



FirstLove Philippines Missions

April 6-21, 2017



On Friday morning, April 7th, the twelve member FirstLove Missions team arrived safely in the Philippine Islands (Manila, Luzon). Pictured left to right: Front Row: Joe Jacowitz, Paul Nelson, Edward Dalcour, Mike Stockwell, Brian Luzny, and Eric Baxter. Top Row: Tom Smith, Gerard Limtiaco, Victa Santos, Eric Santos, Austin Huggins, and Ben Walden.

The twelve member team consisted of Pastor Joe Jacowitz of Christ Bible Church, Dublin, CA; Pastor Paul Nelson of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, Morgan Hill, CA; Dr. Edward Dalcour of "The Department of Christian Defense" (an apologetics ministry based in Southern CA); Thomas Smith, a teacher from Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, Dale City, VA; Ben Walden from Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, Lexington, KY; Mike Stockwell, an evangelist with Jeremiah Cry Ministries; Eric Santos, an expert radio broadcaster and producer from Vacaville, CA and his wife: Victa Santos; Pastor Austin Huggins from Pensacola, Florida; Brian Luzny, a pastoral candidate from Central Point, Oregon; and Eric Baxter and Gerard Limtiaco, members of Christ Bible Church, Dublin, CA.

After arriving on the Island of Luzon in the Philippines, within the first few days, Pastor Joe became ill with a stomach virus and was quite weak. In the providence of God, Pastor Nelson had brought a strong anti-biotic, which fights intestinal issues. Thankfully, it worked quickly. Pastor Joe was back to normal within a few days, just in time to preach at Lapasan Baptist Church in Mindanao. Praise the Lord.

After the team arrived in Manilla, they made contact with Pastor Manuel Vergara (an indigenous pastor affiliated with SGBC, Morgan Hill, CA). He had driven all night with seven of his students and one teacher from his seminary. At 3:45am, Manuel called Pastor Nelson from the hotel lobby to say that they had now arrived and were waiting for him to come down and meet them. They discussed his seminary with the students. He is teaching a full curriculum including beginning Greek. All the students had read Dr. Nelson's apologetics book and were excited to meet him. The amazing thing is that the students had done all of their studies by using their own photocopies and were in desperate need of physical books. At about 4:30am, in God's providence, Pastor Joe walked into the lobby where they were talking. He was introduced to Manuel, and after talking for some time, invited the students to his room where they received 10 cases of books (over 500). The joy on the student's faces as they loaded the books into their van was unforgettable. Manuel and his men then followed the team to the pastor's conference. While at the conference, he and his men were recognized and introduced as having traveled the farthest distance. Later during the conference, Pastor Manuel also had the opportunity to meet Pastor Leo Galanza and discovered that they too were of a kindred spirit. They are already planning at least one conference in the northern part of the Luzon Island where Manuel is located.

Pastor Manuel would write and say: *"Dear Pastor Joe, it was a great moment meeting you and your group. And it was a blessing for us for it was like rain that pours to a dry ground, that gives life to plants and living things. Books are a necessity to our ministry, like the Apostle Paul's letter to Timothy to bring also his parchments (books). We had distributed the books to several Pastors, Preachers, Bible Students, members of churches, family campers, and to several*

churches around our place. We are looking forward to your coming too, in our region, Lord willing. Thank you very much, for we have been blessed the ministry you have with us.”

NOTE: Pastor Leo Galanza uses Dr. Nelson’s apologetics book for both graduate and undergraduate courses. So, all of his students are also very familiar with Dr. Nelson’s work. Dr. Downing’s Catechism on Bible Doctrine has also been incorporated into their curriculum. Both books are main titles listed in FirstLove Publications doctrinal category.

The pastor’s conference on Saturday, April 8, was titled: “The Life of the Minister is The Life of the Ministry”, and was well attended by about 300 pastors. Pastor Joe and two of the pastor team members gave messages of exhortation and encouragement. While a few others from the team shared testimony. Pastor Joe was then able to give his first PowerPoint presentation of FirstLove Publications to a very enthusiastic crowd. Well over 10,000 books were given away to joyful and shocked pastors who could hardly believe what they freely received as they walked away with stacks of books in their arms. Many other pastors could not make it, however, because of a city-wide event (“Angkan-angkan” or festival of clans in Marikina), which made access and parking quite difficult.

Pastor Ferdie Atanacio, the President of a large association of Churches, was in attendance and also wrote to us, saying: *“In behalf of the Marikina Valley Ministerial Fellowship, Inc. (Marval), I would like to extend our deepest appreciation and gratitude to you for blessing the ministers from Marikina City and beyond through your preaching/messages during the Conference last Saturday, April 8, as well as for distributing Christian books which are valuable resource materials for us. Thank you very much for your generous heart and care/concern for the ministers. God bless you and your ministry abundantly... For the glory of God, I will be very glad to assist you in promotion and mobilization of participants for the next Conference... We are indeed blessed by your wonderful ministry.”*



(Above) Pastor Joe is delivering the FirstLove PowerPoint Presentation to Pastors during the conference.

