

looking at rainbows
and midnight sunsets

Klein Fausto Emperado

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(A Compilation of Blogs written during the 2014 Young in the Worldwide
Church Program in Sweden)

KLEIN FAUSTO EMPERADO

FOREWORD

The youth exchange program has for many years enriched our churches, brought life in to our communion and embodied our relations. The program gives young members of our churches the opportunity to meet over borders, experience other cultures and contexts, reflect on life and faith, and share ideas with each other. It makes them grow, and it makes our churches grow with them. It is an amazing thing, how the program manages to bring people together, to create bonds stronger than most friendships and to make us understand how we are all one, always connected, no matter where we are in the world.

“Looking at Rainbows and Midnight Sunsets” contains reflections about the exchange program, the effects of bringing people together over borders and the beauty of the world wide church, of sharing faith, traditions, values and all that is life.

The texts of Klein Emperado touches the very core of the exchange, and describes, in a vivid and thoughtful way how we all are connected and that our differences also are our strengths. The texts describe one exchange experience among many, but still it manages to touch upon feelings and thoughts that exchange participants’ shares with us in different ways every year.

It is with pride and happiness that we see this publication presented during the 20th anniversary of the Concordat between Iglesia Filipina Independiente and Church of Sweden. The publication gives recognition to the importance of our mutual youth exchange which we hope will continue to enrich our churches formal relations with human experiences for many years to come!

As we give our thanks to Klein Emperado for this splendid contribution to our mutual history of youth exchange in the world wide church, we also wish the reader a good time Looking at Rainbows and Midnight Sunsets!

Anne Falk and Åsali Ahlström
Coordinators of the Youth exchange program “Young in the World Wide Church”
International department, Church of Sweden
Uppsala, Sweden

The purpose of a telling one’s story is to share the excitement of one’s adventures and experience. A story gives an insight into the valuable lessons that a wanderer have gained in the course of the journey that was made, and shares the joy and pain, thrill and anxiety that touch the adventurer’s spirit as the journey takes shape.

“Looking at Rainbows and Midnight Sunsets” speaks about the journey of one young person from the Iglesia Filipina Independiente into the Church of Sweden. Browsing the book, one will easily see the walloping feelings that arise from the encounters that Klein Emperado has made as he receives warm welcome from people and communities, and gain new understanding from events that surround and form the stories of his journey.

Flipping through the pages of this book, one will soon discover that this is more than a compilation of essays. This is a gift of inspiration that comes wonderfully wrapped in a young person’s perspective as he shares his passion, aspirations and dreams that were born in the young journeyer’s heart as the friendship between the Church of Sweden and Iglesia Filipina Independiente delights his spirit.

I am certain that those who would read this book will be touched by the gift that these stories share.

† The Most Revd Ephraim S. Fajutagana
Obispo Maximo
Iglesia Filipina Independiente

Our parish St. Mikael's is a part of the Diocese of Stockholm, with people coming from all around the globe.

It was easy for us to be a host parish for Klein F. Emperado. We remember Klein's presence in our church with great happiness and we are grateful for his positive feedback. We appreciate Klein's very kind person full of compassion and love.

Klein participated in our mass with his wonderful song and he taught us about his home country the Philippines a land of amazing landscape and friendly people. His writing about Church of Sweden was filled with understanding for another part of the World Wide Church.

Reading about Klein's visit in St. Mikael's parish gave a real understanding of how important it is for all of us to learn more from each other.

We wish Klein all the best. May God bless you Klein.

David Kindbom

Former Parish Priest, St. Mikael's församling
Vårby Gård, Stockholm, Sweden

"This is the body of Christ" – words usually uttered in the mass, but can also be said about the Parish of Västervik, the Church of Sweden or the universal Church. As a symbol ☞ the word contain more than can be grasped in just a few sentences. We are, as Christians, part in the body of Christ where

Jesus is the head. We need each other. Without each other, Christians of different cultures, traditions and parishes we are no better than the hand telling the foot we don't need you.

Of course, it would be easier to define the Parish of Västervik in words of a gathering of people or members in an association ☞ but that is not what we truly are.

God has high hopes – he expects us to be his hands and feet. To orchestrate a good world and to be cooperators in creating the world every day. He trusts us though we have many a time failed. But with the help of the Holy Spirit there is hope. I would hope that more of us would have the possibility to meet different groups of Christians so that our community would be enriched. And that we would always welcome guests that show us the depth of the unity in Christ.

Mikael Eriksson

Parish Priest, Västervik församling
Västervik, Sweden

Youth may not be as good as anyone spent in a life cycle. Yet, the calling is in the wilderness for one to heed the call. The vocation or *vocare* may not be well understood and accepted by the majority but every individual has the share in His ministry.

The Youth Exchange Program is a good opportunity and an avenue for development and enhancement of talents and skills that will help our young people to empower and lead the flock.

The creation of this publication by our very own youth, Klein Emperado, a very talented and dynamic, a servant leader whose faith rooted in Christ...so committed to serve beyond his call, may open a new horizon to the rest of our young people- to serve God and country.

Pro Deo Et Patria!

Rev. Canon Greg I. Baricar, BBA, BTh

Youth Chaplain and Canon, St. Andrew's Cathedral
Diocese of Negros Oriental and Siquijor
Dumaguete City

Klein Fausto Emperado is one of the many young people from a partner church who has taken part in the Young in the World Wide Church program – since the 1990's a youth exchange program within Church of Sweden. Klein stayed in the congregation of St. Mikael's in the Diocese of Stockholm from March until April 2014.

Klein, like many others in the program, came to share our weekdays and Sundays and look at Church of Sweden with clear and fresh eyes. He brought his own Christian tradition along, making the encounter rich and a true learning experience.

The publication is Klein's gift to his church, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and to Church of Sweden for the 20th Anniversary of Concordat relations between the two churches.

The importance and inspiration of visits from young people from different contexts is undoubtedly one of the fortunes of a global Christianity.

The light of the Risen Lord leads us on our walk through joy and challenges; neither stormy winds nor sunshine – we continue together inspired by each other.

The beauty of diversity gives us a broader understanding of the different conditions and challenges in our separate traditions – the eye level encounters makes us curious to learn, to know more and to grow.

Klein Fausto Emperado gives us hope and courage through sharing his reflections.

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind always be at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face, and rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand

Eva Brunne, Bishop, Church of Sweden

Diocese of Stockholm

The Iglesia Filipina Independiente-Church of Sweden Youth Exchange Program is one of the concrete expressions of the two churches' partnership in mission. It had been there for quite some time in order to provide our young people a clearer grasp of the ministries of both churches for them to have better appreciation of our churches' partnership.

However, only the author is able to discern the importance of writing his personal reflections, ideas, realizations, struggles and even challenges derived during his exposure program in the Church of Sweden.

The undersigned appreciates the initiative of the author as it somehow provides glimpses on how the churches in partnership engaged themselves in ministry in their own context and how the same undertake or gave flesh to its long been established partnership in mission.

Likewise, this piece of work manifests the great value of the exchange program. That, indeed, the Youth Exchange Program is important as the experiences and reflections of those that were involved in it could introduce and offer brighter ideas in order to bring the partnership of our churches to greater heights in terms of relevance, significance and meaning.

Rt. Revd Delfin D. Callao, Jr
IFI Diocese of Cabadbaran



BISKOPEN I LINKÖPING
MARTIN MODÉUS

Linköping, 3th of November 2015

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!"
Philippians 4:4

Greetings from Church of Sweden and the Diocese of Linköping!

In 2015, the Philippine Independent Church and Church of Sweden celebrate 20 years of friendship and partnership in ministry. We are two Churches that work together in the common mission for God's work.

Church of Sweden and the Philippine Independent Church have established different types of relations during these 20 years. One such relation, which is very fruitful, is the still on-going youth exchange program "Young in the worldwide Church". Klein Fausto Emperado was one of the participants and he visited our Diocese of Linköping during the spring of 2014. I understand that these months of exposure to our country and our Church had a positive impact on Klein Fausto Emperado. Experiences like these, sharing the daily life of another Church, change people.

We can have different ways of expressing our faith but we still have a common faith in our Lord. Despite our daily hardships and challenges, God always strengthens us. As Christians all over the world we can rejoice in the knowledge and experience of a God who is love. 20 years have passed and we can look forward to many more years of exchange and of sharing but foremost, of rejoicing in our common Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

God bless you in your work, Klein Emperado. I hope that your texts will continue to strengthen the relations between our Churches and will inspire us to be a part in God's mission.

In Christ,

+ *Martin Modéus*

Bishop Martin Modéus

DEDICATION

This publication, my labor of love, is dedicated to God, the source of all blessings, the Great Author and Conductor of my life

To the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and the Church of Sweden as they celebrate the 20th year of its concordat of full-communion relations

To my parents: Lynette and Douglas Philip and to my immediate family: Killian Marie, Kaiser John, Kirk Philip, Karrell Kentz, Jzaki Kiel, Aunt Chloe, Aunt Ethel, Mark, Jarth Andrei and Cyle Ellery for the inspiration and encouragements

To my foster family in Stockholm: Josefina Bautista, Martha Hultqvist, Ingrid Hultqvist, Cecilia Bohlin and kids: August, Elsa, Ludwig for providing me with a home away from home, coupled with love and care that of a genuine family during my stay in Stockholm

To my foster parents in Västervik: Drs. Ragnar and Kerstin Asplund for the warm accommodation and for letting me experience a Swedish countryside home and for the warm affection

To the exchange program coordinators: Malin Wrigstad, Anne Falk and Lisa Trovik who served as light to my way during the exchange and for guiding me through the journey

To my very supportive program supervisors: David Kindbom, Zebastian Strömberg and Märtha Blomberg for the warm hugs, constant support and guidance during the exchange period

To my bishops, supervisors and friends from the Diocese of Stockholm and the Diocese of Linköping: Bishop Eva Brunne, Lisa Åslund, Margareta Nordström, Bishop Martin Modeus and Fredrik Olofsson for the constant support and interesting exchange of thoughts

To my foster parishes: St. Mikael's församling in Vårby Gård, Stockholm and Västerviks församling in Västervik, Sweden and to the lovely members and church workers for the warm welcome during my stay

To my musician friends: Ulrika Wiström, Peter Nätterlund, Bo Ingelberg, Elisabeth Ingelberg and Cecilia Tengver thank you for assisting my musical performances and for the inspiration to continue with the music ministry

To Bella Ohtonen, Lilly Mattsson, Agneta Hansson and Josefina Klang for the care, love, hospitality and for the appreciation afforded to my home country, Philippines and its culture

To my friends from the exchange group: Mugisha Kahigi, Albert

Peter, Joseline Buberwa, Daisy Charles from Tanzania; Ana Carolina Schieferdecker, Renata Schwingel, Simone Medina Wassen, Vinícius Ponath from Brazil; Gama Nkosinathi, Lesedi Gooi, Tshegofatso Thipe, Innocentia Serite from South Africa and my Filipino companions: Ralph Alojado, Kim Birly Duropan and Geraldine Casareno for the companionship and for letting me see the world through the varied personalities, backgrounds and thoughts during discussions

To His Eminence, the Most. Rev. Ephraim S. Fajutagana, Rt. Rev. Joselito Cruz, Rt. Rev. David M. Ga and Rt. Rev. Delfin D. Callao for putting your trust in my capabilities and for the opportunity to represent the youth of our church

To my loving and supportive program coordinators from the IFI Central Office: Rev. Fr. Dindo Ranojo and Vincent Alay-ay for the support and for preparing me with the exchange journey

To my home dioceses: Diocese of Davao where I first got the nomination for the program and the Diocese of Negros Oriental and Siquijor and my home parishes: Cathedral of the Risen Lord, Davao City and Parish of St. Anthony of Padua, Tayasan, Negros Oriental, its clergy, church workers, supportive and loving members for the constant prayers and support in my endeavors

To my relatives, friends, colleagues from Silliman University Office of Information and Publications: Mark Garcia, Charmaine Melaño, Lanie Acibron-Balasbas, Rigel Suarez, Cynde Arcenas, Kirby Ramos, Jae Ryl Moncada and the faculty and staff members of the Department of Chemistry for the support and love

