

## Philippines:

### Challenges for Prayer:

**Philippines' great economic and political potential** is not yet realized despite a wealth of natural resources, deeply democratic sentiment and a well-educated population. Failures by successive governments to deal with serious economic and social issues hold back development, accelerate unsustainable urbanization and keep half the population in poverty. Pray specifically for:

**a) A government that actively pursues justice and righteousness.** Increasingly, committed Christians take major posts of leadership; pray that they may decisively influence the nation for good. Pray for the Fellowship of Christians in Government, which promotes biblical standards in state structures and among Christian public servants.

**b) The end of corruption and graft,** which has robbed the country of \$48 billion in the last 20 years. A flawed political system helps maintain endemic greed and cronyism and keeps the country's elite in power and wealth. The fact that the Philippines is Asia's most Christianized nation – yet is the fourth most corrupt – is scandalous.

**c) Recovery from the tropical storms of 2009.** A series of storms battered the country, displacing millions of people, killing over 1,000 and causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damages. The aftermath revealed the need for change in a number of areas: government that mishandles disaster relief and assigned relief funds, deforestation that leads to flooding and landslides, and poverty that leads to illegal shantytowns forming in high-risk areas. There are no easy solutions, but many pressing problems.

**d) Much needed reform to land ownership issues.** Most farmers are landless. Changes would hugely improve the lot of the tens of millions of poor. Reform laws passed in 1988 are not implemented; continued injustices produce frustration and violence and perpetuate poverty for millions of farmers. Long-term investment into health, education and other basic infrastructures is also greatly needed, but requires commitment, huge sums and long-term vision by the government.

**e) Peace in Mindanao** among the marginalized, resentful Muslim (Moro) population, the government and the local "Christian" majority. Islamist factions, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, will not compromise. They claim four provinces, two with Muslim minorities, for an Islamic state. Pray for a fair, workable solution that ends the cycle of military presence, violence, kidnappings and suffering. Pray also that centuries of perceived "Christian" oppression might end with freedom and respect for the gospel.

**The Roman Catholic Church** sees much change in the Philippines and within itself as society changes and the religious scene diversifies. Some of the major issues:

**a) Coping with the loss of its position** of privilege and with the decreasing proportion of population affiliated with Catholicism. Some seek to preserve the status of Catholicism in politics and society; others work to oppose threatening movements (such as nominalism, Protestant and Independent groups). Pray for new life to course through the Church and its leadership, institutions and parishes. Over 2,000 Filipino Catholic missionaries serve in other lands.

**b) Large numbers of Catholics** are more influenced by animism and witchcraft than by Christianity. In some parts of the islands, Catholicism is a thin veneer over long-held indigenous superstitions. They need exposure to the biblical gospel.

**c) The charismatic networks** have large numbers and spiritual fervor. Recent surveys indicate that anywhere from 15 to 30% of Catholics identify themselves as charismatic. El Shaddai claims eight million members. Couples for Christ (and now Singles for Christ), *Ligaya Ng Panginoon*, FAMILIA Community and *Bukas Loob Sa Diyos* add up to millions more. Within these movements are many committed evangelicals, but also some extra-biblical superstitions and beliefs. Pray for God's grace upon these dynamic and influential communities.

**Church growth among Protestants and Independents continues**, but not at the rate of the 1980s and '90s. The impetus provided by **DAWN** was an invaluable part of that increase. Growth now occurs in three main ways: smaller congregations plant daughter and granddaughter churches, attendance increases in the mega churches and – unfortunately – churches split. Still, much work remains. Of the Philippines' 42,000 *barangays* (its smallest government/administrative unit), 23,000 have no evangelical church, and these 23,000 contain 30 million people. Pray for new drive and passion in the vision for and commitment to church planting.

**Spiritual vitality does not always equate to biblical truth.** Philippines is awash with sects and cults that blend Christian ideas with all manner of false teachings. Some of these are schisms from Catholicism, some are independent groups that sprang from Protestant contexts, some are effectively neo-pagan religions with a Christian veneer. Most feature highly controlling and manipulative leadership and teachings. Pray for all lies to be exposed, and pray for effective Christian apologetics and ministry to the millions caught within these groups.