(Below) After the Conference, the mission team members disperse FirstLove literature.



That Saturday, after the conference, the team spent two hours in traffic trying to get to the airport for the flight to Cagayan De Oro on the island of Mindanao. Mindanao is the part of the Philippines that has a large Muslim population. Certain parts of Mindanao have radical Islamic occupants, known as “the rebels”, who have defected from the Philippine government. They often engage the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) in firefights, and are known to abduct, capture, hold for ransom, and behead foreigners. The city of Cagayan de Oro, however, is relatively safe.

The plane was late on take-off and did not arrive in Cagayan De Oro until after midnight Sunday morning. Later that morning, after a few hours of sleep, the team prepared for speaking engagements. As they split up, Pastor Paul Nelson and Tom Smith went up into the hills to minister at Emmanuel Baptist Church. Bro. Tom gave a Sunday school lesson from Mark Ch.6 and Pastor Paul spoke on the issue of the “Half-hearted Christian”. Although it was a small congregation, the team was amazed at how much they loved to sing and praise God. The people do not have much, but they were full of the joy of the Lord. Afterwards, they had a blessed time of fellowship over lunch with the Pastor and his family. Dr. Edward Dalcour was well received that morning at First Baptist Church in Cagayan where he preached at their Sunday morning service. They were very thankful for his message and presented him with a certificate of appreciation. The rest of the team ministered at Lapasan Baptist Church, the main church of influence from which FirstLove would operate. Pastor Austin Huggins preached at the first service with a message emphasizing Christ Jesus as the High Priest of our confession and the only mediator between God and man. Afterwards, between services, Bro. Brian Luzny gave an overview of Luke Ch.14 to a large group of combined Sunday schools on the topic of the cost of discipleship. Other team members taught at other Sunday school classes. Pastor Joe would finish off the morning by preaching to the large second service. Pastor Joe also gave the FirstLove PowerPoint presentation to those 700 people at Lapasan.



Normal Sunday morning attendance at Lapasan Baptist Church.



Sunday Morning Services at Lapasan Baptist Church:

1st Service with Pastor Austin (Left), Sunday Schools with Bro. Brian (middle), 2nd Service with Pastor Joe (Right)

Monday April, 10th, was another Pastor's conference at Lapasan Baptist Church titled "Pastors and Workers Conference". Five team members (Bro. Tom, Dr. Dalcour, Pastor Austin, Dr. Nelson, and Pastor Joe) each preached one message. The preaching schedule ran all day from 10am until after 5pm. At the end of the conference, thousands of books were distributed to hundreds of pastors and attendees. Their faces were full of joy and thankfulness as they stood in line to receive books that stretched all the way to the back of the large auditorium and out around the corner. The catechism, the OT surveys, and the apologetic books were in high demand. What a blessing! Pastor Joe turned to Pastor Nelson at this point and said, "*This is what I live for.*"

One dear Pilipino brother who attended this specific conference, Alan Gabe, testified to the need for the kind of ministry that FirstLove provides by saying: *“I have attended to your mission trip here in the Philippines at Lapasan Baptist Church and I was blessed by the messages and received the books. Thank you so much for your ministry. With regards to this, I am appealing to your ministry because I am the Chairman of one of the regional organizations here in Mindanao (Mindanao Fellowship of Fundamental Baptist Churches, Inc.)” ... “As you already know, Pastors here have difficulty of acquiring books because good books here in the Philippines are so expensive and only few have an access to the internet. So, my heart's desire and request to your ministry is, if you may, please give me books to give away for the attendees next annual conference.. Thank you so much.. hoping for your kind consideration...”*



**Main speakers at the Pastor’s Conference - Bro. Tom, Dr. Dalcour, Pastor Austin, Dr. Nelson, & Pastor Joe
(Below) Team Members distribute more FirstLove Literature as Pastor’s Conference concludes.**



NOTE: By this point, several thousands of books from FirstLove Publications had been placed into the hands of the people of the Philippines, all of whom were overjoyed by the blessing. Over 10,000 books were distributed at two conferences and then 10,000 more books were left with Pastor Leo Galanza in Manila. Several hundred more would also be taken on Wednesday to the third conference in Lala, Lanao Del Norte, Maranding. By this point, many new contacts had been made with these other churches. With the doors being as wide open as they were, there were already plans being made for another trip and estimated needs of over 70,000

more books. The need is so great and the Macedonian call of the people to come over and help them is heart wrenching. Pray to The Lord of The Harvest who is also The Lord our Provider!