To my friends, mentors and confidants: Donald Quio, Youth of the IFI National President, Maverick Dave Forcado, Sha Famaran, Ronald Jacalan, Dr. Yul Quanico, Rt. Rev. Rhee Timbang of Surigao Diocese, Rev. Ronelio Fabriquer of the Diocese of Romblon and Mindoro, Prof. Jun Sabug, Leland Francisco, Wilson John Escaner, Vaughn Alviar, Rev. Fr. Eduardo Ruasol, Rev. Fr. Greg Baricar, Rev. Fr. Larry Herrera for the motivation

To my supporters: Quima Calumpong, Aunt Michelle and Uncle Hermie Camero, Uncle Noel Dayagdag, Mommy Joyce and Daddy Jimmy Olpoc, Rowgun and Sandra Fausto, Michelle Emperado for helping me with the financial aspect of this publication

To a relative, Asst. Prof. Sonia B. Sygaco, for the moral support, inspiration, assistance, and for helping produce this publication

To the youth of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente – Diocese of Davao and Diocese of Negros Oriental and Siquijor for the encouragement and the added inspiration for the exchange journey



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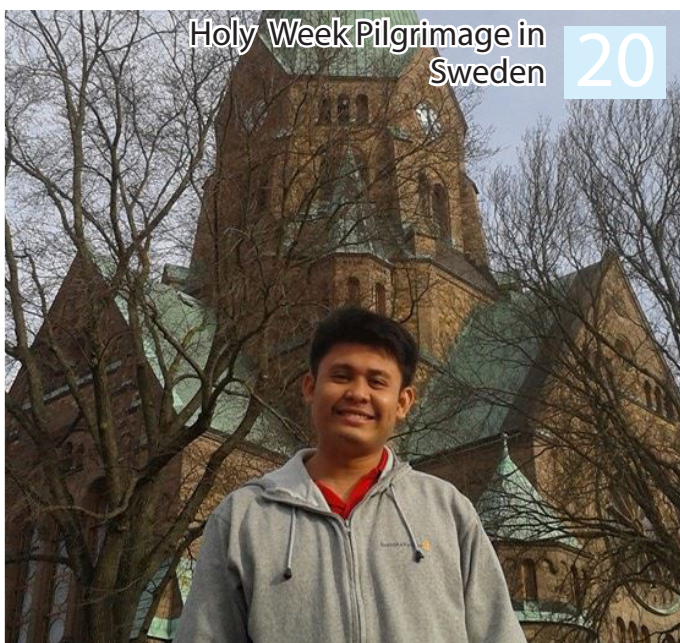


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Looking at Rainbows: A Grown-up's Perspective

When I was a kid, I used to marvel at rainbows in the sky. The childish thought could have vanished through time and maturity. Yet as time passed, I came to realize that my appreciation of a regnbåge (Swedish term for rainbow) was just the start of my understanding that beauty is the outcome of different things coming together.



Coming to Sweden as a participant for the Youth Exchange Program between my church and *Svenska Kyrkan* (Church of Sweden) made me see how 16 different souls managed to get along even for a short period of time. It brought me back to my childhood thoughts, and with that, I have found that my admiration of a rainbow has grown deeper.

Coming from different cultures, traditions, continents and faith denominations, it was a bit hard for me to explain how the magic worked for 16 different people who became united in just a few hours of sharing thoughts and interests.

Thinking deeper, I pointed some similarities with the people from South Africa, Tanzania, Botswana, Swaziland, Brazil and the Philippines that may have caused the unity. To note, the countries mentioned were all former colonies of European countries. Once in their respective historical timelines, they fought for their right – for freedom and for

their country's identity.

Music is another factor that brought more possibilities to unitedifferentindividuals. Withtheexperience, Iwitnessed how music acted as a universal language. I was right with my expectations that most of our brothers and sisters from South Africa, Tanzania, Swaziland and Botswana are musicians. During the second night of the orientation, I had the privilege to teach the song “*Many Gifts, One Spirit*” to my fellow exchange program participants.

In the past few years, I have been working in my church's music ministry, and it was normal for me to direct choirs. But this choir I organized with my fellow participants was very special. The experience was heartwarming; it was never part of my plans or dreams that I would lead a choir composed of people from different nations.

Lastly, it was faith in Jesus Christ that bonded the group together. Even if each one came from different faith traditions, it was still easy to be united in prayer

and songs. I didn't hear anyone talking about differences. Instead, the commonalities among churches were discussed. *Aftonbön* (evening prayer) became a venue to unite in thanking the Lord for the opportunity to pray, to pause for awhile, be in silence and reflect on God's word.

After the orientation week in *Sigtuna Folkhögskola*, all the participants were assigned to some parishes and dioceses in the Church of Sweden.

Within these few months of full immersion with the Swedish people and their church, I hope to see more rainbows in the congregations, but I bear with me the positive mindset that different things are good and beautiful.

My prayer is that God will open my heart and mind, as well as my companions, to see differences as a blessing. I hope for the best in this journey with the Church of Sweden, that I may share what I have, and in

return, I may also learn from their church and society.

(Klein writes regularly at the blog site of the Church of Sweden in order to sum up his rainbow of experiences within a week. This one is his first output during his three months of stay in Sweden and this was also published at the blog section of Silliman University's official website thus, promoting the Iglesia Filipina Independiente.)



Hope Springs from Kids in Church

One snowy Wednesday afternoon, around half past two, kids began arriving for choir practice. Aside from the fact that it was midweek and the weather was very unlikely, it was unusual for kids to spend time in the church. They could have chosen to go home straight from school and spent some spare time doing childish stuff.

Nonetheless, they still came to practice songs for the church service. These kids, I realized, were unintentionally deviating from the trend of secularization in this country. According to the inputs from the orientation week, Sweden is the world's most secularized country; there is currently a very high percentage of people who are not attending church services. This indeed is posing a big problem for *Svenska Kyrkan* (Church of Sweden) in the future.

Yet even with this kind of practice in my host congregation at Sankt Mikael's församling (St. Michael's Parish) in Vårby Gård, I don't see a bleak future a few years from now after seeing the kids. These young ones who are given responsibilities in church while being nurtured in their faith through some creative Sunday school activities will soon grow into mature individuals. It may be different in other parishes here in Sweden, but their practice here in this specific parish is worth emulating.

Educating the teenagers and the matured members could be a hard task, but kids are easy to influence, especially when they see the good or bad examples: the older people. When kids come to church for its services, art-related activities and choir practices, the church workers will now have a chance to share

not just about religion, church involvement, and fellowship with neighbors, but more likely about faith in God, which is the most basic thing that every Christian should bear.

This is an indication of hope. In a country where church attendance and participation is not common, there is still hope for the Church of Sweden few years from now because of the kids who are attending the service and the Sunday school almost every week in this parish.

Last Sunday, I was amazed and surprised to see kids attending the church service on their own. These kids are filled with willingness to attend church, and this normally springs from their responsibilities during the Sunday Mass. When kids would not serve as members of the choir, they assist in the liturgical processions, offertory, and the communion rites.

I felt like home seeing the children participate in the conduct of the service. Back home, I have a children's choir singing for the Mass every Sunday. It feels so good that I share the same mission and passion with my host parish.

Engaging the kids into the service and giving them responsibilities could be one of the best ways to prepare for the church's future.

Years from now, these kids who are willing to take responsibility in church services will soon mature. Surely, in the future, they will find ways to be in church on Sundays, bringing their kids and letting them experience what they used to do when they were young. It's a cycle that continues.



Hope lives, as long as kids are willing to learn about God in Sunday school. Hope lives, as long as you see kids participating actively in the services. Hope lives, as long as you see several kids participate in song practices and other learning activities. Hope lives, as long as you hear kids sing loudly the hymns during the service. Hope lives for the Church of Sweden, as long as you see kids come on Sundays. Hope springs from Kids in Church.



BEYOND THE SWEDISH FIKA

Three weeks after I arrived here in Sweden, I'm starting to love one of its traditions relating to food. *Fika* (fee-ka), which simply means "drinking coffee", is said to be a social institution for Swedes of all ages.

The word is both a Swedish verb and noun. *Fika* takes place normally after the three major meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Coffee comes with pastries, cookies, biscuits, and bread, like cinnamon buns (or *kannebullar*, in Swedish). Like any tradition, it has evolved from drinking coffee to tea, juice or any kind of beverage.

While I was still in Manila for the program orientation, I was intrigued on the fact that Swedes love to eat in small amounts in between meals.

My curiosity was answered upon arrival in Sigtuna during my firsthand *Fika* experience. It was when I first met my fellow program participants from Brazil and South Africa.

I realized what *Fika* truly meant. It was not just a time for Swedes

to take a coffee break or eat cookies, but it is more of a time for fellowship. It's in a *Fika* where conversations between our Swedish facilitators and fellow program participants began to flourish. It was an instrumental time in getting to know our companions well in this exchange program.

Sweden's tradition is deep in its meaning. Also, the occasion of *Fika* becomes a venue for strengthening relationships among families, friends, church members, and work colleagues.

Aside from providing time for interaction, it can also be called a quick yet sweet escape from the serious side of life. *Fika* always brings fun, laughter and smiles to the people. It's an occasion to be happy and to get away from the stress of daily work.

This *Fika* tradition speaks of how Swedes handle the hard and fast life in a developed country. They really make it a point that in the middle of working hours, it's okay to breathe, drink coffee, take some snacks, sit and share thoughts about life with someone. It's indeed an important "pausing" time of the day.

Traditions are very nice to follow when you get to know its essence or purpose. Three weeks had passed and I am still not certain about the whole meaning of *Fika*, but at least I'm able to write some preliminary observations as to why such tradition exists here in Sweden.



A Church Breaking the Bread for the World to Share

Despite the challenges of declining membership and countless problems arising due to its existence in a highly individualistic society, the Church of Sweden has become stronger in its commitment to share the bountiful resources to people from other nations.

Through the work, I realized that the Church of Sweden's purpose is not only meant exclusively for the Swedes and to the people from other countries living along its borders, but also for the whole world, especially to those are in dire need for the most basic commodities like food and water.

I have seen that most parishes of the Church of Sweden follow different formats in their Mass celebrations, but they are still united in their worship life and in the breaking of the bread. The latter act continues to remind them about Christ's commandment to break the bread and share the wine to those who are hungry and thirsty.

Projects do not remain in paper, and all the more, it does not stay in their national office in Uppsala. It has reached the parish levels. As an eye witness to how a certain parish makes the people know



about Church of Sweden's programs in other countries, I was touched knowing that this dominant and powerful church humbled down and went outside its boundaries on a cold afternoon.

Armed with cinnamon buns, coffee, tea and grape juice, the priest and his staff stayed near the *Tunnelbana* (subway). The team brought with them a tarpaulin and some materials bearing the message to end hunger in the world, and this was one way of raising funds for the said project.

From that day on, the scene has left a mark on my subconscious and it flashed like lightning as I heard hundreds of kids chanting, "*Kärlekens väg*" (Way of Love) during a service at Stockholm Cathedral a week ago.

Indeed, it has reminded me that love is about humility and sacrifice. I have seen that it was love for others that moved the powerful Church of Sweden to step down a bit and go to the streets to campaign for the end of hunger in the world. As I see it, this has been the main reason why there are several development projects across countries that are bound to help people, save lives, and organize communities.

Recently, the Church of Sweden sent millions to the Philippines for the rehabilitation and humanitarian relief for those affected by the Super Typhoon Haiyan last November 2013. More projects have been centered on the



eradication of hunger in the African countries, too. The Church is serving like “streams of living water” in a hopeless desert situation.

Through such illustrations, the Church of Sweden has transformed from a normal worshipping church into a serving church. It appears to be more like an organization for humanitarian causes for the benefit of people from different beliefs and origins. It has gained an identity of a church beyond borders, and has widened its reach across nations and continents with a purpose of uplifting lives.

While writing this, I came to realize that the things I was faced with everyday summed up to how Church of Sweden imparts Christ’s teachings, more specifically on sharing the blessings. I can still remember the candidates for confirmation who were made to bake cookies and buns to be sold, and the proceeds of which would be given to the Philippines for ongoing humanitarian efforts.