**Many new challenges confront evangelicals**, often in significant contrast to the typical Catholic hostility and poverty of earlier generations. Pray for the spiritual health of the Church and the right way to address:

- a) *The perpetual fragmentation of churches.*** There are now over 2,000 registered religious denominations, not including the hundreds of unregistered cults and sects. Diversity itself is not a problem, since there are many strong umbrella networks for churches. Too often, the divisions reflect schisms, broken fellowship or unhealthy and authoritarian leadership patterns.
- b) *The lack of discipleship and solid biblical teaching*** for new believers and new congregations. Frequently, the results are lack of fellowship with other groups, erroneous beliefs, a syncretistic worldview and superficiality.
- c) *Spiritual complacency and second-generation nominalism.*** Growing in maturity and depth needs to take priority over mere numbers. The “arrival” of evangelicals as a force in the Philippines must not spawn apathy. Pray for new vision and for a new direction from God for setting biblical priorities and goals.
- d) *Poverty in many congregations*,** especially rural ones. Churches often take one of two extremes – either unhealthy health-and-wealth teachings or equally destructive dependence on foreign funds and sponsorships. Pray that Filipinos in stronger financial positions might assist their less-well-off brethren. Pray that Christian organizations find and implement sustainable ways to empower and uplift the poor in churches. Pray also for loving sensitivity to this on the part of foreign workers and donors seeking to help.

**Leadership development** is a priority. Praise God for many Filipino leaders with national and international influence. Yet, even the more than 100 seminaries and Bible colleges and numerous TEE courses have not kept pace with the need. Splits and schisms – often led by those with minimal training and little accountability – have led to doctrinal distortions and moral failures. Many see formal training as an unaffordable luxury or an unnecessary distraction. Graduates are often reluctant to serve in needier rural areas; many emigrate to the USA. Thousands of rural congregations languish without adequate leadership; thousands of pastors struggle to

survive on the meager offerings of their congregations. Pray for such institutions as the Alliance Bible Seminary (**CMA**), Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary (**IMB**), ATS, FEBIAS (**SEND**), APTS in Baguio (**AoG**), and IGSL (**CCCI**). TOPIC plays a key role in equipping Christian leaders in the Philippines. Pray that God may continue to raise up godly, committed leaders.

**The Filipino Church** is now a significant missionary-sending Church. With over 50,000 evangelical congregations and a widespread Diaspora, the potential is great.

Filipino cultural flexibility, resilience in difficult environments, good education, language skills (including use of English) and positive foreign relations all weigh heavily in favor of Filipino missionaries. Pray for:

**a) *The Philippine Missions Association.*** The PMA is a coordinating body for most of the mission agencies based in the country. Pray for effective national and international networking to maximize the impact of this movement, crucial to world evangelization.

**b) *Growth of this vision,*** that it be embraced by local churches – with all the supportive implications. The PMA seeks to raise up 25,000 mission-supporting congregations by the end of 2010.

**c) *Major Filipino sending agencies:*** CAMCOP(CMA), Free Believers in Christ, Philippines Missionary Fellowship, Tribes and Nations Outreach, RCMH, Hosanna, Christ to the Orient, AoG, Asian Center for Mission, FIFCOP, Church of God, Philippine Frontline Ministries, Victory World Mission, Church of the Foursquare Gospel. There are also significant numbers of Filipinos serving with international mission agencies: CCCI, SdA, YWAM, OM, AEF, WV, International Teams, OMF.

**d) *The PMA goal*** of sending out 5,000 cross-cultural missionaries. About 3,300 are already on the field. They also seek to raise up 2,000 mobilizers, 200,000 Filipino tentmakers and 500,000 mission intercessors; pray for the fulfillment of these ambitious and faith-filled goals.

**e) *Missionary training.*** Praise God for programs such as Asian Center for Missions (ACM) in eight locations, Great Commission Missionary Training Center, School of Frontier Missions and Cross-Train, where many Filipinos prepare for missionary service. Pray for the further development of these programs; such preparation will be essential if the above mobilization goals are to be met.

