



Pagbag-o sang kabuhi

Brother Peter Hardiman

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS KABANKALAN

AR Zayco Sub-division
Mabinay Highway
Kabankalan 6111
Negros Occidental
Philippines

Phone (034)471-3030
From Australia
0011-63-34-471-3030
Cell Phone: 0918-4003685
Email: ptrhardiman@yahoo.com.au

HI 4

There are some people who communicate at regular intervals and some who don't. Guess what category I'm in!

Life has taken a different turn for us at down town Kabankalan, and while memories are still very fresh for me I thought I would say something about them.

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE!

Yes, we have finished our introduction to Ilonggo under our *maestra* Delia. She put her foot on the accelerator in the last few weeks allowing us to get through the first of three books on the language. She really does have to be given full marks for her brightness and sense of fun with us, never letting us think that her lessons were in any way following a pattern. Because if, for example, we thought: 'Right it's a daily news story she will be asking for today to start the ball rolling, so I'll get my little bit prepared,' she would begin by saying: 'What **will** you be doing over the weekend?' Needless to say we were expected to practise our newly learned future tense verb structures. I must confess I cheated because I said: 'I will be smiling about what happened yesterday.'!! I then went on to tell about the Mass for the sick which the Redemptorists had as part of their novena of masses leading up to their big Feast Day of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

100 YEARS UP—FOR THE REDEMPTORISTS

The Irish priest (speaking in English) was at great pains to say that the Sacrament for the sick was no longer to be considered just for the dying. So convincing was he in saying this that, when it came for sick people to come up for the sacrament, just about the whole church came up including a lot of young school kids. Even though there were four priests they didn't know what to do—so tea was a bit late that night. Still Frank, in his best Irish accent said to one who looked pretty fit: 'On your bike, kid' or words to that effect when he presented just with a sore knee. 'Still, you never know,' as they said over tea, describing the dilemma they were in over the huge queues.

If I'm painting the picture of a very well attended set of services it is rightly so. I was amazed at the turn-ups and the organisation which went into it all. I might have even described the Offertory Procession on one night which was sponsored by the poor people from the Magnolia District. They had the sacred vessels and bread and wine being shaded by this sizeable banana tree all being pushed by one of the market workers using his low trolley. Brilliant! Unlike Kabankalan this area of Bicolod has some pretty well heeled people from the smart Capitolville precinct. To see the poor of Magnolia be as at home with these in the church really said something to me about the inclusivity of the church here. Mind you the local church have had to work pretty hard to make it so.

The whole celebration of the feast and, incidentally, the Redemptorists 100 years in the Philippines occurred on the Sunday. I even played my own little part in this as, at my suggestion, we included the Irish *Ag Criost an Siol*—Christ's is the Seed. I tried to be at my haunting best on clarinet and then Frank came in with the Celtic rendition. Went down a treat, so much so that the Filipino choir—brilliant by the way—wanted to learn it! But I'm afraid we didn't hold a candle to the dancers who provided the entrance and exit with some beautifully evocative choreography. Firstly they described the coming of the Reds from Ireland and Australia and at the end of the dance slotted the blue and white sail like segments into a globe featuring the Philippines. Then at the end they enthroned an image of Our Lady.

But you couldn't have a fiesta without a procession which was meant to precede the Mass. Trouble was it was raining the proverbial cats, dogs, soaking in buckets, and had been all day.

Figure 1 No explanation needed!

It meant that the outdoor supper had to be brought indoors with considerable reorganisation called for, not a problem. But do you think the procession would be abandoned? Not at all! I didn't want to miss it for anything either and off I went with the hundreds singing and praying along to the accompaniment of a little band playing glockenspiel



and drums. Indicative of the ordinariness of those assembled my attention was drawn to an umbrella in front of me which had a big bold Mary printed on it. I thought to myself that this was all very appropriate but on reading further I noted that Mary was advertising oral contraceptives!!! I couldn't wait to tell the priests what mixed messages they were giving in their ceremonies. They had a good laugh as well they might for they were rather chuffed at how well the ceremonies for the nine days had gone.

