



# The Advent for Migrants

ADVENT, the four Sundays and the four weeks before December 25. Advent comes from a Latin word which means "coming." The main theme of Advent is preparation for the coming of Christ -- not only at Christmas. It is preparation for the coming of Christ, in the words of the Creed, "...to judge the living and the dead and His kingdom will have no end..." It is therefore the expectant anticipation, the yearning for the fulfillment of God's promise of a different world. Advent then is about the hope for a new world. It is about the transformation of this world -- not a world in the great beyond. It is about a "new heaven and a new earth" (Is. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1). It means the end of injustice, violence and death here on earth. It is about this world renewed/made new because justice and peace reign and where life prospers. It is expectant anticipation of the fulfillment of God's reign on earth.

Because of this, Advent is also a season of repentant preparation. The Biblical meaning of repentance is quite different from our common understanding. We understand it to mean contrition -- to be sorry for our sins, confessing them and probably doing penance. The Biblical meaning of repentance is "change". To repent is to turn away from. And in turning away from, one turns to another

direction. Thus to repent means to turn away from sin and to return to God. To repent is to turn away from what separates or alienates us from God and from our fellow human beings and to re-turn to God.. To repent therefore means to begin to see things differently. It means turning away from violence, injustice and the forces of death.

Thus Advent is an invitation for all of us to participate in the re-creation, in the transformation of the world. It will not be a great cosmic cleanup. God will not change the world for us. A renewed creation will not come down from heaven and be served to us in a silver platter. God will change the world with us.

Thus the yearning for the fulfillment of God's promise of a different world is not about escaping from this earth to heaven. It is all about willingly taking an active part, committing oneself to God's agenda for the earth and for humanity.

Let us look at our experiences as migrants. Among other things we suffer victimization from an inutile no-placement-fee-policy, of extortionate placement and lending agencies, and anti-migrant immigration policies and attitudes of the host societies. Among many of us, these are nothing but the normal experiences of migrants.

Hence these things must be suffered in silence. The least one can do is to be thankful for the chance of being abroad and make the best out of it.

But this attitude is contrary to our advent hope. It does not resonate with the expectant anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promise. It is rather the refusal of the invitation of God to work with him in the fulfillment of his reign on earth. To simply suffer it in silence is to be complicit in our own victimization and the perpetration of victimization until we all sink in the quagmire of helplessness and despair while those victimizing us rake in obscene riches and profits.

Our Advent hope dictates that we must reject the "normalcy" of our situation. Advent encourages us to stand up and resist in so many ways the forces of injustice and violence and death -- be they government policies both in the sending and receiving countries or the cultural IRRITANTS of the local and the migrant populations.

Christians participating in the struggle for the dignity of migrants are often accused --also BY other Christians -- of espousing leftist agenda. In societies such as the Philippines, once so labeled, leftists lose their rights. But they got it all wrong. It is not a matter of ideology. It is a matter of theology! 

## Migrants, Support Groups Push ILO Convention for Domestic Workers

On 04 November 2009, grassroots migrants associations, service providers, trade unions, including migrants advocate sfrom the academe held a dialogue and strategy meeting in Athens, Greece. It positively came out with a communiqué that laid down things that the participants would work together on in support for the recognition of domestic work as work, specifically in pushing through with the proposed ILO Convention for domestic workers.

Participants came from Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Philippines, Canada, US and Senegal representing the AMURA, BOMSA (Bangladesh), Confederation Nationale des Travailleurs du Senegal (CNTS), Filipino Migrant Workers Union, GAATW, International Migrants Alliance (IMA), IMA Research Foundation (Bangladesh), IWC (Canada), Indiana University, Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), May First Movement in the Philippines (KMU),

MWR-Canada, NAFCON, OKUP, Philippine Forum-NY-USA, USA PINAY, TENAGANITA, Thai Regional Alliance, Trans-Asia Sisters Association Taiwan (TASAT).

