

RICK & BECKY MARTIN

YOUR MISSIONARIES TO ILOILO CITY, PHILIPPINES SINCE 1976

MARCH-APRIL 2025 (Part 1) | martinsiloilo@gmail.com |

Dear Friends,

Our recent newsletter emphasized the importance of starting Iloilo Baptist College to train men to start churches and for women to work in these churches. In this newsletter I want to share the strategy to plant churches by starting Bible Colleges. For over 400 years about the only thing the Filipino people were exposed to was Roman Catholicism, Islam and Communism. I believe the way to reach this country is by starting churches and the most effective method is starting Bible Colleges that emphasize church planting.

During the second year of the school a young man named Billy Caalem enrolled. Little did we know how God was going to use him for the next 45 years. Billy was raised in the mountains near the town of Leon. It is a very remote area. The communist rebels used it as it was easy to avoid the soldiers who tried to track them down. Billy loved ministry work and was involved in many. Below is a picture of him when he was a third-year student teaching the Bible to children in one of the poorest parts of the city. He would start at 7:30 am Saturday and have 4 or 5 classes. We still call this ministry the Extension Ministry.



Another thing I liked about Billy was his desire to recruit young people from the mountains to surrender to the Lord, come to Bible College and then go serve the Lord. He has lived a life with many obstacles and trials. During his second year in college, he received the news that his father had been murdered by the New People's Army as they are called, in broad daylight at the school where he worked. In the village where Bro. Billy lived, and two nearby villages, the rebels killed about 100

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residents during the 1980s. Sometimes these executions were in the public square of the village so that others would fear. It was very hard on Billy, but he stayed in school and never questioned God about what happened.



It was during this time that he invited me to go to his village and preach to the young people about giving their lives to the Lord. I told him that it was very dangerous there, especially for an American and that it was also very far. He told me that it really wasn't so dangerous and that it wouldn't be that difficult to get there. The day came and we took a jeepney up in the mountain and at about 10:00 am the jeep stopped as it was at the end of the road. We got out and we began to walk. After about an hour I asked Billy if we were almost there and he said, "It's not too far." We walked another hour, and he said the same thing. A while later he pointed and said that it was over the next mountain. Pictured left is Billy is smiling while I was moaning.



We walked 18 kilometers which is 11 miles and took almost 5 hours. We got to the top of the mountain, and he pointed way down in the valley and said that was the place. It was steep, and I asked him how we would get there, and he told me to follow

him. I was nervous because if you started sliding you were going to go a long way and might not live doing it. I was trying to be careful and slow when a lady passed me. She was carrying a big piece of lumber like 2 by 4 by 10 feet, like it was nothing. Then another lady about 65 years old walked by me with a bag of cement on her head! I asked Billy if we could hire that lady and have her carry me down the mountain. He laughed. We finally made it at 3 in the afternoon. That evening, I preached at the

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village meeting place which was a primitive outdoor basketball court. I found out later that there were quite a few NPA's in the crowd. The Lord blessed as several came to Bible College from that night. Several graduated including George Cabistrant; also, his sister Hena Cabistrante, who married Marianteo Eripol, who is still pastoring a church. Then there was Rolando Capilitan who graduated and pastored for over 30 years until he died.

The next morning, I was awakened by a rooster next to my nipa house. Billy asked me to get ready because it would be very hot when we walk back up the mountain. I was so sore that I had a hard time standing. Slowly we began walking up the mountain. I was so tired. Every step I took I promised never to return. I wasn't even worried about the rebels and wouldn't have minded if they would just shoot me and put me out of my misery.

About a year later he asked me to go to his home place again to recruit students and I just stared at him. He told me that there was a road now and that it went all the way to the village. He went on to say how much safer it was now, and I don't know why but I agreed to go back. When the jeep we were in got to the place where the new road began something in the engine caused the jeepney to stop. So, we had to get out and walk. Actually, we didn't have to walk 11 miles, we got to push the jeepney 11 miles as you can see in the picture here.



We could only push the jeep part of the way, so we left it by the road and walked the rest of the way. At some point I noticed there were some men following who were carrying guns. I asked Billy who they were, and he said they weren't NPAs. I finally found out they were local paramilitary soldiers who volunteered to fight the NPAs and protect the people. I was suspicious and asked if they were protecting me and he changed the subject and told me don't worry, and that I was safe.

That night I preached again, and the next day went back home. That same day, 11 persons were killed by the NPA in an ambush in that area. Here's a picture of some of the men who guarded me.



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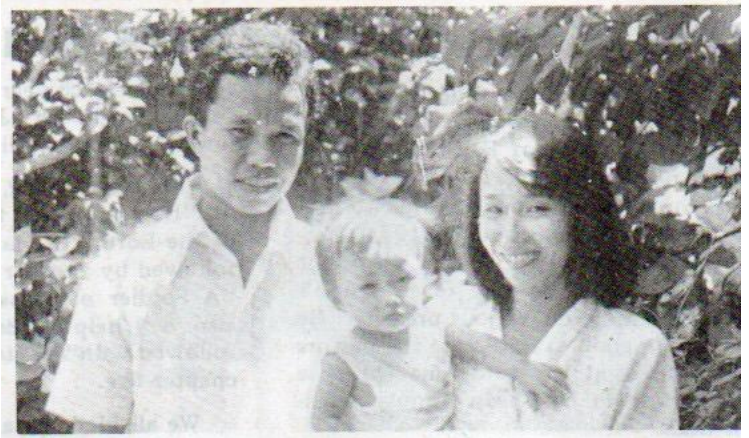
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After he graduated in 1983, Billy became our youth director for 7 years. It was during this time that he married Cheryl Solinap.



