



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.

Dear friends,

When we started running a Bible study for our workers and neighbours and then later a youth group for local youth, we thought of these as peripheral activities which, as we are living here, it would be good to do. Little did we know that God had other ideas.

We made it clear from the beginning that we are not starting a new church, to the surprise and disappointment of some of our protestant friends, as it is expected that missionaries start churches. On the other hand it has worked out well for a more inclusive group as we have young people from six different churches. In fact, as we have mentioned before, we don't introduce ourselves as mission partners but as Christ-believing farmers. We wanted to be free from the expectations here of missionaries as foreigners solely for and interested in religious spiritual activities. It is difficult for us to be holistic in our ministry if we don't live in the day-to-day life of a local community. Sandra being a Filipino helps in our assimilation. To be light and salt we must strive to be accepted as "locals", a careful (and at times frustrating) balance of being one of them and not the local godfather, of being kind and helpful and loving, but firm in determining when and how to help.

It took a few goes starting the Bible study and youth group. But it has settled now to a regular group and we are amazed at how the young people are maturing in their relationship with God. We are certainly not the best of teachers but the Holy Spirit is making God's Word relevant to their daily lives as we listen to them sharing what they want to thank God for at the beginning of each session. The one-sentence prayers we encourage each one to say at the end now include concerns they have. At the end of the evening, during snacks, people stay on chatting while the children run around playing. It is encouraging too that we are getting new people joining, usually by invitation of existing members. Our leadman worker Jojo now runs a Bible study group in his own home after he moved to a Bible-teaching church. Our caretaker Romel and his wife have started an online chat group doing Bible study with the youth from their home villages. We praise God and are in wonder at how he is working! Please pray that these groups will continue and will grow in their relationship with God.

Most of the youth attending the Bible study also come back the following evening for a fellowship



*Sitting around a bonfire
chatting with the youth*

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To the edges**



exclusively for the youth. We are just thankful to God at the interest and desire they have to follow and serve him. Oddie is one of these young people, and we have known him since he was a small boy. Living right next door, he was always a frequent visitor and joined in any activities that were going on, whether an organised one for children or helping Eric in the shed. A couple of years ago, as he reached his mid-teens, he started drinking – sadly all too common among the youth. We were sorry to see this and tried to encourage him in better directions. He continued to attend the Bible study and since we got back from our last leave we noticed him becoming much more interested in the Bible and God. He started to attend a “born again” (as they call them here) church in the next

village. He even brought his pastor to meet us for “approval”! His parents (who are Catholic) were not very happy about his move and did come and ask Sandra about the church. When Oddie asked them whether they would prefer him like he is now or to revert to how he was before, they accepted his choice. Oddie is always encouraging his friends and sharing with them.

Ben is a high schooler, and when he was much younger he joined the summer programme we ran for children one year. Other than seeing him on the road we have not really had any contact with him since. A few months ago Ben started coming to both the Bible study and the youth group, bringing along a couple of his friends. They have all been regular attendees since then. When we asked Ben what made him want to come, he replied that he wants to be transformed, as he struggles with a temper. Pray these youths will continue to seek God and find him relevant in their busy lives.

In choosing the name Barakah (Blessing) for the farm our prayer has always been that the farm will be a blessing. Maybe this is one way it is being a blessing to the local community. Please always pray this verse for us: **Philippians 2:13: “For it is God who works in you to will and to act for his good purpose.”** And we pray this verse for you as well.

With love and blessings,

Eric and Sandra

PS: Several of you have been asking to know more about syntropic farming, so here at last is the link to a short (nine-minute) video we have recorded: <https://hidrive.ionos.com/lnk/fhiMntho>

This is an introduction and we plan to follow up with further videos showing more of it in practice. Please note that depending on the speed of your internet connection it may take a few minutes to download.

Names of young people above have been changed.



Photos from top to bottom: With a general shortage of farm workers there is a need for increased mechanisation – using a seed drill under development for opening a slot for planting Napier grass (you plant the stalks!); adding mulch during the cutting and resetting of the syntropic area (see video) – we had to bring it in from other areas until we could produce enough in situ; coconuts beginning to dry in the sun, the first stage in making copra (dried coconut), which is then sold for oil extraction



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Jesus never gives up. Neither should we. We live in a fractured, hurting world. It can be tempting to give up: on hope, on people, on the idea that things can ever change. Yet, Jesus invites us to follow him on a journey to the edges. Find out more at churchmissionsociety.org/nevergiveup

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

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