

Sarah Ramsey's first update from Manila

I arrived safely in the Philippines on 2nd Oct 2010. After I had managed to get help from a lovely Filipino in lifting my luggage off the carousel I followed my instructions to the meeting place. I then waited and waited for about an hour for my lift. It turned out that the message had not reached those picking me up that the arrangements at the airport had changed. It was my first taste of Filipino organisation which I haven't managed to work out yet, they seem to leave when they are ready no matter what time they told you.

I have a companion, who is also called Sarah and from the UK too; she arrived on the same day as me. It is great to have someone else here in the same position as me and lovely to be able to spend the evenings, when we have nothing planned, with her, which would be quite lonely if I was on my own. We are sharing a room too which is great but please pray that we will continue to get on really well as we do spend a lot of time together.

I feel very at home here, which is mainly because the people here are lovely and very welcoming. Four days after arriving we went on the Drop in Camp, which is a camp for those who attend the Drop in Centre at Cubao Reformed Baptist Church on a regular basis. The Drop in Centre is run every Thursday evening and provides food for those living on the streets of Manila. The evening starts with a gospel presentation. It is a work of Cubao Reformed Baptist Church that is being blessed, in recent years they have seen four people come to know Jesus Christ, these people are a great asset especially on the camp as they know the people and understand what life is like living on the streets. This camp was a great rebuke to me as if I had not gone on the camp I would have walked past these people and not given them a second thought. I realised that they are just ordinary human beings who are in great need. Now when I see familiar faces I stop to say hello. The camp was very heart wrenching as I saw the new born babies who are being brought up in the dangerous environment of the streets. There were about 90 attendees at the camp. There were main sessions when the Word of God was preached and memory verses taught; workshops on practical issues such as drug abuse and encouraging them to look for work; games and swimming. The attendees always look forward to the camp as they are guaranteed three substantial meals a day and a bed to sleep in. Before they were allowed on the bus each person was searched and their belongings to make sure they didn't have any knives on them as the different families are prone to fights, thankfully there were no fights or major incidences while we were away. Whilst on the camp I had the opportunity to taste a local delicacy called balut, which is a half formed chick; it doesn't taste as bad as it sounds but I don't think I would like to eat it again! I attended the Drop in Centre last Thursday (14th) it was good to see how it worked and help out. Please pray that those who attended the camp and attend the Drop in Centre will come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.



It is very hard not being able to understand what people are saying at some of the meetings but the morning service on a Sunday is translated using a radio signal which is helpful and they have two afternoon services: Tagalog and English. I go to the English service, which has only been set up very recently and I am thankful for. Please pray that as I spend more time here I will begin to recognise a few words so that I can at least understand a little of what is being said. The people in the Church have said that if I don't understand just to ask but I don't like asking too often. I have started to learn some Tagalog words and phrases but it is a very hard language to learn; the girls at the home are very patient and enjoy teaching me. They also enjoy laughing at my pronunciation but the delight on their faces when I remember a word or phrase is worth it.

Here's a few examples of some words and phrases:

Anong pangalan mo – what is your name

Babae – girl

Kutsara – spoon

Kanin – rice

Nagpapasalamat - thankful

My basic daily routine is: (Mon – Fri)

8am Rise

9am Start work in office or 10am if I'm in the Notre Dame office.

