

**Saint Mary's School of Sagada**  
**PRINCIPAL'S BULLETIN, 2009-2010 SERIES # 4**  
**June 26, 2009**

Dear Students, Parents, Guardians, Alumni, and Friends:

The highlight of last week is the whirlwind visit of Ms. Gina Lopez, the president of ABS-CBN Foundation, and a stalwart supporter of environmental protection. During her stay, Ms. Lopez visited SMS and Ambasing Elementary School, met with the elementary school teachers of the Sagada District, and conferred with Mayor Edward Latawan, Mountain Province DepEd Superintendent Mary Langa-ayan, and other key leaders of the community. Along with her two sons who are students at International School Manila, and Mrs. Roseanne Belmonte (daughter-in-law of Mayor Sonny Belmonte of Quezon City) and prime supporter of the Betty-Go Belmonte Elementary school in Quezon City, Gina spent Saturday and Sunday visiting the various tourist spots of Sagada. At the end, she enthusiastically offered to adopt the whole of Sagada to become a beneficiary of her Bayanijuan project, a comprehensive development program that addresses environmental preservation (Bantay Kalikasan), community livelihood, education, and protection of children (Bantay Bata).

How did this all come about?

I met Gina Lopez last February 2008 in Baguio when BOT member Evelyn Forbes brought the two of us together in her house, after an SMSSI Board meeting. Gina talked of her dream to elevate the level of education in the country, particularly through the shift of teaching methodology from teacher-directed to student-centered instruction. After a long search for schools for her two sons, she was impressed with the methodology used in international schools throughout the world, and she saw the results with her own children at IS Manila. As mentioned during her talk with Sagada teachers last Saturday, she said "I do not see any reason why our Philippine schools cannot use this tried and tested methodology to effectively educate our own children." In cooperation with the Department of Education, she then established model schools like Oas Elementary School in Albay (Region 4), Betty-Go Belmonte ES in Quezon City (NCR), and Severa ES in Bacolor Pampanga (Region 3). She convinced corporations and donors to provide these model schools the necessary infrastructure needs like books and computers, and convinced educational institutions like Ateneo, UP Diliman, and Beacon International School to provide teacher training regarding this methodology. She was totally surprised when I said that we've been using this style of teaching for the past three years at SMS, and yes, the results show a marked improvement in the learning of children. She wanted to hire me on the spot as a consultant, which I politely refused because I will not leave Sagada and I hate to travel. She asked my help for Betty Go-Belmonte ES, since I was spending my two-week vacation in Manila in July. I countered by proposing that if she wanted my services, she would have to send her teachers to me at SMS in Sagada for further training.

In July 2008, ABS-CBN Foundation organized the first training session for Betty Go-Belmonte teachers at SMS, involving a third of the BGBES faculty. My resource speakers, aside from myself, were SMS teachers like Nemias Lite, Michael Benter, Leones Gonsoden, Lissa Octaviano, Krish Centeno, and veteran educator Mrs. Conchita Bosaing. It was about this time when Mrs. Christina Semon, the newly appointed principal of Ambasing Elementary School came to my office to ask for help to improve the faltering level of education at her school. I offered to include three of her teachers in the one-week seminar. Using our SMS classes as laboratory guinea pigs, the teacher trainees not only observed the methodology in action, but were also taught to try and apply the approach, first among our kids at SMS, with the ultimate objective of applying it in their own classrooms. Happily, as I observed during a surprise visit to BGBES, the Quezon City teachers saw the effectiveness of the approach and convinced their colleagues to follow suit. A second training session was scheduled in November, 2008 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> batch of the BGBES faculty, along with the rest of the AES teachers. Facilitators included Dr. Agnes Kollin, a retired master teacher from Ambasing, and Ms. Joy Bacwaden, a balikbayan from Besao teaching in the United States. Because of bureaucratic problems, our colleagues in Quezon City could not come, but ABS-CBN proceeded with the scheduled training, this time with AES faculty, and representatives from the other elementary schools in the Sagada District. A third training session on developing personal self-esteem among teachers (an ingredient necessary to try out this methodology) was held in March 2009, with Dr. Ophelia Veniegas who also facilitated the same workshop for the Quezon City teachers the month before. This time, more Sagada teachers were involved.

During the course of these events, I asked Gina to adopt Ambasing Elementary School as a model school for the Cordillera Region. Why? Because the school needed help; because I am in Sagada to oversee the project; and because Mrs. Semon was "napati". Gina Lopez agreed, and pretty soon, all the wheels started to turn, with the support of DepED Secretary Jesli Lopus, Regional Director Benito Tumamao, Mountain Province Superintendent Mary Lang-ayan, Sagada District Supervisor Jimmy Andawi, ABS-CBN officials like Zen Dimalanta and Mariles Gonzales, and of course, the unsung heroes like my SMS faculty and students. On the AES side, the Ambasing-Demang community mobilized, with the leadership of barangay captains Francis Kilongan of Ambasing and Mr. Tulingan of Demang, the parent-members of the PTCA (under the leadership of Mr. Pomeg-as), the AES alumni (Atty. Inglay Fokno, Lily Rose Kollin etc.), and of course, the LGU headed by Mayor Latawan and his municipal staff.