Within a few weeks, Church of Sweden’s identity has changed from being a powerful church to a very powerful (because of its bountiful

resources) yet selfless church – mindful of those who don’t have anything to place in their tables and for people who can’t even access potable water to quench their thirst.

Being wealthy is not bad. Wealth can be used in the noblest ways, especially in helping others and by sharing resources to those in need. This is what the Church of Sweden does.

It was the celebration at the Cathedral of Stockholm that triggered this personal reflection. During the service, Church of Sweden’s deep commitment in helping people from other countries was pointed out as a concrete response to Christ’s command of breaking the bread for the world to share.

Seeing the cover of the program, I asked what the title “Dela Ditt Bröd – Mätta Många” meant. I then found out that these were very significant phrases that could best wrap up Church of Sweden’s work: to “Share Your Bread” and to “Feed the Many.”



Walking in the Land of the Vikings

(A Round-up Blog for my First Month in Sweden)

The cold weather woke me one rainy morning, and as I looked at my schedule for the day, I realized that it's been a month since I stepped in this land where the Vikings originated. It was in high school when I first heard about the Vikings through my World History class. They were known to be fierce; they traveled through ships and gained an identity as one of the first to conquer territories.

But I never expected that once in my life, I could live where they came from. This called for some adjustments to the culture and the life of the Swedes.

Just within a month, I have learned to live the Swedish ways, like dealing with the unpredictable weather in this time of year, eating the kind of cuisine which not any Filipino could easily adjust, using the fast transportation system through the subway and buses, wearing at least two jackets and other warmers if I'm going outdoors and most of all, appreciating the discipline of the Swedish time.



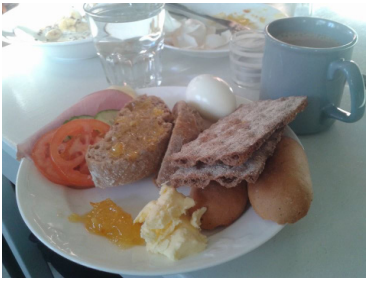
Like the Swedes, talking about the weather would be the first topic that comes out of my mouth when I get up from sleep everyday. When it's cold, I'd love to be at home, but I believe that I should also still go out, coping Sweden's weather and experiencing the life in the beautiful place.



The first snow experience was awesome, but later on, it was more of a hassle on my part, like the native folks also feel. All the more, it would be colder when the snow would melt. Just for a day, I get to experience two seasons like winter and sunny weather. As I

gaze outside the window, I admire the kids in the preparatory school nearby. Whether it was snowy, rainy or sunny, they are to go out and play. This speaks of how Swedes educate their kids for them to go on with life not thinking about the weather.

Clothing here would be far different, in a way that I can't go out of my foster home not wearing at least two jackets as the temperature may reach the negative at times. It also means that I can't go out without a scarf, a pair of hand gloves, or perhaps not wearing a warmer.



On the other hand, food is the lightest feather among the challenges I met in this foreign country. Thanks to my father who taught me to eat salad and sandwiches. Swedish food is simple and nothing much complicated in terms of preparation. In the absence of rice, I learned to love potatoes, bread, couscous and beans.



During my first dinner, I was welcomed by a steamed salmon. It was a sign that I'm in a cold country, the only place where such fishes thrive. Within this time, I could point some favorites like Swedish meatballs, beef stew, wok (Swedish version of the Filipino "pancit") sausages, apple pie, blueberry pie, and raspberry pie.

Of course, I learned to love Fika and the Swedish eating schedules. In fact, I wrote about Fika during my previous article weeks ago.



I was amazed by the public transport system that makes the travels very convenient and the destination easy to access. It also shows how organized and time conscious the Swedes are. When the prompter says that the bus will arrive at exactly 8:29, it will really arrive on the dot, and this is also the same with the train. There are slim possibilities that I'll be lost in the big city or in any place because there are maps and signs everywhere showing the directions.

Most of all, the most beneficial of all experiences is the Swedish time itself. Getting to the place on the dot is somewhat difficult for me all these years, but here, I need to come on time or else, I'll be missing the trip on the bus or on the train. Missing the trip would mean forfeiting a part of the program - an opportunity and an experience.

Discipline can be seen in most Swedes as they really follow time, especially when it comes to appointments. This shows that they value time so much and a minute wasted is like a mortal sin.

Living in this land of the Vikings makes me realize more why these people have become so progressive especially in their economy. The big reason behind such development is their attitude towards life. Despite any weather within the day, they still go out to work, school, or play. They really don't mind the negative factors that surround them. After all, as they say, "There's no bad weather in Sweden but only bad clothes."

Their food and cuisine also symbolize their simplicity towards life. Making all things simple and not so complicated would really make life easier, literally.

But most of all, what I appreciate most with the country and its people is on how they value time. Here, I can see the Vikings in them, being quite fierce with time. And that's something worth emulating.



Church Goes Deviant, Grooves with the Youth yet Abides with Christ's Mission

This is about the Easter Celebration

I arrived in a castle-like church to attend a gathering of young people from *Stockholm Stift* (Diocese). Upon entering the majestic *Sofia Kyrka* (*Sofia Church*), located on a hilltop, I began to hear an unusual sound from the church's interior. The sound was familiar, and it was the type of music played in party houses back in my home country.

As I drew nearer, all the more I have proved that it was party music played in church on loud speakers. Not only that, I saw a Disc-Jockey (DJ) standing on the pulpit, where the priest usually sermons.

Coming from a very conservative background, I could have reacted negatively on what I have just witnessed. For conservative people, they may view it as something sacrilegious. (*Sacrilegious means committing sacrilege; unholy, disrespectful or blasphemous act*)

Gladly, I reminded myself to be open-minded on what I see, hear and witness here in Sweden. Then, I came to appreciate the symbolism brought about by the scene that unfolded right before my very eyes and ears. With this, I arrived to a realization that a deep meaning lies behind that scene which showed how the Church of Sweden strives to draw more young people to Christ, who seems to be unknown to many in the society.

Instead of the church bells, the party music and the DJ signified the call of the *Svenska Kyrkan* to invite young people to come in *Sofia Kyrka*, and the dance connotes how the Church of Sweden gives freedom to young people by allowing them to offer modern groovy moves during the worship.

Added to this, I was told that *FryshusKyrkan* (a church inside *Fryshuset*) often holds Dance Masses. During the service, modern dances with contemporary beats are performed instead of hymns by the dance confirmation class.

In some ways, this could appear as a deviant yet a more meaningful action, because the goal is still to bring God's Word to the young. (*In Sociology, the term deviant means "departing from usual or accepted standards."*)

and learn deeper about Christ not only through worship but also in caring and loving other people - as an actual response to the Gospel. (*During the afternoon, the youngsters were asked to walk around Stockholm City to help collect funds for the Global Mission of the Church of Sweden.*)

Talking about the DJ and the party music played inside *Sofia Kyrka*, I see a church doing away with the conservative norms in order to meet its goal of bringing young people back to God's fold. The party music was a symbol depicting how the church was willing to groove with the youth in order to draw them back to Christ's flock through their interests, like sports, music, arts and dance.

As I recall days before the event, I was able to visit *Fryshuset* (Frozen House), where priests from the Swedish Church are also working for the formation of young people. *Fryshuset* offers social projects and educational programs and serves as an activity center purposely made by Anders Carlberg in the 1980s.

Within the program are four areas of interests for the youth, namely music, skating, basketball and dance. All of these aim to bring young people to the right path and to form useful citizens in the society.

During the visit, I came to know about the Dance Confirmation class, one of *Fryshuset's* programs tied up with the Church of Sweden. In fact, one of its outputs was presented during the event



The Church, in this situation, permits young people to do their interests freely, and as they worship, an encounter happens. Thus, providing the clergy more chances to talk more about God and how a true Christian lives.

So, what I can see is a mutual relationship, because the Mass has become an encounter between the modern dance and God's Word. It is a meeting point between the youth's interest and the Church in mission.

In this kind of project which appears deviant to how a church works, I see Jesus in the modern times. When Jesus walked into this world more than two thousand years

ago, he was called deviant by the Jewish leaders because He did not conform to the conventional traditions of their society.

He preached anywhere, touched and healed the sick, mingled with those tagged as "unclean people", and brought the dead to life. All the more, Jesus did not stay most of the time inside the temple nor built a house of worship for people to visit. Instead, he went out and walked, talked, struggled with the people and more so, he immersed into their daily life.

As I view it in a more Biblical perspective, the struggle of the Church of Sweden to bring back the young people to God abides

with Christ's mission "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

In contrary to Jesus' parable of the lost sheep, the Church of Sweden dwells in a society where more than one sheep has wandered far from the Great Shepherd. The church as Christ, the Good Shepherd's representative, must take a great leap of faith in order to lead the greater fold back to His flock. Although some see the church's actions as somewhat experimental, it is still a fact that behind great inventions were several experiments and attempts.

Yes, Church of Sweden's work may not lead all of the young people back to God, but

it deserves to be given recognition because of its exerted efforts to abide with Christ's mission. It would also sound so unreal or surreal if the Church says that it aims to bring the whole flock back to God's fold because Jesus himself predicted that several individuals would reject His Gospel when He said, "Many are called but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:14)

Lastly in this mission to the young, I see success in the eyes of several young priests pursuing the work in the Church of Sweden. They are the best and profound tools in promoting Christ to the younger generation. "Cool priests," as I tag them, are also what young people would like their friends to be. Cool means to understand the young and to support them with their interests.



Young priests play a vital role in transforming young people in the society. They are willing to step down from being "the priest" to a friend, a playmate, and at the same time, a spiritual adviser in an unnoticed manner.

The event I witnessed was an eye-opener for me as a representative of a church coming from the other side of the world. It was a call to respond to the changing times and to think deeper about the needs of the young generation.

This suggests that it's about time to do away with the conservatives and to think more ways of serving the young people's interests if the church's goal is to bring the Gospel of Christ

to them.

Doing away with the conservative norms would not mean converting churches into party halls and all the more, I am not suggesting that party music should be played inside our sanctuaries. I think it's time for other churches to answer the greater call of becoming a refuge for the young people where they can be themselves and free from prejudice. In this way, the young people would feel they are welcome in God's kingdom and to His big house party prepared for them.

Yes, it was a call to be more open-minded and to act like the deviant Jesus who stepped into this Earth two thousand years ago. In

fact, Christianity was formed because He was successful in doing away with the conventional traditions with His words and act of salvation.

Now it's also time for his followers (churches) to take the deviant path and to groove with the youth if the goal is really to pursue the mission of proclaiming Christ's Gospel to the present generation who are often lured by the new and worldly trinity of **materialism, secularization and individualism** – matters which are now slowly corrupting and conquering the minds of man, who is supposed to be God's best handiwork.

Sweden and Philippines, the Differences in Focus over Faith Celebration

"Glad Påsk!" ("Happy Easter!")

For a week now, I have heard for a couple of times people greeting each other: *"Glad Påsk!"* I was a bit surprised with the exchange of greetings when for me, it was yet too early because before the Resurrection day; Christ's death will still be commemorated on Good Friday.

In comparison to my home country (Philippines), people don't say "Happy Easter" when it is not yet Easter Sunday but instead, I would hear them exchange the greeting: "Have a blessed Holy Week!"

Through the greetings, I have made some reflections on why the two nations differ in focus on this same Christian celebration.

It is a given fact that Filipinos rejoice in Christ's resurrection, but most of the populace gives more emphasis on Christ's passion because they can relate about His suffering and death.

As of the present, the Philippines suffers from the pains of poverty with a huge gap between the poor and the rich, foreign influences, and injustices like corruption thriving in every corner of the society.

In what way did I prove that Filipinos are more focused on Christ's passion? Since I started working voluntarily in church, I have seen the unusual bulk of the crowd attending the Good Friday procession and services in my home parish and that is also true in most Catholic tradition churches all over the Philippines.

On the other hand, it is not surprising why Swedes focus on Easter. Compared to Filipinos, they live a quite comfortable, free and happy life. Every Swedish citizen is given due benefits from womb to tomb, taken from their taxes. These benefits include free education from age one to the time that he or she is six feet under and free medical treatment covered by the government insurance with a certain annual budget for each individual.

