



**Bukás Loób sa Diyós**

**(Open in Spirit to God)**

CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC COVENANT COMMUNITY  
DISTRICT OF NEWARK

# COVENANT NEWS

Church of St. Anne - 325 Second Avenue, Garwood, NJ 07027

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August 2022 – August 2023

## BLD Newark



## 30 Years Of Faithful Service

## A Year Long Celebration

On eagle's wings...  
Growing stronger and deeper  
in Christ

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# LOOKING BACK IN GRATITUDE, A 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY REFLECTION

*Looking forward, full of trust and hope*

**S**aturday, August 26, 2023 marks the end of the year-long celebration of the 30th Anniversary of BLD Newark. It has been a remarkable year! It will also be Community Day, the day when the whole community celebrates another year of existence – its 31st Anniversary. Fascinating! Two anniversaries in one. One looks back in gratitude, and one looks forward, full of trust and hope.

The year-long celebration has given us the opportunity to stop and think, to talk about our journey together, to remind ourselves of who we are, and to recognize and appreciate what we do. We have been a community for a number of years blessed with a name – Bukas Loob sa Diyos. We have a mission; and in this, we are one.

We reflect on the many challenges and the difficulties we have faced as a community. We suffered from the effects of the pandemic – illness, isolation, fear and death. We are amazed and grateful that God has always been beside us, lifting us up and bringing us to higher ground. The Community Day and the Dinner Dance last year, and the March for Life and the Medical Mission in Guimaras this year, all of them firsts after three years, were occasions where the community has shown that it continues to hear God’s call, to feel the desire, and to realize the need to come together as one, as a community.

Last October, we felt the pain of having to leave the Divine Mercy Parish, our home for 17 years. We found comfort in the welcoming arms of the Church of St. Anne, celebrating our coming with the First Friday Mass in November. In our new home, we continued to do the usual things– First Friday Masses, Friday Praise and Worship, encounters, retreats, nursing home visitations, soup kitchen, 2K Hail Mary, teaching, PGC classes, and the not-so-usual things– Lenten Retreat, Flores de Mayo, blessing the graduates of 2023, and the Disciples Assembly.

We started collecting stories and pictures for the Coffee Table Book/Souvenir Journal in February and took part in the Holy Spirit Mass & Brunch (a gathering of charismatic groups in the Archdiocese of Newark) in June and the Healing/Anointing Mass in August.

We have reached out to the least of our brethren, to those in need, providing financial support for the people of Ukraine, for the Scholarship of Hope Program of BLD Manila, and for the Water for Life Project, supplying much-needed water from artesian wells to the inhabitants of Paluan, Mindoro.

The momentous visit of Cardinal Joseph Tobin to the Church of St. Anne, where he celebrated Mass for the 30th Anniversary of BLD Newark, will be etched forever in the hearts and minds of the members of the community. The wisdom the Cardinal shared in his homily, and his responsiveness and friendliness during fellowship will remain an inspiration to many. He has blessed us with his presence.

As the celebration comes to an end, we know that challenges and obstacles will come, and that community life will continue to have its ups and downs. We hold on to God’s promise, and keep within us the words given to the Prophet Isaiah: “They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles’ wings.”

God’s blessings on us all!

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# BLD Newark's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Eucharistic Mass Celebration

*BLD Newark celebrates its milestone anniversary with Cardinal Joseph Tobin*



**BLD Newark** received a truly special birthday present on Friday, March 31, 2023, as we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of our founding back in 1992. The Community was blessed with a Friday-night visit by Cardinal Joseph Tobin of the Newark Archdiocese. It was a highly anticipated event which the leaders and members of BLD spent many weeks anxiously preparing for. But as it turned out, there was nothing to worry about, because, as His Eminence mentioned in his homily, “God is in control.”

And truly, the Lord delivered with many wow moments.

The wows began as soon as Cardinal Tobin entered St. Anne's Church, gracing us with his towering presence (yup, he is very tall!), followed by his booming voice in the Eucharistic Celebration's first greetings. The biggest highlight, of course, was the Mass in which he was the main celebrant, concelebrated by our District Spiritual Director, Fr. Joseph Meagher, Fr Robert Lamirez (Administrator of St. Anne's Parish), Fr. Alex Cruz, Fr. Dave Sison, and Deacons Joey Cruz, Eme Anyanwu, Rod Soriano, Odie Martin and John Scansaroli.

The wows continued in the homily that he referred to as his “little reflection” which he started with a short history lesson on the arrival of Catholicism on the shores of the Philippine Islands over 500 years ago. Then he told us about his own visit to the Philippines, and the cities and sites that he was able to see, including Baclaran Church in Quiapo. He even proudly mentioned the work of his Redemptorist brother priests whose “Baclaran Mass” he found in Jesuit pamphlets at a Church in the Bekaa Valley when he was on a separate trip to Lebanon. Using that as a springboard, he praised the missionary zeal of the Filipino overseas workers, adding that he was humbled and thankful to God that the same zeal found its way to the Archdiocese that he leads here in New Jersey.

Touching on the verses from St. Matthew's Gospel, about dependence on God, his next lesson in the homily was about faith. He told us about Charles Blondin, using the story of the first person to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope to describe what it's like to really fully surrender to God. Then His Eminence proved that he had actually done his homework by reading from BLD's very own Community Commitment Statement:

*“We shall surrender ourselves totally to God the Father, to Christ the Son of God, and to the Holy Spirit of God; and we believe that God is the Source of all authority. We humbly offer ourselves in submission and servanthood to God's authority as represented by the Catholic Church in the persons of the Holy Father and the Bishops of the Church. We submit to the ecclesial authority of the Bishop of our Diocese and the diocesan Spiritual Director of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.”*

Then, to add to the wows, he concluded his talk with his own personal anecdote about the time that he met Mother Teresa when he was a young priest at a parish in the inner-city neighborhoods of Detroit. A Mass was

held during her visit to raise funds for the purchase a new house for her sisters and for the homeless that they cared for. He said that he got the living saint “angry” at him, when he exclaimed “WOW!” when the collection yielded the exact amount needed... not ten cents more nor less! The lesson she taught him was about trusting God, that He will provide exactly what we need, not more, because more leads to our forgetting about Him.

Cardinal Tobin then wrapped up his own message about trusting God... “like the lilies of the field... the birds of the air... like BLD.”

After the Mass, a reception was held by the Community in St. Anne’s Bethlehem room, the same place where we have our fellowship every Friday night. There were presentations by the Mark 10 Ministry’s little angels and a testimony delivered by one of our Youth Ministry leaders, Michael Rangel, to give the Cardinal some insights into what Bukas Loob sa Diyos is all about, who we are and how our lives were touched and changed by the Lord through this community. In St. Anne’s Hall next door, BLD members and their families took turns posing in front of a banner printed with all the diverse ministries of the community.

There was plenty of good foods (delicious even though there was no meat, because it was a Friday in Lent). And the Cardinal was truly gracious, patiently posing for pictures with everyone who wanted a memento to remember the special evening full of the wows that the Lord had provided for our beloved Community... now thirty-plus years... and counting...

Thank you to Cardinal Tobin. Thank you to the many people from different ministries who prepared, contributed, and served to make the evening a success. Thank you to our God.



H.E. Cardinal Joseph Tobin, Archbishop of Newark  
with Tony & Tatess Abad, Boyie & Stella Huelgas, Efren & Yollie Cruz,  
Rev. Joseph Meagher, BLD Newark Spiritual Director,  
Reuben & Cherry Vibar, Alan & Tess Cam and Caesar & Vicky Rasalan

# TESTIMONY FROM A YOUTH MINISTRY KUYA

Good evening Your Eminence, our beloved priests and deacons, brethren. I am Michael Rangel, an active member of this community since my family joined in 2002 (so I was two years old). I currently serve the community in the Youth Ministry as one its "Kuya's" and Young Adult Core. Our family, just like other families; come not only from and around the Newark area; Our members hail from a great multitude of parishes and towns across the East and West Coasts. We have communities in Trenton, Long Island, Rockland, Albany, Washington DC, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Reno to name a few and outreaches in Cherry Hill, Orlando, Tampa, ....**all** gathered as One, to **worship**, and to **know** and **love** God by serving His people.