PEACE WITH JUSTICE

While on that point I might as well let you know of the struggle the diocese is engaged in to correct the wrongs of the past and to preach a message of justice and equity. It's blown my mind a bit at how political the local church is here, led by the Bishop. You have to go back a bit in time to fully appreciate this political involvement by the church. During the Marcos era our island, Negros, was in a state of ferment on account of the exploitation by the sugar cane owners against their workers. This coincided with the time the Pope came to the Philippines and in Bocolod spoke out against exploitation and the inequity of the land distribution. Apparently someone on the landowners side rang up the Bishop of the time demanding to know who wrote the Pope's speech. When told the Pope himself did, he proclaimed: 'Right this is war.' Shortly afterwards churches and schools were burnt down, and grenades thrown in on the Bishop's house. (We've just been visiting these places and hearing the story—and more about our visit shortly).

The Columban priests, either Irish or Australian, including Perth born Fr Brian Gore, had been listening to the cry of the people as they sat with them in their little Gospel sharing groups. For some reason which nobody knows, the Mayor of Kabankalan was murdered. Brian Gore, Fr Nial O'Brien and seven locals were accused of his murder. The whole episode was known as the Negros Nine. The priests were allowed to be under house arrest but on the pretext of wanting to

visit the others they got into the jail and wouldn't leave until all were released. My knowledge is not crash hot on all this but I think Bob Hawke applied some pressure to get the whole thing sorted out and Brian Gore was sent back to Australia for a while. I heard him speak sometimes at North Perth during his period of 'exile'. After a while he got back but only for a year at a time I think and he's now currently Provincial of the Columbines—'I am not a Columbian nor a concubine,' he would say! After his trip home to look after his 90yr old mum he rocked up on our doorstep last Saturday with a large jar of Vegemite for us. Here's a man who knows what side his bread is buttered on—and what you need to put on top of it!! He is the second of our beneficiaries in that department with Linda coming good with two tubes also last week so we are very well endowed in that department!!

With Marcos and the military regime gone things are a good deal quieter now thank God, although you sometimes wonder when reading the local papers. Certainly the Bishop of Bicolod now is not letting up in his opposition to the current political climate where the people are being pressured to allow for joint sittings of parliament with apparent Presidential control. Cha-Cha they call it, short for Charter Change. I'm far too new on the scene to understand all the implications of it and in fact are a bit befuddled by the whole thing. The Bishop is leading a campaign in his diocese opposed to it saying such change should be part of a properly run constitutional convention and that the people should not be bullied into proclaiming what they don't understand.

If further evidence is needed that the local church is not sitting on its hands in these peace and justice issues you only have to read the Acts and Decrees of the Second Bacolod Diocesan Synod 2004–2005:

The highest level of caring, greater than concern and compassion is in the work for social justice. Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.' (184)

'Thems is fighting words' as they say in the classics!!

LANGUAGE GOES WALK-ABOUT

If this Hi 4 has turned into a bit of a history lesson it's because that's what we had been receiving from Delia on our second last day with her. Having learnt more about the intricacies of Ilonggo verbs and the multitude of moods and tenses on offer—leaves English for dead—we were taken on an excursion in the afternoon. The four of us blokes took it in turn to breathe in our taxi ride to this little school where our main transport was waiting for us plus Delia's sister and a Mexican Sister whose Sisters, La Salle, a Mexican order!, teach kindly there.



Figure 2 On excursion. Delia is second from the right.

Off we went to the Negros Museum where the lady there gave us a most informative account of the impact of the different invaders, Spanish, Japanese, and American on the country. Wait till they show the Australian story in a few years time!! The story was better than the exhibits but it was still very well done. The Church didn't exactly endear itself in those days with the Spanish clergy very much part of the colonial structure. Needless to say they got the order of the boot along with the Spanish rulers during the independence period which didn't last very long before the Americans took over until the end of World War 2 when they repelled the Japanese.

