



# COVENANT NEWS

BUKÁS-LOÓB SA DIYÓS COVENANT COMMUNITY • ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

Volume 23 Issue 33

Special Silver  
Anniversary Edition

August 23, 2017



# BLD Newark thanks the Lord for 25 years..., and counting...

On August 23, 2017, BLD Newark will be celebrating its 25th year. From its humble beginnings in 1992, BLD Newark has grown into the vibrant, God fearing and loving Community that it is today. It has striven to be the Catholic Christian light that Jesus asks all of us to be... in the Archdiocese of Newark and beyond.



## Outreaches / Districts whose roots are from BLD Newark:

**BLD** Reno, Nevada ~ **BLD** Long Island, New York ~ **BLD** Seattle, Washington ~ **BLD** Albany, New York ~ **BLD** San Francisco, California ~ **BLD** Los Angeles, California ~ **BLD** Washington, DC ~ **BLD** Trenton, New Jersey ~ **BLD** Phoenix, Arizona ~ **BLD** Allentown, Pennsylvania ~ **BLD** Rockland, New York ~ **BLD** Las Vegas, Nevada ~ **BLD** Charlotte, North Carolina

## New Jersey Churches that BLD Newark has helped in the past:

1. Blessed Sacrament Church, Newark, NJ
2. Divine Mercy Church, Rahway, NJ
3. Saint Andrew's Church, Bayonne, NJ
4. Saint Antoninus Church, Newark, NJ

## Former Homes of BLD Newark:

1. Saint Theresa's Church, Kenilworth, NJ
2. Saint Joseph's Church, West Orange, NJ
3. CYO, Kearny, NJ
4. Blessed Sacrament Church, Newark, NJ
5. Saint Leo's Church, Irvington, NJ

## Current Spiritual Home (2005 - present):

**Divine Mercy Parish  
(Saint Mary's Church), Rahway, NJ**

**THANK YOU LORD!**

**FOR ALL THE LIVES YOU HAVE ENRICHED.**

**YOU ARE THE SOURCE OF IT ALL...**

**WE LOVE YOU AND WE THANK YOU!!!**



Seven years after the birth of the Bukas Loob sa Diyos Community in the Philippines, three couples, strangers to each other and with only BLD as their common experience, were called by our Lord to organize the first BLD sponsored Marriage Encounter in the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey.

That momentous weekend brought forth ME #1, an anointed group of nineteen couples and one nun, which became the foundation of BLD Newark. From there, God's work of evangelization in the United States began and grew, with a zeal that continues to this day. Over the next two-and-a-half decades, Marriage Encounters have been held each year in Newark, bringing the total number so far, to 48.

BLD Newark's impact was destined to go beyond the geographical limits of archdiocesan boundaries. Early in its existence, BLD Newark brought God's work to Reno, Nevada, and by His grace, BLD Newark was able to surmount the challenges of time, distance and resources. Beginning with that first outreach in Reno, BLD districts and prayer groups, in ten states across the United States, from the East to the West coast, trace their roots back to BLD Newark. BLD's presence, through the pioneering work of the Newark Community, is now also in Long Island, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Trenton, Washington DC, Albany, Allentown, Rockland, Charlotte and in Camden, NJ and Orlando, Florida, as outreaches continue to be fruitful. Owing to the multi-cultural milieu of the United States, Catholic brethren of other nationalities now have been sponsored into their own charismatic groups too, with the assistance of BLD Newark.

Through 2017, BLD Newark's evangelization work, which started with Marriage Encounters and Life-in-the-Spirit Seminars, has expanded with our Lord's anointing. It now includes Singles Encounters, Youth Encounters and Solo Parent Encounters, Family Encounters, and John Six Crossing Retreats, enriching the precious relationships of countless families, parents, children and siblings.

The Community has grown continuously over the years, and because of that, the venues for Friday night Praise and Worship have changed several times. BLD Newark has gathered in economically challenged urban locales, as well as safer suburban surroundings, contributing to God's work in each of our host parishes. Initially housed in a small library of a parochial school, BLD Newark now calls Divine Mercy Parish in Rahway, New Jersey its home.

... continued on page 3

# ABOUT US

**The Bukas Loob sa Diyos\*** Covenant Community in Newark is a Covenant Community and a Private Lay Association of the Faithful within the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey.

Our local Community was established in August 1992 and is part of a global Community with districts all over the Philippines, Hong Kong, Canada and the United States. Our inter-parochial and trans-diocesan membership has been blessed with sustained growth.

What started as a Community of encountered couples has taken on a family perspective; it now includes our young children (in the Mark 10 and John 6 Ministries), Youth, Singles, and even solo parents, senior citizens and grandparents.

## NEW VISION:

WE ARE A COMMUNITY OF DISCIPLES  
INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BE LIVING  
WITNESSES FOR TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST  
TO BRING ABOUT A WORLD OF JUSTICE,  
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND TRUE PEACE.

## NEW MISSION:

IN RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF OUR  
PARTICULAR PLACE, TIME, AND CULTURE:

### FOR OUR FAMILIES

WE WILL EVANGELIZE FAMILIES AND BUILD  
COMMUNITIES OF FAITH THROUGH  
ENCOUNTERS, LIFE-IN-THE-SPIRIT SEMINARS  
AND DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION. WE WILL  
GIVE FORMATION ON PERSONAL AND FAMILY  
PRAYER, PRO-LIFE VALUES, CATHOLIC SOCIAL  
TEACHINGS, AND STEWARDSHIP.

### FOR OUR BLD COMMUNITIES

WE WILL ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE  
AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN ACCORD  
WITH OUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS.

### FOR OUR COUNTRY

WE WILL WORK ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION  
THROUGH SCHOLARSHIPS, HOUSING FOR THE  
POOR, AND ADVOCACIES FOR LIFE,  
ENVIRONMENT, AND GOOD GOVERNANCE.

*\* In English, these Filipino words mean "Open in Spirit to God."*

## BLD Newark thanks... (from page 2)

Currently, on any given Friday, six separate simultaneous worship services are held in Community - Adults, Singles, Solo Parents, Youth, John 6 and Mark 10 - each group bringing and celebrating their unique perspectives and styles to Praise and Worship. And on many weekends and weeknights, members of almost 30 ministries sponsor various activities, where always, we ask for blessings and we welcome Christ and His Holy Spirit in our midst.

In its 25-year history, BLD Newark has reached out to God's people: through its support of fledgling BLD districts, by its mission work for the poor - from soup kitchens and nursing home visits in New Jersey, to its annual **Medical Mission** and support of *Gawad Kalinga* in the Philippines; through its fight for the unborn in the **March for Life** in Washington DC; by weekend formation teachings and retreats; and many other endeavors and outreaches.

As a Community, we are thankful and grateful to all who have been a part of our family, and especially to our Lord, for His mighty anointing of its work, for making the BLD Newark Community, a vibrant and active instrument in bringing God and His Word to the ends of the Earth.

## Reflection on Community

Lord, Thank You for the call to Community  
It is Your wonderful gift to me  
Let my heart be true  
and my gaze be fixed on You alone  
As I hold on tight to this gift of love  
- Eponymous



## ***Something Good Was Bubbling Up in the Heart of Newark***

- by Eileen O'Hara

There were new "kids" on the block and the rare but irresistible, Holy Spirit gift of love was beckoning. New, fresh seekers of MORE were called to minister to the inner city, and their exit was #144 on the Parkway.

In they came from near and not so near places, to do what we have been doing here for the past 40 years at St. Antoninus...prayer meetings after the model of Fr. Jim Ferry: Praise & Worship, readings for the upcoming Sunday, reflections on the Word, Living Word sharing, prayer petitions, prophetic words and more praise. Extensive outreaches emanated from this anointed place to encourage others to catch this new movement of the Holy Spirit. And it spread...widely...

But new troops were needed to revive and refresh the dwindling platoon of faithful warriors who were retiring, or moving away, or starting new ministries of their own. And here they came roaring in, the cavalry in SUV's as opposed to steeds, with a name none of us could pronounce. All we knew was that it had something to do with being OPEN to the Holy Spirit.

And along with "Alleluia"... which was our song! That alone was revitalizing... and some others out there caught it and were playing it forward! And then there was that amazing and most powerful Holy Spirit gift of love that just drew people in... from here and all the Catholic Churches in Deanery 20.

This was not just a much needed breath of fresh air. This was the wind of the Spirit and we recognized and rejoiced when we "saw." Even more importantly, we experienced it. So the call that has always characterized St. A's went out: COME and SEE!

So the invitations went out and continue to go out throughout the Deanery and beyond, to come and experience this new move of the Spirit. That was over twenty years ago, and so many have been blessed, encouraged, revitalized in their faith, healed, forgiven, graced and loved.

What greater gift could God give us?

