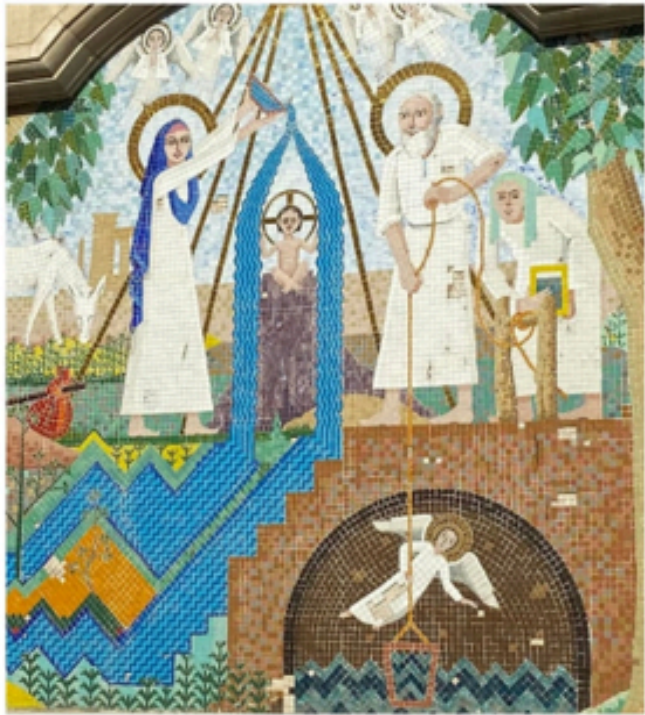
## Church of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus

Abu Serga church is considered one of the oldest Coptic Orthodox churches in **Egypt**. It dates to the 4th century and its importance is seen in its impressive history. The location of the church is believed to be the spot where the Holy Family "**Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus Christ**" rested at the end of their journey into Egypt during their escape from King Herod.



Abu Serga church was dedicated to Saints Sergius and Bacchus, who were great soldiers martyred during the 4th century in Syria by the Roman Emperor Maximian. Saint Sergius died during the intense Christian persecution with his father & his sister and Christians celebrate his memory every year on February 7th. The construction of the church started in the 4th century and ended in the

5th century. Abu Serga church is the Arabic translation of Saints Sergius & Bacchus church, which was built over the site of the cave where the Holy family sheltered during their sojourn in the area.



Source Info from: [tripadvisor.com](https://www.tripadvisor.com)

Photo Credits to: Kamil Ozdemir and Alex Ebarvia



## TO WALK WHERE JESUS, JOSEPH AND MARY WALKED

Due to the ongoing conflict, travel to Israel and Egypt is extremely dangerous, here are videos to allow you view to the holy sites. They were made for those who: had travelled to these holy sites and reminisce about them, are hoping to visit them and who are unable to visit them.

As we near the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, here are videos of the churches dedicated to Jesus, Joseph and Mary.

### The Birth and Early Years of Jesus Christ



Please click on the church name to view the videos.

[Birthplace of Mary - Church of St. Anne](#)

[Visit of Annunciation - Basilica of the Annunciation](#)

[Visit of Mary to Elizabeth - Church of the Visitation](#)

[Birth of John the Baptist - Church of St John, the Baptist](#)

[Birth of Jesus - Church of the Nativity](#)

[The Angel Appeared to the Shepherds - Chapel of the Shepherd's Field](#)

[Flight of the Egypt - Church of St Sergus and St Balchus or Abu Serga Church](#)

[Return to Nazareth - Church of St Joseph](#)

# My Life in the Spirit Seminar *Experience*

*By Felian Cabaal, SPE#9*

I will share an event in my life that I feel can best illustrate my recent experience with Life in the Spirit Seminar.

When I was a young girl I had a scary and terrible experience of being lost in a crowded market area of Manila. I was separated from my caregiver and then grabbed the garment of a different person instead. I could sense that I inconvenienced this person as they tried to hurriedly find and ask who I belonged to among the many people passing by us.

Then by the Grace of God and my Guardian Angels watching over me, a young man recognized I was the daughter of his school teacher. He kindly guided me back away from the crowded and chaotic location to the peaceful, calm, quiet, and open green field of the schoolyard. Immediately I stopped crying and felt relieved once I was reunited with my Mother and caregiver again. With open arms, they greeted me and were so grateful to the unknown young man who was a blessing to us all.