We had to cut short the story telling in order to continue our excursion this time to the northern outskirts of Bacolod to a little hacienda school which was quite unique for us. This represented the good side of the rich sugar growers who built this little school for the children of the workers and it was still running under private management being very Catholic in tone. The best part of this school were the playing facilities for the kids. You could just about put an oval down there such was the room and the kids were using it vigorously too running

their own form of World Cup while the girls were busy with volleyball and basketball.



This was all after school and they had been waiting for us to arrive! This was our first time to chat to the principal and staff and learn of their utter dedication despite the poor

resources they had at their disposal.

Even though it was getting towards evening we bustled back into the covered ute and then headed off in the other direction to visit the shell house. We were to have visited a shell church which I imagined looked a bit like the Beagle bay Church in the Kimberley, but it was closed for repairs. Instead we looked over the extraordinary work of this lady who did her paintings with shells. The work was even finer than the sometimes consisted of create a texture or were whole friezes of done with the utmost different kinds. For really into this kind of amazing. And her story extraordinary faith that around the corner when



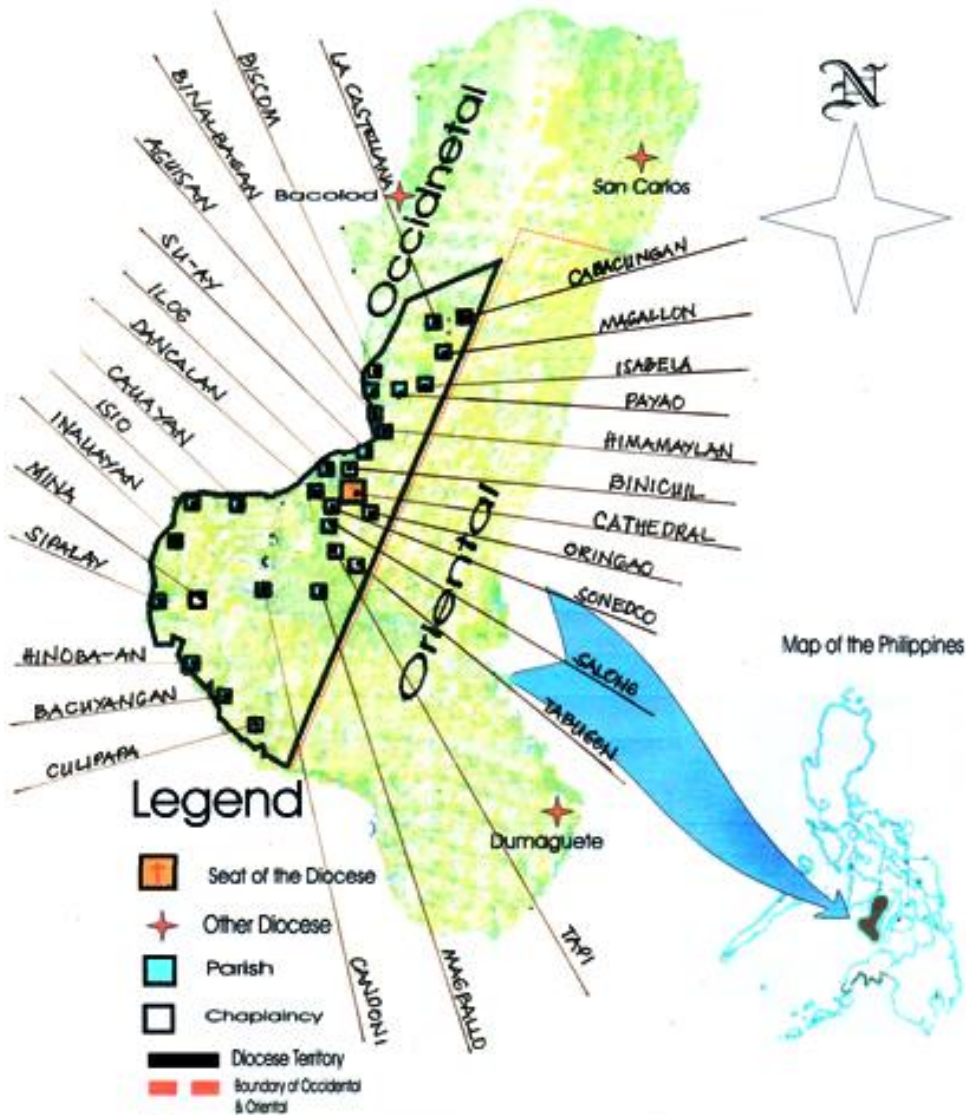
finest of mosaics and just slivers of shell to outline. On her walls designs and art work delicacy in little shells of someone who is not thing it was all pretty even more so. She has finds the next peso just it would seem that all is