**Our Community Leaders** are made up of 5 Apostolates; Mission, Pastoral, Management, Formation & Evangelization - for us to fully grow and mature in love with Christ and follow "**His Way**" Together as a **community of the faithful**, we answer the call to commit to the "**vocation of humanity**" - where **respect, love, and service** is emphasized, acknowledging that **we are all created** in the image and likeness of Our Creator, **with one goal** to be fully transformed into the image of Our Brother **Jesus Christ**, living by **The Life with His Spirit**.

This **lifelong covenant** and **transformation** are offered not only from the local district level; it extends to our global community in the Philippines, Canada, and Hong Kong where our **Faith and Works** come into action locally and **around the World** as commissioned by Christ in our baptism, "**to make disciples until the end of time.**"

Not only are we diverse geographically and culturally, but also in composition. BLD is a "Union of Encountered Families," as there is a place for each member of the household during our Friday gatherings. When it comes to fun for the whole family, BLD Newark has it all. We have our Ministries across **various age groups**: the **Golden Age**, our **SOLO Parents**, our **Singles**, the **Youth**, and **our children in John 6 and Mark 10** too.... have learned how to love and serve God, **BLD's** second generation, the **future of Our Church**.

My personal experience in BLD is not an uncommon one. Like many, I started in a little ministry called Mark10. Spending those Friday nights reciting bible verses and praying the rosary introduced me to the concept of God the Father. When I moved onto John6, I learned how Jesus is the Good Shepherd, which was integral in my time serving as a shepherd for John6 and Family Encounter classes. However, it was in Youth where I truly understood how the Lord fits into my life. From Facilitating Youth Encounters to being a District Youth Coordinator of our ministry, I witnessed first-hand the impact I can have on the people that I serve. For me, the BLD community is a tried-and-true reflection of God's love working in the world. I am so blessed to share this love alongside my significant other, who is a fellow BLD baby, Facilitator colleague, and someone I hope to take Marriage Encounter with in the future. We currently serve as coaches and Young Adult Core to the younger Youth in our ministry, training them into the servant-leaders that the Lord calls them to be. We also specialize in outreach initiatives, evangelizing the lessons learned here in New Jersey to other parts of the country.

Aside from my family's intimate ties to the medical profession, BLD in-part also provided the passion I have for serving others in the healthcare setting. I am currently a first-year medical student at Rowan University, studying how to care for the Lord's most-loved creation: the human body. BLD provided me with the firm foundation that calls us all to treat others with respect and dignity, a mindset that permeates every aspect of my professional career. I know I will be a doctor that loves others as much as the Lord loves me, and I thank BLD for introducing me to the idea of sacrifice and humility.

To the BLD Newark community, thank you for raising me, giving me a place to grow, and showing me how I fit into this world. Happy Anniversary to our flourishing community that will continue to grow for many more years to come. God bless us all and praise the Lord.

**Finally**, I would like to share with you how God also blessed this community with His **Healing Charisms (not only Spiritual but also Physical and emotional Healing)**. Through this healing, many families have restored **peace** and **LOVE** in their homes.

Our sisters and brothers here will present how the Lord has transformed their lives through the BLD Community by showing you their Before BLD and their PRESENT characters. Everyone acknowledge that we are all work in progress and only through God’s grace and allowing the Holy Spirit’s nurturing and sustaining action each day of our lives can we be truly ready for a life of holiness and love in Christ.

**“THE CARDBOARD TRANSFORMATION” (Presentation of The Community)**

- o VIOLENT - Peacemaker (adult, male)
- o GAMBLER - Charitable (adult)
- o DOUBTFUL – Believer (child-like Mark 10)
- o BULLIED- peacemaker (Youth)
- o Sick – HEALED (adult)
- o Broken Heart - FULL OF LOVE (Single)
- o ALONE - MISSIONARY (Solo Parent)
- o I was Lost ...I found Christ in this Community (Single)
- o CONFUSED – CONFIDENT (Youth)
- o MOURNFUL – JOYFUL (Solo Parent)



Your Eminence, these are **your flock**, the **treasures of the Church** and we thank you for your **support**, your **prayers**, and **most especially for your blessings**.



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# *His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Tobin Celebrates BLD Newark's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass*













## **BLD COMMUNITY COMMITMENT STATEMENT:**

**“We shall surrender ourselves totally to God the Father, to Christ the Son of God, and to the Holy Spirit of God; and we believe that God is the Source of all authority. We humbly offer ourselves in submission and servanthood to God's authority as represented by the Catholic Church in the persons of the Holy Father and the Bishops of the Church. We submit to the ecclesial authority of the Bishop of our Diocese and the diocesan Spiritual Director of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.”**

## **30<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY SERIES RECAP**

### **BLD Newark’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a very special milestone worth celebrating all year long**

The Anniversary Series was borne out of the idea that our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary deserves more than one day. Why not keep the celebration going? Just like the previous anniversaries, the year kicked off with the annual Community Day at Johnson Park in August 2022, followed by the dinner dance in September. What’s unique about this milestone anniversary is that the celebration continued for a whole year. Among the highlights are His Eminence Cardinal Tobin’s celebration of our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass on March 31 and the Anniversary Book being distributed as BLD Newark’s 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year comes to an end and our 31<sup>st</sup> year is just beginning.

The Covenant News also helped to memorialize BLD Newark’s 30<sup>th</sup> year through the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Series, where members shared what the Community has meant to them.

The following are the stories published during the year-long Anniversary Series.

### **Story #1**

**HOW GOD BUILT BLD (Newark) NJ – OUR HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH** - Volume 28 Issue 25 30th Anniversary Edition August 19, 2022 - Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN August 19, 2022 Issue

### **BLD NEWARK CELEBRATES MILESTONE ANNIVERSARY: 30 YEARS AND COUNTING...**

As we celebrate BLD Newark’s 30th anniversary, it is good to remember our humble beginnings and to give thanks to the Lord for His continued presence in our community. It is fitting for us to be reminded of what this community meant to us when we first joined and what it means to us now. Whichever weekend encounters you have attended, whatever inspired you to praise, worship, and serve the Lord through this community all these years, and whatever you witnessed that made you want to have the same, this community played and still plays an important part in your faith journey.

To celebrate our milestone anniversary year, we are kicking off a series of stories and reflections on what BLD Newark means to you. We want you to reflect on your WHY and WHAT. Think about the reason you said YES to the Lord and chose to be part of this community. Why did you say yes to your first encounter, however long it took you to say yes, and the subsequent ones. If you stayed away for some time, for any reason, what brought you back and made you stay? If you have been praising and serving the Lord through this community all these years, what is your why? Why did you choose to be with the Lord and serve the Lord through this community even though it was not easy? What is your why?

To kick off this series, let's start at the very beginning.

This beautiful remembrance of the first years of BLD Newark was written for the 25th Anniversary celebration of 2017 by Roger and Irma Santiago.

## HOW GOD BUILT BLD NJ – OUR HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH

***“Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” (2 Tim 2:21)***

### **ROGER:**

In 1988 I was ready to transfer work assignment from New York to West Africa. The promise of a very lucrative pay and other perks convinced me it was the right move. It would fulfill my highest career goal in the bank and would ensure big savings for my children's college education in the future.

However, an emergency surgery changed my mind about moving. I could not understand what hit me – it was as if someone waved a wand before my eyes as I woke up from the surgical bed and suddenly my mind was rendered blank. Financial gains were totally erased from my mind, and before I knew it, this state of stupor led me to a decision to back away from the foreign assignment at the last minute. This, notwithstanding the consternation of my wife, bewildered at the seemingly wasted efforts I exerted to be chosen for the coveted post and the resulting expenses my company had to incur in processing my family's intended relocation.

Suddenly, what became important to me was my health and that of my family, since living in West Africa would unnecessarily expose us to the hazards of dusty winds blowing south of the Sahara Desert. Somehow, the thought of losing monetary gains did not mean anything to me at all. I felt no regret. Little did I know that God had some other plans for me – not in Africa but in Asia. And I only comprehended His plans for me after 4 years – in 1992!