I can easily recall the details of that traumatic event even now as an adult and can describe my feelings of fear, anxiety, abandonment, helplessness, and confusion.

That early stage of my life I was completely dependant on others for my well-being to guide, care, and provide for me. I required the wisdom, experience, and knowledge of my elders to navigate my life the best way they knew how for what they felt was best for me physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Memories of my childhood was generally a happy one growing up in the Philippines and I was blessed with a strong foundation of a loving family and Catholic upbringing. It was truly a traumatic event in that brief moment of being lost and separated from family that potentially could have made a detrimental change in my life.

On the day of our reunion for the LSS, I had an epiphany as I realized the dark moments of my life when a tragic and devastating event occurred. I was filled with feelings of anger, resentment, fear, confusion, and depression. I was spiritually lost. Negative emotions stirred up within me much in the same way I felt when I was a lost 4-year-old Filipina girl in Manila.

However, as my late Dad would say, there were always many "blessings in disguise" in those tough moments. He, Mom, and my Lolas always reminded me to have faith and pray for guidance. As a child of God, I can always rely on His tender mercy and unconditional love to put the right people in my path to take my hand and show me the way back to a spiritual haven of peace, love, and tranquility. I strayed from time to time but I am always brought back to God's light and the Holy Spirit to navigate through life's difficult moments to find comfort and reassurance that all will be well again.

During the LSS, I was overwhelmed with emotions from the thoughts coming to me and all I could do was cry, my knees grew weak. I felt compelled to go to the crucifix and ask for his forgiveness for the times I lost my way relying more on outside influences and myself rather than on Him.

LSS enlightened and challenged me to dig deep within my soul to bring up the painful memories and comprehend the feelings that have been buried. Remove resentments and animosity and be brave enough to discern the lies from the truth.

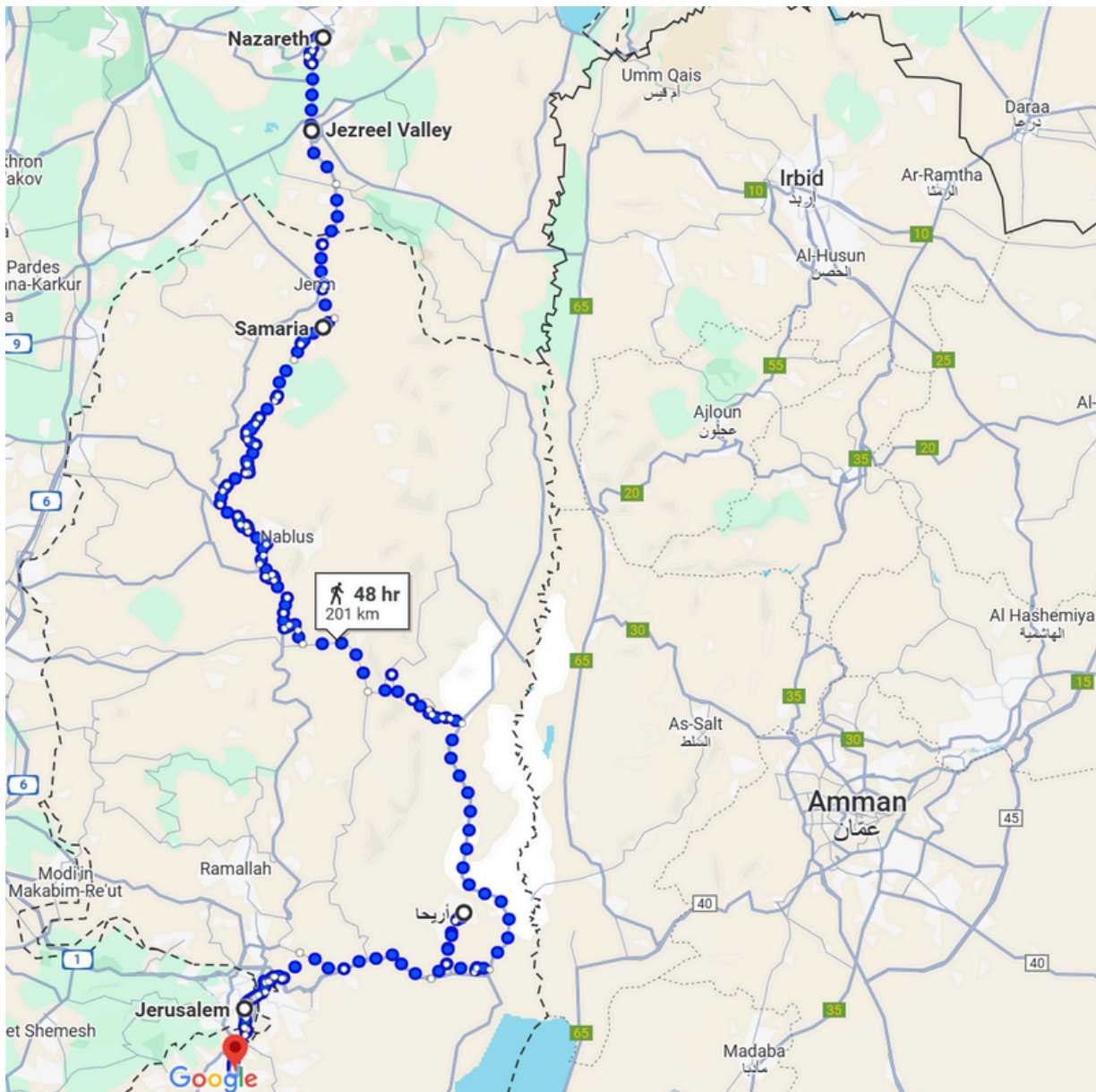
In the last few months since my initial encounter with the BLD attending the Solo parent retreat, my life has been filled with more peace, love, joy, and internal happiness. I have extended my support group and fostered true friendships. I pray more often and yearn to learn every day about my faith. Living my life for God's purpose rather than my own is the spiritual path that leads me back home again.