Keep in mind, the team would primarily reside in Cagayan de Oro city, which is in the northern part of Mindanao Island. This city has a minimum Muslim population of around 10%. It is relatively safe and there is no terrorist threat there. As you go west or south, the Muslim population increases as you move into contested “rebel” zones. On Wednesday, April 12th, “The Twelve” would prepare to travel southwest into jungle and mountainous areas in western Mindanao for another pastor’s conference where 300 were to attend at Pastor Cube’s church at Maranding Bible Baptist Church.

Wednesday was certainly a very long and exciting day. Many from the team were awakened in the hotel by an earthquake at 5:30am, which measured at 6.0, the epicenter being within a couple hundred miles south. After lunch, the team took a very long and arduous 4.5 hour drive, over pitted and unfinished roads, southwest into Muslim territory. We finally reached Maranding Bible Baptist Church, where the team had time to fellowship with several church members and with Pastor Cube before the preaching. He was the first missionary in the region back in 1983, when it was a war zone with fighting against both communists and Muslims. Since then he has trained men and planted 31 other churches in the area, and gives a daily radio broadcast. He has built a sizeable church building that could seat a very large crowd. Many of these brothers had not seen recent American

Missionaries in quite some time and treated us with almost a sense of wonder. Several team members shared and gave messages that night to an attendance of about 500 excited Christian people, where Pastor Joe also shared the FirstLove Presentation again on a small projector. After all the preaching, the team then handed out the books. To say that it was a unique opportunity to see the people eagerly and joyfully scrambling for the books would be an understatement. Sadly, we did not have enough books for all that wanted them and we had to turn some away empty handed. At this time, the book supply was then virtually depleted as 35,000 books had now been distributed in the Philippines. Immediately afterward, the team loaded back up and retraced their route back to the hotel over another 4.5 hours. The team arrived back in the early am hours.





Team Members work to distribute their final round of FirstLove Publications Literature at Maranding.

NOTE: The preaching atmosphere in Maranding was certainly unique. Lizards and cockroaches climb the walls and run across the floor. Birds fly overhead in the building. Sometimes you have to wave off hornets flying around you. In one church that Pastor Nelson preached in, there was a neighborhood dog sleeping in the center aisle during the service.



prayers and light candles as offerings to God. The goal is to take several hours walking up the mountain, visiting, praying and burning candles at each of twelve crosses and then walk back down. So, on Good Friday, April 14th, during the pilgrimage, First Love Missions team members Austin Huggins, Brian Luzny, Gerard Limtiaco, Tom Smith, and Eric Baxter, engaged many adherents with the full Gospel of Christ, evangelized, testified, and passed out hundreds of

Every year leading up to Easter Sunday, the Catholic Church of the Philippines recognizes Holy Week via special sacramental pilgrimages. Although some groups will conduct reenactments by parading partially crucified volunteers through the streets, many other Catholic adherents choose to walk up into a local mountain just outside Cagayan De Oro on Good Friday. Alongside this winding mountain path there are numerous Concrete White Cross stations at which they will say



tracts. Numerous groups were receptive and listened to presentations of the Gospel message.

On Sunday, April 16th, Dr. Nelson and Bro. Tom traveled about 30 minutes west to Great Shepherd Baptist Mission, a very small congregation in a small village. Bro. Tom spoke at Sunday School and Dr. Nelson gave the message. Many did not speak English, but the fellowship was sweet and the brothers were received with joy. This was also the first time many in this congregation had seen anyone from the US, so they were quite taken with the team members. Pastor Joe preached the first main service at Lapasan Baptist Church. Pastor Austin preached to the large group of combined Sunday Schools between services. The second service was preached by their Senior Pastor, Dimver Andales. The other team members taught in other small group Sunday schools in the church.

By Monday, the team was down to six missionaries of the original twelve member team as some had to return to the US. That Monday, the remaining six would travel to a large youth camp where they would continue to share, preach, and minister.

The Team checked out of the hotel at Cagayan De Oro on Monday morning and drove to the Youth Camp up in a mountain village called Bukidnon, about an hour outside of the city. With no hotels nearby, a house was rented on the mountain at a price of 6000 pesos per night, which is about \$120.00, or \$20.00 per person per night. The owner was away at a wedding in New Jersey. Although it was a beautiful house on a small farm, the team encountered frogs, lizards, a very large spider, (which Austin and Eric killed), and cockroaches and locusts inside the house. The owner also raises roosters for cockfighting, so there were about 50 roosters who will call out throughout the night, especially at about 4 am.