**Press on!**

**This world needs what you  
have more than ever!**

## **A Fond Friday Night Memory**

A few years ago, a friend of mine from California and her daughter came to visit us in New Jersey. She had always been a religious person, and so, that made her curious about this "BLD" that I was always talking about whenever we spoke to each other. For my part, I was glad when she set aside a Friday night to join us, especially since I wanted her to see how many people would be there... and maybe, be impressed. Well, it seems that God intended to impress her even more.

Yes, she saw many people at BLD that night, but what became truly memorable, and the sight that really impressed her and her teen-aged daughter was, for me, a proud BLD-papa moment.

At that time, my two sons were still in the Youth Ministry, and as we arrived in front of St. Mary's Church, both of them jumped out of the car and literally raced towards the school auditorium, leaving my California friend and her daughter wondering and asking "Why?" Then they said that there must really be something special about BLD...

### **SOMETHING SPECIAL**

- a simple rhyme

When friends ask me Why I come to BLD Why I'm in Rahway Almost every single Friday	Before, when my life was a zoo"
After giving them a hug Often I just shrug "Because we have something special here."	"I think I've found something special here..."
"See, there's the joy in worship Praise in Spirit and in Song There's the food and fun at fellowship That makes me feel like I belong"	"Now it seems I have time For everything I used to do Now I also have time For BLD weekends too"
"But I already go to Church on Sunday," They would reply "I'm waaayyy too busy everyday... To even begin to try."	"See, my heart kinda does a jump Each time I see everyone A feeling that nothing can trump Save for seeing Jesus in each one"
So I'd say, "That's what I thought too	"See, everyone in my family On this we all agree We have something... make that Someone special here... Simply put... we see Jesus here..."

## **In 25 Years, What We've Done and Continue to Do...**

Almost thirty apostolates and ministries busily plan and conduct BLD's activities on most weekends, and even weekdays and weeknights. Among the significant weekend events are the Life-in-the-Spirit Seminars and the Encounters; monthly, there are teachings, soup kitchen sponsorships and nursing home visits; and of course, every Friday evening there is Praise and Worship.

The next few articles, contributions from some of those apostolates and ministries, provide a glimpse into some of these endeavors.



- by Boyie Huelgas

***"...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father"*** - Eph 5:19-20

As faithful and dedicated believers, the concept of praising and worshiping our Triune God has been deeply embedded in the heart of the Community ever since the first seed was sown in 1992. The desire and the need to move ever forward in our ability to worship our Savior, our Lord and King, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and our Heavenly Father, has always been expressed, not only in prayer and selfless service, but also in songs and music that evoke emotions. Joyously sung tunes and melodies can instill in many a state of heart eager to demonstrate humility, thankfulness, and obedience to His Word.

With thankful hearts, the Praise Ministry has led the Community in the expressions of its aspirations, inspirations and its gratitude for our Lord's sacrifice on the Cross. Through the music of the Ministry, we are able to give thanks to a future destined to reveal God's never ending mercy and grace.

The Praise Ministry has always been a key and distinct part of BLD Newark. It is an evangelization tool that our Lord uses in transforming those whom He has called to His flock.

Through the years God blessed the Community with gifts and talents to lead His flock in raising their voices in unity, in proclaiming praises, in giving thanks, and in declaring God's work and attributes. Through its members and their efforts, the faith of everyone is strengthened and the Community is able to minister to God and able to recognize His greatness.

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## **THE INTERCESSORY MINISTRY**

- by Boyie Huelgas

BLD Newark, which from its inception was founded on prayer, has been blessed with the gift of intercession, not only to seek God's blessings upon people, but in forming its members to be faithful prayer warriors. Through prayer, the Community's intercessory ministry has persevered in approaching God for its members and those God sends into its fold. It releases the power of God, His love and compassion upon those who need Christ, those facing the many problems of life, those in crisis. Through prayers for others, it has become "men for others" whose only desire is to see God's victory in everyone.



The Intercessory Ministry has been instrumental in the transformation of those whom God has brought to His flock and who have submitted their hearts under the Lordship of the Great Intercessor, Himself, our Lord Jesus. The Ministry instills the superordinate value of righteousness, along with compassion, sympathy, love and care, and a sense of communion. It has been the powerhouse of intercession, prayer, and fasting, and is like the vestibule of the Church before entering the main sanctuary. Similar to that point of entry, intercession, prayer, and fasting are also entry points of the Spirit, through which they usher everyone into God's presence to stand in the gap and be the hedge against the enemy.

***"Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name He will give you... ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete."***

- Jn 16:23-24

## ABRAHAMs in BLD Newark

- by Bing Frio of the Intercessory Ministry



*"Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"*

*"What if there are five less than fifty righteous people?"*

*"What if there are no more than twenty?"*

*"Please, do not let my Lord be angry if I speak up this last time. What if ten are found there?"*

*"For the sake of the ten," he replied, "I will not destroy it." (Gen. 18:22-32)*

I am in awe of how our father Abraham, who the Lord had made a covenant with (Gen 15:18), intercedes for his people. God knew how many innocent people were left, yet He listened to Abraham. Patiently, He allowed Abraham to plead with Him, and willingly gave in to his requests. So this too is what happens in the Intercessory Ministry!

Every Friday, as petitions are placed in the basket, there is the trust and belief that through intercessory prayer, the BLD disciple will receive an answer. Requests are categorized and the IM member prayerfully collates them and composes prayers. This starts the weekly cycle involved in praying for the Community's intentions.

Next, an email is sent and it becomes the collective prayer for the Ministry's members and volunteers. Daily, as the intentions are offered to God, the ABRAHAMs of BLD have FAITH and HOPE that the Loving Father hears, and takes pity. Although we too are sinful, we know that He is a Loving God, a caring Father, forgiving, merciful and generous. So we continue to lift our pleadings up to Him, and we raise our gaze as we present other's many needs. Nonetheless, it is God the Son Who assures us, in the words of St. Faustina, that, "The prayer of a humble and loving soul disarms the anger of My Father and draws down an ocean of blessings." (Diary of St Faustina, 320).

Be an ABRAHAM of our Community! Be the one called among the many! Take this blessed opportunity of praying, of interceding, of being entrusted with a need and be relied upon, that on their behalf, you joyfully communicate with our God and He lovingly listens to you. Come join us and together, let's pray!

## A Life-Long Formation

- by Jemma Reyes (Teaching Ministry)

*"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit" - Mt 28:19*

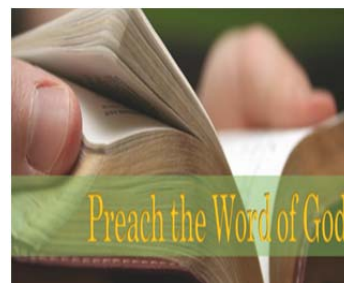
We thank God for the grace of being part of BLD's 25th Year Anniversary!!! May Our Triune God continue to bestow His blessings upon the Bukas Loob sa Diyos Community!

Through our spiritual journey, from the Marriage Encounter, the Life-in-the-Spirit Seminar, the Aspirants' and Prayer Healing Retreats, the Family Encounter... and more, we are blessed to have been evangelized by dedicated, humble, and loving disciples of Christ. Through our active participation in different ministries - Liturgical, LSA, Pastoral and Teaching, we also learned how to evangelize others. We are so grateful to have been a part of this BLD Community, which has allowed our faith to grow deeper in Christ, and has prepared us to be fishers of men.

Our family has benefited from the experiences we shared through the Mark 10, John 6, Youth and Singles Ministries. The BLD Christian Formation Discipleship Program has also been instrumental in strengthening the foundation of our Catholic Faith. It is not just a program, but a life-long formation. And as teachers here, and in our parish as RCIA coordinators, we are humbled to be called by God to serve.

It is not an easy task; at times, we continue to falter and fall; yet, God is so forgiving!!! What a gift from God this is: to know, love, and serve Him, and to be able to share our faith and relationship with the Lord, with all who are searching for Him. BLD gave us the boldness to be witnesses of His love. This has even expanded out, impacting our healthcare careers where we have incorporated it into the healing of body, mind, **and** spirit.

Truly, we have an awesome God Who watches over each of us and calls us to be His disciples. He calls us to spread the Good News to others, not only through our speech and what we say, but also through what we do, and by our witnessing as true disciples of our Risen Lord.



# What Is The Solo Parents Ministry?

- by Libby Maljian



During the early years of BLD Newark, solo parent candidates graduated from Singles Encounter (SE) and Life-in-the Spirit Seminar (LSS) weekends. As a growing number of solo parents, not only joined, but continued to remain active within the Community, the leadership of BLD Newark realized that these members required their own ministry.

The Solo Parents Ministry (SPM) of BLD Newark was thus born, with the first Solo Parents Encounter weekend (SPE1) in 1999. Every annual SPE weekend, from that initial SPE, up to, and including SPE19 in 2017, has been blessed to have Monsignor Paul Schetelick as Spiritual Director. He was recently appointed the Spiritual Director of the entire Community, so SPM has been more than doubly blessed!

