

Unity in the Philippine SDB Family of Churches
By Michael Spearl

I was contemplating the progress toward unity within the Philippine SDB family of churches as Pastor Samuels and I flew into Dumaguete, in the province of Negros Oriental. Since the early 1980s, two separate SDB conferences have been active, leading souls to Christ, representing the SDB name in the Visayas and Mindanao regions of the Philippines. The United Seventh Day Baptist Churches Mission Conference (USDB) has been the recognized Conference for approximately two decades. The other conference, the Philippine SDB Conference (PSDB) has also done a good job representing the SDB name throughout the Central and Southern Philippines where Cebuano is the primary language. Both conferences had expressed the desire to move toward unity. The issues from the previous generation that always seemed to prevent unity no longer seemed insurmountable.

In 2013, the leaders of the two conferences met together to discuss the possibility of unity. I remember the meeting well. It was tense. Yet the meeting, at the home of Eleanor Fabillar was a starting point, the ice was broken, and a new relationship, although fledgling, gave hope for a new beginning. At a unity meeting in 2016, the Holy Spirit was moving when the presidents of both conferences embraced. Tears were flowing down the cheeks of those who were present. In 2017, the leadership of both conferences signed a commitment to move toward unity; the decision was made to keep the lines of communication open and to work on building an interconference relationship over the ensuing two years.

In 2016 a third conference formed in the Quezon Province area headed by Dr, Glenn Sales (Sa-les) and Pastor Teogenes Pestolante. This Conference's name is Grace Seventh Day Baptist Manila, Inc. These SDB churches are Tagalog speakers, they love the Sabbath and identify with the SDB family of churches in the Philippines. SDBs now have a viable presence in the Luzon region of the Philippines.

We, Pastor Samuels and I (Pastor Spearl) were scheduled to meet with the leadership of all three conferences. Our first stop was with the USDB Conference at Tabuan SDB Church in Negros. There we participated in the USDB annual Thanksgiving meetings. We were privileged to preach and teach and prepare the USDB leadership for a meeting that had been prayed and hoped for during the previous six years. We traveled with the USDB delegation to Cebu City, where a unification meeting was scheduled on April 8, 2019. Leaders from both the USDB conference and the PSDB conference had invited us, as leaders from the SDB World Federation to facilitate the formation of a new umbrella organization. They requested that we chair the meeting. I enthusiastically accepted the offer. After some wonderful praise and worship, with the Holy Spirit moving among us, those present were ready to forge a new way forward. A motion was presented that the USDB and PSDB conferences unify through the formation of an umbrella association. The name of the new association would be the Philippine Seventh Day Baptist Association. The motion was seconded and unanimously passed by the voting delegates. PTL! The President of the new Association is Sister Nilda Albino, Vice-President is Sister Marian Ferraren, Secretary is Sister Lolete Pasturan, and treasurer is: Sister Elizabeth Vinzon.

Pastors and Leaders at Cebu City Unity Meeting



The following day Pastor Samuels and I were privileged to lead a seminar teaching about spiritual leadership. Joy was on the faces of everyone present. We stayed in the area for three additional days for fellowship and encouragement. On Friday morning we winged our way to Manila to meet with the leadership of the Grace SDB Churches, Manila Conference. Again, Pastor Samuels and I

were privileged to preach, and we were also invited to baptize two new believers.

Dr. Sales, a doctor of alternative medicine, pastor, and the conference president has big plans. This conference is starting a Bible College. The name of the college is Grace Seventh Day Baptist Bible College, located at Tiaong, Quezon Province. Classes begin this summer



with their first five students. The college is already recognized by the government and upon completion of the three-year Bible Course, a fourth year follows that will provide a teaching certificate allowing the graduates to teach in the Philippine elementary school system. This is exciting! Not only will the new college train future pastors, but it will enable them to have a job that allows them to earn a living while staying true to their Sabbath convictions. Please keep this wonderful new College in your prayers. God 's Holy Spirit is moving greatly among the SDB brethren in the Philippines.

Baptism at Tiaong

Dr. Sales, left; Pastor Samuels 2nd from left
Pastor Spearl, rear; Pastor Pestolante, right