Those mentioned were a few reasons why the Swedish society can feel the joy of the resurrection than relate to His passion. Most of them, unlike Filipinos, do not live in poverty or experience catastrophes like earthquakes and killer typhoons.

Also, equality is seen in the Swedish society. Those who earn less are given importance by the government by providing opportunities and financial assistance if needed.

People, especially children, as I stated previously, are valued from the day they are born, and education is free in all levels. (*Tuition fee in universities is free but books are to be bought. But each student is given allowance by the government and there are student loans often offered.*)

Added to that, parents don't need to worry about their kids while they are in school because food is provided for free. In this society, I can really see the abundance that some young people often take for granted.

In the Philippines, many children cannot attend school because they don't have food to eat for lunch and they don't have resources to buy school materials. In far-flung areas, children walk several miles barefoot in order to reach the nearest school – not to mention the hills and rivers they need to pass through along the way.

So, the Filipinos' focus on Christ's suffering and death might contradict to what the church teaches that Easter is the central feast during the Holy Week. But I could not blame my fellow countrymen who focus on the scourged, beaten, crowned with thorns, carrying a heavy cross, forced to take a bitter drink, mocked and put to death Christ, because most of them can feel what Christ had been through in their own lives.

During this festive event, I see Swedes commemorate Easter with symbols such as: *Påsklilja* (Easter Lily), *Påskägget* (Easter egg), and *Påskris* (Easter twigs with colorful feathers) with parties serving lamb meat, meatballs and traditional food. Filipinos, on the contrary, celebrate the feast of Christ's resurrection in their daily life.

Yes, Filipinos celebrate Easter in an unintentional and unnoticed way, every time they rise from a calamity with a beaming hope coming from the Risen Christ. Every time they succumb to earthquakes and typhoons, they celebrate new life given by Christ. Through the priceless smiles and the remarkable courage, they continue to walk and strive for a better life despite the tragic incidents that come their way.

Although there are focus differences, I still see Christ as the common ground of the celebrations here in Sweden and in the Philippines. During this Holy Week, I am glad to see how Christianity's central feast is held on this side of the world.

"Glad Påsk Sverige!" (Happy Easter Sweden!) and *"Maligayang Pasko ng Pagkabuhay mahal kong Pilipinas!"* (Happy Easter my dear Philippines!)

Holy Week Pilgrimage in Sweden

Pilgrimage is described as “a journey to a holy, special and unusual place.” Some may name places like Jerusalem in Israel, Taizé in France, Santiago de Compostela in Spain or Fatima in Portugal – where pilgrims normally flock to enrich their faith.

As for me, journeying in Sweden and experiencing how the Church of Sweden celebrates the Holy Week and Easter can, as well, be tantamount to what they define as a pilgrimage.

The Holy Week experience here in this part of the globe is not so far from the practices of my church, but I see the celebrations here as somewhat less-complicated yet meaningful.

Palmsöndagen (Palm Sunday)

Kicking off the weeklong faith journey is Palm Sunday, and their way of commemorating the triumphal entry to Jerusalem was special because kids from the Sunday school program marched with their handcrafted paper palms during the offertory procession.

What made it special? The kids were raising and waving the paper palms thus, it emitting a festive sound of welcome. The scenario helped me recall how the people of Israel welcomed Jesus riding on a humble donkey as He was on His way to save His people by dying on the cross and to manifest His power by rising from the dead.

During that day, I was overjoyed as I welcomed Dr. Yul Quanico, a fellow member of the IFI who accepted my invitation to attend the service in my host parish. Dr. Quanico, a medical practitioner specializing in Urology, was here in Sweden to attend a conference.

While guiding him through the Mass, I then realized that I have been used to the service in the Swedish Church. He appreciated the hymns and the conduct of the Mass in my host parish and I strongly agree with him. Their service is more congregational – a Mass highly-participated by the several people of all ages.

Skärstorsdag (Maundy Thursday)

Like in any journey, a traveler has to take

some rest. There were no public services on Holy Monday until Holy Wednesday (for the church workers) so, the pilgrimage continued the next day on Maundy Thursday.

The Eucharistic celebration with slow paced hymns accompanied by organ music was short, plain, and solemn.

But after the postlude was played, I was touched and emotional as the altar was being stripped and emptied. My longing for Christ ignited even more as candles were extinguished and the crucifix was covered.

After the service, an empty altar and a covered crucifix were left with dim lights inside the church. Such symbols made me realize what a person's life is when Christ is absent: a life with no beauty and meaning.

Långfredag (Good Friday)

When I arrived in church before the service, I gazed at the empty wooden cross on the altar with a crown of thorns hanged on it. The surround was a bit dark, and only a small candle was lit in front of the cross with some blood-colored roses on the side.

As the short service began, I felt the sad mood conveyed by the opening hymn, and throughout the worship, there was an unexplainable grief. Commemorating Christ's suffering and death on the cross is commonly a heartbreaking and gloomy event in the Liturgical life of any church following Catholic traditions.

Svart Lördag (Black Saturday)

While going to the Easter Vigil Mass, I thought of how the service would be conducted and how many people would usually come to a midnight gathering, starting at half past eleven.

Before the service began, about sixty to

seventy people were already inside the church. Near the entrance, people started to gather holding candles and psalm books.

The usual procession going to the church's interior began the Mass with the Paschal Candle leading the way for the congregation. I recognized the *Exultet* (Easter Proclamation). Although it was sung by two cantors in a different language, it was the most solemn way to commence the joyful service for me.

Like what my church does back home on this same day, only the Paschal Candle is lit during the reading of the lessons. There are also the renewal of baptismal vows and the holding of candles until the end of the Mass. In addition to the rites, the priest blesses the congregation with water from the baptismal font.

Now, what struck me most during the service? It was the empty table that was turned into a colorfully adorned altar with the crucifix, numerous tall candles and vividly colored flowers.

Scenes and rituals expressed the joy of Christ's resurrection including the happy songs which were sung joyfully by the whole congregation, who also felt energized even if the celebration ended at early dawn.

Food is something essential in every journey and I also had the chance to taste what Swedish people usually eat after the Easter Vigil. My host parent was busy preparing the smoked lamb and some bread earlier that day.

Påskdag (Easter Sunday)

After the faith-renewing service, I slept for a few hours and went back to church for the Easter Sunday Mass, the most important of all Sundays in the whole of Christendom.

With a grand choir accompanied by the music of the trumpet, the Mass illustrated the joyful and festive atmosphere in celebration of



Christ's victory over death through His resurrection.

Around eighty people attended the said service. Most of them sang the happy hymns by heart, and the feel of Easter was all around when the Gloria (Glory) was sung by the church choir. Among the congregational favorites, it was Per Harling's "Du är Helig," used as Sanctus (Holy) that made the celebration more festive and participative.

Journey's End

Easter Sunday marked not just the end of my Holy Week Journey but it also signaled the closing stages of my stay here in my first host congregation.

While delivering a message of thanks to the congregation, my weakness in bidding goodbyes rose to life. I almost cried while recalling how the parish had provided me more than a church but a home where I could be a light to others through my songs and music for more than a month.

I share with the parish the same goal of preparing for the church's future by educating and involving the kids in church activities. Our churches are being threatened by the world's materialism and through the kids; we can together combat the threat.

The parish has inspired me to continue my work in the music ministry and with the kid's choir I have back home. With everything, *Tack så mycket!* (Thank you very much!) I will never forget this journey with my first host parish.

For me, the forty days of stay was more than a scheduled exposure program but a pilgrimage of faith, a journey with Christ, a learning experience and a closer look at rainbows in church and in the society.



Intertwined Web of Experiences

(Mid-Gathering Blog)

Upon arrival in Sigtuna Folkhögskola, I suddenly felt like I'm home seeing the program coordinators and my companions in this exchange program. The gathering signaled the end of my stay in the first congregation at Stockholm Diocese.

“Mixed emotions” were the two words that best described how I felt throughout the day. As expected, the feeling of sadness was over me because I had to end the five weeks stay in my first host congregation, but on the other hand, my heart jumped in happiness seeing my fellow participants. I also felt excitement as I start to sink slowly into my consciousness, thinking

During the sharing of diverse experiences from several settings, I could imagine an artist working on a canvas with the goal of creating a masterpiece from materials like brushes of varied sizes and paints of different colors. Indeed, the unique experiences comprised the whole image of what is called the youth exchange program.

Hearing my fellow participants express their different experiences, thoughts, reactions, opinions and reflections made me revisit my first blog's title: “Looking at Rainbows.”

But now, I get to realize how intertwined such occurrences are, like a spider web, or with this

context, a web of experiences. One experience may differ from the other but certainly, each thread of learning is connected in order to come up with a support system and a unified impact for

societal issues in comparison to participating nation's contexts caused the outbreak of numerous learning insights.

On the other hand, the gathering was not only meant to give clarifications but it has also enlightened the faith of the participants through the inspiring message of a priest during the Sunday Mass at the lake's view deck and the moving Bible study experience in the afternoon.

There was that reminder of a person at the fulcrum – a person to be in the middle, setting aside the background where he or she comes from when meeting new people in the congregations.

Doing away with prejudice was also a very profound suggestion that encouraged me to delve deeper on people's lives and actions towards church and society.

With all the intertwined web of experiences, I concur with what the Bible study facilitator shared: It could be dangerous to leave our own Jerusalem (comfort zones) like Jesus in order to set foot in Samaria, but leaving the comfort zones (countries and contexts) can also be exciting, because it is only where one could listen to different kinds of people with a rainbow of views.

But in the end, I see the meetings and conversations as a venue to elicit more personal realizations about faith and life in an international context.



about the start of a new journey in a new parish.

But before embarking on a new journey, the mid-gathering gave opportunities for participants to unload concerns and thoughts, to recharge batteries, and to share insights with the group.

the Swedish society and the Church of Sweden.

Within the days of the middle gathering, simple questions about the Swedish society triggered the thinking minds of the participants resulting to the unending brilliant discussions. Talking about the

Of Hellos, Getting to Knows, and Goodbyes

“Hej!” is a common greeting for people of all ages in Sweden that reminds me of how I was introduced to my first congregation in *Vårby Gård Kyrka* of *Sankt Mikaels Församling* in Stockholm Diocese.

Greeting Swedes would be done normally with a handshake, but apart from the gestures, saying “*Hej!*” is a must. While uttering your name and giving a handshake, eye contact is also very important, and for me, it is meant to show sincerity in greeting.

Home was what I felt when I attended my first service and the congregation members were very glad to have us being the first exchange program participants to immerse in their parish.

Hej Hej! After being introduced to the congregation, church workers and priests, it was easy to move around and I began to help in my most simple way in the conduct of services and in some outreach programs by playing the recorder. They have given me opportunities to sing my heart out with the aim to inspire people and to praise God.

I found the service lively and inspiring, though I did not understand the hymns so much. The tunes were enough to explain the messages conveyed. Good thing I could read music sheets, so I learned the melody in a quite easy way. Yet I still had to take an extra effort in practicing the pronunciation of the Swedish words.

There were services without a choir, but the church musician was quite powerful in encouraging the faithful to praise God through the hymns. I always loved congregational worship,

and this parish has been very good in showing me such type of service.

Apart from the congregational worship, the kids’ presence in church signaled the growth that the parish would soon be facing. The kids are not only educated through Sunday school, but are also engaged to assist in the Mass by serving as choir members, symbol bearers during the offertory, and closing processions. Most of them take part in distributing communion with the priest.

The regular attendance of the kids is a big contributor to the growth of the whole church attendance. Kids have become used to attend church on Sundays and it were the parents who followed the children in this aspect.

I was not able to attend Sunday service with only a few kids. One thing remarkable with kids in the parish is that they would still decide to come to church on their own if their parents were busy.

Why is this happening? I could share a few reasons. First, the relationship that the kids have with the Sunday school teacher and with the other children is solid and well-established. They almost didn’t want to go home after choir practice on Wednesdays.

Yes, you’ve heard it right - relationships. Relationships that are built by more compact and genuine people are the best way to increase

church attendance.

People who feel at home with each other will find a way to meet their church friends, or shall I say church family on a weekly basis and that would be during the Sunday Mass. Their ministry to the kids has extended to the parents as they are having their annual family camp.