The SPM celebrates its own praise and worship on the second and fourth Fridays of every month. It has its own praise ministry, organizes its own annual retreat, conducts its own visitations to soup kitchens and nursing homes several times a year, hosts its own Christmas party, and organizes the encounter weekend annually. Newly encountered solo parents have their own monthly reunions too, while the Christian Discipleship Formation Program (CDFP) that they attend exposes them to teachings; rotations immerse them in the Service, Intercessory, and other ministries. For the larger Community, members of the SPM help to sponsor every LSS weekend; some are members of the larger Praise group too, Teaching, and others; many volunteer for the Medical Mission to the Philippines. The SPM of BLD Newark helps organize SPE weekends for other BLD districts, including Trenton, Camden, Long Island, Washington, DC, Phoenix, Reno, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Toronto.

By 2009, the SPM of BLD Newark became so large and active that it began triennial emergences for a five-member Council of Stewards (COS), in order to assist the SPM head coordinators. Together, they organize the evangelization, pastoral, mission,

formation, and management activities for the SPM, and they coordinate efforts with the larger BLD Newark Community, as well as with their counterparts in the other districts throughout the United States and Canada. In 2013, the SPM of BLD Newark began a biennial SPM inter-district conference, for members to discuss and address the unique, yet similar needs, situations and challenges of solo parents.

The seeds planted by nineteen (and counting) annual encounter weekends has yielded the fruit of hundreds of solo parents who are blessed to serve God within the Ministry, the larger BLD Newark District, and the Global BLD.

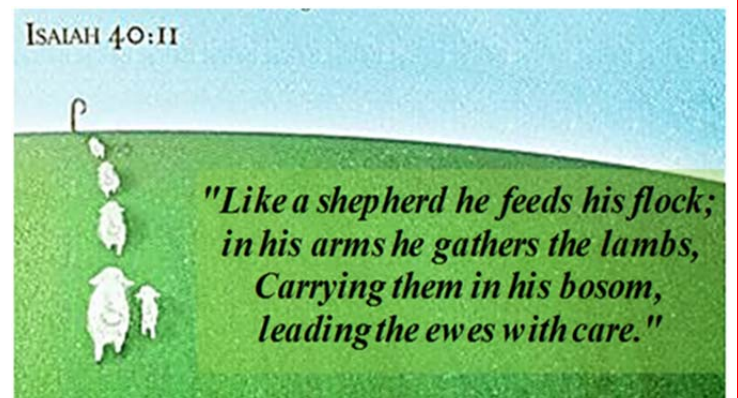
The Ministry Coordinators and the Council of Stewards, on behalf of all members of the SPM, congratulate BLD Newark for receiving the blessings of a Silver Jubilee from Almighty God. We pray that the Lord will bless BLD Newark with many more decades of serving His Kingdom, and after another 25 years, the SPM will join everyone in triumphantly celebrating BLD Newark's Golden Jubilee!

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## Life of an SPE Class Shepherd

It wasn't that long ago that I used to harshly judge the people who were separated from their spouses. More so, if they already had children, since I saw them as selfish people who cared only for themselves and their own feelings, while ignoring the needs of their kids. I believed that if they loved them, they would have given more effort to staying married, in order for them to have the firm base of a good family structure. However, when my sister finally separated from her abusive husband, I began to see the reality of what it was like to be a single parent.

But God molds us and makes us complete and fruitful so that we can serve in His vineyard. When we accepted His call to be SPE class shepherds, the Lord showed me the errors of my previously critical ways.



With no help from a partner or spouse, an SPE lamb who is a solo parent must take on the total brunt of family problems. The shepherd then becomes the lamb's partner, the absentee spouse, the best friend and the shoulder to cry on. And addressing their urgent calls about their relationships, their teen-aged sons and daughters, and the many unending challenges of life, become part of the shepherd's responsibilities and worries. I'm sure that being an ME class shepherd is a difficult task, but being an SPE class shepherd might be twice as hard, simply because your lambs are single people performing double-duty.

One of the weekend encounter's teachings taught us that you cannot be both a mother and a father; simply be, a mother or a father. I definitely agree with this, but in my observation, you have to be twice as loving, patient and nurturing as a mother; or twice as strong, tough and hardworking as a father.

I do not want to discourage any future shepherds, but I even developed an anxiety disorder when my lambs first took the LSS. Every time the phone rang, my heart would start to beat faster and faster; I would suddenly have tingling sensations in my hands and feet; and I would feel chest pains as if I was having a heart attack. It was as if my body did not want to hear any more of the traumas and heartaches revealed during the shepherding sessions, for they would then need to be addressed together with their LSS shepherds. Every concern became mine; every heartache pierced my heart as well; every suffering became my own cross.

Now, would I do it again?

The answer would be a resounding ***Yes!***

Being an SPE class shepherd has been one of the most rewarding tasks the Lord has assigned to me. After several years, seeing our lambs now as Covenanted disciples and leaders in the Solo Parents Ministry makes it all worthwhile. The seeds that had been planted have become the trees that now bear much fruit. They have become tall and big and they provide protection and shelter to the spiritually needy who may be experiencing stormy times in their lives. They now minister to others so that they too will have new life in Jesus Christ.

***"And some seed fell on good soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."***

- Mk 4:8

*BLD, of course, focuses on the family, and the SPE shepherd's sharing (in the previous article) powerfully shows how we care for each other, just like family. In this next contribution (from BLD's Divine Mercy Parish Mission), find out about some of the families now strengthened by:*

### **Project "I Do" - by Suzie Atienza**

One of the highlights of 2013 happened in May of that year, when the BLD assisted parish, Divine Mercy in Rahway, along with the Community's assistance, started **"Project I Do."** Its worthwhile mission was to help couples who had been living together, but without the Sacrament of Marriage, by facilitating the process of their receiving the Sacrament. Sacred Scripture begins with the creation and union of man and woman; and in one of the last few chapters of Revelation, it concludes with **"the wedding feast of the Lamb"** (Rev 19:7,9). By their marriage, the couples witness and experience a glimpse of Christ's spousal love for the Church, where Jesus is the Bridegroom, and the Church, the Bride. Like any sacrament, marriage gives grace to the lives of the couples and their children, imparted at the very moment that the sacrament is received. This sanctifying grace elevates this love to a supernatural level. With God's grace, after completion of the requirements, so far, eight couples now live with the Catholic Church's blessings, and five of them were even able to join a BLD ME weekend.

Testimonies from these two couples further spotlight the impact of **Project "I Do"**:

- "Indeed a blessing. My wife and I have been married for over 24 years; civil marriage. Although my wife has always been ready to marry through the Church, I was the one with the "buts", "waits", "whys", monetary constraints, and excuses after excuses. I began to know my faith while attending St. Antoninus Parish in Newark, serving in ministry for a year and a half. As I grew in my faith, I felt a deeper calling and continued to search for God. When I was convicted by the Holy Spirit, I knew it was time for my marriage to be blessed and to receive the Sacrament of Marriage. Now, as I open my heart to Jesus, He lovingly softens and guides me; my response is "Jesus I trust in You"

- "I seriously could not have done it without help, help through a very chaotic time, and the help needed for me to appreciate what a glorious blessing it is. The choir that sang at our wedding and the members of **Project I Do** helped make it a special day for our family. I truly feel as if they have made our family a part of theirs and I am so thankful to the Lord for allowing us to have this experience."



## A report from Secretariat:

# Technological Advancement in Communications

- by Ernest Sun

**In** the beginning, the basic medium of communication was a simple telephone call. BLD members contacted each other by calling and making arrangements to meet and plan. As membership grew, telephone chains became increasingly inconvenient. Fortunately, technology advanced, and the internet emerged, and email started to proliferate. To this day, email has become a basic means of communication.

Since those days of simply using the telephone, Secretariat has been pursuing how to make advances involving BLD's web presence and communications. Initially, several web hosting services provided our basic needs. However, technical knowhow and the IT experience requirements of that process soon rendered the BLD website stale and outdated, with sporadic issues hampering email communications.

Fortunately again, technology had advanced and recently this year, Secretariat was able to secure a simpler web hosting service (the cloud-based environment of MS Office 365 Online) that was also more dynamic. Now, besides Secretariat's members, other ministries have been empowered, and they now maintain their respective ministries' web pages.

This was rolled out in the second half of 2016, with the vision of having a stable, established, and powerful platform from which to deliver:

- email, calendar, contacts, and more, all in one place
- consistent and transparent messaging
- ease of communicating with members
- better collaboration and conferencing
- simpler maintenance of compatibility across the organization
- increased access to shared information and file sharing from peer-to-peer
- the ability to stay connected from anywhere there is an online connection, and with any device
- built in security, compliance and privacy
- convenience, flexibility and enhanced efficiency, resulting from standardization, integration, collaboration and use of common software platforms

With this in mind, we have now taken BLD Newark to the 21st Century in terms of its technological modus operandi.

Now, some words about the



**T**he first issue of the Covenant News (the "CN") was born in 1995, out of the basement of one of the early member-couples of BLD Newark. A number of early Community pioneers (sponsors and members of the first few Marriage Encounters) collaborated to make it happen. Since then, and just about every week thereafter, the CN has been published by BLD Newark's Word Ministry.