# *The Journey to Bethlehem*

The Journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem started in Nazareth, a town in the region of Galilee. They traveled south to Bethlehem in Judea, which is about 90 miles (145 kilometers) away. Google however estimates the walk at 201 km for 48 hours.

- Nazareth: Starting point in Galilee.
- Jezreel Valley: Traveling south through the valley.
- Samaria: Passing through the central region.
- Jericho: Reaching the ancient city near the Jordan River.
- Jerusalem: Moving towards the capital city of Judea.
- Bethlehem: Final destination, located about 5 miles south of Jerusalem.

## Mapping the Path to Bethlehem with Google Map



# Today's Journey to Bethlehem

Today's **Journey to Bethlehem**" typically refers to the spiritual and physical pilgrimage that believers undertake to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. This journey is often highlighted during the Advent and Christmas seasons and can have several meanings and expressions. During Advent, which begins four Sundays before Christmas, Christians focus on themes such as hope, love, joy, and peace.

The 'Journey to Bethlehem' invites believers to not only remember the historical events but also to experience a personal spiritual journey. Through various traditions and practices, Christians are reminded of the hope and joy that Jesus' birth brings to the world. Additionally, this journey serves as a reminder of the second coming of Christ, encouraging believers to live in a state of readiness and anticipation. The promise of Christ's return brings a message of ultimate hope and redemption, urging the faithful to reflect on their lives and deepen their faith as they await His glorious return.

## SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

- **Daily Prayers and Devotions:** Individuals and families may engage in special prayers, Bible readings, and reflections that center around the coming of Christ.
- **Advent Wreath:** Lighting candles on an Advent wreath each week symbolizes the light of Christ coming into the world.
- **Acts of Kindness:** Many use this time to perform good deeds and charitable acts, emulating the spirit of giving and compassion that Jesus taught.

## NATIVITY PLAYS AND REENACTMENTS

- **Scenes from the Nativity Story:** Depicting the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus in a manger, the visit of the shepherds, and the arrival of the Magi.
- **Community Involvement:** Local communities, schools, and churches often participate, making it an inclusive and educational experience.
- **Cultural Variations:** Different cultures have unique ways of telling the Nativity story, incorporating traditional music, dances, and costumes.

## PILGRIMAGES

- **Church of the Nativity:** Built over the site traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Jesus, this church is a major pilgrimage destination.