Bro. Tom Smith standing in front of the house that was rented in Bukidnon

The team was able to minister at the camp every morning and evening, including having four team members give teachings to approximately 30 youth Tuesday through Thursday morning in small group devotionals. There were about 300 youth total in attendance, in addition to many staff workers and helpers. The Youth Camp schedule also hosted three main teaching and preaching sessions in the morning for the entire camp gathering, and two sessions in the evening. Pastor Joe had taken one of the morning sessions, while Bro. Tom Smith and Pastor Austin alternated the other morning session. Pastor Joe also continued to preach at one of the evening sessions while the rest were covered by the native Pastors and speakers. Though Pastor Joe was feeling weak the previous weekend, he had been feeling much better, as the Lord had heard our prayers and gave him strength to bring God's Word.





Pictured on Top row, from left to right: Pastor Austin Huggins, Pastor Joe Jacowitz, and Bro. Tom Smith Preaching at the Annual Youth Conference. The Middle Row pictures Bro. Eric Baxter and Bro Brian Luzny teaching small group morning devotionals. Bottom Row: Bro. Gerard “G” Limtiaco is teaching.

The youth there were all very polite and grateful. The last day of ministry at the youth camp was on Thursday. Bro. Tom, Bro. Bryan, Bro. Gerard, and Bro. Eric each gave a small group devotional to their own group of youth. Bro. Tom left time for the young people to ask questions, but they were polite, shy and a bit tired. He asked for prayer for our young people in the US, as many are distracted by the things of the world and materialism.

Pastor Austin and Pastor Joe gave messages in the morning. We have concerns as how well grounded the local churches and young people are in the fundamental doctrines of the faith. In the evening, Pastor Joe gave a message on the accomplishments of the cross, a basic outline and explanation of the great words of salvation. He challenged the Pastors in the audience to preach these truths to their congregations.

One of the young people in attendance had a good conversation with Bro. Tom. His name is Job, and is 16 years old. He had traveled over 5 hours to attend the camp. They talked about the challenges he was facing. Although the people in general are very poor, Job says they face the same temptations of materialism and worldliness in the Philippines.

The youth camp ended about midnight, so the team did not make it to bed until somewhere around 1:30am in the morning. Thankfully, most did not hear the roosters and were able to sleep in until about 7am. The next morning, a van was rented to take the two hour trip to the airport in Cagayan De Oro for the flight back to Manila. Due to flight delays, Pastor Joe and the rest of the team had their flights to Hong Kong cancelled, but by God’s providence, they were rebooked on a direct flight to San Francisco. It seems, as with the rest of the trip, Our Lord had not only kept us safe, but had looked after us and provided for every situation we encountered. With 35,000 new books now distributed in the Philippines, and with our safe return to the states, we give praise to The Lord God who is merciful and does all things well. God is good!



28th Annual Summer Youth Camp hosted by Lapasan Baptist Church. Mission team is front and center.

We are very grateful for the partnership of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, and Dr. Peter Masters, for their help in freely supplying hundreds of books for distribution at our conference in Marikina, Manila.

By God's grace in this two week missions outreach (April 6-21, 2017), our twelve-member team was able to distribute 35,000 books at five conferences, engage in street evangelism with dozens of people, pass out hundreds of tracts, witness to many other people in our travels, share personal testimonies, teach bible studies to groups of 10-30 people, teach bible classes, preach many sermons in churches and conferences.

Thousands of additional books were left with FirstLove Publications branch leader Pastor Leo and Hannah Galanza for distribution among people and churches in the Philippines. The official launching of FirstLove Philippines occurred on April 8, 2017 during a conference in Mindanao. Please pray for the Galanza's as they now are tasked with building up FirstLove Publications' inventory and distribution network in the Philippines. Their mission is to distribute as many books as possible to churches, individuals, and conferences throughout the Philippines. Our prayer is to saturate the Philippines with millions of books, booklets, and tracts in five subject categories: doctrinal, devotional, evangelistic, apologetic and pastoral. We desire to fulfill the Lord's statement to the apostle Peter, "If you love Me feed My sheep." There are countless souls who are hungry and thirsty for the word of God and sound bible teaching in the Philippines. We saw that hunger in the eyes of many people during this last trip. There are still many places in the third world where there is a vacuum of sound bible teaching. The vast majority of people cannot afford to buy Christian books and bibles, nor pay for the shipping costs to get them to the Philippines. Our prayer is to remove the financial transaction of buying books that restricts the mass distribution of Christian literature. By God's grace we ship the books ourselves and distribute them without charge, for *"God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,*

while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God” (2 Cor. 9:8-11).

We are praying about our next missions outreach to the Philippines to possibly occur in January, 2018. It is still in the planning stage, but we hope to distribute double the number of books (70,000), minister at three pastor’s conferences of 1,000 pastors at each conference, pass out thousands of tracts, meet with local politicians for permission to pass out Christian books in the public schools, and much more.

Please pray for the Lord to provide for all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. For more information about FirstLove Missions and our upcoming trip to the Philippines email us at:

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In Christ,

Joe Jacowitz

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