Being a model school, AES would undergo the following: continued teacher training for three years; infrastructure development like the computer laboratory; instructional resources like books, educational DVDs, music, art and sports equipment, and appropriate classroom furniture. All sectors pitched in. ABS-CBN would give P700,000 for construction materials for the computer lab, the municipal government would give P100,000 in terms of aggregates and cement and

produce the architectural plans (c/o Engr. Ciano Baldo and his staff), DepED (through the Adopt a School Program would provide 25 computers, the AES alumni would raise P200,000 for salaries of skilled laborers and the food of unskilled volunteers, and the people of Demang and Ambasing would provide free labor. SMS would oversee the financial aspects of the project (including purchasing, accounting, and project management), in addition to continuous teacher training.

As of today, the computer lab project is almost completed. The computers are ready to be delivered as soon as the computer desks are done (the computers should be ready for use by mid-July). Nine Sagada schools have received their educational DVDs, and some dictionaries have been given out last Saturday. The rest are in my house in Quezon City, ready to be shipped to Sagada.

Gina Lopez wanted to see for herself this wonderful achievement, as it is the shining example of what she has dreamed in her Bayanijuan program—that a community can accomplish much for the betterment of ordinary people through cooperation, selfless dedication and determination, and integrity. Juan can finally have his “bayan” as a result of “bayanihan” and eventually, and become a “bayani” or modern hero. “Yes, the Filipino can! Yes, you can!” was the main theme of her impassioned speech to the Sagada teachers last Saturday.

Thus, the entire municipality of Sagada can now be a beneficiary of the Bayanijuan project of ABS-CBN Foundation. It is my sincere dream that once Sagada has elevated its quality of life—from education to livelihood, from environmental protection to instilling pride in its culture, we can prove to the entire nation that “Yes, the Igorot can!” and be able to share with others what is good, through example and inspiration.

Dennis Faustino

#### **Announcements:**

The **1<sup>st</sup> School Dance** will be held starting at 6 p.m. in the school theater this Friday, June 26. A heavy snack will be served by the school.

On Saturday, the **1<sup>st</sup> HS PTA Meeting** will be held also in the auditorium at 10:00 a.m. Included in the agenda are the introductions of the faculty and staff for SY 2009-2010, the presentation of financial statements of last school year, and the plans for PTA projects for this school year. Your presence would be much appreciated.

**Faculty Corner:** *Daniel Ambasing hails from Besao, a product of St. James High School and the University of the Cordilleras (BCF). He joined the SMSS faculty three years ago, after having served in the public school system (Besao National High School and Tambuan Elementary School) for five years. Daniel is a professional trainer of coaches and a licensed referee for basketball and volleyball. He deserves much credit for the many achievements our SMSS students and others have garnered in district, provincial, regional, and national athletic competitions. Like all of us, he looks forward to establishing a quality athletic program that would be made possible by the completion of our dream gymnasium. Daniel is married and has three children. The following are his reflections and insights:*

Being human is being filled with experiences – joyful and painful. I place a lot of value on my experiences and I value the people that lead me to important realizations, especially those who reach out to others. Most of all, I value those wonderful experiences that serve as an inspiration for me to strive harder.

A month has passed already and I wonder how far have I gone in terms of being a family member of SMS. Coming from a long vacation, have I become a better person, or have I learned what it is to become a member of this family?

I would like each and every one of us to reflect on a story that goes this way. “A veteran priest decided to go on leave after 35 years of ministry in one of the remotest areas of the country. Those cherished years that he spent in his “community” meant a lot to him. He ministered to almost all of the needs of that community. It was time to come back and while he was on his way, the people meeting him on the way looked shocked as though the priest was a stranger to them. In the heart of the town, a man told him, “The church you have left had died with you”, and so he answered, “Okay, since tomorrow is a Sunday, I’ll invite everybody to mass and let’s bury the dead.”

Sunday morning, the priest started ringing the rusty bells of the church and almost everybody was there to join and witness the burial mass for the coffin that was inside the church. After the homily, the priest invited everybody to form a line and pay their last respects to the dead before proceeding to the cemetery. After all have finished viewing the dead, everybody went back to their seats and reflected on the years the priest had shared with them. How deep was their faith? Were the values they learned rooted in their hearts and in their minds? Did they respect how the priest, who was a stranger to them before, transformed their lives into what they are now? Were they responsible enough to apply what they were taught while the priest was away? A lot of questions sprang up unto their minds, mindful of the shame they have brought out. Ahhhh .... Ohh... Eishhh ....Heksss .....

Experiences bring us back to where we once stood and serves as a springboard for us, that we still have time to extract them and get a lesson or two that can lead us to become better members of the family we are in.

**After all, there was no body dead in the coffin. The priest had put a large mirror that anybody who views the coffin sees nobody but his own face – and his own self.**

**“TRUST IN THE LORD AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING, IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM AND HE WILL DIRECT YOUR PATH STRAIGHT “**