- **Bethlehem's Historical Sites:** Pilgrims can visit various historical and religious sites, including Shepherds' Field and Manger Square.
- **Spiritual Renewal:** Pilgrims often describe a renewed sense of faith and a deeper understanding of the Christmas story after visiting Bethlehem.

## ADVENT TRADITIONS

- **Advent Calendars:** These calendars count down the days to Christmas, often including daily scripture readings, prayers, or small gifts.
- **Setting Up Nativity Scenes:** Many households and churches set up Nativity scenes, gradually adding figures to represent different parts of the story as Christmas approaches.
- **Special Church Services:** Advent services focus on the prophecies and events leading up to Jesus' birth.

## REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

- **Reflecting on the Incarnation:** Christians meditate on the significance of God becoming human in the form of Jesus, contemplating themes of humility and divine love.
- **Christmas Celebrations:** The journey culminates in joyous celebrations of Christmas, with Midnight Masses, festive meals, and family gatherings.

## **"Echoes of Compassion: Following Christ's Example in Our Daily Lives"**

**By Suzeth Sanares**

***The people were utterly astonished and said, "He has done all things well! He makes even the deaf hear and the mute speak." (Mark 7:37).***

Brothers and sisters, our God is beautiful beyond description. He is too marvelous for words. Who can fathom the depth of His love? In the Gospel we heard tonight, Jesus demonstrated His miraculous power. He acted with great compassion. He took upon Himself to not only see the man's distress but to stop it. One endearing character of Jesus is being compassionate. In the same way, those people who brought the man to Jesus were filled with compassion. They wanted Jesus to lay His hands upon him & be healed.

I wanted to focus my reflection on the word compassion as it also relates to our theme tonight. At times, compassion and empathy are used interchangeably or confused with one another. However, there is a clear difference. Empathy is our ability to relate to another person's pain as if it were our own; it doesn't have an active component to it like compassion does. Compassion sees another person's pain and suffering - and takes action to stop it. Compassion is mercy in action.

The Bible has a lot of stories that show compassion:

- Parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke about the man who was attacked by the robbers, the Samaritan saw the man's pain, took pity on him & rescued him.
- The story of the two blind men sitting on the roadside; Jesus had compassion on them & healed them.
- Jesus reacts with a feeling of compassion in the Multiplication of the 5 loaves and 2 fish
- Jesus as the Good Shepherd, showed compassion for His flock, caring for their needs and not allowing any of them to get lost.
- Jesus was deeply moved with compassion and raised Lazarus from the dead

There are so many related stories both in the Old & New Testaments but above all, our Almighty Father is the God of Compassion. He rescued His people from wickedness by sending His only begotten Son Jesus to enter into the suffering of humanity and to die for our sins.

***Luke 6:36 says, "Be compassionate, just as Your Father is compassionate".***

Brothers and sisters, we don't have the ability to raise anyone from the dead but as followers of Christ, we will also feel His desire to suffer with others, to have the desire to act. Mother Teresa of Calcutta lived a lifetime of compassion and service to humanity. God performs miracles in our lives every day. Every time He strengthens us, fills us with hope, courage, charity and any other virtue, this is a miracle of transforming grace. And so He wants us to share these miracles with others."

*"Ephphata - be opened"*. Jesus uttered this word and immediately the man received healing. Just like the man in the Gospel we too met Jesus and had our ears and mouth opened by Him when the priest touched our ears and mouth during our baptism as he says "May the Lord Jesus who made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak grant, that you may soon receive His word with your ears and profess the faith with your lips, to the glory and praise of God the Father". The commission to proclaim the Good News began then when we were baptized & continues now.

Our theme tonight is calling us to show compassion to others. The challenge is how we can live out the true meaning of compassion. There are endless ways to show compassion to others - showing acts of kindness and charity, providing emotional support to the brokenhearted & grieving, encouraging and affirming others, praying for others, defending the oppressed, being a channel of peace and forgiveness, being generous with our time, talent and treasure, for parents to teach compassion to their children is to lead by example and most importantly bringing others to Jesus.

I recalled the conversation I had with the father of our recent YE graduates. He wanted his children to join the YE weekend to get closer to God & help them grow in their spiritual life, especially in this modern world. This shows great compassion of a father to a child. Here I am Lord. I have heard You calling in the night. I will go Lord if You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart.