The early years presented many logistical and production challenges. On many occasions, the hunt would be on in the wee hours of the morning, for an open Staples or Kinkos so that copies could be made for distribution later in the day. Still, they persevered! Kudos to all who worked on the CN back then, for barring severe weather related issues it still came out, every single Friday that BLD convened for Worship!

Initially, the newsletter contained much of the Community's news. Its articles kept members informed of what was happening. It reported on current events, including retreats and encounters, reunions and ministry assignments. It also celebrated birthdays, anniversaries and other such milestones.

As electronic means of communication improved and began to be used more extensively to circulate urgent information to BLD's members, email took over as the main source of Community news. The CN staff from the Word Ministry transitioned its main contents to have more material with a stronger religious and spiritual focus. Today, every issue has COUNSELS, Catholic-related NEWS that is of interest to many, and Bible reflections from various members. On occasion, contributions of poems and other creative writing efforts from the Community also enhance its pages. Major BLD events are still featured; the Community is updated on the progress of our stewardship efforts; and readers are informed about upcoming events on the Community calendar. The CN is now also available electronically; a pdf of each issue gets emailed out on Fridays and issues can be found on the BLD Newark website.

Since 1995 through today, the CN has been a

source of information, as well as additional reflective food-for-thought for BLD Newark's members. Each week, the Word Ministry rises up to the challenges of editing, layouting and publishing; striving to be faithful to Catholic beliefs and teachings; defending and indeed, spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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### BLD Newark / UST Medicine Class of 1976 / GK Help the Poor

*“Ako’y may kaibigan... at siya’y nahihirapan. Handa na ba kayong lahat, upang siya’y tulungan?”*

*“I have a friend... and he is suffering. Are you all ready now, to help him?”*

*- from the song “Himig Natin” by the Juan dela Cruz Band*

A sixty second video, posted on Youtube by Gawad Kalinga starts out with people from a Philippine village, dropping whatever they were doing, to help carry a mountainous pile of scrap wood and debris away from their barrio. They are doing this, “bayanihan” style, with everyone shouldering some of the heavy weight of the pile on their shoulders. In the background, the haunting tune, “Himig Natin” (which, loosely translated means, “Our Nation’s Song”), accentuates what everyone is doing - they are helping out. Then, the camera zooms out to reveal what exactly they were carrying and what they were going to do with it: the mountainous pile was made up of the makeshift shanty houses that they used to live in, and they were collectively, joyfully throwing it all off the side of a cliff.

BLD Newark’s association with the Gawad Kalinga movement in the Philippines, started more than ten years ago, with a challenge made by Fr. Paul Lehman to the Community, to fund a truly worthwhile project. It continues to this day. And it has made a big difference. In the Fr. Paul Lehman and UST Medicine

Class of 1976 GK villages in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija, the highlights include:

- \* current funding for college tuition for deserving students
- \* graduates now working in various fields – Information Technology, Management, Hotel / Restaurant Services, Accounting and Education
- \* Scholarship of Hope (SOH) assistance for deserving elementary and high school children
- \* installation of a potable water supply and a new concrete road through the village
- \* progress of a livelihood project, with villagers making mats (“banig”), lampshades and bags from water lilies, which is an abundant local resource; they have now also added wig-making as a source of income
- \* completion of a roof re-painting project for all of the houses in the village
- \* construction of a covered multi-purpose court to be used as a livelihood hall, and also as a venue for teachings, sports activities, and if needed, as an emergency evacuation center

But the list above probably does not quite fully convey the renewed hope that’s stirring. The following excerpt, from an article written by Merle Encarnacion for a 2016 CN issue, sheds some light (she, along with Bong Encarnacion, are members of ME-8, Class Shepherds of ME-27 and are alumni of the UST Medicine class of 1976):

*“...But this time, I saw something different. I saw the changes that are happening in the village youth. I saw them helpful and enthusiastic. I heard them talk and look forward to their future. I saw hope alive in their hearts as they try to work and study harder so that they too, can go and qualify for scholarships to go to college and have a better future! And I couldn’t help but be moved, that after all these years, we are finally really making an impact and changing people’s lives! One mother spoke of her own experience in the village... how her neighbors and friends in the village have helped each other in times of need. She now has a sense of community that she had never experienced before! Witnessing these inspires us to continue the work for the people He loves. ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ (Mt 25:40)”*

Understandably, the need for support continues, and the efforts of UST Med’76 and the BLD Newark ministries involved in GK have to be augmented. Already, our younger members, as well as solo parents have undertaken some extra projects for the village.

But, even more children's dreams of excelling in their education could be enhanced by scholarship assistance; the upkeep and improvement of the village's structures and facilities must be maintained; and livelihood assistance projects must continue to be spurred and innovated. Generous donors, including those from Newark still have a pivotal role in the village's emerging success.

So the refrain from that song probably best summarizes what we, as a Filipino Christian Global Community, must still have to do:

*"Ang himig natin, ang inyong awitin; upang tayo'y mag-sama-sama, sa langit ng pag-asa...."*



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*In a quarter century, the Community has seen many personal stories of healing, conversion and calling. Eight members share the following...*

***"God gave me a sign that I would be healed."*** - Vino Guiang

First of all, my family and I would like to give our sincere thanks, from the bottom of our hearts to our Lord God Who is the Divine Healer and of course to all of you who unceasingly stormed the heavens, so much so, that I believe that He got overwhelmed by your perseverance and granted me this second life.

I was diagnosed with a very rare type of cancer called Diffused Large B Cell Lymphoma of the prostate, which was a very rare disease. In 2013, they estimated that there were only about 200 cases of this in the whole world. The day my urologist told us the bad news, I was somewhat prepared. But I could see my wife Beth crying as we went from doctor to doctor to seek answers. The hardest part was how to tell our kids after our family had also dealt with a similar challenge seven years ago, when their mother was also diagnosed with cancer.

We all expressed this thought: "Not again!"

But God gave us the strength and assured us that He will be there once more. We re-started our daily family rosaries and this definitely lessened, if not removed all worries. And you know what, God is good and He is really good all the time. He gave me the best oncologist doctor, the best hospital to have the chemotherapy (close to our house, so, convenient too!), and most of all, the intercessors, those from BLD and my family and friends from all over the world. And with the advent of modern telecommunications, our dear ME-27 family started and completed a 9-day vigil via conference call that was joined by members, from east to west coasts, from Canada and the Philippines. What a feeling it really is, knowing that everyone is praying for you!

I actually have a lot of stories to tell about the experience, but will not have enough time. Suffice it to say that the visits, the healing cards, texts, emails, even steaks from Omaha and fresh vegetables from gardens, the fruit baskets and cancer healing leaves from the Philippines, and a lot more, were sincerely appreciated. Thank you very much to all of you. I could not have survived this without the prayer and the support.

I would like to claim this as a true healing from God. A miracle because you, all of you, were His voice that gave me comfort during those months; and the doctors and the nurses, they were His hands that gave me healing!

You could call it faith, hope, full surrender and trust in our Almighty God. These are all true and I'm living proof that without holding on to these, I don't think that I would have survived. At times, I was being subjected to torturous procedures, but I clung on, believing in an eventual healing. Thing is, I knew it from the start that I would be healed, that this was just going to be a transition that I had to go through.

You might ask me, "Why?"

Well, it's because of what happened during one of the Friday worships soon after the cancer diagnosis. At that worship **God gave me a sign that I would be healed.**

The Church was packed and during the quiet time, many people proclaimed prophecies, so many that my attention started to drift off to solely my prayers about my illness. As I closed my eyes, the only thought in my head was, "*Lord if I could only touch your cloak I will be healed*" (from the Gospel episode about the woman who had suffered hemorrhages for 12 years).



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As I said those words in the silence of my heart, I suddenly heard a loud voice yelling, "Who touched me? Who touched me?" It was from one of the people prophesying. Then she continued "...your faith has healed you." I couldn't hold back my tears as I silently responded in Tagalog, "Ako yun! Ako yun Lord!" ("It was me! It was me Lord!") Later on, everyone I shared this story with, especially my wife, were so ecstatic.

How about that for an instant response from God? It was an instant answer to my prayer, so why worry?

You see, I don't even think that I'm that religious; all I know is that I have a little faith. But I learned that even with just a little faith, like that of a mustard seed, we could move mountains. My full healing from the cancer is proof of that.



So let's continue these things that we are doing because God is real and He is listening.

Thank you again and may He bless us all.

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***"I believe and I claim that I was healed through the BLD Community's prayer."***

Twenty five years ago, the founding men and women of faith believed that opening one's heart to God is the key to experience and know Him, and to live a life with Him. It also meant serving and sharing God with others. Through the years, the BLD Community has blessed, healed and reconciled many families. I would like to share with you my life's journey with the Community.