In 1989, my old NY boss called me to join him in the Asia Pacific region in Hong Kong. I found the place busy and very materialistic. This lifestyle did not sit well with me as I was looking for something higher, more meaningful, something spiritual.

And God heard my search. In 1991, a close friend of mine then assigned also in Hong Kong, sponsored Irma and me to a Marriage Encounter Weekend (MEW) under the auspices of the BLD District in Hong Kong. It was held in the idyllic island of Chung Chao and the priest who officiated our MEW was Fr. Larry Tan, SDB, who was one of BLD-Manila's spiritual directors “on call.”

### **IRMA:**

After the ME, weekly worships and teachings filled our free time, which was over and above our hectic schedule that included attending to our 3 kids' homework and activities in Hong Kong's British schools. Six months after the MEW, our ME shepherds encouraged us to attend the Life in the Spirit Seminar (LSS) so that we might gain access to a deeper spiritual existence. Although worried that attending BLD events would make us even busier, we took consolation in the fact that, three months after that LSS, our family would be going back

to the US again, as Roger's foreign assignment would be ending by then. Our shepherds were happy we completed the LSS and we were joyful that we became more spiritually enlightened after the LSS.

Three months passed and Roger found out that while our kids and I could go back to the US in time for the kids' enrollment for the start of the new school year, he had to stay behind in Asia for an extended assignment in Singapore. Roger was there, alone, for 9 months, and it was only in June of 1992 that he was able to join us in the US for his new assignment back in New York.

When Roger arrived in the East Coast, I hurriedly broke the news to him that Fr. Larry Tan had visited NJ a few months back and had gathered 2 other BLD disciple-couples from BLD-Canada (who also were originally from BLD-HK) and from BLD-Manila, whom he had encouraged to pray about forming a BLD community in NJ. However, since it would take at the very least 3 couples to start a community, Fr. Larry instructed the two other couples to await Roger's return to NJ from Singapore.

So, then and there, we realized how wrong we were to have assumed that we could run away from BLD after we left Hong Kong! And we couldn't help but wonder what the Lord could be planning for us this time.

Then the appointed time came one evening in June of 1992. Roger and I received an invitation from Jay and Salou Sobrepeña who had migrated to the US from Manila some 2 years back. There, we met Andy and Belle Escaño, graduates of ME#1 BLD-HK, who had moved to Canada, where they helped to build the BLD-Toronto community. They just moved from Toronto so Andy could commence the job he was to assume in NYC.

That night, 3 couples who did not know each other from Adam broke bread for the first time. After getting acquainted with each other a little bit, we took advantage of the occasion to hold a mini-worship, the way we were accustomed to do in our respective BLD communities. Andy and Belle led the worship while Salou accompanied our singing of praise songs with a guitar. We prayed hard to discern whether it would be the right time to start a BLD community in NJ.

#### **ROGER:**

The discernment proved positive and in no time, we were in consultation with BLD-Manila head servants. After 2 weeks of regular worship and word reflections, we were able to draw a list of 100 prospective couples whose names we prayed over every night for a possible first ME in NJ. These names came from the different BLD districts of HK, Manila, Canada, and also from our own local friends on the East Coast. After a month, our prayers yielded 18 potential couple-candidates from NJ, Washington DC, and California ... and a nun from NY.

Everything is a challenge when building a community. The biggest hurdle we faced was FUNDING. Trusting in God's providence, we committed to use our own savings and counted on mother community in Manila to supply us with their sharers and priest. PRAISE GOD! BLD-Manila agreed to advance the plane fares of two couple-sharers and a priest – with considerate assurances that we could pay back Manila when we became financially able as a community.

#### **IRMA:**

Venue-search was another challenge, given our limited funds. But God would not be disappointed! At the last minute and climactic in every way, the St. Joseph, The Worker Family Center in Maplewood, NJ agreed to let us use their facilities and quoted us a price well within our estimated budget. To make the miracle even more profound, the facility had 19 rooms good for each of our 18 couple-candidates and one nun, two rooms earmarked for the couple-sharers and another room reserved especially for the spiritual director. Moreover, the center also had a good-sized conference room, a well-appointed chapel, a large lounging area for visitors (our auxies from Canada!), a fully-equipped kitchen that was ably manned by a cook and his staff, which was directly connected to a reasonably-sized dining area. We could not help but praise God for leading us to this venue, which looked every inch perfect for our purposes!

Immediately, we set our plans to motion. We scheduled that first ME weekend for August 21-23, 1992. BLD-Canada came in full force to provide praise and piety support groups, offering their helping hands in the different

teams needed to hold a successful marriage encounter. On top of that, and another miracle, their donation also exactly covered our \$500 fund shortage to fully pay the venue.

**ROGER:**

Our couple-sharers were no less than Head Servant leaders, Sonny (deceased) and Bai de los Reyes as Couple-B, and Assistant Head Servants Joey and Marilou Velez (both deceased) as Couple-A. Our officiating priest was BLD's Founding Father himself, the late Rev. Adorablé "Fr. Ado" Pascual, SJ of Ateneo, otherwise known as the "thunder voice of God." Discerned ME1 Class Coordinators were Richard and Lee dela Fuente as Head Coordinators, ably assisted by Winston (deceased)/Eve Alcruz and Nes/Es Tambor. After 6 months, the Lord sent Donnie and Ningning De Vera (ME1 – HK, classmates of the Escanos) to replace the Escanos as shepherds of ME1 as the Escanos had to relocate to Bahrain for another job assignment for Andy.

To guide the flock spiritually, the Archdiocese of Newark had given us 2 anointed & gifted priests: Fr. Paul Lehman and Monsignor Paul Schetelick. They, along with other guest priests, helped the community grow and mature through worships, teachings, and recollections. They conducted many of our Encounter and LSS programs.

Well, as they say, the rest is history. ME1 had their LSS1 before they sponsored ME2 in May 1993. Then in November of 1993, ME2 sponsored ME3. and so on, following the rhythm of 2 ME classes every year. The community grew by leaps and bounds through continued worships, word sharing, shepherding and teachings, come hail, storm or high waters.

**IRMA:**

In 1993, we had our first set of covenanted disciples, sharers and teachers and started tithing to the Archdiocese of Newark and BLD-Manila. By the 4th year, we were able to fully pay our obligations to BLD-Manila for all the plane fares of past ME and LSS sharers, teachers and spiritual directors and other event materials.

Our growth included having outreaches in 15 states, after 15 years. By God's grace, the community also managed to form 7 groups of pastoral ministries, taking care of the spiritual immersion of our kids in Mark 10 and John 6, our youth in the Youth Ministry, our singles in the Singles Ministry, our encountered couples in the Adult Ministry, our single parents in the Solo Parents Ministry, and our senior members in the Golden Years Ministry.

Wonder of wonders. How 3 couples, strangers to each other – from Canada, the Philippines, and Hong Kong – all earthen vessels, would meet at God's appointed time out of their individual circumstances, one no less miraculous than the other and respond willingly to the Father's call. Indeed, God was in control all the way. His grace allowed us to serve Him and this community from our hearts

**ROGER:**

Lord, thank You that You called us to be laborers in Your vineyard 25 (now 30!) years ago, despite our sinfulness, limitations, and personal situations. It was YOU Who changed my mind not to work for material wealth. It was YOU Who moved me to Asia after my surgery – because it was there that YOU wanted me to know You more and learn to love You more. You empowered us to do what You wanted us to do for Your people and for your glory!

Lord, without YOU, we are nothing; with YOU, nothing is impossible! You used us mightily the moment we said YES to Your beckoning. You wanted us to empty ourselves of ourselves so You could FILL US with Your mercy, Your power, and Your love! This community is YOURS! It IS YOU WHO BUILT THIS HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH CALLED BLDNewark, NJ THAT BECAME THE MOTHER OF ALL BLD HOUSEHOLDS OF FAITH IN 14 OTHER US STATES! We are but Your laborers, Lord -- called at different times! Some of us planted the seed, others watered it -- but it is YOU Who continue to make it grow!