Hej då! Bidding goodbye to the church family where I stayed for more than forty days was difficult and I almost shed tears while talking to the congregation during my last Sunday Mass in the parish.

I really am sick with goodbyes. In fact, while writing this blog, tears just fell from my eyes thinking about those nice people I met and the fruitful experience I had with them.

But I need to move on with life and embark on a new journey at a different setting. Memories will always linger in my mind whenever I see pictures, watch videos, and hear hymns, reminding me of the wonderful time I had in my first host congregation.

What I would also miss would be playing the recorder and singing during the Mass, attending the kid’s choir practices, and lastly, sharing faith, life and music with the congregation.

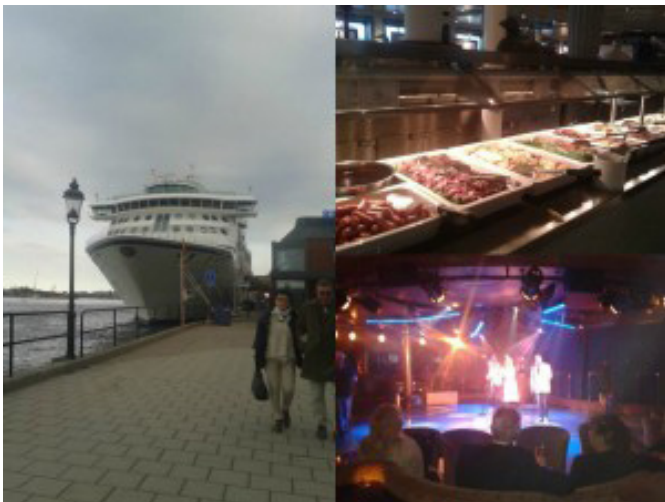
Hej! Hej Hej! Hej då Vårby Gård Kyrka! Tack så mycket!

11 Interesting Things for the Second Month

There was a bit of hesitation before writing this blog. In the process of choosing a preferred title, I was about to point out a dozen of interesting things, but in the end, I only got 11.

Then, I realized that I'm coming up with my eleventh blog which is a round write-up of the second month of stay here in Sweden. This sounds like a good coincidence with 11 interesting things featured in my 11th blog.

Cruise Ship to Finland



For typical Swedish families and individuals, riding on a cruise is somewhat a literal way to unwind and get away from the professional matters. While staying in Stockholm, experiencing the quite luxurious treat of riding a cruise ship to Finland was something new to me. It was actually my first time.

Going on a cruise can be associated to seeing how the Swedes are trained to be more focused even at a young age. So, it is normal that when they grow up, they do not mix up things. Work is work and fun is fun.

With mostly adult Swedes on the ship heading to Mariehamn in Finland, I was an eye witness to how they get away with their busy life.

Food was overwhelming. There were different kinds of dishes and fun – watching shows, drinking, dancing, singing in a karaoke and buying tax free products.

Castle Visits



Growing up, I was made to watch several movies about monarchs, royal families, legends, battles and of course, castles. Seeing one that looks like the castle shown in most movies brought out the kid in me.

As I gazed upon the towers of Gripsholm in Mariefred, I wandered far from the real world. Entering its wooden bridge with the defense gate gave me some historical feel of how it was in the olden times in Europe. Most castles are built around bodies of water for defense purposes.

Mariefred was a small city, yet it provided a display of how the old Swedish city looked like. Its panoramic view of the lake paired with the castle gave me lasting impressions that small cities are beautiful and cozy.

Aside from the Royal Palace near the Storkyrka (Large Church) in Stockholm City, my first foster family also brought me to Drottningholm, the Royal Residence, the majestic edifice with a huge garden and the scenic view of the lake and the surrounding landscape.

Solo Concert

“Songs of Faith Amidst Struggles” was the title of my short concert that’s focused on the unwavering faith of the Filipinos to the Almighty. It was a celebration of the revolutionary heritage of my church, Iglesia Filipina Independiente, through the nationalistic songs. It also featured some of Filipino liturgical composers’ work expressing the faith of my country’s people.

Given the privilege to sing in a solo concert was rather monumental for me because back home, I normally perform during church services. All the more, I felt blessed seeing the people cry to tears during my finale song, matched with the pictures from the recent earthquakes and typhoons.

Easter Play, Easter Celebration and the Symbols



I played the role of a Roman soldier with no speaking parts on the first day, gave goodies for the kids on the second day, and became an alternate musician for the third day. These were the roles I played during the Easter play in my first congregation.

Others became the upper room host at the Last Supper, Judas the traitor, Peter who denied Jesus three times, Mary Magdalene and the Angel inside the empty tomb were portrayed by two priests and church workers. I really admire the church workers who themselves became theater actors and singers within the three days.

Retelling the Easter story was an indirect way of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to the kids who are living in a highly-secularized society, and they are compelled by the system that prayer of any kind is not allowed in school. It was an accomplishment to expose the real meaning of Easter - Christ’s resurrection which goes beyond what they have known through symbols, like Easter eggs, bunnies and feathers.

But one unforgettable thing about Easter celebrations here was when I received Easter gifts from my foster mother’s daughter. At least I’ve experienced how nice it is to be a kid in this part of the world; receiving gifts doesn’t happen during Christmas only.

Cherry Blossoms and the Different Colors of Spring



It was the second day of spring when I set foot in this land of the Vikings, and each passing day would mean new colors adding to the surroundings. Spring brings new life to every creature in this land, especially the plants and the trees. Wild flowers of all sorts come sprouting everywhere, Easter lilies bloom in time for the celebration, and tulips of different kinds grow in the home gardens and parks.

Trees also grow their leaves and flowers from the long winter cold, and one of the most beautiful trees I saw were the cherry blossoms in Kungsträdgården (King’s Garden) Park in Stockholm City.

Middle Gathering’s Food Festival



Aside from the sharing of learning experiences from the first congregation, it was an awesome experience dining with my fellow participants with dishes from the participating countries.

The food Festival was a convergence of food traditions in one’s plate and of course, it was a pride for the Filipino group to feature “Sinigang” (Tamarind Soup) using salmon.

Västervik, A Walk through Sweden's History



My new journey began in the 28th of April in Västervik. Transferring to a new congregation brought new challenges, adjustments, and new experiences but the feel of being in a small city made me appreciate its ambiance more. Cozy and beautiful, that's how I described the city that could be a perfect hub for a writer scribbling his thoughts every now and then.

The place also serves as a window to the history of Sweden. In Sta. Gertrude Church alone, one can find stories about the culture, traditions, church life, and way of living centuries back. As I see it, even the chairs inside the church have their stories to tell – from the chandeliers and the altar to the church organ, one of Sweden's oldest and finest.



As I recalled, the group of exchange program participants was brought to Skansen's open air museum. The experience has given me an idea of what the city looked like centuries back, and in this second congregation, it's as if I'm walking through Swedish history everyday as I drove the bike around the town.



Swedish Holidays and Traditions

Traditions come from history.

On the 30th of April, I witnessed how people value the spring and their celebration of the eve before St. Valborg's Day meant lighting a big bonfire and singing of spring secular tunes. Despite the cold and rainy weather that time, there were several people of all ages who attended the event which was graced by a male choir singing songs of admiration for the spring.

King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden turned 68 on that same day, and to show their respect to the monarch, Swedish flags were unfurled around the public places.

Labor Day came next day and May 1 was filled with demonstrations. There were at least two groups who held their rally at the City Park. People came to witness and take part on the demonstrations as well.

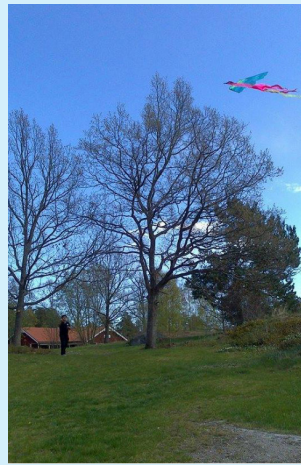
Meeting Last Year's Swedish Exchange Program Participants to the Philippines



Last year, there were four exchange program participants sent to the Philippines, but I never met them because they were assigned mostly in the areas of Luzon. I was glad to finally meet three of them here in Sweden, though.

Lilly (Linköping Diocese), Agneta (Stockholm Diocese) and Bella (Västervik, my second host congregation) shared their own experiences from my home country, and most of them conveyed that they loved the country especially its people. It was the family spirit of the Filipinos that they get to love and miss about their short stay; I got to tease them about my fondness of the "balut" (developing duck embryo).

Bikes and Kites



With this second congregation, I was rekindling my childhood years through bikes and kites. Though the words may rhyme, I'm not doing a poem. These are the two things I used to do almost every day in the yesteryears.

Riding a bike around Västervik is the easiest way of transportation from one point to the other. Added joys to biking around town would be the panoramic view of the sea, colorful trees, plants scattered in its vicinity, and the cozy feel that the place wishes to offer.

It has reminded me so much of my childhood and the funny way on how I learned biking when I was in the fourth grade. Because I did not know how to bike and I envied on my classmates enjoying the ride, I was a bit pressured to learn it on my own by stealing the bike owned by one of our bakers (we used to have a bakeshop).

So later in the day, I learned a little of biking, but I came home with wounded knees and feet. I got reprimanded, but at the back of my mind, I was happy because I learned how to ride a bike.

I also felt nostalgic while flying a kite on my own during my first days in Västervik. Years ago, it was my father who taught me how to fly kites, and all these years, I have not done it on my own. But I was glad that once in a mature man's life, I flew a kite on my own.

Faith Renewing Experience in Vadstena

My day started in a seemingly stressful way because I had to wake up at five in the morning to ride the bus to Linköping. Days before the trip and when I arrived in Linköping Diocesan Center, I had a heavy heart with me.

But when I was in Vadstena, and while coming inside the Abbey Church where St. Bridget of Sweden's remains is laid, I felt calm and had goose bumps. The burdened heart of mine felt at ease while inside the church, and the song a women's choir sang chants before the noon prayer added to the mystic and reflective ambiance of the place.



Peace and calm was all over me and I started to pray and lit candles for the intentions of my family, relatives, friends, workmates and fellow members of my church.

Two months passed quickly and home is a month away from now. But what I do know is that I have to cherish every single experience here in Sweden.

It's been fun scribbling thoughts all these weeks, and I keep doing it because the experiences are motivating. The environment, for me, is very conducive for a working mind, a sensitive heart, and a reflective soul.

Swedish Morality can be at Par with Christian Values

"Refrain from prejudice" was the focus of a priest's enlightening reflection for the exchange program participants at the middle gathering. The phrase was a profound reminder on how a participant for this exchange program should perceive matters, or else, the experience will all be put to vain.

Statistics says that the Swedish society has gone far from being a Christian nation since it embraced the religion in the 11th century. Proof of the said trend is the current label it bears as "the most secularized country in the world."

But as days come to pass in this three-month exposure walk, I have gained some interesting reflections about the Swedish morality and its resemblance on how Christ has called His followers to be.

Humble. Jesus wants His followers to act humbly and brag not of their own achievements. This is one of the interesting points I always admire about Swedes.

If you happen to bump with one, an introduction would just mean saying the first name; don't expect to hear about degree, work or previous occupation, unless you will ask. Titles are not often used in the society and I truly appreciate the practice.

Kind. Several experiences led me to conclude that Swedes are kind, even to strangers. For several times, I have asked people on the streets about directions but I never experienced being rejected. Halting a moment from a walk to help someone is a very kind act that Swedes normally do when asked about information.

Humanitarian. Sweden's government and citizens possess a humanitarian heart for the world to avail. The presence of thousands of migrants and refugees from war-infested countries around the world attests how they welcome people or should we say, strangers who are actually living in the country now.

For years, Sweden has become a safe space for millions of people who were affected by war and military conflicts.

Environment Conscious. Developed countries normally lose a good and clean environment but not for Sweden. The country has maintained its vast forest lands which one can see in most parts of the country.

Love for nature and all of creation is one of the aspects that most countries, even those who call themselves Christian nations, have strongly neglected. Christian nations have exploited their natural resources and caused loads of

destruction to the environment through mining, deforestation, and water pollution.

Swedes have the sublime love and respect for nature because they know their necessities, especially the need for water. On this part of the world, water is still abundant from a natural source, and every household can avail of fresh potable water from the faucet.