I was blessed to have God-loving and God-fearing parents who baptized and raised us, and inculcated the love of God in us at an early age. My education by the Carmelites and Dominicans, and the influence of an uncle who was a Benedictine priest made me realize

His presence and love all around me. I lived the life of a good Christian knowing that by being good, God would be pleased. I then followed my dream to be a physician, believing that all things are possible through God.

Twelve years after my wife and I were married, my in-laws invited us to join the BLD Community where we discovered that living life in the Spirit would bring our relationship with God to another level. The Community's teachings, retreats, missions and other services to help others, gave my wife and I a different view of faith, with works as an indispensable part in the life of a good Catholic.

My life was blessed. I had a loving wife and three wonderful children. I was living my dream of healing the sick and had just returned from serving our Filipino brethren in the Philippines through the Medical Mission. I felt even more blessed after we were covenanted with God through the BLD Community. God reigned in our household, and His presence and blessings were obvious in my family. In the spring of that year, I was suddenly diagnosed with stage four cancer.

So I questioned God... my faith was shaken... and my dream was shattered! Everything appeared to be a blur. I wondered about what would happen to my family. One thing I remembered as a child was my parents telling me to pray when in trouble, so we prayed. Soon, a global petition for my healing and for my family was started by the Community, and from Newark to Canada, and all the way to the Philippines one voice cried out for my complete healing.

***"Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God."*** - Phil 4:6

**I believe and I claim that I was healed through the BLD Community's prayer.** Along with that, God made my family and I as living witnesses of the many healings, reconciliations, conversions of souls, and countless blessings that He has granted through this Community. Truly, God worked in this Community to show us His love and mercy. Now our lives move on with a better and stronger perception of His presence in everything. Then I thought of another question, "Why me, why us?"

What I have now come to realize is that God guided my family and I to green pastures during the early years of our lives, then He taught us how to cling to the Vine.

***"I am the vine you are the branches"*** Jn 15:5a

**Yes!** He will save you and me from the raging river and deliver us into calm waters. If you happen to walk through the dark valleys, fear no evil for the Lord is there and He shall comfort you. His mercy and goodness shall follow us all the days of our lives.

Growing in faith with my family in the BLD Community, I've realized that God has a perfect plan for each one of us. There are some who are called to teach, some who are called to serve, to write and to build; some have answered their priestly calling. All we have to do is to yield to His perfect plan, open our hearts to God and say, "Here we are Lord, we come to do Your will." This is our faith as envisioned by the founders of BLD.

May God continue to bless our beloved Community; may we continue the good that God has started in each one of us. May we always be united in Spirit and in Truth to do the Father's will. May all that we do be pleasing to God, giving glory to the Father, the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.



- from a member of the ME 18 Family

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## Oh What Overwhelming Joy!

- by Elaine Fernando

I came to BLD through friends and started attending back in 1994. My husband and I were not sacramentally married so we attended the LSS as singles. Since we were not married in Church we were not allowed to go to the Marriage Encounter.

It was hard to serve the Community while feeling that there was something incomplete in my life. Being treated as singles, rather than as a couple was hurtful, and yet it was a very humbling experience as we yielded and respected the Church and BLD's pastoral authority. With a heavy and hesitant heart, I yielded, obeyed and continued to serve in different capacities, in service, as a lector, and as a Deanery 20 volunteer.

However my heart was yearning to be a full-fledged member of the Community, and I really wanted to participate in a Marriage Encounter.

I wanted my life to be in order, so with the encouragement of my shepherd, I started the process of my annulment. It was a bit torturous, yet it was a very healing experience since I was ready to close that chapter of my life, and embark on a new life in Christ. After a year-and-a-half, and much to my surprise, my annulment was granted in December 1995. It was a great relief.

What was even more joyous was when the BLD Community attended our wedding celebration in my Parish Church back in September 1996. When we finally said our vows, we had tears of joy in our eyes as we were overcome by emotions. And to celebrate our wedding with our BLD brothers and sisters, who prayed for us while we were going through this was such an overwhelming feeling. Now that there was no impediment, our shepherds wanted us to take the next Marriage Encounter. We finally did in November 1996. **Oh what overwhelming joy!**

A situation like mine was, reminds me of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It was the love and grace of God that found me and saw me through the trials of my life. I was a lost sheep, yet I never lost the warmth of His love that carried me through. I came to a deeper understanding of our Lord's calling.

It is a long, slow and sometimes difficult journey. If we go too fast and too soon, we burn out. Just like a marathon runner we need focus, endurance and determination. As a disciple, we all need to keep our focus on the Lord, to open our hearts and minds so that He can teach us and take us through. And with His love and grace we hope to attain our goal, Eternal Life with Him. Amen!

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## Belonging

- by Nestor de Guzman

BLD continues to be confident in the power of the Catholic faith to transform life. For 25 years now, its foundation had stood the test of time and weathered every storm. It is built on solid ground.

My life before joining BLD was like that of a Pharisees who failed to see the kingdom of God, because I was caught in the mire of self during all those years. I had not been able to feel the Holy Spirit's movement and failed to fully recognize and accept the good things that came into my life.

Conscience whispers that I must die to my old, immature and egotistic way of living, in order to transcend life. I was made to understand that life is a shared journey among God's creations and I need the company and inspiration of others to keep me going. I've learned to confess my brokenness, which had been kept sacred and secret.

As a Community disciple, the greatest impact and the one thing that defined my life, that brought me the most good and the most love, is **belonging** to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church.

Hebrews 12:2 had admonished me to keep my "spiritual eyes," the eyes of my heart, fixed on Jesus so that I could feel His tender love for me and hear Him telling me that I can count on Him. The presence of God gives me strength. To be worthy of Christ, I must love the Lord greater than anything in life – including the love of family, and be willing to face trials and temptations, which God allows, to cause me to stand and be more like Jesus.

*"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God."* (Eph 2:19)

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## REVERSED BY GRACE ~ *A Pro-life Conversion*

- by MayJen Apiado

After a twenty year break, I was able to read my embryology materials again, and came face to face once more, with us as human beings in the early stages of life. Some abortion proponents dismiss the fetus as "butilki lang" (just a house lizard), so they are able avoid the moral qualms that surround abortion this way. But, I now thought, between the single cell (the zygote) and eventually, the cooing and moving infant, there are stages of division and development. These stages are so specific and so special, from their whole to each of their parts, that they even merit unique and distinct names.

This physiologic reality struck me: without any one of those stages, there would be no functional person. Every little cleft, bump or ridge, like the neural groove that develops in the dorsum of the three-week embryo, become systems, so spectacularly fine-tuned and ultra-complex, that they later require whole sub-specialities in medicine. The human body is like a microcosm of nature where everything fits, everything is so well apportioned and thought out and harmonized. Man is truly an awesome creature!

I was a very aggressive pro-choice medical student, but discovering God, His sanctity, majesty and love, and that reality about man, made me revere human life in all its stages, and in all of its forms.

To convey the majesty of life would take more than just having information; it would require understanding and formation. Thus, our invitation to the "Joy of the Gospel" is a necessary part to converting people into pro-life advocates and warriors. Inviting them to prayer groups and LSS would make them pro-choice, pro-family, pro-person, because the love of Christ would overflow and make them healed and renewed. Realizing God's love and mercy for a soul is the real game-changer. It was for me.

This is what I tell pro-life groups now, as I work with them in various settings. There are medical and secular arguments for life, but also, we must not forget that there is a spiritual battle that we have to face accordingly – with rosaries, confession, adoration, and active Churches and prayer communities; and with mercy and compassion... for Jesus Himself had said, *"Neither do I condemn you..."* (Jn 8:11b)

Because Jesus defeated death already, we should be honored that we are on His (naturally pro-life) side and lovingly and encouragingly invite others to His Way, which is Truth, Life and all that is Good.

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- by Deacon Serge Bernatchez

It is hard to believe that ten years have passed since my ordination to the Diaconate; but that is the reality. Doing God's work makes time go quickly. I often lie in bed at night before going to sleep and reflect on my journey to becoming a deacon, and can only laugh out loud at God's sense of humor.

I would definitely say that I would have been the last person I could think of to consider this ministry. Yet God in His wisdom and persistence through many friends of mine planted a seed. I became hungry for God's Word and wanted to learn everything I could about my Catholic faith. **Enter BLD...**

My wife and I joined ME-10 / LSS-10 in 1997. Taking advantage of all the teachings and retreats offered by the Community, we both quickly realized the God was equipping us for His purpose. That led us to offering our help in the parish, where we became Eucharistic ministers and readers, then began teaching CCD. I had a lot of anxieties about that, but I realized that this was what we had been learning in Community teachings, and so CCD soon became one

of our greatest joys. Shaping young lives with our faith is a great responsibility and we both embraced it.

After a few years of parish involvement, there seemed to be a logical conclusion to “what’s next?” After encouragement from many friends I began to pray about possibly, becoming a Deacon. It was at our Aspirants’ Retreat that I had a conversation with God. Spending time alone with the Blessed Sacrament, I asked God what He wanted from me. He did not take long to answer.

