

*"Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, 'Celebrate with me! I've found my lost sheep!' Count on it—there's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue." Luke 15:4-7 (The Message)*

Tondo is a tough place to grow up in especially the poorer slum areas - the place we are located was described by a journalist as "a place where shanties built from plywood crowd each other inside the hollow shells of old tenements. Teenagers crouch sniffing solvent inside burnt-out buildings. Outside, on the sodden passages that pass for streets, piles of leftovers scavenged from the back alleys of fast food joints are packaged for resale at about 50 pesos a bag..." The description is unfortunately quite accurate, and yet it is here that I witness time and again how lives are changed as our young people are connected to Jesus.

Identity is so important - I always tell our young people how special and important they are to God. That there is no limit to Jesus' love for them no matter if they are at their lowest or most troubled He will fight for them as their shepherd because they are precious and worth it to Him! 'Going after the one' may take everything, it may mean encountering the dangers of the night, confronting those who would harm them, stepping in to mediate on their behalf when necessary, going to them when they are sick, showing mercy when they are substance affected, grace when they stumble. Always speaking truth with a love and respect that has been fought for and earned. But it is this 'shepherding' that without fail draws them to Jesus, the true shepherd.

So in this context - to give them 'gifts of love' care packs at Christmas which contained clothes, shoes and a Bible, communicated to our young people that yes, they are worth it! They are special to God and their lives are important. To speak life over them in this way is like watering a plant - I see them respond and grow as we continue to go to them daily.

*For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.  
(Psalm 139:13-14)*







Life is busy at the moment - a typical day starts at 6am for our volunteers as they prepare the meals for our breakfast club (about 80 meals) which is for our ALS (Alternative Learning System) students aged 14-18, local children who do not regularly have a nutritious breakfast otherwise, and for our volunteers. We have a devotion and worship time at 8am and the ALS students start their online classes in our upstairs office area from 9am - 12pm.

The lunchtime feeding program (350 - 500 meals) continues daily for local kids and for our elderly folk. For many of the children it is their main meal of the day. The economic effects of the pandemic has meant there is higher unemployment than usual - jobs that were once common in the construction and service sectors are now scarce.

I have with me a team of volunteers who are locals - committed to serving their community. Some have done prison time in the past and therefore are street smart and know first hand the challenges faced by our youth in this area. It is a privilege and joy for me to disciple them. They are able to connect positively especially with our at risk youth who are affected by gang membership, riots at night, caught up in substance abuse and running 'errands' for those higher up in the command of their groups. To have a 'Kuya' (elder brother) who knows the life they come from, yet also knows the love of Jesus to bring freedom, is powerful indeed!

### **Ministry Snapshot:**

*Lola Vergie (Grandma Vergie - pictured on right) is aged 76 and the sole carer of her six grandchildren aged 8-19. Even at her age, Lola Vergie will still walk the streets to collect garbage to make a livelihood for her family (wage about \$6 per day). Her grandsons are a part of our youth ministry and ALS education program.*





I have an opportunity I'd like to ask you to pray about. We've been allocated a plot of land by the local authorities, less than a minutes walk from our 'Bahay Pag-Asa' (House of Hope) ministry centre. Bahay Pag-Asa is good for our smaller programs, base for feeding, Bible Studies etc and office (capacity is 35 people downstairs and 25 upstairs).

The land we have been allocated is about 2/3 the size of a basketball court and can fit about 200 standing / 100 seated. As I look at the rubble and trash littered on the site I see the potential of this spot to be a place to reach our community. In particular the youth who are increasingly being pulled in to gangs, where drug use, alcoholism, crime and the horrors of endemic poverty cause our young people to be older beyond their years.

For those of you who have known me over the years, you'd know that Streetlighters showed the power of building relationships over time with youth at risk, earning trust by 'doing life' with them. A holistic approach to spiritual and practical needs. From the drop in center, to the 'hip hop church' services, Streetlighters FC / basketball teams, visitation, life groups, advocacy walking through life's hurdles, pointing them to Jesus as the Hope of our world.

I plan to construct an open plan warehouse type building to use for our larger events including church services. A youth drop-in center where we can connect with them and have a safe space. I see similarities with how Streetlighters progressed with provision each step of the way - a facility we can use and the right people with a heart for God and others.

We will have full rights to the land (being a 'slum' area, there is no official land owner apart from the government housing authority) - it will complement what we are already doing at Bahay Pag-Asa.

The area is literally just rubbish and rubble at the moment. I see this through the eyes of our Father who draws people in to His love. The fire last April was devastating in its entirety however what I see is the beauty from ashes.

The anticipated costs of construction and labor will be about PHP750,000.00 (AUD21,000.00). Please pray with me that I will be able to start construction in early March. If you are able to contribute an amount to the construction costs please let me know.





## Prayer

I am careful not to include potentially sensitive items for prayer (especially concerning criminality) - there is a limit to what I can write in a prayer update. If you are an intercessor and would like to receive more detailed intercessory prayer points please contact me and I will send these to you. Ministry is always busy here and the effects of covid-19 are very far reaching. I appreciate a lot hearing from you - it means so much more at the moment as I cannot travel. To know that I have a faithful team of pray-ers means more than I can adequately put in words. Thank you for being a part of this.

Following are the ways you can pray:

1. **Bahay Pag-Asa** (House of Hope) - Team and ministry.
  2. **Cultural** - Tagalog language fluency - Cultural awareness.
  3. **Favour** - With local authorities and community.
  4. **Finances** - My monthly support levels are lower than usual at the moment and ministry costs higher. Please pray for regular monthly supporters.
  5. **Health** - Protection from disease including Covid-19 and other respiratory ailments common here. For general good health and for rest.
  6. **Ministry** - That many will follow Jesus / discipleship / outreach ministry - protection and wisdom.
  7. **Personal** - family - it is not possible to travel to Australia at the moment to see my parents and family / friends due to border closures & flight / visa restrictions. I miss my parents a lot and would love to see them again soon.
- Personal relationships spiritual growth and walk with Jesus.

*Thank you again for journeying with me and being a part of the ministry here in Tondo. I appreciate you all and love hearing from you. Thank you for staying in touch and for praying. God bless, Tom*



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