**Expatriate missionaries** see their role changing rapidly as the Philippine Church matures. Praise God for all achieved! However, much remains unfinished, and outside assistance is welcome. Pray for wisdom for expatriate Christians in finding the most appropriate roles for this time, for wise input from Filipino Christian leaders and for fruitful partnerships between expats and nationals. The largest mission agencies: **WBT, AoG, NTM, GMS, PCThap, OMF, AI, KBC, KMCBM, YWAM.**

**Metro Manila is a mega-city** of 11 million, with the Greater Manila area totaling up to 20 million. It faces enormous challenges, but God is working greatly here. As many as 15% of the population are linked to an evangelical church, but a big proportion come from outside Metro Manila. Pray specifically for:

**a) *The poor.*** Modern ministry to the urban poor was pioneered in Manila. One-third of the NCR live in 1,000 or more slums and squatter communities – the kind devastated by the storms of 2009. Of these, nearly 50% still have no evangelical church. Many slums are built on the city's dumps, since over 4,000 tons of garbage are produced in Greater Manila every day. Many living in these areas are very receptive to the gospel, but most evangelical churches are in the more affluent areas.

**b) *Those that minister to the poor.*** Many cooperative efforts linking national and international agencies and churches have sprung up, such as the National Coalition for Urban Transformation (NCUT) which links denominations to facilitate urban improvement. The Alliance of Christian Transformational Agencies and Mission Ministries Philippines are interagency networks aiming at innovative ministries for the poor. Special mention must be made of the ministries of **AI**, Servants to Asia's Urban Poor and **IT**. Pray for discernment for effective ministry, for eternal fruit and for viable churches that impact the city.

**c) *The rich.*** Manila is home to those who control most of the nation's wealth. Possibly over 75% of the GDP lies under the thumb of the elite who congregate in Greater Manila's wealthiest neighborhoods. They are isolated from the gripping poverty of millions of their neighbors. But they have the potential to transform not only Manila but also the entire nation. Pray for the gospel to impact these wealthy elite and for them to use their formidable resources to build God's Kingdom in the Philippines.

#### **Special ministry challenges:**

**a) *Students,*** over 2.5 million in 1,800 tertiary colleges and universities. Many agencies are involved:

**CCCI** with vision for Christian movements on 125 campuses nationwide, **IVCF(IFES)** with 42 staff in ministry on 125 campus chapters, Navigators, **AoG** and others. There are also many locally initiated student ministries such as Student Missionary Outreach and Student Movement for Christ International. Pray for effective evangelical cooperation, multiplication of conversions and the development of a nationwide student missions movement.

**b) Children.** More than half of the population are under age 20. **CEF** has over 120 workers with ministry for school children in 55 areas. However, 24% of school-aged children are unable to attend school; most either work or have no local school. There are 75,000 street kids in Manila alone. Action International, International Teams and World Vision are just three of dozens of ministries focused on children.

**c) Sex trade workers.** Up to 100,000 children and 400,000 women are involved, many of them trafficked to other countries. The sex industry is apparently the fourth largest source of income. Pray for all involved (**YWAM**, Jubilee Action and others) in rescuing, rehabilitating and disciplining these tragic victims of sin.

**The major export of the Philippines is people.** Filipinos are rich in skills but work opportunities are few, even for university graduates. Over 8.1 million live abroad. Of those, over four million work in Asia, the Middle East and Europe, often as nurses, engineers, seamen, domestic servants, nannies and menial workers. Many go to difficult and “closed” countries to be witnesses for Christ, and some suffer much for the gospel. Pray that all Christians may shine for Him. Pray that the unconverted may hear the gospel; especially pray for the 245,000 Filipino seamen scattered around the world (the largest number from any nation).

**Pray for the less-reached peoples and areas.** Great progress has been made in reaching out to isolated tribal peoples all over the islands, so much so that of the 17 remaining indigenous and unreached peoples, only two of them practice mainly tribal religions. The rest are Muslim. Pray for the Church to be stirred up in loving concern for Muslims and led into wise ways of reaching them.

**a) Mindanao has a healthy number of evangelicals,** but growth slowed recently and revival is needed. Continued violence between government forces and Muslim rebels, and deep resentment of the Magindanaw, Maranao and Iranun, are all major obstacles to witness. Christian concern for them increased, and now over 200 (mainly Filipinos) work among them, often in highly dangerous situations. Increasing numbers have been won to Christ and over 100 house churches planted. Pray for these believers who face great pressures. **OMF, SEND, TEAM, SIM** and others have ministry to them.

**b) The Sulu Islands,** between Mindanao and Borneo, are the home of the Muslim Tausug, Sama(3), Sinama and Yakan peoples. There is a significant breakthrough among the Sama Bajau Sea Gypsies who moved to urban areas of the region. They now take the gospel back to their home areas.