All praises and glory be to You, our Lord and our Almighty God! Amen!

## Story #2

**Why Say Yes** - Volume 28 Issue 26 30th Anniversary – Bulletin Edition August 26, 2022 - Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN August 26, 2022 Issue

### WHY SAY “YES!”

Why say “Yes” to serving the Lord, especially in our beloved community? I feel it’s more of why NOT say “Yes”? In 1995, Jesus saved my parent’s marriage (Marriage Encounter / Life in the Spirit Seminar), my family (Family Encounter) and my soul (LSS). I’ve been blessed to experience Jesus through so many members ever since. Of my time with the community, 85% has been spent serving with the Singles Ministry; in fact, I met my spouse during Singles Encounter #8.

Upon receiving the sacrament of marriage, a few challenges came about, and it was only with the support of this faith community that we were able to overcome and push through it all. While serving, we’ve witnessed miracles among members and in our immediate family, all the result of the power of prayer and service with our brethren. Were there times where we said “No” to the community? Absolutely, but it was prayerfully discerned as we found our Lord had plans for us to serve in our parish.

Fast forward to today, serving as the Singles Head Coordinators, where our term began at the onset of a global pandemic, we felt (and still feel), it would be wrong NOT to serve. How could we not pay forward what our elders of community built, loved, and nurtured for myself, my spouse and so many others, for the love of Jesus. The elders of our community and the previous Ministry Heads’ kerygma was beyond inspiring; in fact, it was infectious. I was spiritually dead and felt I was at a place called the point of no return, but God breathed spirit and life into me, washed me with the precious blood of the Lamb and empowered me to be a shining light in Christ.

Moreover, we are commanded to spread the Good News to the four corners of the world. Jesus died so that I may live...why put limits on service and spreading His love? Can I get Covid while serving? Yes, and I can get the flu, a cold, or a respiratory infection. With that, like in pre-Covid days, I pray for protection and rely on blind faith and take a leap knowing God will catch me.

To survive in this world today, we need the community more than ever and we need each other. The BLD community needs members to thrive, to continue the mission of faith. How can we forget the praise song that brought us healing, or the sharer that was an instrument of encountering Jesus, our shepherds that were representative of Jesus’s love and leadership or the teaching that helped us look into the Word in a way we would never have done on our own?

So, I say it again, why not serve? Why not keep the community alive? In short, do what you can; and if you feel that you can’t, have a sincere transparent conversation and do what you can. Trust God will make a way, He always does. If God’s love isn’t conditional, why should my service be conditional? His perfect plan for me is already written in the palm of His hand. May our community flourish and grow and abound with servant hearts.

To God be the glory!!!



## Story #3

Where Else – Vol. 28 Issue 27 – September 9, 2022 – Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN August 2023 Issue #10

### WHERE ELSE?

*A response to the question of why I'm still active in BLD*

After over sixteen years in BLD, including the almost two-year hiatus from in-person events due to the Covid 19 pandemic, I found myself pondering this recent question from the Word Ministry: “Why am I still active in BLD?” And uncharacteristically, I was mum about it. That was because initially, I was puzzled by it and didn't really know how to answer it.

Looking back over those sixteen years, it seems that BLD was in its heyday. Friday nights were packed, not only at St. Mary's Church (now Divine Mercy), but also at BLD's five other simultaneous worship services – those for the Singles, Youth, Solo Parents, John 6 and Mark 10 ministries. I also still remember First Friday Eucharistic celebrations in the auditorium and how the gym had to be opened up in order to accommodate everyone who came. And imagine this... at my LSS, there were close to a hundred candidates! Then there was that one year when not even the heat of mid-summer could deter folks from coming, even though the Church was closed for renovations and we had to contend with sweltering conditions in the school because the building's AC wasn't working.

Yes... it was easy to think that going to BLD was something to be desired, and I was convinced that I had to do what I could to maintain the magic that sparkled around BLD. And it seemed that many others were like me, sharing that same sentiment.

Now, despite hindsight's 20-20 vision, it's hard to pinpoint exactly when the decline in attendance began. What's even harder to do is to figure out the reasons why.

For me, while I do miss the collective exuberant enthusiasm of a lot of members that the Community used to have, the main reason for going to BLD today, in 2022, is still the same as it was in those early years. Yes, it's still because I find that it nurtures my relationship with God. But I do believe that if one were to look for Him, He really isn't hard to find. In fact, we simply have to open up our senses to Him and His blessings; because indeed, He is - not just at BLD - but everywhere.

So, I'll phrase my response in terms of two questions with these two words: “Where else...?”

(1) Where else...? Where else can I raise my arms in worship to our Creator, His Son, Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit... and raise them up high in total abandon and praise?

If I were to do that at Sunday Mass in my home parish, I could only imagine the funny looks that would come my way from the others there. Sometimes, I can't imagine doing that even when I'm all alone (although I suppose that I certainly could). As I think about it, only in BLD am I able to unreservedly raise my hands in praise... with kindred spirits who are likewise quite eager to do the same thing.

(2) Where else...? Where else would I really be able to add to my collection of best friends?

Here, an anecdote of a recent experience illustrates what I mean. This summer, a small group from our ME was able to go on a tour of the United Nations in New York City, courtesy of one of our members who works there. Less than three years ago, I didn't know him and the other couples of our ME at all; but, as we were walking through the halls and the grounds of this noble institution dedicated to world peace, I felt astounded by what the extension of sincere friendship amongst us had enabled. Yes, because I found myself, in of all places,

where world leaders have sat in the UN's General Assembly Hall before. But more so because I felt the closeness that I know now exists with those whom I was with (and also with those of our ME who were unable to join us on that particular day, and with many other BLD members too!).

Despite the relatively short time that I've known them, I now consider them to be among my very best friends.

Then, while we were sitting in one of the UN's small performance rooms where someone was masterfully playing a beautiful melody on a grand piano, I realized this about BLD – that it's the best place that there is to continue to add to my collection of best friends.

I know you're not supposed to answer a question with a question. But when it comes to BLD, the answer to "Why" is "Where else?"

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## Story #4

**Our Community Journey... Why we are still with BLD 30 years and going...** - Volume 28 Issue 28 30th Anniversary – Bulletin Edition September 16, 2022 - Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN September 16, 2022 Issue

### **Our Community Journey... Why we are still with BLD 30 years and going...**

My wife and I are among the first fruits of BLD Newark. It was during Marriage Encounter #1 in summer of 1992 that we had a momentous encounter with the Lord. 1 Peter 2:21, says, "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps." Our Lord's message was the not the OLD YELL of my Hail Mary School, "ONE BIG FIGHT!" It was not a resounding "CHARGE!" but a gentle and incessant "Follow me!" His recurring invitation, "Follow me!" demanded a kind of leadership, a kind of life, a kind of surrender, a kind of change that measures up to His obedient witness to the Father's will. His was a compelling model, an inspiring "Follow Me" that was contagious. It brought us to dedicate our lives to His service.

As our Lord built His BLD church, He called us to contribute to His work as He enabled us to organize and coordinate our community's Praise Ministry, Secretariat and Word Ministry, and be witnesses during ME and LSS weekends. He equipped us to shepherd and disciple couples who have decided to have a meaningful relationship with God and even brought us closer to Him by anointing us to shepherd a flock of ME graduates towards their covenant with Him. God made us fruitful teachers and disciplers, and we saw ourselves share in the task of building community in its early years. We found ourselves working towards the establishment of a BLD church.

Together with another couple and two couples whom we shepherded in their initial walk with the Lord, we navigated the organization of a district, now a pillar within our global community.

Many years passed, and we found ourselves again confronted with the task of building another outreach. We shepherded another district-in-process for three years. But the roads that led to our mission were filled with detours despite our hard work and perseverance.

Our journey in community may have followed a different pattern from what most had in community. We had some bumpy roads along the way but God in His goodness paved the way for us. God revealed to us what a true servant of the Lord should be. Sure, it was tempting to remain hard-hearted and to get out, to just turn

around and call it quits. But a true servant is never a quitter and will never abandon his work for the Lord and His discipleship, no matter what the turbulence – because he serves a Savior who did not abandon His assignment, even when it meant a crown of thorns on His head, spikes in His hands, and a spear on His side.