The activity was initiated and hosted by the CARAM-ASIA, Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development (APWLD) and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) who are regional members of the United for Foreign Domestic Workers Rights (UFDWR). UFDWR is a network that pioneered the recognition of domestic work as work campaign that includes the one-day-paid-off per week. UFDWR also collaborated and published the *Saya Migran*, a comic hand-out popularizing the campaign for migrants to know their basic rights. The Mission for Migrant Workers is part of the UFDWR.

You can find the communique of the said dialogue and strategy meeting at the website of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants at the <http://apmigrants.org>.

## Migrants meet US Ambassador-At-Large Luis Cde Baca

A lunch meeting with the United States Ambassador-At-Large Luis Cde Baca was graciously hosted by the Acting USA Consulate General on December 4, 2009.

Heading the Office to Monitor & Combat Trafficking in Persons in Washington, Ambassador Luis Cde Baca had a healthy exchange with representatives from seven different grassroots and non-governmental organizations namely the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI), Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge, Catholic Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Migrants, International Organisation for Migration, International Social Service, Mission for Migrant Workers and Zi Teng. These groups are involved in providing support to women and children victims of trafficking.

This is part of the Ambassador's efforts to visit various countries with regard the issue of trafficking. He would meet with various groups followed by a meeting with representatives from the government like that of Hong Kong. 

## Filipino Friends Hold Traditional Christmas Lantern Making Contest



Clockwise from top: the winning lantern from Movers, Cuyapo Association for second, and Likha and ACFIL for third.



The Filipino Friends for the fourth consecutive year held its Christmas Lantern (*parol*) making contest in their area of congregation near Hong Kong's City Hall. *Parol*-making is a tradition in the Philippines and has been replicated in this territory to give Christmas cheers to its Filipino migrants.

The organization's *parol*-making competition is unique in the sense that it requires only recyclable materials to be used in making the *parol*.

Fourteen organizations participated in this year's contest. A parade ensued around the City Hall area and up to the underpass near Chatter Road before going back to its place of origin.

This year's top three winners are: Mission Volunteers (Movers) bagging the top price; Cuyapo Association for second place; and Likha Filipino Migrant Cultural Organization and the Association of Concerned Filipinos (ACFIL) for third. More importantly, the event kindled the Christmas spirit among the Filipino migrants even if they could not be with their loved ones this year. 



# The Story of Deny

## *All She Wanted Was To Give Something Back To Her Family*

She is Deny Setia Mairany of Malang, Indonesia. She was born in 1985. The only daughter among three siblings, her eldest brother is 30 while the youngest brother is 17. Her parents are farmers.

In 2006, her Mother had a stroke. Then in 2007, her Father had a heart disease. Since then, her family suffered from financial crisis due to the medical expenses of her parents. Although her brothers earned some money, it was not enough to sustain the medical fees. Deny decided to apply as a domestic helper to Hong Kong to earn additional money to support her family.

In December 2008, Deny went to a training center in Indonesia to learn different domestic skills for seven months. She was able to get an employer and arrived in Hong Kong in June 2009.

During the first week, she was happy to work with her employer. However, after a week her employer told her to work in the fruit shop and the employer's salon. Aside from this, the attitude of her employer started to change which made her sad.

***She was made to work at the fruit shop and at her employer's salon.***

***She was hit in the head for no apparent reason. She could not understand why everybody can sleep while she still needed to work. Her salary was HK\$3,580 but was only receiving HK\$580.***

Her employer always hit her head without any reason even in public. They insisted that she must work in the market from 7:00 in the morning until night time. Deny cannot understand her employer well because her Cantonese is not very good and that made her feel more abused. She was thinking of going home but she cannot do so because she needed money for her parents.

She did not understand why everyone can sleep while she still needed to work. She knew that she should not lose her job so she just kept silent in her workplace. Her salary was \$3,580.00 but she was only paid HK\$580.00.

One day the Police talked to her at the market and told her she cannot work in the market. She told the Police she worked in the house but

the Police did not believe her and warned her. She told the employer that she was very afraid of the Police but the employer said it was not a problem.

After three months, she told her employer that she did not want to work in the market anymore. The employer got angry and told her to sleep in the salon. Then the employer brought her to the granny's home in Kowloon Tong. Later, the employer told her that she has to work in China but she refused.