**c) Palawan** – a long, isolated island – is rapidly developing, with many new Tagalog and Muslim immigrants. Through the ministry of **NTM**, these have responded: the indigenous Palawano groups, three Tagbanwa groups and plains Cuyunon. Much Bible translation work is completed, and churches are planted. The remaining challenge is to see more spiritual fruit among these: the superficially Muslim Molbog on Balabac and surrounding islands, the Batak, Brooke’s Point Palawano and Sama Mapun on Cagayan Island. Recent response and growth among the Molbog and Batak are encouraging. Praise God for some beginnings among these peoples.

**d) Luzon.** Praise God for church growth in the north-central mountainous area, where many of its peoples – the Ifugao, Bontok, Kankanay, Kalinga and Isnag – see the beginnings of people movements from animism to Christ. The Bicol region remains the neediest, with Albay, Camarines Norte and Catanduanes provinces having the lowest evangelical percentages. Many small, semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer Dumagat (Agat, Alta, Arta, Ayta, other) peoples live on the typhoon-lashed, rugged north and northeast coastal mountains of Luzon. Few are Christian, and the task of church planting is complex. **NTM** makes a large investment of personnel among these peoples.

**e) Visayas** is in some ways the most needy region of the country. Christianity is widespread, but too often very nominal. The islands of Samar, Cebu and Leyte all see growth but remain well below the national average for evangelical presence. Widespread poverty often combines with a lack of hope to create a toxic socio-economic climate.

**Ethnic minorities:**

**a) The Chinese** number nearly a million. Most are wealthy targets of much crime and kidnapping. Many are Catholic, but only 2-3% are evangelical Christians. Some of the Philippines' oldest Protestant churches are Chinese in makeup. The challenge of reaching out to both the younger generation of Chinese-Filipinos and the newly arrived Chinese from the mainland needs prayer.

**b) South Asians.** Among the Punjabis, many are Sikh (21,000); others are Muslim and Hindu. Among the 12,000 Sri Lankans are both Tamil and Sinhalese. Pray for spiritual breakthroughs among them, and that the few believers may multiply. Pray for the few Christian workers trying to reach them (**Christar**).

**Christian support ministries for prayer:**

**a) The Philippine Bible Society.** The PBS(UBS) is extensively involved in translation, production and promotion of the Bible. Millions of Bibles, NTs and portions are distributed every year. Pray for the Bible to make a deep and lasting impact on lives.

**b) Bible translation** has been and continues to be a major ministry of a number of agencies. Of special mention are SIL and **WBT**'s affiliate organization, The Translators Association of the Philippines. By 2010, 25 Bibles and 67 NTs were completed. There are another 54 active projects and 14 more with translation needs.

**c) Literature** is extensively used by Christians. Nearly 50 denominational and nondenominational literature agencies print, publish and distribute. Pray for the work started by **OMF** (publishing house and network of more than 50 bookstores), **CMA**, **CLC** and others. There are more than 100 Christian bookstores in the country. The use of Bible comic books is effective in reaching youth.

**d) The ministries of EHC and the Bible League** have significant impact. **EHC** has distributed more than 54 million gospel booklets through the country. The Bible League has sent out over 8.5 million Bible Correspondence Courses and provided Bibles for discipling, leading too many conversions and hundreds of new churches.

**e) GRN** has prepared messages in 137 of the nation's languages.

**f) Christian radio.** **FEBC** and **TWR** between them broadcast over 2,000 hours of programming a week in 20 languages for the Philippines. This is in addition to the many local Christian radio stations, both Catholic and Protestant/Independent. Pray for the effectiveness of these broadcasts in reaching unbelievers and in helping disciple believers. Pray also for the fruitfulness of outgoing shortwave broadcasts to Asian countries and regions more difficult to access – especially China, Siberia, Indochina and Myanmar.

**g) Christian television.** Christians make widespread use of radio and TV, including the charismatic networks within the Catholic Church. Few countries have more extensive Christian television coverage. A Pentecostal TV Channel, Zoë Broadcasting (Jesus is Lord Church), is one of the more prominent evangelical channels in operation full-time.

**h) The JESUS film**, available in 36 languages, has been seen by around 75% of the population. In a recent initiative, all of the country's 122,000 police officers received a copy of the film on DVD.

**i) Internet usage** is growing rapidly in the Philippines, and many ministries and churches extensively exploit this medium to spread their message. From online communities to web streaming TV to podcast sermons to Bible studies, the dynamic and technologically savvy Filipino Church is making a powerful redeeming impact via the web.