Moved by the Holy Spirit, I picked up my Bible, opened it, and landed on Isaiah 61:1, *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted...”*

I thought that it was just wishful thinking, until two years later when I was going through the process of applying. I took the day off from work to pray about it again and the first reading for that day’s Mass was Isaiah 61. Was God talking to me? I still thought that I wasn’t sure. But then, after four years of formation, one of the last things I had to do was attend a retreat, and on that retreat’s last day the reading for the Mass was... Isaiah 61!

I share my story because I am convinced that there are many people in the Community, who, like me, may be hearing God’s call in their lives. Not all are called to ordained life, but definitely, many are called to share their God given talents. It is simply a question of discerning what are our gifts are and to use them for God’s Kingdom.

If God is calling you, do not harden your hearts or have doubts about your abilities. We are blessed to be in a Community of believers who can pray for us and guide us. Let your answer be:



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## **FRI-DATES WITH THE LORD**

- by Lucille Vizcayno

I joined BLD through the Solo Parents Encounter in 2011; afterwards, I attended LSS-35 and also the teachings offered on weekends. I had no intentions of dedicating my Fridays to Praise and Worship, but I soon realized that I had a hunger in my heart to know the Lord more. Then He touched my heart and healed my brokenness. I experienced a peace and joy that

could not be equaled. I knew then that I wanted to have a deeper and more personal relationship with my Savior. This led to my **Fri-dates with the Lord.**

I started looking forward to hearing His Word, to singing praises to Him, and to adoring and loving Him in ways I was not able to see before. I heard His call to me and I clung to His message of hope and love. He provided me with the means and willingness to worship Him in a Community that showed me how to be humble and obedient to His commands. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I became His chosen disciple. The Lord lighted my way and helped me to live a life of truth. I know that nothing and no one can separate me from the love of God. *“...when I found him whom my soul loves.... I held him and I would not let him go”* (Sg 3:4)

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What a blessing it is for the BLD Covenant Community to reach its 25th Anniversary! I feel so thankful and so proud, having been a member for more than 20 years. How can I forget what God has done for me through this Community? I cannot calm this feeling inside of me, of wanting to write something to express this overwhelming gratitude in my heart that can only come from the love that God has enabled me to feel. He has sensitized and awakened this wonderful emotion in me, and has helped me understand the incompleteness and coldness that I felt when I was without it. Such strong feelings that I needed a way to release them by sharing them with the people I love, and with the many who have touched my life.

People have been busily preparing for the celebration of this milestone in so many ways, and rightly so! The excitement has motivated me to ask myself what those 20+ years in the Community have done to me. And I heard myself say, “You’ve come a long way, baby!”

Like many of the other members who came to their first BLD weekend, I didn’t know what to expect. I only knew that I was trying to find myself, trying to make sense of my life and hoping to find the way to being more peaceful, more meaningful, and happier. I was so stressed out, dysfunctional, and clutching at straws to keep my family together. I was at my wit’s end trying to be strong.



But what a miracle weekend that was! To me...to us...to our life! It was indeed a life-changing, life-giving weekend! And the rest is history...

The many years in BLD have come and passed so quickly. I was on the upstroke, maybe even at the peak of my career when we started, and now, I'm on the verge of retirement. But it was an exciting journey.

There were many times when the hustle and bustle of Community life left me exhausted. The desire to lead a balanced life seemed like such an unreachable dream. There were times when I felt like I was in a constant race against time as I tried to satisfy the incessant demands of personal, family, career and Community life. Feeling physically and mentally fatigued, I often ran through the gamut of emotions, sometimes feeling angry, frustrated and burnt out.

But then, always, a glimmer of hope would come to refresh, energize and reinvigorate me, leading me to a place of joy, peace and serenity, where, I quiet down, raise my eyes and look at Him. In my daily prayer, I am able to empty my heart of burdens; with prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments, I know that I am not alone and that I am loved.

As the Community grew, so did my family, and so did the responsibilities; and the trials became more challenging. While tears were shed, the sharing and the presence of true friends gave me comfort and support. How could I have gone through those conflicts with calm acceptance? Where did I get that reassurance that everything would go well? Where did I get that ability to trust that I had nothing to fear from the challenges that lay ahead?

I found You... You, indeed O Lord, have been my Refuge and my Strength, my ever-present help in time of need! You enabled me to look at life with so much hope and confidence.

I once approached my retirement and the twilight years of my life with fear and dread, uncertain of what's ahead, and looking for a guarantee that nothing would go wrong. But I now realize that all these years have prepared me to learn to trust Him Who loves me so much more than I can ever imagine!

I am now looking forward with hope, peace and joy as the Lord has given me a new perspective. He has taught me to slowly let go, and let Him take the lead. He has shown me the promise of new growth and new meaning. He has given me a glimpse of how more meaningful and exciting life would be; to spend more time with the people I love most; to live as my true

self, with love, and without doubt and fear; to continue to get closer to Him; to know Him, love Him and to serve Him by serving others.

Yes, Lord, I am delighted at the thought of getting even closer to You, feeling Your presence in the here and now, hearing Your footsteps wherever I am, basking in Your love. Thank You, Lord. I am indeed **forever grateful!**

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*Four more reflections on BLD – one from a CPA and another from a 25-year veteran of BLD who was just 4 years old when he started attending worship with ME 1, and, from the two priests whom we all love named Paul:*

## **BLD Newark Marches Forward**

- by Willie Santos

The 25th anniversary celebration of BLD Newark's foundation is here. Much has been accomplished during the past 25 years, but there's still plenty of work to continue. Would it move on to survive as a vibrant community for the next 25 years?

The key for optimism is volunteerism. Two quotes from the bible come to mind, "*each looking out not for his own interests, but also everyone for those of others*" (Phil 2:4), and, "*No one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor*" (1 Cor 10:24). It is clear that these emphasize volunteerism.

BLD-Newark, as a faith-based community, is primarily driven and directed by volunteers. They are willing members, devoted to giving selflessly of their talents, time, efforts, and resources, in order to serve the Community. A majority of these folks are busy with their day jobs and family responsibilities, and yet, there are many instances of family commitments taking a backseat in order to fulfill participations in Community sponsored activities and programs. It's very comforting that they do these out of the goodness of their hearts, without the need for recognition. They are true Christians serving and praising the Lord.

Who are these volunteers? Many are unrecognized and contentedly serve in the background. To name a few, they are: the kitchen brigade who works quadruple-time to ensure adequate refreshments during fellowships; the cleanup crew who stays late to make sure that after any event, the venue is spic and span;



the writers, editors and proofreaders who work on the newsletter; the team members who stay late, accounting for collections and depositing the funds on a timely basis; the choral group that prepares, rehearses and performs the music during meetings and prayer services; the teachers who help us all discover more about our Catholic faith; the missionaries who travel great distances to provide medical assistance to the poor in the Philippines; everyone tirelessly involved in the encounters, retreats, seminars, ministry presentations, and practically all the worthwhile endeavors of BLD. It is very clear that volunteers are the lifeblood of BLD Newark and the drivers for fulfilling its mission and vision.

As the letters to the Philippians and to the Corinthians emphasized, service for the good of others is paramount. Since members of the Community subscribe to the cooperative path of Christian service that this involves, then, BLD Newark's march toward the future is indeed very promising.

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## **FOUR ASPECTS OF BLD NEWARK:**

### **A REFLECTION** - by Dave dela Fuente

We have come a long way from holding prayer meetings in the library of St. Theresa's in Kenilworth in 1992. I was four years old then, and without really knowing what was happening, I accompanied my parents to this ordinary school library. No one could have seen what would unfold over the next 25 years. More importantly, it is usually after the fact that we can see more clearly what God had planned for us, for the Church, and for the world. So what might we see if we reflect on these 25 years that have passed?

To me, four aspects stand out: the influence of **Ignatian spirituality** on BLD Newark; that the Community is **Catholic** (and "charismatic"), **prayerful**, and **family-oriented**. Some of these are obvious elements, but looking at them may help us discern how we can respond to God's invitation, more faithfully and more generously, both within and outside of our Covenant Community.

Whether we realize it or not, BLD is influenced by the Jesuit, Fr. Pascual Adorable SJ, who helped found BLD when it began in the Philippines. Indeed, the name *Bukas loob sa Diyos* reflects a central component of the **spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola**, where we are called to be so radically open to God's will, that we only choose what is more conducive to praising, revering and serving Him.

Thus, being faithful to our name and inspiration means that we must constantly pray and choose to love Jesus more intensely, and follow and imitate Him more closely. This may help us better understand what discipleship entails. Discipleship is not about completing a training program; it is about being ready to respond to the call of Christ the King, to imitate Him ever more closely, such that it is no longer we who live, but Christ in each of us (cf. Gal 2:20).