Cheryl was the first convert of Iloilo Baptist Church and a very strong and fruitful Christian. Cheryl was 16 years old when we took this picture. She is second from the right. These teens are in a uniform as this was our first singing group in our church.

Here is Billy and Cheryl with their first child, Genevieve, who graduated at IBC and has been working with her dad to this day, along with her husband.



In 1990, Billy Caalem started a church in his home place up in the mountains. Like myself, he started a Bible College about one year after starting the church. He was the first IBC graduate to start a Bible College. Below is the first building they built for the Bible College.



To get to the property you would have to use the old bridge made from bamboo.



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For more than 30 years he has held youth camps for young people all over the mountains in that area. He will often have as many as 500 campers or more. Below is a camp in 2001.



They now have a "modern" swinging bridge which is 50 feet above the river.



He would baptize near a small waterfall



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Pictured below are some of his Bible College students in the early days of school.



Around the turn of the century, Billy decided to move the college to the town. He started the Victory Baptist Church inside the town which has a population of 4400. People go to his church from all over the area by jeepney, motorcycle, or they walk.

Sunday morning service



The church has a choir and orchestra



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Visitors receiving Bibles



Pictured below is the graduating class of 2023.



The Lord has used his college to start well over 125 churches through the years. He started the college in 1990 and had his first graduating class in 1994. This year will be their 32nd class. During the past 8 years 72 of their new graduates started a church. He also has a Christian high school with 250 students and each year many of their graduates enroll at the Bible College. Many of the men end up starting churches.



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Below is the student body of the Bible College. They presently have 196 students. Today there are churches all over the mountains in that part of our island.



Pastor George Cabaya, one of Billy Caalem's graduates, also started a Bible College years ago. He grew up on Mindanao Island and ran with the wrong crowd which affected him. He made a trip to Panay Island in 1990 and met Billy Caalem somehow and received the Lord as his Savior. His life changed and he surrendered all to God and enrolled in Bible College. He was in Billy's first class and graduated in 1994. After graduation he started a church in another town and helped with the Bible College as well. He would often walk 6 hours to go to the Bible College to teach because he didn't have fare. In 1997 he went back to Mindanao to a very dangerous town, Midsayap. There were serious problems with the communist rebels and even more so with the radical Muslims there. God used him to start a church and later a Bible College. Pictured here is George Cabaya on the left and Billy Caalem on the right about 20 years ago.



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Below is Brother Cabaya baptizing:



He married a student at Brother Caalem's Bible College named Magdalena. She and her husband sacrificed much. Magdalena never went back to her home place here on our island for the first 19 years she was there. Then in December of 2015 she made a visit to her family who were so glad to see her.

George was often sick which could have greatly hindered his ministry, but Magdalena did everything she possibly could to help and encourage him. The Lord has blessed Brother Cabaya as he has started many churches.

On March 7th, 2016, Brother George and Magdalena went to the city of Kidapawan to renew Brother George's license to marry. They rode home on a bus. Suddenly their bus was ambushed by Muslim rebels. Magdalena was shot. Brother George begged her not to leave him and their 2 children - but she was already gone.



Pastor George Cabaya with his wife with their first child.

Broken-hearted, he buried his wife and continued to serve God. In the past 8 years, new graduates of his Bible College have started 30 churches.

To the right is Dr. Don Sisk, a hero and friend with Billy Caalem, about 10 years ago.



For many years I wanted to send some of our guests to Billy Caalem's ministry in the mountains. I knew it would be a blessing as it was amazing to see what these Christians who were living in extreme poverty were doing for the cause of Christ. It used to be very dangerous with the rebels there so I would never send the pastors who would visit us to go there. I didn't think it would be a good thing if something bad happened to one of our supporting pastors.

In the mid 1990's we had a visitor named Bob Ballou who was the head of Lifeline Philippines. This ministry would send containers of Bibles, tracts and other items to help the churches. I thought that

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he might be good to be my "Guinea Pig". He went there and walked very far like I did and was there several days. He didn't get shot or anything bad. When he got back, he was so tired. But he survived so I began to send others there.

Bro. Ballou told me later that right before he left Billy Caalem gave him a large number of envelopes from his students. He said he often would get requests from pastors for Bibles, or other items and so he put the letters in his bag to read later to see what they wanted. I try to train our workers not to do that but kind of understand. He was on the plane going back to the US and it can be 12-15 hours flying time on some of the flights, so he decided to get those letters out and he began to read them. The first one he opened had a letter thanking him in broken English for coming and being such a blessing. With that letter was some paper money which was a love gift to Bob. He opened the next one and it was the same. Each one of those letters had 20 pesos, 50 pesos or 100 pesos.

This was about 30 years ago. He was so blessed that they would sacrifice like that. I am not sure if he realized that likely some of them were giving him the money that they had for their food and may have gone a day or longer without food just to give.

When I heard that story I was so blessed. Billy Callem is such a wonderful Christian whose testimony has touched so many lives here including mine.

Bro. Caalem has endured many trials. He has been attacked physically. He has an adult son who is an invalid that needs 24-hour daily care.

Bro. Caalem found out he has Stage 4 bone cancer about 4 months ago. It is too late to do any kind of surgery. Please pray the Lord will allow him to live. No graduate of IBC has been more fruitful. He is also one of the nicest and most gracious Christians I know.

God bless,

Rick and Becky Martin

Our May-June 2025 newsletter will continue with the importance of Bible Colleges in the Philippines and will share about some of the other Bible Colleges started by the IBC grads.