lost—especially when some of her clients are not forthcoming with their money! If memory serves me correctly when all was lost she got a commission from Korea or Japan to work on a huge picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe to whom she is very devoted.

To finish off our language work with Delia we took her out to lunch nearby having presented her with an English–Ilonggo Dictionary which has just been produced. We have the second book to delve into when we get the time but even so our main task now will be to engage with the people to get more fluency. It's amazing that with the little we do have we can have a bit of conversation with

people who are very forgiving! But that's more the story of the other three—they are much better than I am.

Map of Negros



The Diocese of Kabankalan was erected on March 30, 1985. It is composed of 21 parishes, 8 chaplaincies, 14 parochial schools and a seminary. It also encompasses 3 cities and 6 municipalities and has an area of 3,423.70 km², geographically mountainous but most areas are accessible by a car or motorcycle.

ON HOME SOIL

So here we now are in Kabankalan having broken our record and been here for a whole week without uprooting ourselves to Bacolod. But we have been doing plenty of moving around all the same. Starting last Sunday in fact.

We took only a short ride this time to a place called Himamaylan where the Presentation Sisters prepared a lovely lunch for us. They've shown the way to becoming indigenised and there were 7-8 Filipino sisters there and one Irish, the senior one. We had a great time with them and the local priests and feel something of the bond which must have existed between our Founder, Eddie Rice and the Presies in his day. He gave them a bit of a start too! One thing I was able to do was help one of the sisters there transfer her digital pictures to computer, being the expert in these matters (ahem!!).

HOW TO FEEL VULNERABLE

The only trouble was that on my way back in the cramped confines of the bus I must have lost my wallet somehow and have not seen it to this day. Once I realised it was gone I contacted Master Card and lo and behold my replacement was delivered yesterday by special courier from Singapore. Now that is a little bit different from the normal run of things here. For example, I went back to the Police Station to get the number of the report I made a few days previously. Traffic Branch in Perth want it for my replacement of licence. First I was told that it would cost me P400 (\$11.00) and I would have to go to the local Taj Mahal which are the biggest offices in town by a country mile. The only trouble was they were closed on Saturdays. But, they said if I were to go to the local market there was some sort of notary there who would be able to provide me with the number. But then the policeman could see that I was a bit put out by this sort of red tape and said just wait a bit. He then proceeded to copy the report out by hand himself and handed it to me! I'm not sure why because I only wanted the number of it. I was able to see that for myself and duly noted it down. He even helped me do that!!

SCHOOL VISITS

I rather think it was the depression I was feeling at losing my wallet and cards which coloured the first of our visits to the schools because it was all a bit of a shock to me. We had been into the grounds often enough to go to Mass in the cute little chapel with dome but open on all sides. But the poor state of the buildings and lack of any redeeming features in the grounds made worse by the new elementary school wing going up was one thing. A look at the computer lab

which could well pass for a junk room was a bit too much. However, to meet the head of the Elementary was a lift. She calls herself hyperactive and she certainly is a live-wire. She has a doctorate but is battling to implement any vision for the school because of lack of funds in not even being able to do a pre- and post-test to gauge literacy levels. She took us on a visit around the classes and lo and behold the children were already occupying the ground floor of the uncompleted building with workers all around them. They are definitely caught in the tension between the now and the not yet! However, what was pleasing from my perspective was that the welders were working into the balustrades a Celtic Cross motif, very much with Bishop Buzon's blessing, as a tribute to the Irish Columbans who had pioneered just about all the education in the diocese.

