



Eric and Sandra Read

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Location: Philippines



What we do: Demonstrating natural farming models alongside equipping churches in holistic mission for real community impact.



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life to release their God-given potential

Dear friends,

We have been back in the Philippines two months now, and the UK seems a world away!

Things have mostly been going well since we came back. We went to see the principal at the primary school the other day and he is keen on partnering with us through school visits to the farm. The plan is for the coming school year which starts in June. Lots of preparations to do!

Please pray for God's inspiring guidance in this. Things have also been going well on the farm (apart from a lot of cloudy and sometimes damp weather, which is making drying the cassava harvest a very long, drawn-out process). Guava and banana production is up, the papayas and jackfruit have started producing decent quantities and we have good workers... or at least we did, until last week!

It suddenly all came crashing down when all three of our workers announced they are leaving in May and June (they are all related and from the same place). This left us feeling winded, with all our plans and expectations out of the window. We have just been fixing their accommodation and given them another raise in accordance with a government mandate. We have a good relationship with them. But family commitments are calling them home. It is very difficult to find people willing to do farm work now as there is plenty of easier work around, and finding good people is even harder.

We immediately started discussing various (im)possibilities... selling the farm and giving up, finding someone to take it over, etc... initial reactions. And then of course...! How could we forget...? We sat down and started to pray and read the Bible and seek God. The farm is part of the ministry, in the last few months it has started to increase production and earning. It is the base for the planned day camps and school visits – God must have a plan.

Eric turned to the Psalms and his Bible opened at Psalm 65. He began to read. Verse 2 says: *You who answer prayer, to you all people will come.* Then, verse 5 says: *You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds...* (NIV). Verse 9 onwards is all about God's care for the land and his bounty and blessing the crops!

We didn't have any answers or specific guidance, but did have assurance from God to persevere with the farm. He is steering us to something new, which gives us hope and expectations. A memory verse from months ago has prepared Sandra for this time: Isaiah 42:16 says, *I will lead the blind by ways they have not*



Meeting with the school principal in his office

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**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them (NIV). This has settled her frustration and anxiety. It has given us the grace to understand our workers' different plans for their own lives. And to shakily step into a new challenge in our faith.

We are now trying to work out a different approach to manage the farm, as we don't just want to hire new workers and carry on as before.

As the farm is an integral part of the ministry, we want our workers to understand this. So we plan for them to actively participate in the youth and children's ministry activities too. The practicalities will need to be discussed and worked out. We want to follow God's unfamiliar paths and for him to guide us through the changes. First, we need to have a team who are willing to do farm work and at same time have the heart and desire and maturity of faith to minister to young people. A calling to be tentmakers, like the apostle Paul.

And God is showing us... as Romel is stepping forward to be one. He has decided he will stay. He was in charge while we were in England. Romel has been with us for seven years now and we have seen how God is working in his life and how he has grown and matured in his faith. **Please pray** that he will know clearly with conviction that this is what the Lord is leading him and his wife to do. We have also been in contact with Bernard, whom some of you may remember worked with us before in training churches. **Please pray** he will join our team too as we know he is also committed to God's work and his strengths will be a good balance for both farm and school visit activities as he is also interested in farming. That is where we are now, still seeking God's guidance, with hope. **Please do pray with us** that we will know God's leading and always be confident to step forward with him.

Since the farm's earnings are increasing at moment we have decided to put the plans for processing the fruit on hold to focus on preparing for the school visits. We are also looking for local churches to partner with for some periodic joint youth activities to encourage our youth group. We are also in contact with a small Christian organisation which does youth training to see if there are possibilities for partnership. In all these things we seek and thank you for your support through **continuous prayer** as we hope that these plans and initiatives will come to fruition. We look forward with expectation to see how God will work it all out! Thank you for being there for us and for your willingness to also step out in faith to continue to support us.

With love and blessings,

Eric and Sandra



Photos from top to bottom: Romel and Arnie chopping the last of the cassava harvest for drying – depending on the weather, drying can take from a week to a month; papaya in production (the white bags are wrapped around bananas); new planting of papaya – these are only a year old but already some are dying off; having fun at the Christmas party



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life

We've been encouraged to hear recent mission stories from around our wider area of work. In Ukraine, families are being assured they are not alone amid the hardship of war, and our colleagues in Paraguay have seen a young man overcome challenges to learn academically and spiritually. Read more at churchmissionsociety.org/empower

Please note that opinions expressed in updates are those of mission partners, not necessarily of Church Mission Society.

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