On September 26 2009, she constructively terminated her contract and sought help at the shelter which she came to know through friends.

She filed her claims at the Labour Department then pursues her case at the Labour Tribunal. She accepted \$4,000.00 only out of \$18,000 because she missed her family so much that all she wanted to do was to go home.

She will never forget the help from the people around her, their friendship, care and love for the past few months at the Bethune House. 

# The Mission in 2009

*This year, we hurdled through issues, campaigns and struggles. Although the crisis may have hit us hard, we used it in coming and working together, empowering ourselves as we empower other people.*

## Forming the CSPEM

The Coalition of Service Providers for Ethnic Minorities in HK (CSPEM) was launched to provide opportunities for various migrant-serving institutions to coordinate their efforts in better serving migrant workers. Its founding members are the Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge (BH), Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Filipinos, El Shaddai, International Social Services, Jesus Is Lord Church, MFMW Limited, New Beginnings Christian Fellowship, SJC – HIV Education Centre.



## Attending to Migrants' Needs

The Mission serves an average of 310 clients a month. Such cases filed involve unpaid wages and benefits, erring recruitment agencies (i.e. imposing excessive fees, illegal recruitment, overcharging, fraudulent loans), and immigration, police, and health problems.

## Doing Advocacy

We have conducted dialogues with the Hong Kong government as well as consulate generals of Indonesia and the Philippines among others to provide support to the campaigns being launched by migrant workers themselves. One of the major issues pushed by the Mission is the inclusion of foreign domestic workers in the Statutory Minimum Wage law of Hong Kong. We also have started engaging with members of the Macau SAR government with regard to migrants' concerns.



### Providing Shelter

The Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge held a charity dinner and auction this year garnering both financial and material support to the more than 40 residents of the BH shelter. We prefer calling those staying at the BH residents rather than clients.



### International Engagement

Through our membership in the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), we participated and led campaigns at the international level especially the RECOGNITION of Domestic Work as WORK as well as projects such as the a workshop on women migrants in the 2nd International Assembly on Migrants and Refugees and the dialogue and strategy meeting of the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers.



### Projects For and With Migrants

Aside from our monthly publication of the Migrant Focus, we also cooperated with the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers and Engender in the release of *Bergerak*, a video-documentary about the struggles of Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong, and *Lagu Kami, Perjuangan Kami*, a CD collection of Indonesian migrant songs.

### Empowering Migrants

The Mission has cooperated with various migrant organizations in launching paralegal and welfare training programs for migrant workers. Like the Women Working for Women project, the Mission aims to provide capacity to women migrant workers in confronting, dealing and resolving issues together.



# Macau migrants hold dialogue with Labour Bureau exec

## MACAU CORNER

THE MACAU MIGRANTS Rights Network (MMRN) was invited to an hour-long dialogue by Labour Affairs Bureau Director Shuen Ka Hung on Nov. 19.

Said dialogue covered some questions especially with regards to the New Migrants Bill, namely: the six months re-entry ban, the levy on employers for the non-resident workers and the transfer to other job categories, aside from the issues concerning some practices of placement agencies and employers affecting the non-resident workers.

Nevertheless, the MMRN feels that the issues should have been discussed more substantially. With only an hour for a dialogue, some important questions still remain unanswered, while others are unclear.

Among these are the following:

1. It is already clear in the labour law that when a non-resident terminates the contract before its expiration, a penalty is already set with no restrictions in transferring to another employer. The 6 months re-entry ban adds an additional penalty on the non-resident worker by preventing he/she from working for a period of 6 months.

2. Employing local workers does not require payment of a levy. The fund for such a tax would go to a social security fund where non-resident

workers do not benefit. An example of this is that foreign workers pay more for health and educational services than the local residents.

At the moment, most, if not all, foreign domestic workers are not paid through their bank accounts.

3. As to the issue concerning placement agencies and some employers, the Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI) which is a member of the MMRN, had already tried in the past to complain about paying to placement agencies a fee equivalent to 10 months

salary and the confiscation of travel documents. They were told by the Bureau personnel that they cannot act on this because of the non-existence of any law that governs this practice.