This is one of two colleges in the diocese and caters from elementary to first degree status with about 2000 students all told (about 850 in high school and college each). The Bishop was keen for us to take over the whole college but we desisted wanting to be a support rather than presume to be able to do great things. Unfortunately the dean of the College, Fr Radny, was not well on this day so we didn't learn a great deal really.

SEEING WITH NEW EYES

As I say I was a bit depressed on this first visit but that was the end of any negative feelings about the educational institutions after that. We next went to Binulbagan another college with even more pupils (3000) half way between Kabankalan and Bacolod. It was possibly the warmth of the greetings from initially Sr Joy, Presentation, and the Principal of the high school, and then seeing a great big welcome in beautiful lettering on the blackboard-cum-noticeboard which brought about a huge transformation in my thinking. Instead of seeing poverty of resources which were still there of course I was now seeing utter dedication, friendliness, hunger for education despite the difficulties, and amazing expertise in people who could have earned heaps more in the government system. Part of the journey around the school was to visit the classrooms and be greeted so wholeheartedly by the students who were as intrigued by us, as we were by their keenness to learn.

Lunch I thought was a bit early consisting of doughy rolls with meat in them—something you would get at a Dim-Sums in Perth and a couple of other dishes. But I learnt later that was only morning tea. Where I was supposed to put lunch was another question altogether!

One of the highlights for me in this visit was having a good chat with the Dean of Education in the College. Her specialty is Reading Education and so I enjoyed sharing ideas with her on that level referring back to my own postgraduate studies in that area and what I had done in Broome. She with the other dean both have Doctorates but they say some of the other staff are lacking a Masters and that is a common problem among the teachers. They just can't afford to do the studies on their P3-5000 (\$140!!) a month and the schools are struggling to aid them. When we met the principal of the next school, Ilog, she told us she received less than her staff, because that's all the school could afford! Everybody makes huge sacrifices to stay in the Catholic sector because it just cannot pay the salaries but they all say the job satisfaction is there and they don't have to move away from home. So it is not unusual for the senior teachers to have been there for more than twenty years. The retired ex-principal has even stayed on to help the new principal who in her turn has been there since her childhood!!



Figure 6 Typical of our welcome everywhere. Just in front of me is the lady with an sos for microscopes. Next to Rod is the Principal who can't afford to pay herself as much as her teachers!

A PLEA FOR MICROSCOPES

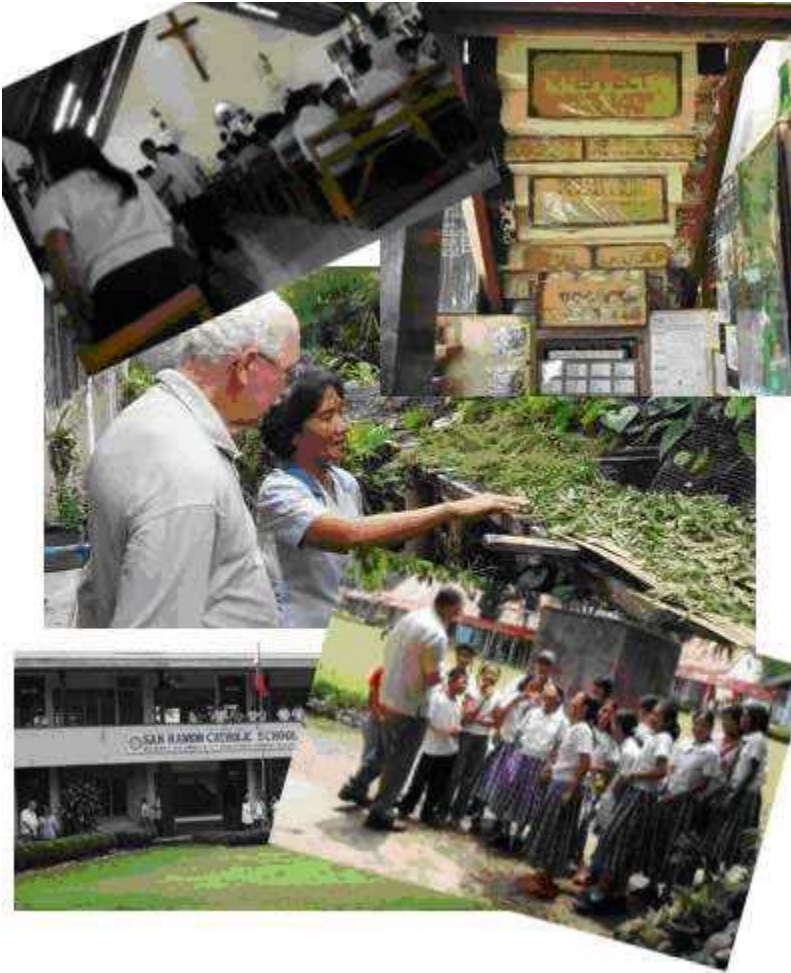
One plea for help really struck home to me. The assistant principal in this school pursued me along the corridor as we were moving around and pleaded her case for three microscopes if possible. 'We had three but two broke and the third now has a faulty lens,' she said. Without promising anything, I thought