Swedes express their love for nature that goes beyond adoring the sun and appreciating flowers and trees. It is more shown on their way of caring for the world that God made, an indirect way of worshipping the Maker of all things.

Resemblance of Christian Values and Swedish Morality

There may be a big percentage of the country's population claiming about unbelief in God, a big bunch practicing a private religion, and a high number of people not attending church services, but this doesn't mean that Sweden is a highly-secularized country.

Jesus Christ, who walked on earth two thousand years ago, wanted people to live according to His Father's will – to be humble, humane to anyone regardless of color, creed and race, kind, and respectful to nature – His own handiwork.

I am not conforming to the secularized movement in the society but the purpose of this blog is to clarify and correct wrong assumptions, prejudice, and exaggerations about the Swedish society, and that the inactive attitude towards church does not define these people of goodwill.

Because beyond the towers, big belfries, and huge churches all over Sweden is a larger church called Earth where one worships daily through actions, in helping neighbors and in respecting fellow human beings regardless of color, race, or creed.



Candles, Gestures and the Unique Features in the Liturgical Celebrations of the Church of Sweden

At the first service I attended in the Church of Sweden, my eyes were captured by the numerous candles (Ljus) lit inside the house of worship.

Back in my church, it was enough to light at least two candles during the Mass, but here, candles can be seen from around the altar to the church's interior.

Based on several interviews I made, I found the main reason behind this candle trend in the Church of Sweden: to make the people feel at home when they are inside the building to attend worship. This could be traced back to the olden times of Sweden when the homes were cold and dark especially during winter and people used candles to provide warmth and light inside their own abodes.

Mainly, candles are part and parcel of the Swedish life. In fact, the practice of lighting candles inside the home, restaurants, offices and churches is still evident up to the present time.

Aside from serving as the liturgical symbol of God's presence, the Church has adopted such practice in a more meaningful way, and that would lead to another unique feature of the Church of Sweden's liturgy. It is when they offer prayers as they lit candles during the Mass or in a service.

The next gesture which caught my attention was the clock ringing and the extreme Tystnad (Silence) that calls everyone into deep prayer before the service begins. Inside the Swedish liturgical service, there is also a point wherein complete silence is required as everyone is asked to pray for their individual intentions.

Apart from those, what I consider as the best feature of Svenska Kyrkan (Church of Sweden) is the shortened form of Mass. A sung Mass with at least four songs from the Psalmboken (Hymn Book) would run for a maximum time of an hour but the recited Mass would consume only half an hour.

Once more, the Church of Sweden can be seen in this example as a church answering the needs of the people. Long services could be as meaningful and lively as the shortened one. Even in schools, it is not advisable to conduct long lectures as it will not cause good effects on its students.

Looking back to Jesus' days on earth, He adjusted to the needs of the people, went to places where people gathered, walked the streets, and visited houses in order to preach the Gospel that all should hear. That is what I also think churches should do, to answer the needs of the people.

This liturgical renewal of the Church of Sweden is worth replicating for many churches all over the world who are still conducting long Mass celebrations lasting up to two hours and more. Years from now, there could be a big possibility for people in other countries to be bored, lose concentration, or may drop the choice of going to Mass on Sundays due to the length of the service.

Another observation about the Mass is the varied forms used in each church. This is due to the ongoing study and observation on the implementation of the new Mass form and new church handbook. Some parishes use a certain form with several prayers but some are a bit musically accented.

One may notice that in most parishes, music plays an important role in encouraging people to join in the corporate worship.

Over the weeks of attendance in the church services, the liturgical celebrations have been simple, less complicated yet meaningful. Apart from the hymns, the preludes and postludes speak of the celebration's theme played by equally-talented musicians.

But of all the gestures, there is this one thing that personally struck me in all the Masses I have attended in the

Church of Sweden. It is when the priest partakes of the communion after everyone has been given the bread and wine. This may sound simple for many, but as I view it, the gesture symbolizes how the clergy should act – to be humble in serving the people. (In my church, the priest is first to partake of communion symbols before distributing to the congregation.)

Lastly, Svenska Kyrkan, pursuing the mission as a worldwide church, has the unique feature of having an open table to anyone, regardless of church denomination, who may want to partake of Christ's meal during the Mass.

On the other hand, Church of Sweden's liturgical life is a mix of everything beautiful from the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Described as the "bridge church," it has remained faithful over the years to the Mass form similar to the Roman Catholic Church (with slight revisions), but also holds fast to Protestantism's flavor of giving more emphasis to preaching within the service – the mark of what is called the Evangelical Lutheran identity.



Holding Fast to the Tradition of Educating People

For the Church of Sweden, educating people is more than a form of service to the community. It is a continuing tradition of nourishing, not only the soul through God's Word, but the human body and mind as well. Thus, a holistic trend of education can be seen evidently pursued in most parishes.

In retrospect, Church of Sweden played an important role in society, more specifically with education.

Centuries back, it was the Church that taught the basics of reading and writing. Some narrations would include the four hour-long sermons of the priest every Sunday, containing not only Biblical reflections but also official orders from the government about laws and warning for some incorrect practices.

But the waves of time changed with the development of schools and universities, separation of Sweden's government and church, and the secularization of the society. Yet, the Church of Sweden has found a way to educate people not only through the Sunday Masses but also through other forms taking place almost every week.

In every church, an **Open Preschool Program** (*öppna förskolan*) exists for kids aged at least one year old. Toddlers usually come with a parent, who stays at home for a year but receives a monthly sum from the government. This is one of Sweden's best practices of encouraging parents to provide personal childcare to their kids.

Facilitating the said program is an employed teacher by the Church. Activities would involve free playing time for the kids, sing-learn-dance time, the typical "Swedish Fika," talking time for parents, and educational field trips.

There's also the traditional **Confirmation Classes**, which has been innovated not only as a form of teaching young people about Church and Bible teachings, but also on how to find meaning within their lives. Since



it could be hard to instill purely about spirituality to the young in this society, a perfect diversion is to mentor them instead, giving inspiration to take the right path to life and

to providing a support system from colleagues in the confirmation group, church workers and from priests/deacons.

For almost all types of people and age groups, the Church of Sweden has its **Various Ministries**, especially to the old Swedish folks, widows, alcoholics, and even for drug addicts. Every month, activities take place in various forms, like church services, fellowship parties, and outreach programs.

But there's one thing: the Church did not forego since it began. It is the **Education of the Soul through Musical Concerts**. Yes, music soothes the soul and gives peace to the mind.

Providing free music concerts inside the church for people to avail is one way of feeding the soul. People who come may not notice that during every performance, they feel the Divine Presence inside the Church while listening to the soothing musical pieces.

The Church of Sweden is moving forward, but the practices mentioned are but a few proofs that it has never turned its back to its original work years, decades, and centuries ago. Its identity would always remain as one of the most important organizations in the Swedish society, responsible for providing information to the people and education of the body, mind, and soul.

Friendship and Home Feel *Inspires* Youth to Get into the Circle

It is so uncommon for young people to engage or even get near the circle of church groups nowadays. This does not only exist here in Sweden, but it has become a worldwide trend.

There's a possibility that this was actually the "not so good effects" of media, social networking sites, and globalization, things which are actually related to secularization. Some would also point at misconceptions about church that the youth may see it as boring.

But there's still hope. The Church can use several means to counteract with this worldwide phenomenon. One profound example would be the very typical Swedish *Fika*.

Fika is often described as light snack in between major meals, but has more of a cultural and societal meaning of sitting down and relating with other people by sharing ideas, thoughts, and good humor.

Good humor attracts young people to come into a group, and that's what they enjoy in every meeting.

Within a month of exposure in *Västervik Forsamling*, located in southern part of Sweden (part of Linköping Diocese), hope can be seen beaming and rising with the sight of young people gathering every Monday through "Ungdomskvällar på Prostgården" (Youth Evening at the Deanery).

Aside from good humor, the young people also look forward to the weekly meetings due to the **home feel and friendships** they share with each other.

Fun is what they always share when coming together while playing games like mini-golf and bowling. Oftentimes, they share stories, insights, and experiences which could help strengthen the bond between young people and the group, as a whole.

For the youth group leaders, it could not be hard to draw more youngsters into the circle because of the shared friendship. Yes, if the Church has been commanded to be fishers of the young, the best net to be used is friendship.

Aside from their own home and school, the Church can also be should serve as a **home**, an abode where they can express more of themselves. In addition, another factor that could encourage young people to join the



group is to **do away with the boring matters**, their usual perception about church.

Various activities scheduled in a weekly basis boost the young people's interest to attend youth group meetings. Incorporating the importance of an active lifestyle like encouraging engagement in sports and physical activities are very helpful ways not only to develop young people, but also to show that a church group is not a boring organization.

Engaging the youth in activities like sports, canoeing, mini-golf, mountain climbing, hiking spree, treasure hunting and other fun games where everyone can participate and enjoy enlivens the life of the youth group.

Young people would also love to share their interests and join adventures. As they express their sides on things, they feel welcomed.

Presenting the youth group as an interesting organization can be the most effective way to draw more young people into the church circle.

In this way, doing away with the boring things would make the young people think that church is beyond going to Mass and is more of building friendships, family, support, comfort zone, and safe place for a young person to be nurtured in all aspects of human growth.

At the end of the gathering, the youth members were called to the upper room for the evening prayer. During that point, one can't help but be moved while witnessing young people singing youthful hymns, lighting candles, praying, and reflecting as they end the weekly routine.

Honestly, it was unexpected because they all had been having fun, talking, playing, running around, but suddenly, there was time to be silent for prayer.

Within those days of seeing the gatherings, there is that familial spirit clearly manifested in the way they are treating each other.

Though the group is not really that big, I can see their faithfulness, and it was good than having none at all. Again, there's hope for the future with those young people in the church groups.



CELEBRATING THE GRANDEUR OF HELPING HUMANITY *(Världens Fest Special Blog)*

Through the grand chorale and orchestra, the three-day Världens Fest opened with a musical concert depicting Church of Sweden's international work through the decades.

International work for the Church of Sweden has been a tradition imbedded in this church across borders.

During the three days in Karlstad, discussing the current issues in the world today was given focus through seminars, forums, concerts, worship services, and Masses.

Talking about grandeur, Church of Sweden's international work can be seen as grandiose in the eyes of a young person coming from a third

world to become a better place for people to live in is a grandiose work. This work is what the Church of Sweden has been pursuing for several decades, and it is a proof of an extravagant love for the world.

"To be a true Christian is to turn faith into action" was the most striking statement uttered by the Church of Sweden youth leader. It was a living testament how the youth from the church looks at the important ministry not just for those who are living here in Sweden but for all humanity, regardless of race, creed, and color.

People from different churches, different cultures and traditions meet to answer the common need of people who suffer from

are neglected by their respective communities, not just Church of the poor, the needy, the common people, but a church with the poor, the needy, and the common people.

Open Table for the World

Reflecting upon the phrase "Open Table," which the Church of Sweden often uses to describe the way they conduct the Mass and answers who can take communion.

Before the Opening Mass began, a special table made of wood was prepared by children with special needs assisted by some church workers. That was a very touching moment which symbolized how the Eucharistic table is made alive through international work, and in the table, it is where the world meets Christ and to partake of His meal.

The absence of the liturgical vestment on the altar table was a reminder of how the Church of Sweden works for people from different cultures, traditions, and religions.

Also, cups of different sizes and colors used during the communion rite were the symbols of the variations in each setting of the Swedish Church that are still one in the purpose to become instruments of care for the world and humanity despite diversity.

Building God's Kingdom on Earth



world country.

As an international participant, I described Feast of the World as a celebration of unified cause for humanity.

In its truest sense, helping the

different problems in the society. They discuss issues, meeting people, sharing insights, uniting church moving towards caring for humanity.

Make the church a safe space, a shelter, a refuge for those who

Humanitarian work for different nations is a modern day version of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. Symbolized by the wooden cross hanging in the Löfbergs Arena, God's reign on earth would simply mean all of the basic needs of the people are addressed, rights are rendered, and issues are given solutions.

Though people may not see the difference today like the stonecutter who was getting some materials for the big church, the Church of Sweden also aims to build the Cathedral of God's Reign on Earth, and the international work is a move towards the goal.