Brothers and sisters, maybe this week God will put someone in our path that has a physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual need and is unable to help them in this matter. If we have the capacity to do something even if it means we need to take extra steps, despite inconvenience and sacrifice on our part, be it small or big things, let's act on it. Let's not turn and look the other way when someone needs a helping hand &; a compassionate heart. Let's accept the challenge.

Dear God,

*"Ephphata - Be opened. Lord, fill us with Your Holy Spirit and inflame our hearts with love and compassion. Bless us with eyes that can see people's needs and be compelled to meet them for Your Kingdom's sake. Make us an instrument of Your mercy and peace that we may help others find healing and wholeness in You."*  
Amen.

*"O little town of Bethlehem, the journey of Jesus Christ began. Through His journey, His unwavering compassion touched the hearts of many. As we embark on our own journeys, let's strive to be like Him, embodying His teaching of compassion."*

**BLD Pre-Planning Workshop Seminar:  
A Deep Dive into Strengthening Spirituality, Growth, and Leadership Development**  
*by Jun & Gena Narva*

On November 30, 2024, more than 70 committed and covenanted members of the BLD Vancouver District gathered for a transformative pre-planning workshop seminar. This highly anticipated event focused on deepening spirituality, attracting new members, retaining and engaging current members, and preparing future leaders within the community. With a sense of purpose and excitement, participants came together to explore innovative ways to elevate BLD to new heights and strengthen its collective mission.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the seminar was the high level of engagement and enthusiasm from the participants. Grounded in **Human-Centered Design Thinking**, the workshop placed the needs of people at the core of its planning process, encouraging creative problem-solving. Members took part in various dynamic exercises, including **Rose, Thorn, Bud**, where they reflected on the organization’s strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Other activities like the **Creative Matrix**, **Visualized Voting**, and **Creative Posters** allowed attendees to brainstorm and prioritize ideas, ensuring the event was not only productive but also engaging and enjoyable.



*“The exercises were so much fun, and it felt amazing to be a part of the creative process. It made the workshop interactive and engaging—it was a refreshing and delightful experience. To be given a chance to express our viewpoints, concerns and suggestions show our relevance in our beloved BLD community,” shared Joy de la Torre.* The hands-on activities helped foster a sense of camaraderie, with members working in teams to share ideas and collaborate on solutions. A common theme echoed throughout the event was the sense of validation and unity members felt. *“The pre-planning was a good first step in getting the community members involved in creating plans to increase and retain membership which is crucial to BLD’s future,” said Jojo & Bing Zulita.*

*“The collaborative exercises made us feel good knowing that our voices were heard and that our ideas aligned with the community,” said Roselyn Panganiban.* *“It was inspiring to see how our individual contributions fit into a larger, shared vision.”* This sense of alignment was pivotal, as it highlighted how, despite differences, the group was united in their commitment to the spiritual and organizational growth of BLD.

**Human Centered Design**  
**What is it?**

An approach to problem-solving and innovation that prioritizes the need behaviors, and experiences of people

The core idea is to create solutions having empathy for people's needs and pain points




The workshop also emphasized the importance of aligning personal goals with God's divine purpose. Through collaboration, members developed actionable strategies that will help the community thrive. ***"It may not be perfect but it is better to try what is the best for everyone. And with God's guidance and knowing that the community is in the same vision and mission, little by little, we will bear the fruit,"*** said Jojo & Michelle Verzosa.





Looking ahead, it's clear that the BLD community is energized, spiritually committed, and ready to embrace the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. ***"It brought out thoughts and inputs that members normally won't be able to share with leaders. The program could have been allotted more time, especially with the enthusiasm that the activities generated. For us, the underlying message to the community is to let the Holy Spirit lead the BLD Vancouver district"*** shared Joy & Deo Simbulan. The rhema of the workshop from Proverbs 19:21 will continue to guide their efforts: ***"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."***

As the seminar came to an end, it was clear that the BLD community had not only generated valuable ideas but also solidified its collective vision for the future. The thoughtful planning and creative approaches discussed laid a strong foundation for the organization's activities in the coming year. Participants left the seminar with a renewed sense of purpose and determination. ***"We're really excited about the future of BLD," said another participant. "The ideas we discussed today are going to drive our growth and transformation, and we can't wait how these ideas are put into action."***



*Stay tuned for more updates on how the ideas and strategies discussed will come to life, as the BLD community continues to grow, serve, and thrive with faith and purpose.*



## PEPSICO – COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD

By Van Cliff and Stella Maris de Guilo



In the spring of 2024, my wife Estela and I attended the Marriage Encounter #46. As we completed the registration form, we were pleasantly surprised to learn that the hefty registration fee had been waived. While we were familiar with BLD as a religious group, we had little understanding of what their programs involved, so the weekend retreat was a complete surprise to us.