somehow we ought to be able to do something about this. So if anybody can do any moving and shaking about this it would be really good. If it's a school which is upgrading and has surplus stock the trick will be to bury one in someone's bag who's on his way here and hope customs are not too interested. The other alternative is to post some money on to our Special Projects account and buy them in Manila. Any help gratefully accepted!!

A LESSON IN CREATION CENTRED SPIRITUALITY AND EDUCATION

But the best news in all this for me was our last visit on Friday to one of the smallest schools on our list with only about 400 kids in it. We got there at the start of a Mass and Baptisms for about 8 of the senior pupils who were transferring their allegiance from one of the other faiths I presume. The participation of all the school in the sizeable church as they all are here was heart warming. But then we walked through the beautifully kept and luxuriant grounds to the very basic school buildings. In my remarks to the staff I made mention of what I perceived as a wonderful unity between Christ, Church, and the environment from what I could observe. That was all the Religious Education Coordinator needed. She spoke at the meeting about this unity in terms of Creation Centred Spirituality which pervaded the whole ethos of the school. And then when I was about to go on a schoolroom visit she gently detained me to talk further on the matter. This entailed a tour of the clinic where they dispense their own herbal remedies to staff and students based on best research from other noted herbalists in this field—I even picked up a packet of capsules myself for constipation using red ginger! (Seems to be working!) Then it was to the drying racks and preparation room which sound flash but which were very basic. But really as the resident biologist, she really seems to know her stuff. Even the wonder plant aloe-vera was there in several pots. She boasts that whereas others might espouse green and clean principles—and they do too very noticeably—they take the whole thing a lot further saving the school hundreds of pesos in medicines.

But enough of that. Time to finish off by saying that the travelling conditions have taken their toll on our computers I think. The space bar on my laptop doesn't work so I have an external one now, and John has stripes going across his screen which his supplier is trying to rectify. And our internet is working pretty well on my laptop but not on anyone else's! But we're now looking at a system of telephone communication which enables us to speak computer to computer at no cost if both computers are on the same program called Skype



<http://www.skype.com/download/skype/windows/downloading.html>

I'm in the process of downloading it now. So it could be a cheap way of saying hello. I'll keep you posted or else you can too!

Our own internet needs a bit of finetuning. I'm fully on line myself in my room but the others can't receive at the moment. Hopefully that will be rectified by next week when our guru from Bacolod will make a special trip down for

us. It did work for a while but since we have returned to K the others can't get connected. So everybody flocks into my room to get the footy results or whatever.

But I've done enough damage to your eyes already and will sign off and see if I can get some pictures ready.

With the very heartiest of best wishes,

Peter.