After an active role in community building in its early years, we in later years, served as regular members of both Service and Intercessory Ministries. During those years, humble service and a deeper prayer life nourished us in our journey. In total surrender to God, we received the strength to remain firm in community. God awakened in us the kind of loyalty and dedication that should characterize anyone entrusted with an assignment from Jesus, Who deserves the highest honor for the death He died for us and His victory over death on Easter Morning.

Jesus revealed to us that, it is not the position that gives leadership, it is authentic discipleship of following Him despite every hurt, every pain. It is the way we live our life. It is the consistency of our convictions. It is the way we treat people. It is the kind of person we are more than the kind of position we hold that makes one a leader and disciple of Christ.

If we wish things and people around us were different in some way, we need to be that way ourselves. The #1 responsibility of a disciple of Christ is to set the climate where they are. It is not preaching that gets people to move, not nagging, or criticizing, or demanding. It is by giving everyone an example to follow. Remember Jesus' life-changing leadership. Remember, His word was not "Charge!" but "Follow me!"

Discipleship in Christ means emptying ourselves until we are nothing, till it hurts. It means following in the footsteps of Christ, living for others, being Christ to others. It is to be crucified yet to believe that redemption is upon us because God is faithful, never to be outdone, for great is our Lord's faithfulness!

It has been 30 years since my wife and I decided to join this community. We have often been asked why we are still in community when a lot have left and gone their separate ways.

To us, staying in community is to live a life of love and service for God, the least we can do for everything God has blessed us with. It means that when we sealed our covenant, we gave a total commitment of ourselves to the person of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. It meant union of mind and heart and spirit with other Christian couples and their families, in obedience to God, the Father at the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is honoring our covenant as a solemn contract, a solemn pledge, a solemn promise, before the Lord and one another, to live a Christian life through Community, a deepened lay expression of the consecrated life of faith, hope and love.

Today, we are still in the service of the Lord and work as Formation Stewards of community. We continue to bear the responsibility of molding and forming our disciples towards a truly meaningful relationship and covenant with the Lord.

We always look to Jesus for the faith to make us honor our covenant as sacred and to give us an obedient heart to keep it, and the strength to carry it out.

Our Dear Brothers and Sisters, stick it out through the storm and turbulent times, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:57, 58).

The road in one's journey may be very narrow and full of bumps, but it is worth every painful turn, every tear, every cry. And every joy!

## Story #5

**Fellowship of those who have been touched by God...** - Volume 28 Issue 29 30th Anniversary – Bulletin  
Edition September 23, 2022 - Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN September 23, 2022 Issue

### FELLOWSHIP OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN TOUCHED BY GOD...

I recently started a job in a pregnancy center counseling women in at-risk pregnancies. I have found that converting them to a prolife position is not that difficult with the joy of the Holy Spirit and the conviction that everything works out for those who carry their babies to term. Often, the opposite is true for those who abort, especially when it brings them to deeper and deeper suffering which can last a lifetime if they do not repent and seek healing. The women do respond when I tell them that abortion is never a good option and begin to rejoice at carrying their babies, and they discover a whole community of support (Sisters for Life).

Because of this, I began to consider that maybe I should present the Gospel and the invitation to go to Church, perhaps pray the rosary and read the Word. Thus, I was delighted when BLD Global Shepherd Jojo Jalandoni's Sept. 3 talk at Divine Mercy Rahway auditorium proved to be prophetic. Jojo had a wild youth, doing drugs and promiscuity at age 15-30. Then, at the end of his rope, having already committed but failed in ending his life, he saw a tv evangelist praying for a lost soul similar to him. He cried out for help and leaned his head toward the tv as if the evangelist could reach out to him. At that exact time, his sister came with an invitation to attend a Life in the Spirit seminar with BLD, which began his 36 years -and-counting with the community. "You have tried everything. Why not try me?" said the Lord to Jojo's heart. It was this personal encounter, this intimate experience, that gave Jojo conviction in talking about and ministering for the glory of the Living God.

Conviction cannot come before the faith experience because it doesn't come from an intellectual place. Once we have conviction, we can move mountains, that mulberry tree is toast as is any obstacle in our way. Jojo understood that the relationship with God is everything, from where every blessing flows, even unusual decisions like God's marital choice for him-- a fellow Single's member named Koi who received the same calling to marriage—to him!

That we act on these inspirations means we are being Fruitful, Inspired, Renewed and Engaged, the tenets of his talk, Be on FIRE. Listening to the lessons of a layman like Jojo made me recall how my conviction to save these women and their babies has led them in a positive direction, an infinite cascade of possibilities from one protected life. How much more could be done if I would be more inviting in the area of faith: introducing them to a prayer habit, even a church; helping them to hear the word of God in Spirit, in the Bible and in the godly circumstances around us; and then having them really come to the knowledge of God's love and mercy. Then they will see how the depths of their despair launched the beginning of a new and joy-filled life because the Lord has been given His proper place.

This is why I go to BLD—the fellowship of those who have been touched by His hand and now want to cast that net wide to others for their salvation and eternal life.

## Story #6

**WHY WE ARE STILL IN BLD AFTER 29 YEARS...** - Volume 28 Issue 30 30th Anniversary – Bulletin Edition  
September 30, 2022 - Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN September 30, 2022 Issue

### WHY WE ARE STILL IN BLD AFTER 29 YEARS...

October 29 - 31, 1993 was a very memorable weekend for us. That was when we joined Marriage Encounter Weekend #3 of BLD Newark at Daylesford Abbey in Paoli, Pennsylvania.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to our persevering ME sponsors, Crispin (Cris) and Amparo (Ampy) Escobinas (ME #2), who never gave up on us, until we agreed to join BLD Newark, where we met our beloved ME #3 classmates (27 couples) and our class shepherds, Richard, and Lee de la Fuente. The Pastoral Team consisted of Father Sancho Sison, our Spiritual Director, “A” sharers, Tito Eliong and Tita Leah Sison, “B” sharers, Joey, and Marilou Velez, who all did a wonderful job that weekend. With God’s grace, they kept us focused during the weekend, which helped us to have a closer relationship, as husband and wife, and a closer relationship with God.

During our first year with BLD, my husband, Manny, was not able to attend Friday worships, due to his work schedule, so I went by myself. We were not able to join LSS #3, either, so we joined LSS #4, instead. We were blessed to have one of the BLD couple founders as our LSS shepherds. Blessed with the guidance of elders in the community (ME and LSS), who would go wrong? We learned how to read the Bible, religiously; prayed as a couple/family; became more sensitive to other people’s feelings; took every opportunity to evangelize and spread God’s Word; attended teachings to complete the CDFP requirements and when we were ready, we were invited to join the Praise Ministry. It was then that my husband started attending Friday worships, regularly. He enjoyed singing praises to the Lord!

We joined the Family Encounter on June 28-30, 1996, where we had the chance to have a closer relationship with God, as a family. Our children, Ana, and Victor, also, enjoyed their stay in Mark 10 Ministry and later on, in the Youth Ministry. It was only when they went to college that they had difficulty in attending Friday worships.

As a couple, we were discerned to be Praise Ministry Coordinators, which we considered to be the toughest and most demanding ministries we had ever handled. We were discerned as LSS sharers and ME sharers, as well. The first class that we were asked to share our lives with was the class of ME 17, the class that we shepherded. Of the 37 couples who attended the weekend, 17 couples consistently attended the BLD teachings and were covenanted after 3 years. Shepherding the ME 17 Class was a great blessing for us. We had another family, which consisted of loving, thoughtful, generous fun-loving and servant-hearted couples, two of whom are currently members of the District Council of Stewards (DCS) – Alan and Tess Cam (Mission Stewards, 2nd term) and Tony and Tatess Abad (Management Stewards). Others became Ministry Coordinators and Class Shepherds. During our ME reunions, their children would also be around, so their children bonded with each other, too.