Flashback of the Congregation Periods

Three months of stay in Sweden for the exchange program went fast like lightning, but Världens Fest served like a flashback of the times spent in the two congregation periods for the participants.

Such a feast became a reminder of the relationships and efforts made in the congregations and in the dioceses.

Personally, it also provided a time to assess and ask myself, "How far have I been in this program? Did I truly live the purpose of the program?"

Yet meeting the people from the congregations, diocesan level, and some other people I met months

ago, gave me the answers. The good feedback from people gave me more inspiration to go on with the work.

Taking the farther leap of faith from being the ordinary exchange program participant was a tough yet fulfilling job. Part of which was singing for people of different ages and blogging my feelings, insights, and reflections about Sweden's church and society.

Doing the blogs from the heart was what I can only offer as payback for a wonderful and once in a lifetime experience.

Three months in Sweden has given me so much learning and was genuinely life-changing.

For my stay, I prayed to the Spirit and vowed to myself that my goal would be to touch lives, share my gifts, give hope for the Church of Sweden, and not just utter the usual and old negative comments.

The Church of Sweden has taught me to look deeper at the church as more than a worshipping entity. Through the experience, it has given me the fresh eyes to view the church in a worldwide perspective, and that the relationship between churches is important to enrich and sustain. Helping one another through constant prayers and encouragements is also important.



WAKING UP FROM THE LONGEST DREAM AND THE LEARNINGS FROM SWEDEN

Through the Young in the Worldwide Church Program, I was flown into a new society and culture. And as I was reckoning my story, I realized that mine is similar to that of Dorothy and his friends in the tale, “The Wizard of Oz.”

Unexpectedly, these were things that just came out of the blue, like fresh wild flowers and shoots of grass on springtime. These are the things that transpired only during those three months of exposure in a totally different society and country.

But going back to the Wizard of Oz, the Scarecrow wanted to have a brain. In my experience, the journey has given me a new thinking and perspective at things I see in church, society and also, among youth.

Looking at things in a positive perspective was more evident in the everyday activity I have experienced. Like the scarecrow, the way of thinking was with me, and it was just the turnout of events that led to unlock such way of thought.

On the other hand, like the Tin Man who was in dire longing to acquire a human heart, I also had my share of getting a new heart and feel for people I meet along the way. I now have the heart to understand actions, and most of all, my heart now opens for brand new relationships in church and from the community where I stayed.

Courage was what the Lion sought after, and that’s why he joined in such a tough journey to see the Wizard of Oz. This was the same virtue that I did not expect to gain all these months while staying in Sweden.

First, I had the courage to sing high notes and to sing solo in a big crowd outside the Holy Mass. For once, I did that in my own solo concert. This was the courage I was wanting – the courage that will

make me step out from my comfort zones. One of the profound examples I want to give is to cook for many people for the “Filipino Fiesta” I organized for the youth in my second congregation.

Lastly, like Dorothy herself who was in a searching for her home, in my case, I found a home in the care and love of my foster families, host congregation, priests, church workers, program supervisors, the youth, and kids. Their efforts have made my stay wonderful, meaningful, smooth flowing and life changing.

I suddenly caught myself in a deep thought, as if I am waking up from a very long sleep with the longest dream I ever had. All of the parts were worth remembering and with no regrets, I could say every single day, a learning/lesson was added into my life.

Three months in Sweden was a wonderful experience which taught me so many important lessons in life that I get to use as I continue with my life journey, ministry, and profession.

1. Plan ahead. Like Swedes usually do, I am very inspired to prepare at least six months before.
2. Focus. Take one focus point and concentrate on something in order to attain a certain goal.
3. Cook food. I was shocked that I can truly cook for other people, and maybe, I just need more practice.
4. Eat light meals. I just realized that doing away with rice once in a while is fine and nothing will happen. It could also be better to eat light meals during the evening and just take one full meal in a day.
5. Always greet people with Hej, Hej Hej and Hej då to people. It’s one thing I miss about Swedish people.

6. Be open-minded. I was a bit conservative during the first days, but there was a point when I vowed to be positive and to be more open to differences within the church, society, and among youth.
7. Gain more confidence. I was never confident about my voice and with myself, but Sweden taught me to use my talents to inspire people through my singing performances.
8. Sing Swedish hymns. I am really fascinated with the hymns that even though I don't really grasp fully on the meaning of every line in the songs, the tune was enough to explain the feel and the inspiration contained in such a work of art.
9. Be time-conscious. Swedish Time is probably what every young person in the world must put into their system, because being on time shows professionalism and enthusiasm.
10. Go out when it's sunny. "idag är soligt" (Today is sunny) was my most favorite line, because I loved it when the sun is up in Sweden; I can wear comfortable clothes. While I was on my second congregation, I was able to wear short pants and slippers in some days.
11. "Lagom". Swedes are not of the extremes, and it taught me some lessons to be at the middle or fulcrum of things.
12. Speak your mind. When you have a thought, you can talk about it with no hesitation.
13. Learn to read signs on the road, obey traffic rules, walk right in the escalator, and wear seatbelts. Swedes are obedient to such safety rules.
14. Life must go on despite the weather. Like the kids in the nearby school in my first congregation who always play outside during noontime, not thinking of the weather – whether snowy, rainy, or sunny – that's how they train people to be. Go on and mind not of the weather indeed. After all, there is no such thing as "bad weather, but only bad clothes" in Sweden.
15. Take a break. Take a Fika. It is one of the most essential parts of the Swedish culture that I appreciate so much and will probably bring the tradition to my family, friends, relatives and fellow workers in the office.



Perception of a Church after the Exchange

Exactly a year after the exchange program in Sweden, I found myself writing afterthoughts and deep realizations about the church, which came into fruition.

Through the experiences, my eyes were opened to see the church's essential role in the society as a platform of change. It has changed my perception of how and why churches should exist. More than the worship services filled with songs, meaningful Scripture readings and reflections, there is also a greater need to take into action our faith for the betterment of people and society.

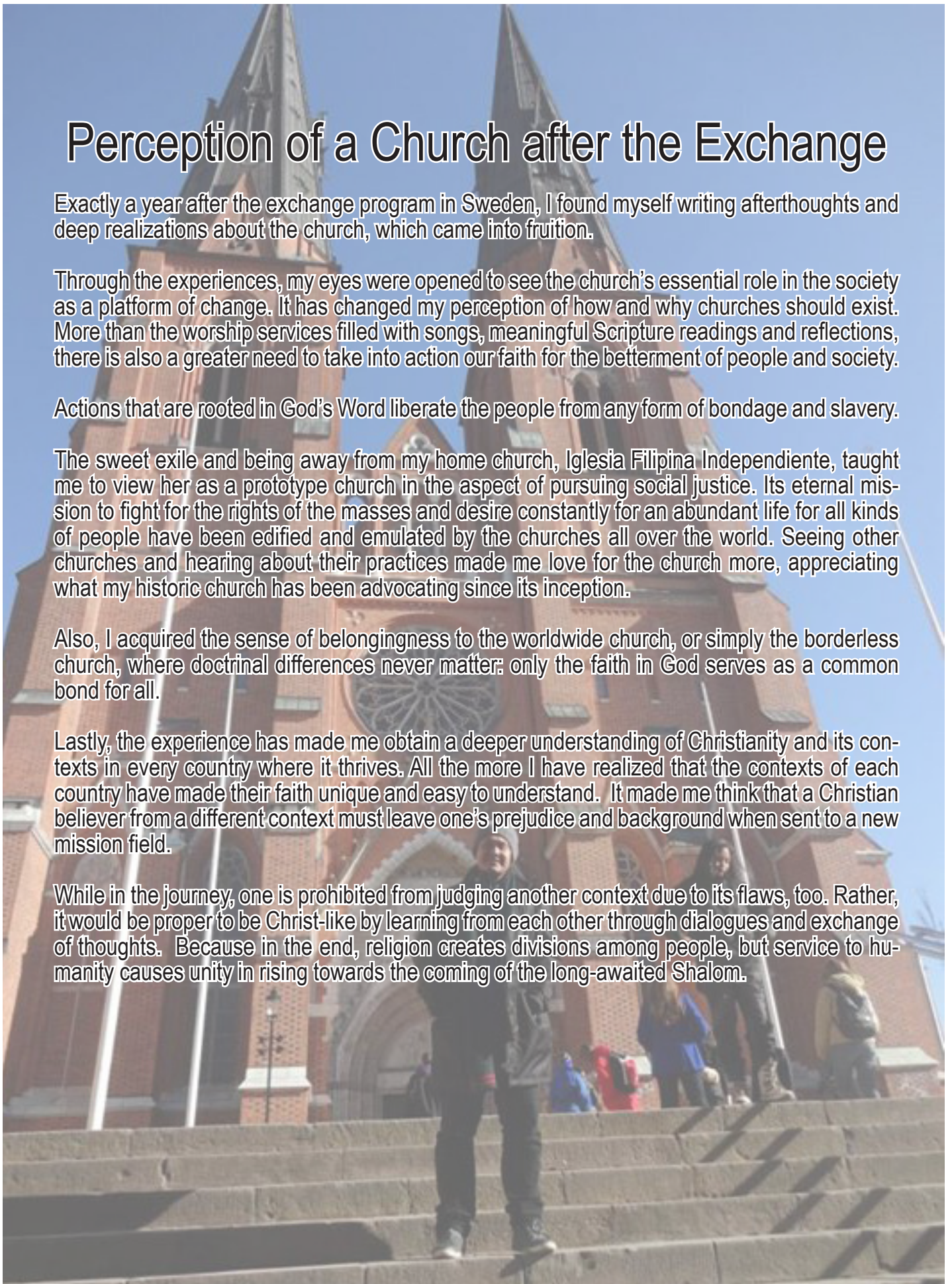
Actions that are rooted in God's Word liberate the people from any form of bondage and slavery.

The sweet exile and being away from my home church, Iglesia Filipina Independiente, taught me to view her as a prototype church in the aspect of pursuing social justice. Its eternal mission to fight for the rights of the masses and desire constantly for an abundant life for all kinds of people have been edified and emulated by the churches all over the world. Seeing other churches and hearing about their practices made me love for the church more, appreciating what my historic church has been advocating since its inception.

Also, I acquired the sense of belongingness to the worldwide church, or simply the borderless church, where doctrinal differences never matter: only the faith in God serves as a common bond for all.

Lastly, the experience has made me obtain a deeper understanding of Christianity and its contexts in every country where it thrives. All the more I have realized that the contexts of each country have made their faith unique and easy to understand. It made me think that a Christian believer from a different context must leave one's prejudice and background when sent to a new mission field.

While in the journey, one is prohibited from judging another context due to its flaws, too. Rather, it would be proper to be Christ-like by learning from each other through dialogues and exchange of thoughts. Because in the end, religion creates divisions among people, but service to humanity causes unity in rising towards the coming of the long-awaited Shalom.



chasing after the midnight sunset

With a diverse group of exchange participants coming from different continents, cultural backgrounds, and faith traditions, it is inevitable to ignite varied reactions and views during the program.

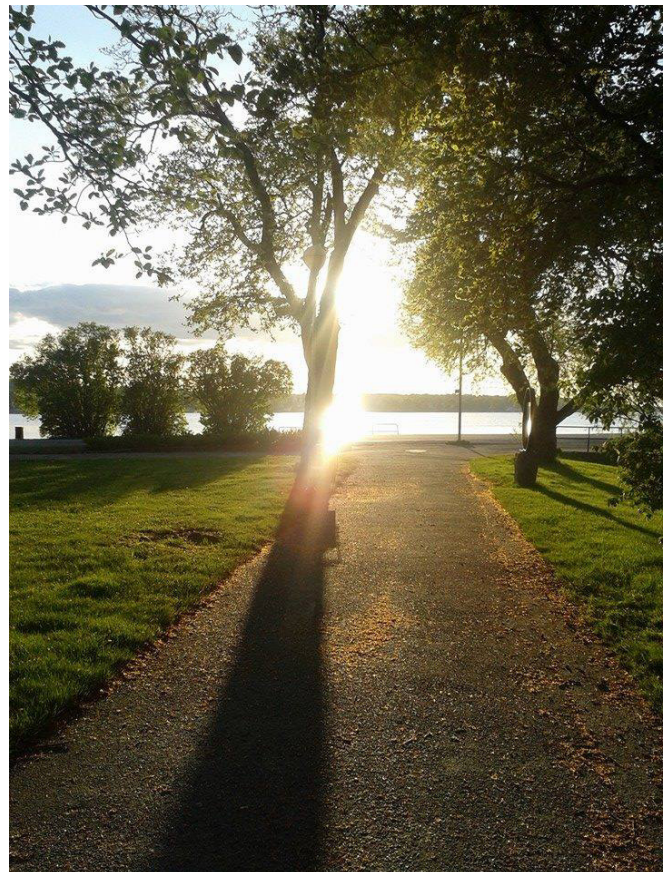
Within three months, Church of Sweden's Young in the Worldwide Church helped me see beyond what is written in publications and hear beyond the talks and witness how Swedes and its church exist.

