

# The Philippines

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(Excerpted from 1980 December *Worldwide Family Spirit* magazine)

The Philippines is an archipelago of eleven major islands and about 7,100 islets lying some 600 miles southeast off the coast of mainland Asia. Strung a thousand miles from north to south, the islands are bound by Taiwan to the north and Indonesia to the south. Neighboring countries to the west are Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore; to the northeast, Japan; and to the east, several thousand miles across the Pacific Ocean is Hawaii.

The Filipino is a blend of various races. Basically, he/she is of Malay stock, unto which Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, Indian and American strains have been blended. Migratory waves of people have produced not only the racial mixture which is characteristic of the Filipino people today, but have also served to enrich the Philippines' culture and history with varied and diverse influences. This cultural pluralism is the product of a mixture of oriental and eastern traditions resulting from years of cultural interactions.

The Philippines ranks among the world's fastest growing population. From the 1960 census of 27.1 million, the population increased to about 36.7 million in 1970, representing an average annual population growth rate of 3.0%. The 1975 census showed the population at 41.8 million which reflects an average annual population growth rate of 2.8%.

Asia holds 60% of the world's population but only 3% are Catholics. However, of this 3%, almost half are in the Philippines. In 1979 the Archdiocese of Manila celebrated the 400th anniversary of its existence. The celebration culminated with two historical events worthy of record in the annals of the church in the Philippines — The Manila Synod on October 1979 and the International Mission Congress of December of the same year. The latter came up with its theme: "The Good News of God's Kingdom to the People of Asia". With an 85% Catholic Population (1970), the Catholic Church is considered to be the most extensive, if not the most influential, proponent of the Christian way of life.

The goals and values that the Philippine Church envisions is evangelization towards total human development through Basic Christian Communities.

According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines Joint Pastoral Letter, January 25-29, 1977 "Evangelization is the proclamation, above all, of salvation from sin, the liberation of everything oppressive to man, the development of man in all dimensions, personal and communitarian, and ultimately the renewal of society in all its strata through the interplay of GOSPEL TRUTHS and MAN'S CONCRETE TOTAL LIFE". It includes the three-fold apostolate of formation, and service.

The Manila Synod stresses that the family should be the center of Evangelization: "Pastoral care of the family shall be given higher priority in the Archdiocese" since it is "certain that evangelization in the future depends largely on the domestic church".

Worldwide Marriage Encounter began in the Philippines in November 1976 with the first Weekend attended by sixteen couples and two priests. It was presented by a team from Los Angeles and Hawaii and a foreign priest residing in the Philippines. This was followed by another Weekend in December 1976 after which the Archdiocese of Manila decided not to accept Worldwide Marriage Encounter. However, through the efforts and representation of our encountered couples the first two Weekends, Archbishop Ricardo Vidal on March 1977 decided to accept the Worldwide Marriage Encounter in Lipa.

The Weekends in Lipa prospered, supported by team couples and priests coming from Los Angeles and Hawaii. Don and June Chu of Hawaii coordinated and took good care of providing the Philippines with the support that was needed.

In September 1977, Pol & Nena Repotente were selected as Executive Couple of the Philippines. Later, Father Anthony Van Santvoord was selected Executive Team Priest. The Weekends prospered and in August 1978, the first all Filipino Weekend was held. By then, close to 800 couples, priests, and nuns had already made the Weekend. The need for support programs for encountered couples was beginning to be felt. It was recognized that the programs could fill this need. In 1978, Pol and Nena and Father Tony created an Open & Apostolic (O & A) coordinating team, whose job it was to launch the various O & A programs.

Since then, through the joint efforts of the Executive Team and Archbishop Vidal, the Archdiocese of Manila accepted Worldwide Marriage Encounter. A two Weekend per month schedule was adopted for the Archdiocese. The Weekend was also started in the Diocese of Cavite. In March of 1978, a reach out to Visayas was started with the first Weekend given in the Diocese of Bacolod. Since then, Bacolod has had a Weekend every other month and to date, around 220 couples, priests, and nuns have joined the family there. Cavite has had only two Weekends thus far, due to lack of facilities. However, couples from Cavite regularly go to Manila for the Weekend and their community is steadily growing. The greatest set back was in Batangas, where the Weekend had to be suspended because the Retreat House where it was being held changed ownership. Fortunately, the Redemptorist fathers through Father Peter de Sousa's intervention decided to convert one wing of their seminary to provide twenty rooms for Marriage Encounter Weekends. Consequently, in April of 1980, Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekends resumed in Batangas.

With the Weekend regularly going on twice a month in Manila and once a month in Batangas and Bacolod, we have begun to experience difficulties. Major problems include:

1. Lack of team priests.
2. Lack of acceptably priced facilities
3. Poverty and high cost of living.

Despite these problems, we've grown and are moving ahead. We have around 200 couples, priests, and nuns encountered from Lipa, 220 from Bacolod, 130 from Cavite, 1,000 from Manila and 100 from other various dioceses. In the meantime, other dioceses have asked for the Weekend. Pagadian is asking for it as Bishop Tuquib himself has made the Weekend. Bishop Valerio of Apostolic Vicariate of Calapan is asking for it. Bishop Puruganan of the Diocese of Iligan has requested it for his diocese. His Eminence Julio J. Cardinal Rosales of Archdiocese of Cebu likewise requested it for his Archdiocese and the first Weekend was held in September, 1980. Aside from these dioceses, there is a standing request from the Archdiocese of Lingayen-Dagupan, Archdiocese of Zamboanga, Archdiocese of Davao and Archdiocese of Jaro.

Target dates for our reachouts are as follows:

- Archdiocese of Cebu - September 1980
- Archdiocese of Jaro - January 1981
- Apostolic Vicariate of Calapan - February 1981
- Archdiocese of Davao - March 1981
- Diocese of Pagadian - March 1981
- Diocese of Iligan - May 1981

To ensure continuous recruiting and full-capacity Weekends, we have planned to have Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekends in our local dialects. Within the next five years, we will have Weekends in two major languages, English and Spanish and six major dialects, Tagalog (National Language); Cebuano; Hiligaynon; Ilocano; Bicolano and Pampango.

The Philippine community has envisioned a ten year expansion plan with the objective of encountering 10% of the Catholic couple population. And at the same time, the community plans to provide a full range of follow-up and O & A programs.