As the years passed, all these evangelizing activities in BLD kept us busy. We really enjoyed serving the Lord with all these good-hearted servants of the Lord. However, we can’t say that we didn’t experience heartaches in the process, knowing that here on earth, nothing and nobody is perfect, except Jesus Christ. Being focused on our service to the Lord, both in BLD and in our parish, we can say that the good outweighed the bad and happiness outweighed sadness.

So, with God’s grace, we are still in BLD after 29 years. We could never leave the community, because so much of who we have become as individuals, as a couple, and as a family, we owe to BLD. The community has been a gift from God. Christ is its center! It is where we were formed to be whole-hearted disciples and where we made a Covenant with the Lord to serve Him through our family, our parish, the BLD Community, and everyone we meet. It is where we have learned how to live out the commandments of God and not just honor

Him with our lips. It is where we know Him more, love Him more and serve Him more. ***"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."*** (Jos 24:15) Thank You, Lord, for bringing us to this beautiful, loving, and Christocentric community!

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## Story #7

**God Provides** - Volume 28 Issue 31 30th Anniversary – Bulletin Edition October 21, 2022 - Click **HERE** to launch the CN October 21, 2022 Issue

### God Provides

Back in the early ninety's, I heard about a thriving charismatic prayer community in New Jersey...Bukas Loob sa Diyos (BLD) but I was already actively involved in the weekly activities of a prayer group in my old parish. For spiritual growth, I attended a couple of Life in the Spirit Seminars (Basic and Advance), healing masses, retreats, and other prayer groups' activities in the tri-state area as well as the National Catholic Charismatic conferences and conventions.

I thought, I was well underway in my spiritual journey. So, that when I was invited to attend a Life in the Spirit Seminar (LSS) weekend sponsored by BLD, I was like Nathaniel in John's Gospel miming my own "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" What more do I have to do? Philip's invitation to Nathaniel, "Come and see," drew me in, nonetheless, and I accepted the invitation. I am so glad I did.

I appreciated the "one on one shepherding" of the BLD disciple who was so generous with her time, going through the LSS prep-booklet, praying, and reflecting on the readings with me. The LSS preparation I had experienced in the past was only done in a group setting. I made it through the LSS9 weekend in 1997 and my BLD life began, attending Marriage Encounter (ME10) and soon after that, Solo Parents Encounter (SPE2), and gladly served as an auxie or sharer for SPE weekends and as an under-shepherd to LSS lamb candidates, sharing with them what I had experienced.

I do not drive, and transportation was my limitation. However, I was, and still am able to attend almost every Friday community Praise and Worship and other BLD activities. Truly God provides, and He makes ways for me to be with Him when He sees the sincere desire in my heart. I was often asked by my class shepherds and other members, "How did you get here? Who is bringing you home?" I am grateful to the kind-hearted and thoughtful BLD members who were, and still are, my angels' wings, bringing me to and from the BLD venues and activities. The Lord provides when we humbly ask, knock, and seek help and in faith believe that He answers our prayers. I also learned to graciously accept a NO answer when I was not able to go because maybe the Lord had other plans for me, and sometimes I did not understand.

What is next after the LSS and encounters? Most parish based prayer groups do not have a growth development program in place, but BLD offers another gem – the 3-yr Christian Discipleship and Formation Program (CDFP), a roadmap to discipleship which is not always appreciated because it entails sacrificing some weekends and social activities...Jesus did not send the apostles and disciples out to spread the Good news until after three years of teaching, counseling, sharing and witnessing to them, preparing them to continue His work of evangelization and so must we, BLD disciples. We do need to be properly equipped with wisdom and knowledge before we bear the Good News to others and be fruitful in His works. Through the BLD community, I have learned and continue to grow deeper in my understanding of God's transforming love, mercy, and

compassion and to emulate His Son Jesus' model of servanthood. Jesus said, "Learn from me...for I am meek and humble of heart." I count my blessings for the times I was given the chance to share and witness to the good things the Lord has done in my life, in LSS and Solo Parents encounter weekends, both in BLD Newark and in other outreaches.

During the marriage encounter, I was asked what I got out of the weekend, knowing that the topics/activities were geared to the relationships, concerns, and issues of couples. Did I, a solo parent, feel like an outsider? Yes, of course, especially when they called for "ME position." I observed all the couples holding hands, clinging to each other, while I had no partner to hold hands with. No wonder, the Solo Parents Encounter weekend was soon introduced to respond to issues more unique to solo parents.

But a couple's communication with each other was emphasized during the encounter, and I thought it was a common issue to deal with, not only between married couples but also between solo parents and their children, singles with co-members and the people around them. It is often said that we should not let the sun go down with your hurts unresolved. Communicate and let go of them.

Being solo parents, we have a mindset to be both father and the mother to our children – a notion we were exhorted to erase from our minds during our Solo Parents Encounter. Rather, we were encouraged to be the best mother or father that we can be to our children and to be willing to reach out for help when a father or mother figure is needed. We were also reminded that we are never alone in our changed status; the Lord is with us to deal with our situation. We just need to trust in His greatness and goodness for, ***"He is good to all, compassionate to every creature... supports all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down....The Lord sustains the orphan and the widow"*** (from Psalms 145, 146).

I am forever grateful to the Lord for the decision I made (although hesitatingly) to COME AND SEE what the BLD community had to offer as help in my spiritual growth. I am reminded of what Monsi Paul said during my aspirants' retreat, that we are forever learners. Ask for the grace to be open and accept new inspirations from the Holy Spirit who is always with us to lead and guide us to the path of righteousness. Yes, I still claim to be a work-in-progress even in my golden years. I ask the Lord to continually strengthen my gifts of awareness and openness to the workings of the Holy Spirit in me, so that I may cooperate with His grace to acknowledge, accept, and deepen my relationship with the Lord. For I am nothing without Him. Through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ and in unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory be to the Father forever and ever. AMEN.

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## Story #8

**Why Am still with BLD?** - Vol. 28 Issue 31 - Oct. 28, 2022 - Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN October 28, 2022 Issue

### Why am I still with BLD?

Not often do I get surprised by a question. This is one of those: "You're still at BLD?" An instinctive comeback answer is always there, "Yes, my family has so much to be thankful for." It's the one conviction that we have embraced from day one in our walk with God. Perhaps, a bit too deep for those who never took the first step with Him. So then, when do you realize that you are actually walking with Jesus? Well, I would guess it's when God hands you a walking stick and gives you a mission, when He gives you that hint that will help Him spread the Good News.

My question to whoever may be reading this is, "What did you do when God called you?" You might ask, "God needs help? Really?" The answer is, "yes," ever heard of the 12 apostles? I could go on and on, and on,

but let me just remind you of this: when Jesus cured 10 sick people and only 1 came back to thank Him, what did Jesus do? He asked where the other 9 went? Yes, God takes account of everything He does for each of us. Now, ask yourself this, “Are You the one that came back, or are you one of the 9 who left?”

One particular bible verse struck me so deeply that it led me and my family to where we are now. When we joined BLD, our youngest children were a 2 ½-year-old toddler and a 10-month-old baby. Our ME23 shepherds led us to the children’s ministry called Mark 10, so we could be introduced to the community. That’s when I heard God ask me that life-changing question, “Will you be the one that came back?” I went home, grabbed a dusty bible, opened it, and turned to Mark 10: 29-31. The rest is history. we stayed in that ministry for almost 7 ½ years, then went on to lead the older-children’s ministry called John 6. Three years later, we were asked to shepherd a Marriage Encounter class called ME50. Meanwhile, all of our four children have remained very active, both in community and in the parishes in which they serve. To be blessed with four children who know how to serve God, is a lot to be thankful for, and God, for His part, did not disappoint. He blessed our children with unimaginable accomplishments. One became an Immunologist, another a pharmacist; our third is on her way to becoming a Physician Associate, and our youngest is in business school.

***“In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” (1Thessalonians 5:18).***

Why don’t you grab a bible and open it to the verse I just mentioned, Mark10:29-31? It’s life changing.