I was deeply impressed by the solemnity of the venue, the generous meals, and the heartfelt openness of the sharers. Listening to their personal stories was a blessing, as the lessons they imparted from a lifetime of navigating the ups and downs of marriage were both valuable and moving. For Estela, one of the highlights of the weekend was the beautiful, live music performed by the dedicated members.

The weekend's activities were thoughtfully organized, and we appreciated the smooth flow of events. Bringing our children along allowed us to fully participate in the encounter without any added stress or anxiety.

Overall, our time at the encounter was both enriching and fulfilling. We came to see BLD as a vibrant community of Catholic believers, united by faith and a shared mission to positively impact the lives of others. We are grateful for the collective effort of the members who generously bring their talents and skills to make the encounters a success.

I work for PepsiCo, and through its philanthropic arm, the PepsiCo Foundation, the company runs the Community Impact Grants program, which supports non-profit organizations addressing equitable access to nutritious food, safe water, and economic opportunity. As an associate, I have the privilege of nominating community-based non-profit organizations in the U.S. and Canada to receive a US\$ 7,500 grant. Inspired by BLD's commitment to making a meaningful difference in the well-being of others, especially through its transformative Marriage Encounter program, it is an honor to nominate BLD Vancouver for this grant [as a way to 'pay it forward.'](#)

By the grace of God, BLD Vancouver was among the top 100 awardees in North America. It is my prayer that this grant will support the BLD's mission to inspire positive change and empower couples and families to build strong, loving foundations that create a ripple effect, benefiting not only families but the community at large.





**A Blessed Day for Civilly Wed Couples: Now Sacramentally Married during  
Vancouver Archdiocesan Mass Wedding in Richmond, BC  
By: Ted & Lourdes Lim (Mission Apostolate Stewards)**

Dreams became reality for 30 civilly married couples as they received the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony at St. Paul Parish in Richmond, BC last September 21, 2024. Archbishop Michael Miller, CSB, officiated the ceremony, creating a day filled with both joy and solemnity. Family members, friends, couple facilitators, choir members, and the dedicated working team from Bukas Loob sa Diyos (BLD) Covenant Community witnessed this sacred moment.

In preparation, couples participated in rehearsals, confession, and fellowship with BLD facilitators, to ensure a smooth and meaningful ceremony. The BLD action team worked tirelessly to decorate the church and parish center, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere for photo sessions and cake sharing, that added to the beauty to the celebration.

The Mass Wedding is an initiative of the Filipino Catholic Ministry of the Archdiocese of Vancouver. Guided by Deacon Raul Abella, who supported the couples go through the necessary steps like the marriage preparation course and documentation. Priests & Deacons co-celebrated the Mass, officially receiving the couples' responses on their matrimonial vows.

This sacrament marked not only a beautiful ceremony, but also the beginning of a journey rooted in faith, love, and commitment to God. This special day serves as a powerful reminder of the strength the sacrament brings to families and the broader Church community.

A reunion for the couples to receive their wedding certificates was held on Dec. 1st, organized by BLD Mission Apostolate team. A time to reconnect with their facilitators, now considered prayer partners, who will continue to support their spiritual journey as sacramentally married couples through an invitation to join the BLD Marriage Encounter Weekend in April 2025. The Mass Wedding, full of love and grace, will be cherished by all who were present.



# COUPLE FACILITATORS

# Choir



# ACTION TEAM

## Another Morning – What Will You Do Today? Reflections of Sr Chita Torres (ME #44)



Ten years, a mixture of laughter and sadness, tears and joy. An experience of being loved and accepted, and being cursed and rejected. When I have reflected more deeply on each of the situations I experienced, I could not help but smile and say, “What a loving God I have, who has journeyed with me through the years”. In all these experiences, I have felt so blessed.