4. Some of the provisions on Macau's labour relations laws are difficult to understand because it seems to contradict other provisions in it. Others differ in content while referring to the same issue such as Articles 71 and 72 on termination of contract.

Director Shuen Ka Hung also informed the MMRN that they

would set talks with the non-resident workers to inform them of the contents of the new law by January next year. While this is most welcome, it would have been better if the Bureau conducted hearings before the law took effect and not the other way around.

The Migrants Bill, despite its anti-migrant provisions, would still be implemented by April next year and the migrant workers only options are to question the Bill in court and raise it to the international level such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations. 

MIGRANTE MACAU HELD its first General Assembly on November 29. It was attended by 42 members, majority of whom are domestic workers.

Its theme was, *"Advance the Rights and Welfare of Migrant Workers in Macau, Support the Peoples Movement in the Philippines."*

The guest speaker of the Assembly was Vicky Casia Cabantac, chair of Migrante Sectoral Party - Hong Kong chapter (MSP -HK). Migrante Macau was transformed from MSP - Macau which was first established in 2004.

Catalina Yamat was elected chairperson. In her speech, she said that Filipino migrant workers in Macau should continue to oppose the new Migrants Law of Macau and the Affidavit of Support being required by the Philippine



## MIGRANTE-Macau holds 1st General Assembly

government officials to Filipinos who wish to go to Macau.

She also added that the migrants should also advocate sectoral and national issues such as the delisting of MSP and the gruesome massacre in Maguindanao.

The formation of Migrante Macau augurs well for the migrants' movement in the former Portuguese colony. They aim to lead more militant forms of struggle to ensure that their rights and welfare are upheld as they forge solidarity with migrants of other nationalities. 

# Reflections on a Hong Kong Visit

*by Rev. George O. Buenaventura  
of the UTS Choir and Family*

Dear Co-Mission Workers, Partners, Colleagues and Friends,

Advent Greetings!

Accept our whole-hearted gratitude to your active and very significant contribution to the successful and fruitful mission tour of the UTS Choir to Hong Kong last November 27-December 2, 2009. We thank the Methodist International Church ministerial team and congregations for the opportunity to participate in your various worship services and warm fellowships and meals.

We are specifically grateful to Rev. John Illsley and Rev. Jesus Delos Santos for inviting us to draft and lead the liturgy for and preach at the two Filipino worship services, to sing 6 anthems in these services, and 4 (Introit, 2 anthems, choral response) at the English worship service. We thank you also for the sumptuous fellowship meals with our kababayans the whole day of Sunday. You never left us to the end. The dinner at the Peak was refreshing and energizing, and we thank sister Rhoda Battad and her family for it. We indeed felt the warmth of Christian fellowship and hospitality of the MIC family.

We appreciate and thank the ministers and lay leaders of the church for providing the much needed space, care and spiritual nurture to our migrant workers in Hong Kong. During our brief visit, we realized how important and necessary your ministries are to our OFWs there. We observed and heard how they found a home away from home. We

thank you for your generosity to us and them. Some choir members were delighted to have met relatives, co-churches and kababayans in the church. Dr. Anno and I were also grateful for the opportunity to visit the TEE class in session and had short conversations with them. We are indeed encouraged by the enthusiasm of the graduates in helping the new students and the efforts and commitment of Dr. Illsley in supervising and teaching the center. You will always be in our thoughts and prayers.

We also thank Brother Jun Tellez and Sister Edwina Antonio and the wonderful volunteers for welcoming us to the Bethune House, a shelter and refuge of migrant workers who experience abuse and exploitation while working abroad. We were encouraged by your care and advocacy for them. We were delighted to know that you have also expanded your mission to the growing number of Indonesians and other nationalities, who were distressed in Hong Kong. Your testimonies of struggles with the residents/clients who took refuge in the shelter challenge us to do more intentional in doing theology and ministry to people who were forced to leave home for survival. In this advent season, you reminded us of how the little child Jesus of Christmas found a home in a manger.