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## Story #9

Lost Sheep - Volume 28 Issue 32 – Nov. 11, 2022 - Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN November 11, 2022 Issue

## Lost Sheep

***“For as in one body we have many parts and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering, if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over other, with diligence; if one acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Romans 12:4-8)***

BLD provides a sense of belonging. Because we are a Catholic Charismatic Covenanted Community, our efforts and our intentions are always to help people. As such, all of us have been blessed with different talents, personalities, and gifts, which work all together as one body in humble obedience to Christ. These graces given to us by the Father, can be cultivated by showing up every week, as outlined in our signed commitment and covenant with our Lord. Through BLD, we discover our hidden talents. It is our duty to exercise these talents in obedience to further edify the church. The community offers each of us many ways to practice our talents. Through the Evangelization Apostolate we invite our friends and family to encounters and LSS; we participate in the formation process through the Teaching Ministry. We practice exhortation through the gift of the Praise Ministry, contribution through the Treasury Ministry, acts of mercy through the Mission Apostolate, and ministering through our DCS and Management Apostolate. In essence, there is something for everyone. We are all working toward achieving our ultimate goal of getting each other into heaven, into eternal life, supporting one another through the name of Jesus Christ.

Based on *Isaiah 53:6* and in the lyrics of Don Moen, ***“All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us turning our own separate way. We all have sinned and fallen short of your glory, but Your glory is what we desire to***



*see and in Your presence is where we long to be. O Lord, show us your mercy and grace, take us to Your holy place. Forgive our sins and heal our land. We long to live in Your presence once again.”*

Deacon Serge once told me that being a sinner was the only requirement for becoming a member of BLD. This my “WHY?” the reason I keep coming back to BLD, week after week, to attend the P&W and 1st Friday Mass; it is because I was a lost sheep but now am found through BLD. I have witnessed miracles with BLD brethren who shared their experiences as worship leaders. I have myself experienced miracles working in my life, and attribute those to the Intercessory ministry prayers. This is further cultivated and solidified as we are witnesses to each other through WSC (Word Sharing Circles) –sharing in God’s Word and messages to us for the week. At its essence, it can be described as spiritual therapy.

It is in our own presence, where two or three are gathered together, that we invite His Spirit to be present with us during BLD praise and worship, in the glory and in the midst of God’s presence. With that, God provides many graces since He sees the dedication of our time devoted in prayer, praise and worship to honor Him together in His holy place, our treasure, talents, and charisms to serve God, and giving back the gifts that He has given to us. As disciples of Christ, it is our responsibility to help lead others the way to Him by our words, deeds, actions, and in all ways that others will see Jesus Christ working within us as one body. We leave it up to our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ to lead the flock including, and especially, the lost sheep.

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## Story #10

**Team BLD** – Vol. 29, Issue 1 – Jan 1-15, 2023 - click [HERE](#) to launch the CN January 1-15, 2023 Issue #1- Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN January 1-15, 2023 Issue #1

### TEAM BLD!

When I was growing up in the Philippines in the 60’s & 70’s, my favorite thing to do was to play basketball. Kids from my neighborhood formed a team to participate in the district league. Our team was middle level talent in the beginning, but through practice and teamwork, grew to become a good team and later won first place with a trophy and the bragging rights. I learned a lot about life playing basketball.

Fast-forward to the 1990’s, when my elder brother introduced me to BLD. The very first time I attended its Friday worship, I said to myself, “This is where I want to belong, among people who, without reservation, sing glory & praises to God.” It was the very opposite of where I just came from – the communist Soviet Union, where atheism is the state religion, where children are taught that there is no God, and where morality is not based on God’s love, but on what the society at large deems it should be. In hindsight, I learned that the environment where you live and grow up exerts an enormous pressure on how you will think and act.

In BLD, I saw and realized that its mission was to gather together a group of individuals for a cause that is greater than its individual parts. It was forming a team to compete for the greatest prize and championship the world has ever seen, eternal life with God! BLD, with its programs, was gathering individuals to an environment that is separate and distinct from the culture and society at large. BLD was training and conducting practices that would improve the members strength, endurance, skills and focus. In spiritual battle, as well as in any sport, training and preparation will provide the best chance of success. I still remember the first time I was assigned to proclaim the Word of the Lord in front of all the congregation. I was excited and nervous at the same time, but I was told that when I stand up there, it is God’s Word that I am proclaiming, not mine. At the age of about 30, I was a newbie in the ways of God. Now the nervousness is all but gone, with training and practice, I can shoot that free throw with confidence.

Prayer time, devotion, praising, testifying, service, missionary work: all these are training and preparation. In the beginning, I did not know how the community works; I did not know the playbook. So, I was observing what the first team was doing, and learning along the way. Always listening to what Coach Jesus was telling me. Sometimes he would tap me and say so-and-so needs a breather/a break, get in the game and do the best you can. And I would lead the rosary, join the intercessory prayers, be a prayer leader, etc. The seminars & encounters are milestones; I compare them to playing a visiting team, so preparation is more intense and teamwork is key to victory. We are being molded to compete for the next level teams. It is difficult and I have seen others quit and give up, go back to their former way of life.

Jesus said ***“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** Love for one another is teamwork. When we are not playing together, when we fail to do our part, when we do not pass the ball, when we try too hard to be the next superstar of the team: all these things work against our long-term goal of winning the unfading crown of glory we will receive when the Chief Shepherd is revealed (1 Pt. 5:4).

St. Paul said in *Philippians 2:13*, ***“God is at work in you for his own loving purposes, and he puts the will and action into you.”*** Aside from preparation, training and teamwork, there is also endurance and focus. The game of life is more of a marathon than a sprint. We will get tired and also grow old. That is why the first team needs substitutes, the second team eventually has to step up. The third team should be preparing themselves. Sometimes we need to bring back the veterans, but nobody can be sitting on the bench all the time. When the Coach calls our name, we have to get in the game and do our part. That is what a team do; that is why we were called; that is what our baptism means. To belong to God’s kingdom, to belong to His Team.

Nobody can be beaten unless they beat themselves and quit. Sometimes a person will give up and say, “the struggle is too much for me; I cannot continue this fight;” or “I am not the right person to do this; let someone else do it;” or “I cannot handle the drama or the personalities” (all part of the training). It is at these times that we need to keep our focus and attention on our Coach even more. He has been through this himself. We have to keep our focus on the prize. We have to listen to Him and not the enemy: His words of wisdom, His encouragement, His promises. Jesus has our back; we can lean on Him and on each other. Together we will come out on top. Btw, have I mentioned our cheerleaders in heaven?

God Bless and Go Team BLD! B-L-D, B-L-D!

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## Story #11

**The Grace of Memory and a Big Heart Open to God** – Vol. 29 Issue 2 – Jan 16-31, 2023 – Click [HERE](#) to launch the CN January 16-31, 2023 Issue #2

### The Grace of Memory and a Big Heart Open to God

Two phrases by Pope Francis come to mind when I recall BLD Newark: we are “united by the grace of memory,” and discipleship is all about having “a big heart open to God.” I grew up in this community, and I grew up with many of you. I remember many of the people whom I’ve met along the way, some of whom have returned to God. I remember the places: in the earliest days, it was St. Theresa’s in Kenilworth. All we had was a keyboard and a tambourine, and yet the praise and worship was captivating, even for a four-year-old—and apparently, I initially got the words wrong, singing “He is insulted” instead of “He is exalted.” But God is merciful! It is astounding to look back and to see that out of a small community emerged a large one, with more members than one could name. There are so many memories to cherish, lessons to return to, and dreams to reignite. (As

a side note: it would be a very good idea if community members were to commit to a history project and start writing down or recording interviews of various members to capture as much history as possible!)

Shortly after Francis's election, a famous interview was published, and its key image was that of "a big heart open to God." It stopped me in my tracks when I read it, because it sounded an awful lot like Bukas Loob sa Diyos. I know that BLD has cultivated my heart to be like this, and it has led to some surprising results: I have not been active in BLD since I left for college in 2006. Some may wonder why. I do not feel that I "left" or repudiated BLD. Rather, I am convinced that God was inviting me to bring the charism with me as I pursued God's calling for me. Indeed, when I look at how my vocation as a theologian and lay minister has unfolded, I clearly see the imprint of BLD—and I give thanks to God for you for this reason! I specialize in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and in the place of scripture in theological reflection, and I love being in the classroom. I feel at home in retreat houses and thrive in retreat ministry. I run a young adult "praise and worship" in the context of Eucharistic Adoration. And now I work as an RCIA director and as a spiritual director—both settings that require openness in spirit to God. Hopefully you are detecting a pattern: I got it from BLD. (P.S., one of my dreams is to write a book about BLD Newark).