The experience of BLD Newark is deeply tied to the conversion and renewal of the **family**. It began with the renewal of marriages in faith, but that grace of renewal expanded quickly to include everyone, reaching beyond the nuclear family, to the extended family, and even to professional networks and alumni groups. Many people can look at their history within BLD and recognize dozens of people among their family and friends who have experienced renewal. It may have seemed accidental back then, but upon looking back, it clearly must be a sign of what we were, are, and will be missioned to be: **a family**. The most effective sign of renewal is this transformation; that despite the arduous task of reconciling with each other, many BLD families have reconciled. We have been faithful to God's invitation, and it is here that we will continue to be fruitful.

It is stated in the Catechism that **prayer** itself is a covenant relationship with God. Looking back on my experience here, I find that my favorite memories almost always have to do with prayer. As a four year-old, I was apparently captivated by my first experience of "praise and worship" with nothing more than a keyboard, a tambourine, and voices that filled that library in Kenilworth. I vividly remember witnessing faithful and intense prayer in vigil rooms, at healing masses, and especially when we offered petitions at Mass. What still strikes me about those moments is the fidelity to, and intensity of the prayer that this Community expressed. Through this, one can appreciate that the Community holds in its collective memory, all its members, living or deceased, and in this way, it expresses God's covenant fidelity, for God forgets no one.



But one must admit that we never stop growing in prayer. More importantly, the gift of intercessory prayer must point toward the future. We must never

lose our zest for prayer, and perhaps we now also need to extend our witnessing to enrich parishes and dioceses too. Maybe we are now called to support small faith sharing communities, much like we do within BLD. Surely we are all called to grow ever faithful in prayer.

Finally, this Community is distinctly **Catholic**. BLD Newark has become increasingly aware of its “Catholicity” by becoming a Private Lay Association of the Faithful with this Archdiocese, and it has gradually become more involved in outreaches and collaboration with local and universal Catholic bodies. An important hallmark of an earlier generation has been its desire to root the Teaching Ministry’s formation program in Catholic doctrine. We may even note the effect that BLD has had in awakening discernment in the pursuit of vocations to Catholic lay, ordained and professed religious life.

What does all of this mean? It means that we have again been faithful to our roots. In the same words that St. Ignatius himself once used, we have learned to “think with the Church.” But being Catholic also means being open to everything and everyone claimed by God. It means not just thinking with the Church in terms of doctrine, but also in terms of practice. It means promoting unity amidst diversity, by sharing goods, being united in prayer under the teaching of the apostles, and in the breaking of bread (cf. Acts 2:42-47).

Clearly, there is much to give thanks for. But major graces still await us in the Community, as well as in our individual parishes. These graces are awakened when we volunteer, for then we will see how much more fruitful we can be when we become like a stream, poured out from one source into a wider body; when we become willing to respond to the call that God expresses in the work of ministry. Indeed, Pope Francis has affirmed that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is to be just that: a current of grace for the Church.

But where should this current flow? All streams flow into the sea (cf Eccl 1:7), and the Sea into which we all flow towards is God and the people He has gathered for Himself. **“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”** (John 12:24). Just as streams do not choose which direction they flow, but merely flow outward to give life, direction and energy, so too is each disciple of Jesus destined to flow outward, emptying and becoming like a grain of wheat that bears fruit through self-offering.

How can this Community respond more generously to the call of Christ, and more authentically be *Bukas loob sa Diyos*? What are we doing for God’s family, and how can the treasury of spirituality in God’s family enrich our charism? How are we being invited to pray more faithfully and more generously, and where are we called to share our prayers and our gifts? In which direction is BLD to flow? These questions should not confound us; they should prompt communal discernment and rouse in us a holy desire to respond to the call of Christ the King, to think with His Church, to follow the examples of the great cloud of witnesses before us. To strive to imitate Christ more closely, to serve Him more generously and more faithfully, with special attention to God’s family, the Church, and to the covenant relationship that is prayer - this is what it has meant to be, and what will continue to mean to be, who we are...

**WE ARE BUKAS LOOB SA DIYOS.**

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**Fr. Paul Speaks**

**How Filipinos can contribute to the strength of the American Church**



In trying to report on the state of the American Church and the influence that the BLD Community has on that Church, it is relatively easy and even tempting to give statistics. I think it is safe to say that BLD is numerically doing well in the US. We do very well in areas where there is a preponderance of Filipinos in the general population.

Filipinos love to be together! They are naturally community minded. On the other hand, the American culture presumes that at the end of a worship or social event, people will leave. Filipinos therefore, are a good target for community-based life. This natural cultural attraction to community life is one of the strong elements that the Filipinos bring to BLD, and progressively to the wider Church.

However, let me surface a small caution, as well as an encouragement here. While we are all relaxed in our own cultural comfort zones, I am convinced that the gifts and values of BLD can minister to the wider non-Filipino community. But it seems that for the encounter and LSS weekends, Filipinos in the US look for mostly just fellow Filipinos.

I don't know how many times I've said, "It is easy to work with Filipinos. We will minister to all the Filipinos you bring (and some need very serious ministering). But get me the 'tough guys, the meat-eaters, the Americans.'"

I have seen it and I know that BLD works and fits in with the American and Canadian individual, and I want to see it move into the mainstream of America, with the values that can contribute to a vital and faith-filled American Church.

I spend most of my BLD ministry on the East Coast - in Newark, Rockland, Trenton, Long Island DC, Albany, and in Charlotte North Carolina. I have also given weekends in Toronto, Guelph, St Catherines and Vancouver in Canada. I periodically go to Seattle, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Phoenix. I never cease to be amazed at the enthusiasm and dedication of those who sponsor these retreats, and I believe that this is another charismatic gift that BLD has: the gift of an instinctive generous desire to serve.

I remember years ago during the preparation for a YLSS weekend, the direction was given to many of the youth, not to come!

And why was that? ... Because there were too many volunteers! **What parish in the world has this kind of problem?**

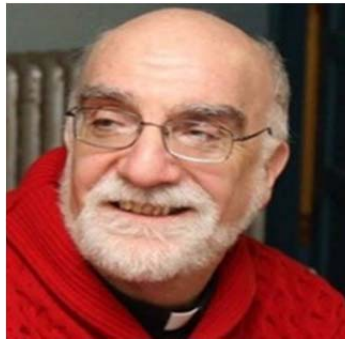
The Archbishop of Newark has made BLD an Association of the Faithful, which means that we collaborate with, and share in the mission of the Church in Newark. He has told us very explicitly that he will not give us a mission or assignment. Rather, he has asked us to offer our gifts and service to the Archdiocese. That is now the Community's ongoing challenge.

May I conclude by thanking everyone for the honor of addressing such a dedicated group of people. Your enthusiasm and encouragement have been a real support for my priesthood. I am not young any more, and eventually will have to curtail some of my involvement with BLD. But in the meantime, I am honored to serve you and to be strengthened by your love and encouragement for as long as I am able.

*- Fr. Paul*

*BLD Newark would not be where it is today if not for the guidance of Fr. Paul Lehman. As its Spiritual Director for over 20 years, seems that the only frustration he ever really had with BLD involved the Community's habit that's also known as "Filipino time."*

**Fr. Paul, WE THANK YOU AND WE LOVE YOU!!!**



## Msgr. Paul Speaks

### A Community Collapses When Christ's Love Is Forgotten

*"Lord You are more precious than silver, Lord You are more costly than gold, Lord You are more beautiful than diamonds and nothing I desire compares with You."*

In the conception of our Community, before BLD Newark, a wisdom figure named Rev. Pascual Adorable, along with nineteen couples and one nun, chose to bind together to desire only Jesus. To paraphrase Christ, they desired an anointing of the Holy Spirit to bear fruit that would last. They completely understood that the "world" in which we live in will NEVER be completely redeemed until the Lord arrives a second time. So with great discernment and prayer, these pioneers created a nuclear community of *fearful* disciples, chasing a promise by the Master, to be transformed into His faithful friends.

We are blessed to be one of the many branches from the Manila vine, and we celebrate 25 years of desiring to be, "faithful friends" of Christ.

**"I love you, I forgive you, please forgive me."** This is the phrase that is repeated in many of our encounters, and it is the essence of Christ and His community. Traveling across the United States to serve in so many BLD districts has enriched and educated my heart. In all of them, if there is no forgiveness, then there is no community. In our natural environments fruit trees regenerate themselves by shedding some of their fruit to fall to the earth and die. The entire physical and biological world depends on this pattern of transformation. We also, especially as disciples of Jesus, are called to die to self, and so, to truly live. Seeking and offering forgiveness is the concrete, incarnational death necessary for new life. Any follower of Christ who cannot forgive will remain fruitless.

When Jesus told us at the Last Supper, "*remember Me*" (cf Lk.22:19), He was reminding us to forgive as He forgave. "**Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.**" (Lk.23:34)

The world in which we exist preaches unforgiveness, resentment, revenge, retaliation, renegeing on promises. Jesus proposes something new: forgive always, love always, reconcile always. By this will all know that we ARE His disciples and friends.

