



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 reach their God-given potential

Dear friends,

The end of May was a pretty busy time. First, the municipal agricultural office came to see what we are doing with the syntropic farming. Eric did a short presentation on how it works, then we had a walk around to show them it in practice, comparing syntropic and non-syntropic areas. We were able to show them guava seedlings in a syntropic planting that had come through two months of drought with no irrigation, compared to seedlings in an area that is not yet syntropic, where the seedlings started to droop after a month and we had to start irrigating them to keep them alive. Eric was invited to present at the municipal agricultural council last week (made up of a farmer representative from each barangay). They will visit us in August.



Mowing the grass between the tree lines of banana and guava (the guava can't be seen because of the support plants)

We are excited at the possibility of working with the Department of Agriculture (DA) (whose staff are all young and keen and open to new ways of doing things) and other farmers, and also feel it is the right time both in terms of our being ready and the need for regenerative agriculture. The hike in fertiliser prices, climate change and the damage fertilisers and tillage are doing to the soil – especially as tropical soils are much more fragile than temperate soils – all point to a need for regenerative agriculture. We would like to have three or four small farmers to work with and train in syntropic farming. But since syntropic farming is a process of rebuilding the soil and environment, its benefits are gradual. Observing that small farmers here need a quick return to survive, the idea is to start the syntropic system just along the edge of a field or unused poor land and they can continue their conventional cropping on the main fields. Since this system needs less intervention and is flexible on timing, this will work better for them.

In the meantime we are making the most of the rain while we have it to add as many biomass plants ("weeds", invasives, shrubs, trees, etc) as we can to support the fruit trees and build up the whole the macro-organism before El Niño takes effect.

In the afternoon after the DA's farm visit we joined our church's overnight retreat at Peter's place. At the same time he was preparing for a three-day hippie festival he was hosting the following weekend, so there were quite a number of volunteers already there. That evening, after three weeks without rain, it started to rain heavily and everyone had to crowd onto the veranda! Thankfully the rain did stop later (a big relief for

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



those who were camping), so we were able to make a very late start. We live nearby so slept at home. Despite the mud, the sessions went well and everyone seemed to just get on with it.

The volunteers for the hippie festival were from all over the Philippines, and quite a few of them were into New Age. Some of the church guys did chat with some of the volunteers, who had overheard the speakers talking with some of them saying they felt blessed by what they had heard. It was good to see positive interaction between the two groups whose paths would not normally cross.

In support of Peter, we set up a stall at the festival,

selling juices and fruit pies Sandra made from our fruit. Both received plenty of positive comments. But we still made a loss – it's no wonder with Sandra giving freebies to friends and some hippies' hungry children – after all the hard work too. There were over 40 musicians and performers from as far away as Japan, including a local tribal dance group. We did enjoy meeting and chatting to people and also some of the music, but there were also performers spouting complete nonsense! Our stall became a respite for Peter when it got too much for him and also for his dog when it got too much for her! The festival made a big loss too, but thankfully that is not primarily Peter's problem.

During the school summer holidays last April, which was very hot and dry, Eric drove the tractor hauling the big farm irrigating water tank to the plaza and everyone had a great time joining in water games! More children now come to our Friday activities, which may be a result of the carolling we did last December.

Sandra has just started a playgroup with five mums and children from nine months to four years old. A large box of toys from Sandra's niece will be the initial attraction, but the mums also want tips on "managing" toddlers – an opportunity for chats on biblical principles to encourage their parenting. Hopefully others will join later.

We had a good few months of connecting with family – Sandra's 96-year-old mother stayed with us for a few months, then all her siblings came for Christmas (but unfortunately most of us came down with flu!), then Atiyah came home last March and Eric's niece came for a visit too. All these visits remind us what a blessing it is to be able to connect with family.

And we feel so encouraged to have you all still behind us after all these years in mission. Just as you pray for us we also pray for God's wisdom and courage for you all in whatever and however he uses you to bring blessings around you.

With love and blessings,

Eric and Sandra



Photos from top to bottom: At our festival stall with Nanau Ipang, tribal elder of the dance group; tribal dancers performing at the festival; water games; our first playgroup gathering



Empowering people pushed to the edges of life

We hope that you're inspired as you read about Alison in Kyiv, Ukraine, who is seeing many answers to prayer as she faithfully serves God. And that you get a moment to read about the displaced disciples in Ethiopia – church leaders taking part in bespoke training designed for people living in refugee camps. Read more stories about empowering people pushed to the edges at churchmissionsociety.org/empower

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