The most amazing parts of my life have been the moments shared, loving everyone, even those who could not love me back. Embracing everyone that came my way, giving myself to those most in need. It was not the quantity of service that I gave, but the extra miles that I walked with the most marginalized and vulnerable people in the Downtown Eastside that made me smile. The laughter, the stories shared and listened to – sometimes they made me smile, and sometimes they made me cry.

Walking in our neighborhood gave me the opportunity to know and share myself with the whole community. I have said that when the time comes for me to say goodbye to this precious community, I will leave behind a big portion of my heart, but I will bring with me the very rich experience I have had in the DTES.

I was out walking one day when I noticed two men with a drug pipe and other paraphernalia. They saw a lady experiencing a drug overdose and immediately put aside their equipment and called me to help. This is a community where people take care of each other.

Am I ready to give up what I am doing to help someone else? That was my question to myself long ago – until I was in the same situation, seeing someone experiencing drug overdose. After all, our call is to give ourselves in the service of God to save one another physically, and our loving presence will draw others to God.

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*The Door Is Open (TDIO) is a drop-in ministry that provides food, clothing, counseling, and shelter services and referrals. It is a warm and safe environment located un the heart of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. TDIO is a ministry under the Archdiocese of Vancouver.*

## The Door Is Open: An Eye-Opening Experience by Sandell Mateo, ME#46

Volunteering at *The Door Is Open* soup kitchen in Vancouver has been an eye-opening and profoundly humbling experience. Situated in the Downtown Eastside, one of Canada's most vulnerable communities, this organization serves as a vital resource for individuals facing homelessness, poverty, and addiction. The time I spent there not only gave me an opportunity to give back but also deeply influenced my understanding of resilience, compassion, and the challenges faced by marginalized populations.

The staff and ME 46 volunteers at *The Door Is Open* are a testament to the power of teamwork. Everyone worked collaboratively, whether peeling eggs, assembling meals, or cleaning up afterward. The sense of camaraderie was palpable, and it was heartening to see people from all walks of life coming together with a shared goal: to create a welcoming space for those in need.



This experience taught me the value of empathy and the impact of small acts of kindness. It made me reflect on my own privileges and encouraged me to think critically about how I can contribute to creating a more equitable society. Above all, it reminded me of the strength of community and the importance of treating everyone with respect and compassion.

Volunteering at *The Door Is Open* has left an indelible mark on my heart. It has motivated



me to stay involved in initiatives that support vulnerable communities and to advocate for systemic change. I am grateful for the opportunity to have been a small part of such meaningful work and look forward to continuing my journey of service.

For anyone considering volunteering, I wholeheartedly encourage it. Organizations like *The*

*Door Is Open* offer more than just meals; they offer hope and a reminder that we all have a role to play in supporting one another.



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After several years of buying, selling and holding investment properties in Greater Vancouver, I would summarize the following lessons in Real Estate:

1. That Real Estate will almost double in value every 8 to 10 years (3 major Real Estate booms happened for the 30 year period with minor booms in between.)
2. That home ownership is still the best option to fight inflation;
3. That Real Estate is the best way to leverage your money (imagine you can control Real Estate with only a down payment of 5% or no down for creative investors).
4. That most of the millionaires made their fortunes in Real Estate and or included Real Estate as part of their investments.
5. That Real Estate is not a quick money investment but follows the principle of buy and hold.

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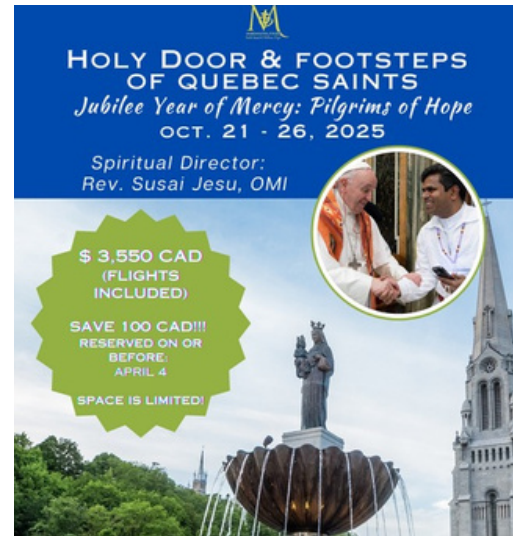


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