***“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

– from Jesus’ sermon, 34 AD (Jn 13:35)

The Community’s initials may have originated from three Tagalog words, but over the years, it has been proven that they have a translation in English too. They are the initials of three action verbs that I know, as guided by the Holy Spirit, BLD will continue to do:

**Believe** that all sacrificial LOVE makes us more Christ-like

**Love**, even though LOVE involves making sacrifices.

**Decide** to LOVE always, everywhere and in every situation.

- Msgr. Paul

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*In the next two articles are a summary of how it all started and a total tally of the encounters and LSS Seminars that have been held over the past 25 years...*

## **Earthen Vessels**

***Little did I know that God had some other plans for me – not in Africa but in Asia. And I only comprehended what His plan was for me 4 years later – in the US in 1992!***

- Roger Santiago

In July of 1992, I was able to join my family in the US for a new assignment in New York. But as I returned, my wife told me that Fr. Larry Tan had visited and had gathered two BLD disciple-couples (from BLD Hong Kong and BLD Manila), whom he encouraged to pray about forming a BLD New Jersey. However, since it would take 3 couples to start a community, he instructed them to wait for my return.

So, I thought, we were wrong in having assumed that we could run away from BLD after we left Hong Kong! What could the Lord be planning for us this time? Suddenly, I was reminded of a song in our LSS, based on Psalm 139 that mightily touched my inmost being.

**“WHERE CAN I RUN FROM YOUR LOVE?  
IF I CLIMB TO THE HEAVENS YOU ARE THERE.  
IF I FLY TO THE SUNRISE OR SAIL BEYOND  
THE SEA... STILL I FIND YOU THERE.”**

After two weeks of continuing worships and word reflections, a list of 100 couples, who were the prospective candidates for the first ME in New Jersey, were prayed over every night. The couples’ names came from Manila, other BLD districts and our own local friends. After a month, our prayers yielded candidates from NJ, Washington DC and California, and a nun from NY.

But the biggest challenge we faced was funding. So we got prepared to use our own savings and counted on the mother community in Manila to send their own sharers and priest. Praise God they agreed to advance the plane fares, which we could just pay back when we became able to as a community. Given our limited funds, venue search was also difficult. In the last minute, for a small fee that fit our meager budget, St. Joseph’s Church in Maplewood agreed to let us use their small conference and chapel facilities.

Finally then, we were able to schedule our first ME Weekend on August 21-23, 1992!



BLD Toronto came in as auxiliaries to help with our praise and piety support needs. They also completed our temporary funding deficiencies, and fully paid for the venue. Our sharers were no less than the Head Servant Leaders of BLD, Sonny and Bai de los Reyes, and Assistant Head Servants Joey and Malou Velez. Our Encounter’s Spiritual Director was the BLD Founding Father himself, Fr. Pascual Adorable, SJ of Ateneo (whom we fondly called, “Fr. Ado”). The ME-1 Class Coordinators who were discerned were Richard/Lee dela Fuente as Head Coordinators, and assisting them were Winston/Eve Alcruz and Nes/Es Tambor.

And the rest, as they say, is history...

ME-1 had their LSS before they sponsored ME-2 in 1993. Then ME-2 took their LSS, and later sponsored ME-3... Now, twenty-five years later, ME-47 sponsored ME-48, and ME-48 will be the candidates during the upcoming LSS.

The Community has grown by leaps and bounds through continued worships, word sharing and teachings. Lord, You were always in control, and You allowed us to serve from our hearts, as we offered ourselves as **earthen vessels**, ready and willing to be of lofty use for You, the Master of the House!

Lord Thank You, for You called us to be laborers in Your Vineyard, despite our limitations and our personal situations. It was You Who changed my mind, to not work for material wealth, because You wanted me to know and love You more instead. You empowered us to do what You wanted us to do for Your people. Without You, we are nothing; with You, nothing is impossible! You used us mightily the moment we said YES to your beckoning. You wanted us to be emptied of ourselves so You could fill us with Your mercy, Your power and Your love!

This Community is Yours and we are just laborers who planted, others watered, but it is You Who continues to make it grow. **All praises and glory be to You, my Lord and my God!**

## **Totals So Far**

People seem to really like statistics. While BLD Newark's impact on the lives of many families and individuals is difficult to quantify, it is truly safe to assume that it has been immense, both in New Jersey and beyond this state's borders! It could very well number in the thousands, and that's just counting those with more direct associations with the Community.

As its members demonstrate to others, their joy in finding the Lord through BLD Newark, and as countless others receive the Community's support, be it direct material assistance, prayers, or true and lasting friendships, the impact is actually immeasurable. (*Closer to home, and personally most important, is what the Lord has done for the four of us in my family... Thank You Lord!*)

But to get a clue on truly just how much, perhaps these tallies of the number of encounters and LSS retreats (since 1992) that the Community has sponsored in Newark, can serve as a meaningful barometer of that impact:

**ME48 + LSS47 + SE37 + YE24 + FE24 +  
SPE19 + YLSS22 + J6Crossings17 =  
Total of Encounters and LSS Seminars  
as of August 2017 = 238**

*The following poem was written almost six years ago. Although I was the one who typed the individual letters on a keyboard, as you'll probably conclude also, the words aren't really mine... - CC*

## **It Matters to Me**

Sometimes the world seems so big  
Sometimes you'll feel so small  
That what you do won't matter at all

Know that it matters to Me

When you pray, I will listen  
When you cry, I will hear  
When you smile, I will smile

Know this, you matter to Me

When you do grand things  
When you do little things  
When you try...

It matters to Me

The dollar you give to the homeless  
You might not know it, but I multiply it  
Even the simple hello you extend in the morning  
You might not be aware of it, but I too receive it

It matters to Me

When you pray, I listen  
When you cry, I hear  
Anywhere and everywhere  
It's your smile that makes Me smile

In the grand and little things you do  
I'm there each time you try  
Because it matters to Me

Often it might seem  
That the world's too full of people  
Though you may be just one  
Know this... everything about you

**... It Matters to Me**

## THANK YOU to...

- \* Fr. Paul Lehman
  - who provided essential leadership, friendship and constant care for us as BLD Newark's Spiritual Director for over 20 years
- \* Global Spiritual Director, Archbishop Lagdameo
- \* the three founding couples of BLD Newark
  - Roger and Irma Santiago
  - Jay and Salou Sobrepeña
  - Andy and Belle Escaño
- \* BLD Newark's Class of ME 1 (and the many who helped make that momentous weekend possible)
- \* Thank you also to Msgr. Paul
  - although Fr. Lehman's shoes are hard to fill, your own unique and boundless energy will surely infuse the Community for many years to come!
- \* BLD's leadership - the CSL in Manila, Newark's CS, DCS and DLC, both current and past
- \* the many others who are part of the BLD Newark family, old members, new members, young members
- \* to Our Mother Mary, and,
- \* to our God, Our Loving Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

Lord, Your mighty anointing has blessed this Community for 25 years, and it has been quite a journey. It has only been possible because of You, and **WE THANK YOU!** We have found true friends amongst each other, but best of all is that, through BLD, we have found You. Bless us as we continue on in pursuit of the vision and mission You have graced upon BLD. And may all we do always be for Your Greater Glory. Amen.



*A pdf of this Covenant News and more information about BLD are available online at [BLDNEWARK.com](http://BLDNEWARK.com)*

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

### WORSHIP

- \* Corporate Worship: Fridays  
8:00PM Rosary; 8:30PM Prayer Meeting
- \* Eucharistic Celebration:  
First Friday of each month, 8:30PM

### Encounters:

- \* Married Couples - twice a year (~ May & Nov)
- \* Solo Parents - once a year (Jun)
- \* Singles - once a year (~ May / Jun)
- \* Youth - Teens / Pre-teens - each @ once a year  
- YE (Jul) - John 6 Crossings (~ Sep / Oct)
- \* Family - once a year (Jul)

### Life-in-the-Spirit Seminar

- \* Adults & Singles - twice a year (~ Apr & Oct)
- \* Youth - once a year (Mar)

### Monthly Activites

- \* Teachings  
- every 3rd Saturday of the month
- \* Newark Soup Kitchen  
- every 4th Saturday of the month
- \* Nursing Home Visit  
- every 2nd Saturday of the month

### Annual Activites

- \* March for Life (Jan; Washington, DC)
- \* Medical Mission to the Philippines (Jan/Feb)
- \* Christmas Celebrations (Dec)

### Other Activites

- \* Retreats, Reunions, Meetings, and More!  
- as scheduled
- \* Joy, Fun, Fellowship and Friendship  
- everyday of the year!!!

## HELP WANTED

Position: Practicing Christian

Salary: None

Requirements: Just a giving and yielding heart  
No experience required

Job Description: Proclaim God's Word;  
Evangelize through Praise and  
Worship; Fellowship with other  
Christian brothers and sisters

Benefits:

Credits towards Eternal Life in Heaven

*Equal Opportunity Employer*

This listing was first posted in the August 8, 1997 issue of  
the Covenant News. Positions are still available and all  
applicants will be hired!

*A haiku for the next 25 years and beyond:*

**Sing God a glad tune  
Sing it from July to June  
Noon until next noon**