While we came to bring the advent message, we actually heard it from you. We hope we could act swiftly and effectively out of our learning in this mission tour. Our choir members talked and shared a

lot about what we saw, heard and felt when we were at the shelter. You taught us a lot! Thank you also for the lunch and dinner you prepared for us. We enjoyed every minute of our fellowship with you. We hope our presence and songs also brought joy, hope and power to you and your ministry. We also thank Edwina for taking us from and to the airport and the sandwiches. Kuya Jun, we thank you for giving shelter to Emman and Maricel to your home for a night. What you are doing to the least of our sisters and brothers, you are doing it to God, our creator sustainer and friend.

The choir is grateful to the wonderful coordination work of Dr. Afrie Song Joye, one of our UTS faculty who was then teaching at the Divinity School at the Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Thank you ate Afrie for accommodating us (9 the first night, 4 for the next 2 nights and 5 the last night), in looking and reservations for our hotels, and helping pay a significant portion of our local travels in Hong Kong.

We also thank you for effectively coordinating the mission tour with the Divinity School in the University, the MIC, the Bethune House, and other must see tour sites in Hong Kong. We are grateful to the Divinity School administration for the special welcome, tour around the university and lunch by our partner seminary, though Prof. Tobias Brandner. We felt the warmth of fellowship with the students, staff, and Tobias. Special thanks to him for opening his house and table

for four choir members for 3 days. We pray we could also reciprocate same kindness to you anytime you come to UTS. Ate Eden Songco, thank you for your kindness. You helped us a lot in making this tour possible, fruitful and meaningful. Thanks for the travels in Hongkong, meals, and many more. We thank you for your generosity. God's blessings be with you always.

Thanks to the choir members who have committed and shared their precious time, energy and resources for this mission tour. I believe, our collective and individual experiences and lessons we've learned surpassed the energies and resources we spent. UTS, through the choir brought the powerful advent message to them this year. We went to them when they can not come to us, but spend Christmas away from home, in a foreign land. Thanks to the whole UTS family for the prayers and support. You were all with the UTS mission tours in spirit. UTS, through the choir and many other UTS sectors and means must continue doing mission and exposure tours such as these. Let us not get tired in doing what we must do. God will always be with us. God bless UTS. God bless you all, our partners in mission and theological education

Again, thank you very much to you all. May God in Jesus come and reign in us. Peace...

In Christ,

Rev. George O. Buenaventura  
For the UTS Choir and Family

## BETHUNE HOUSE REFUGE JOINS CHRISTMAS FETE

Christmas cards that were made by the residents along with secondhand toys and clothes offered by Bethune House Refuge were snapped up by Christmas holiday buyers during the annual charity bazaar aptly named 'Christmas Fete', a yearly tradition of celebrations through charity works and fun for the whole family sponsored by St. Stephen Church on every first Saturday of December.

A real fete for bargain hunters the public were offered Christmas decorations, second hand books, clothes and toys which were displayed for sale by the different charity groups in attendance hoping to cash in on the holiday spirit of shoppers while earning some cash for their charity work.

Lots of fun and games for children and a peek from Santa on the Bus around the Stanley ground on that day was one of the surprises.

Bethune House Refuge, a home for distressed migrant workers has for several years been one of the beneficiaries of this annual event hosted by St. Stephen Church. 

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### Anglican Refugees and Migrants Network Consultation

11- 15 January 2010

*This will be a gathering of interested personnel within the Anglican Communion in a meeting in Hong Kong. The objective is to establish a Network among those with direct and indirect services for migrants and refugees. For more information, please contact the Mission, APMM and St. John's Cathedral.*

#### Bethune House Charity Cocktails

29 January 2010, 7:30-9:30PM

Helena May

*Make a difference in the lives of the displaced foreign domestic workers in Bethune House by supporting this charity event. Tickets are being sold at the Bethune House and Mission office.*

#### Mission 29th year Anniversary March 2010

*The Mission will be celebrating its 29th year in 2010. Several activities and events are being planned together with migrant organizations, fellow service providers and other friends.*



## MIGRANT FOCUS

**Migrant Focus is a monthly publication of the Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW Ltd.)**

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A/C No: 210-116448-883

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