I want to make a special plea to this community as it celebrates thirty years, but to do so, I'd like to describe what's happening in the ministry God has called me to, and I want to note that they are based on old memories in new settings. For my parishioners, Sunday Mass is their prayer meeting, and I join many of them for reflection on the lectionary readings. For my catechumens, the Easter Vigil is their LSS—indeed, RCIA is the LSS since catechumens are baptized, confirmed, and receive holy communion all at once. For my young adults, the weekend retreat (be it themed or silent) is their Encounter weekend. The experiences are just as vivid and powerful: I still remember my first catechumen, moved to tears as we approached the Baptismal font while chanting the Litany of the Saints. It felt a lot like shepherding another as they awaited the grace of "baptism" in the Spirit. My parishioners talk about how they feel the Holy Spirit at Mass: they are moved to tears, they sing with gusto, they feel the closeness of Jesus at the table of God's Word and at the altar of sacrifice.

Everything that I remember is happening again in another setting. In my own life, too, it has reached the point where the experiences and feelings I used to prize in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (and therefore, in BLD) happen exclusively in the liturgy—of course, not every time, but they do happen. Isn't this a clue to some of the possible ways that the entire church can experience renewal, if only we dare to have a big heart open to God?

My plea, then, is this: have a big heart open to God and turn to your parish and diocese with fresh eyes. Surely the Holy Spirit is ready to surprise us all if we do. And if one feels fear, skepticism, or resistance, remember: isn't the whole history of BLD Newark a surprise? The early generation never could have imagined that BLD would become what it is. They were bold and generous in responding, risking their time and energy to proclaim the gospel of Jesus. That openness took us all over the globe. As we remember the graces over those thirty years, let them remind us all that the Holy Spirit has more in store if we remain radically true to our name: Bukas Loob sa Diyos—or, in Pope Francis's language, if we have "a big heart open to God."

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# 30<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY RECAP, IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR!

## A Blessed and Wonderful Day at the Park (*Community Day*)

On Saturday, August 20, 2022, BLD-Newark's Community Day was notable, not only because we were able to hold this yearly outdoor activity again after being locked down by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because we celebrated another milestone - BLD-Newark's 30th Anniversary!...

[Click HERE for the full story](#)



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## BLD Celebrates Another Milestone Decade (*Dinner Dance*)

A festive atmosphere... check! A great and fun time... check! Lots of food... check! Lots of dancing... check!  
Plenty of pictures... check!

Hearts full of gratitude to the Lord... CHECK!!!

... then that must have been the BLD Newark 30th Anniversary Dinner Dance Celebration!!!

[Click HERE for the full story.](#)



## BLD Newark's last Praise and Worship at Divine Mercy Parish

On October 28, 2022, BLD Newark held its last spirit-filled Praise and Worship at Divine Mercy Parish led by Mat and Precy Yap. Many community members came for the P&W and stayed for the fellowship one last time.

[Click HERE for the full story.](#)

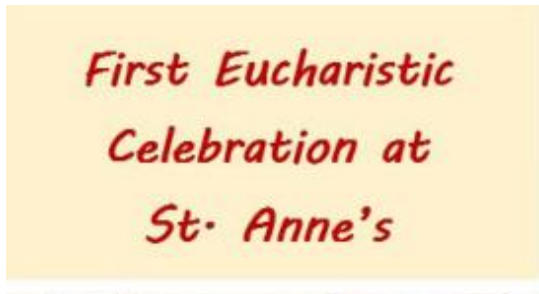
### *Last Praise and Worship at Divine Mercy Parish*



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## BLD Newark's first Eucharistic Celebration at St. Anne's

On Friday night, November 5th, we celebrated our First Friday Eucharistic Celebration in our new home of worship at Church of St. Anne in Garwood. While it is in closer proximity to some, it may have added an extra 15 minutes for others. It is easy to get to from the Garden State Parkway to North Ave. On the exterior, the building itself is a beautiful red brick with decorative pathways to the entrances of the church.



The interior felt fresh, clean, and cozy. It was simple, yet humble. The fellowship area is in the basement of the church with stairs at the front, back, and side of the church.

[Click HERE for the full story.](#)

## BLD Newark Joined the Historic First March for Life – Post-Roe America Theme: “Next Steps: Marching Forward into a Post-Roe America”

Thank You Lord for blessing the BLD Newark Marchers for Life with a Eucharistic Celebration concelebrated by Fr. Robert Lamirez and Fr. Joseph Meager, at St. Anne's Church, before we headed to Washington, DC last Friday, 20th of January.

BLD marchers, 36 strong, included Fr. Joseph and his two guests from St. Antoninus.

[Click HERE for the full story.](#)

### Historic First March for Life - Post-Roe America



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**BLD NEWARK'S ANNUAL MEDICAL MISSION RETURNS TO THE PHILIPPINES TO SHOW TRUE LOVE TO THOUSANDS IN GUIMARAS**

[Click HERE for the full story.](#)

*Annual Medical Mission  
Guimaras, Philippines*



**FEBRUARY 2023**

## BLD NEWARK HOLDS ITS FIRST 2000 HAIL MARY DEVOTION OF THE YEAR AT ST. ANNE'S CHURCH

[Click HERE for the full story.](#)

### 2000 Hail Mary



## WATER FOR LIFE: BLD NEWARK PROVIDES ARTESIAN WATER IN PALUAN, MINDORO OCCIDENTAL

[Click HERE for the full story.](#)



*Artesian Water  
for Paluan, Mindoro  
Occidental*



# ADDITIONAL NEWS RECAP IN PICTURES

## Soup Kitchen



## Youth Ministry Battle of the Classes

## Singles Ministry Visits Alaris Health Nursing Home



# *Life in the Spirit Seminars / Encounters*



**LSS #54**  
OCT 2022

**LSS #55**  
APRIL 2023



**Youth**  
**LSS**  
**#26**  
MARCH 2023

JUNE 2023  
**Singles**  
**Encounter**  
**#41**





**ME #55**

**MAY 2023**



**Solo Parent Encounter #23**

**JUNE 2023**

**YE #28**

**JULY 2023**



**FE #27**

**JULY 2023**



# Disciple's Assembly

JULY 2023



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*The latest copy of the Covenant News is available at  
[www.bldnewark.com](http://www.bldnewark.com)*

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May 2023 Issue - Click [HERE](#)

April 2023 Issue - Click [HERE](#)

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## ~ EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION ~ PRAISE & WORSHIP ~

FRIDAY SCHEDULE	
Holy Rosary	Every Friday (8:00 PM)
First Friday and other Eucharistic Celebrations	First Friday (8:30PM)
Praise and Worship Weekly	2 <sup>nd</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> Friday (Starts at 8:30PM)
Solo Parents Ministry	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> Friday
Singles Ministry	3 <sup>rd</sup> Friday
Youth Ministry	4 <sup>th</sup> Friday
Mark 10	3 <sup>rd</sup> Friday of the Month Starting June 16, 8:30 pm @ Bethlehem Room

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### ONGOING ACTIVITIES

INTERCESSORY MINISTRY	<p>Please join the <b>nightly</b> community prayers <b>via Zoom</b>. Everyone is most welcome to participate. Zoom ID: 2265467380 / PW: 750109 @6:30PM Contact: Ram &amp; Clair Bautista</p>
NURSING HOME VISITATION	<p>2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday EVERY OTHER MONTH – June 10, 1:30 PM - 2:30 PM Alaris Nursing Home, 135 S Center St, Orange, NJ 07050 c/o Alan &amp; Tess Cam (201) 233 6991</p>
FEEDING THE HOMELESS	<p>3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the Month - 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM Sisters of Charity, Newark, NJ Contact: Rene &amp; Claire Monje 973-460-2001</p>

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