Coming from a country with a vast majority of Christians, it would be hypocrisy if I would not accept that I once envisioned of making a change within the faith communities situated in the world's most secular nation: Sweden.

In the long run, as the daily immersion progressed, I came to understand the context of Christianity in Sweden and learned the reasons why people tend to move away from religious affiliations.

The desire to convert people to the faith then slowly mellowed down, and I gradually realized that the unbelief of people is caused by the context itself. Moreover, I started to point out that the welfare state – the trend of a government that cares for every single individual from womb to tomb – contributed mainly to the increase of doubtful Thomases, denying Peters, and atheists.

Usually, humans tend to seek God when they are in need. This explains why third world countries like the Philippines are called bastions of Christianity. Why? Because in the face of poverty, continued oppression, inequality, extreme deprivation of rights, inequality coupled with a government and



its leaders that care not of the people's welfare, Filipinos only have God as their stronghold and only shining hope.

Along the process of desiring to convert people into the faith, I was transformed from a socially-conscious and silent apathetic individual to an empowered soul, unafraid to speak in opposition to the ills of the government and society.

I saw the beauty of a government that cares for every individual. Instead of feeding the leaders' personal desires, I have seen the existence of an almost perfect government as funds are spent



more importantly on unlimited healthcare benefits and free education for all levels composing the society.

The benefits being enjoyed by the Swedish people and the good practices of their government are like midnight sunsets that I used to gaze and chase at past 10 in the evening with my blue bicycle while I was assigned in the beautiful summer town of Västervik.

Normally, midnight sunsets during summertime in Sweden and other European countries in the Arctic Circle are characterized by the unbroken almost 24 hour period of sunlight. Beyond the setting of the midnight sun is a deeper meaning in my eyes as a part of the Filipino community. It speaks of the Swedish society's respect and high regard for gender equality, equal opportunities and abundant lives for almost every person living in the land.

Chasing after the midnight sunset is like dreaming of a nation with leaders who prioritize people's welfare over self-interest, a government that provides essential needs to the countrymen, and a Philippines where no one lives in sublime poverty or die from extreme hunger.

Seeing the midnight sunset's unending light awakened in me the spirit to join the unending struggle for abundant life, equality, justice, and lasting peace for all Filipinos.



Editor: Andrea D. Lim
Layout Artist: John Rey Lee Villareal
Cover Page Artist: Ingrid Arricheta
Publication Consultant:
 Asst. Prof. Sonia B. Sygaco

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*looking at rainbows
and midnight sunsets*



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Klein Fausto Emperado is a church worker from the Iglesia Filipina Independiente – Diocese of Negros Oriental and Siquijor and is engaged specifically in the music ministry and youth affairs since 2007.

At the age of 17, Klein took over the responsibility of leading the music ministry in his home congregation, the Parish of St. Anthony of Padua in Tayasan, Negros Oriental. Coming from a politically-affiliated family, he was not able to escape public service at a young age and served as Sangguniang Kabataan (Council of Youth) Federation President from 2007 to 2010 in the Municipality of Tayasan, his hometown. In 2011, he earned a degree in Mass Communication from Silliman University.

From 2011 to 2013, Klein served Davao Diocese, specifically at the Cathedral of the Risen Lord, in the aspect of music ministry and youth work while working in Davao City.

In 2013, Klein was recommended by then Bishop of Davao, Rt. Rev. Delfin D. Callao Jr. to become an exchange program participant with Church of Sweden's Young in the Worldwide Church but his visa arrived later than the deadline of submission. But this did not halt him from serving the church. In 2014, Klein was again recommended by retired Bishop of the Diocese of Negros Oriental and Siquijor, Rt. Rev. David M. Ga to the Youth Exchange Program and this time, Klein was able to join the group of young people to represent IFI in Sweden. In a span of three months, Klein was able to immerse and at the same time, serve his foster parishes in the Diocese of Stockholm and in the Diocese of Linköping also in the line of music through singing performances and talks about the Philippines, the IFI and the situation of the young people in his home country.

Currently, he is employed in Silliman University as secretary of the Department of Chemistry and for two years, he served as editorial assistant and broadcast coordinator at the University's Office of Information and Publications. On weekends, Klein serves voluntarily as cantor, church choir director, liturgy coordinator and composer of music for the services.

Young in the Worldwide Church Program

About the Exchange

Our churches are all parts of the world wide Church. We are connected by our faith, history and our relationships today. Together we take action to shape a better world, and we gather together in our faith and reflections. This exchange has existed for many years and in different shapes.

Since the year 2006 it has been a mutual exchange between Church of Sweden (CoS), the evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania – North Western Diocese (ELCT-NWD), the Philippine Independent Church (IFI) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Costa Rica (ILCO), and in 2008 the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brasil (IECLB) joined the exchange, and from 2014 we also welcome the Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA)—making the total number of churches six.

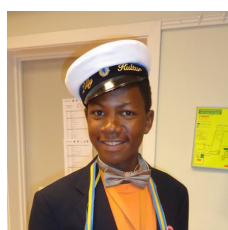
One of the core values in this exchange is the mutuality; we all send out as well as receive participants. Thanks to this mutuality our relationships can grow stronger, deeper and more equal. The goal for the exchange is to give young people the opportunity to meet another part of the world wide Church and share their experiences with the people there, talk about life, faith and the mission of the Church.

The exchange is also supposed to have a positive effect for all the participating churches and congregations, to help them connect to other churches and to be enriched with new perspectives and experiences.

Source:

Falk, Anne. "Re: Welcome as participant in the Youth Exchange Programme 2014!" Message to 2014 Participants. 14 February 2014. E-mail.

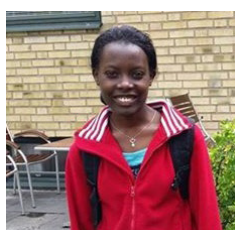
COMPANIONS IN THE JOURNEY



Albert Peter



Ana Carolina
Schieferdecker



Daisy Charles



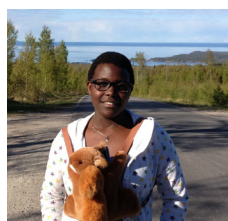
Gama Nkosinathi



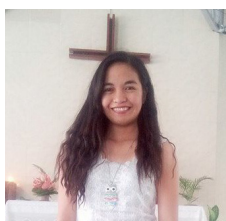
Geraldine
Casareno



Innocentia Serite



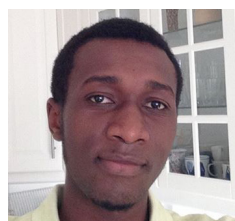
Joseline Buberwa



Kim Birly
Duropan



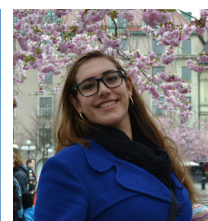
Lesedi Gooi



Mugisha Kahigi



Ralph Alojado



Renata Feiten
Schwingel



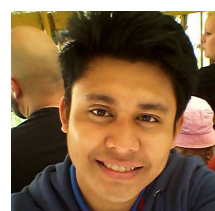
Simone Medina
Wassen



Tshegofatso
Thipe



Vinícius Ponath



Klein Fausto
Emperado

FOSTER HOMES



*Vårby Gård,
Stockholm,
Sweden*

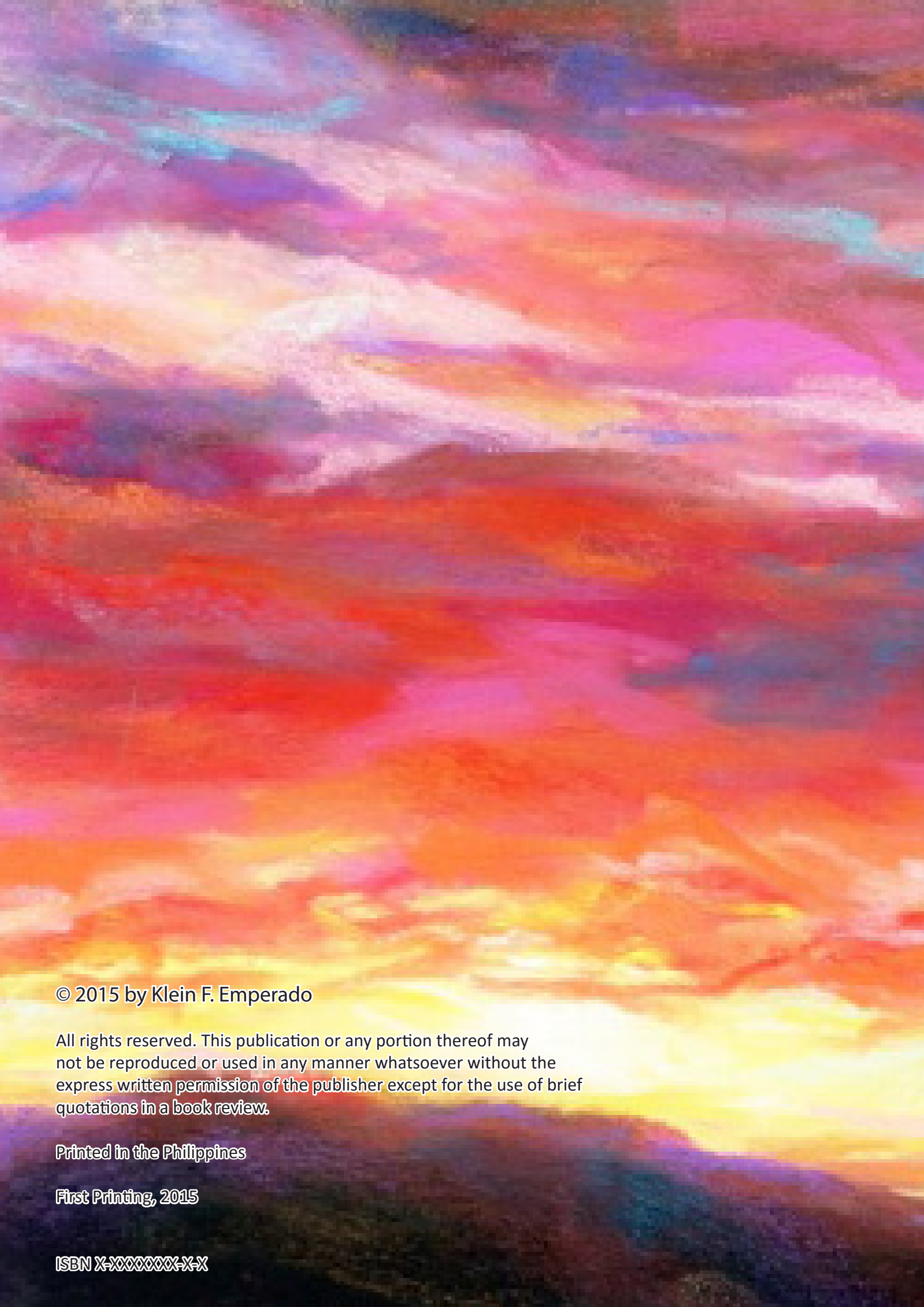
Foster Parents:
Josefina Bautista

Children:
Cecilia Bohlin
Martha Hultqvist
Ingrid Hultqvist

Västervik, Sweden



Dr. Ragnar and Dr. Kerstin Asplund



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Printed in the Philippines

First Printing, 2015

ISBN X-XXXXXXX-X-X