12pm Lunch

1pm Back to work

6pm Dinner

Monday, Tuesday and Friday I am in the Masinag office (the office at the girls home). Wednesday and Thursday I am in the Notre Dame office (this is the office that deals with the Educational Assistance Programme). Christian Compassion Ministries (CCM) is divided into two: the children's homes and the Educational Assistance Programme. There are four girls homes and a boys home; each home has about ten children. The Educational Assistance Programme helps out families who cannot afford to put their children through education, sadly an education over here is not free, which is a shame as the children are so willing to learn. The work I am doing at the offices is basically anything they need me to do. It is generally the work that takes a lot of time and therefore frees up the time of the social workers to get on with more important work. So far the kind of jobs I have been doing is: making two thank you cards for the churches who donated money for the drop in camp, cutting out the insides for the card making day, sorting out the ID cards for washing after the drop in camp and editing reports. On Wednesday evening I go to the prayer meeting at Cubao Reformed Baptist Church and on Thursday evening I go to the Drop in Centre. Also every alternate Monday evening I take a devotion at the boys home and every alternate Tuesday in the girls homes. I have so far given my testimony at both the girls and the boys homes, please pray that these children will put their trust in Jesus Christ, they have all the knowledge but they need that relationship with God. Please also pray for Sarah Field and I as we prepare our devotions.

Last Friday (15th) we went on a community visit to one of the slums with a social worker. We visited two families that are helped by CCM and saw the conditions in which they lived. It is humbling to see how basic



Eight people live in this room. It is only slightly bigger than one you can see in the photograph! Two of the people living there with a social worker.

their living conditions are and makes you thankful for what you have. We were able to take medicines to the families we visited which we very appreciated. They basically eat, sleep and live in one room which is smaller than most people's bedroom in the UK. In one of these rooms there is a family of eight living there. Most of the people in the slums have come from the provinces to metro Manila for work and are willing to put up with their living conditions for work. The sad thing is that near the Church some high rise apartment blocks are being erected which are aimed at professionals and are going to be very expensive. I find this very sad because there are

so many people without a proper home and they aren't building affordable housing. As a result of the construction of the new apartments they have been 'cleaning up' that area which includes arresting those living on the streets. There is a gentleman who goes to the

Drop in Centre who has just recently got out of prison and he was imprisoned because he lives on the street. Don't get me wrong some of the people who live on the streets are involved in crime but being arrested for living on the street is purely wrong. Unfortunately the influx of people looking for work has resulted in a lot of slums and many people living on the streets; leaving many without work. In the slums there is no electricity and no water. There is water available to buy in barrels but it is very expensive for them and they can't always afford it. This particular slum is by the sea and I was told that if they have no money for food they fish for shellfish. Filipinos automatically assume that if you are white you are American and so the children in the slums kept shouting 'Americana' at us to try and get our attention.

Christmas in the Philippines, I am told, is a big thing despite the poverty and already this is able to be seen. Many shops have Christmas trees up and have decorated their stores. There are even whole stores dedicated to Christmas decorations and I thought that the shops in the UK started Christmas too early! Also Christmas songs are being played, including 'Let it snow' which I thought was very funny as there is no way going to be snow here; Christmas in the Philippines, amongst other things, has been westernised.

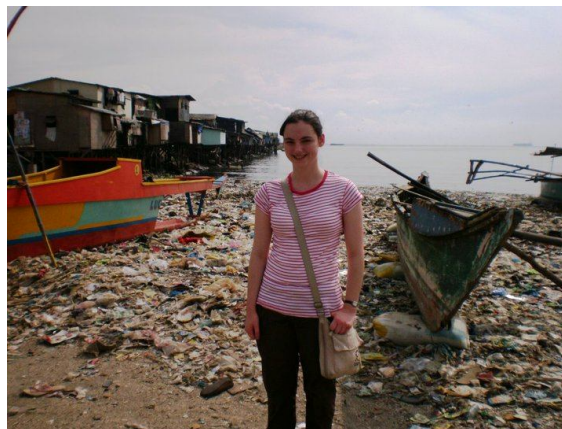
I just want to add that the way it is looking at the moment we will not be badly affected by the typhoon, we will have some rain and wind; but we have had a short power cut already. Please pray for those who have fled their homes in the North.



This is how we had to get to one of the houses.



One of the Christmas stores. L to R: Sarah Field, Sarah Ramsey, Happy Balairos (one of the social workers)



The mess on the sand is rubbish