

MOUNTAIN VIEW COLLEGE OUTREACH

SULADS is a Manobo word meaning “brothers.” It is also the acronym for the student missionary program at Mountain View College (MVC), which reaches out to the indigenous tribes in the surrounding mountains of the Philippines.¹

The Manobo, a warlike tribe in the highlands of the Bukidnon province in the south Philippines, subsist largely on roots, frogs, snakes, and whatever game they can find. For generations, the Manobo, a colorful people who enjoy music and dancing, have chosen to remain isolated from the lowlanders, resisting influences of the mainstream Philippine society. As animists, they worship the trees, rocks, and rivers in their surroundings.

Efforts to reach out to the Manobo began in 1969, when James Zachary, then chair of the religion department at MVC, sought to take students into the mountains to work for the betterment of the primitive tribes. Villages were contacted and student missionaries volunteered to spend a year in a village, teaching agricultural methods, personal hygiene, and biblical values. As a result, young and old learned to read and write, and many accepted the gospel. The first to be baptized was the datu (chief) of the village of Dampaan. In the past 20 years, some 150 MVC students have been involved in the program.²

Although the program became less active around 1990, it never died out entirely. Rather, it continued to live on in the hearts of graduates who had served in the mountain villages. In 1994, stimulated by some of these veteran student missionaries, the program was revived under the leadership of Daryl Famisaran, Fred Webb, and others.

The SULADS program has now devel-

Picture Removed

SULADS student missionaries and sponsors.

oped 25 village schools, serving not only the Manobo, but also the T’boli, Talaandig, Higaonan, and Muslim people groups. Many of these schools have been opened because individuals in the villages have had dreams³ that instructed them to look for lowlanders who would teach them about healthful living and “Sabado,” the day of rest.

While working in SULADS, each MVC student receives a small monthly stipend for living expenses⁴ and a one-year scholarship when he or she returns to the college. This year, 54 student missionaries are serving in the program, with two usually being stationed in each village.

When the student missionaries arrive at a village that has requested their help, they spend their first few days getting acquainted with the leaders and people and assessing their needs—usually in the areas of sanitation, personal hygiene, nutrition, and literacy. Then they begin the process of education, teaching largely by example. They brush their teeth and wash in public

so that the villagers may observe them. They gather everyone to watch them dig a pit latrine. They plant gardens and make certain that the villagers see them eat the vegetables they have grown. Worship services are conducted with much singing, and the villagers are invited to join.

Soon the student missionaries organize a school for the children and literacy classes for the adults. The villagers construct the building from local materials. Within the year, a large proportion of the formerly illiterate villagers can read simple words, write their names, and perform basic calculations.

The student missionaries are often called upon to perform special duties such as conducting funerals, caring for the sick, and arranging for mass weddings—up to 41 couples at a time—so that the children may legally obtain birth certificates. They have also faced life-and-death situations involving family feuds and rebel factions, but they have remained at their post of duty.

As the result of the SULADS program, entire villages have been transformed, and hundreds have learned to read and write in their local dialects as well as in Visayan, the regional language. The program has even caught the attention of the national government. In 1997, the SULADS program was awarded the Most Outstanding Literacy Program in the Philippines and its director, Daryl Famisaran, was selected as the Most Outstanding Literacy Worker in the nation.

The villagers themselves have been deeply impressed. The datos of the SULADS villages, for example, have formed an organization to defend the interests of MVC among their fellow tribesmen. Five SULADS leaders have been ordained by the villagers as official datos—a great honor, as datos are usually only chosen from among the tribe itself.

The effects of the SULADS program, however, go beyond literacy, nutrition, and sanitation. Many of these villagers have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour. In the past three years, the student missionaries have been responsible for at least 1,500 baptisms.

The experience has also brought profound changes in the student missionaries themselves. Entering the tribal villages, braving the challenges, learning the language and culture, and seeking to uplift others has resulted in a fresh outlook, new directions, and renewed commitment. “As I worked as a student missionary,” Lawrence Veloso says, “I felt the presence of Christ. I will go anywhere He wants me to go.” Darlene Gersava adds,

Picture Removed

A happy student at a SULADS school.

“I, too, have learned to trust God with all my life.” The continuing commitment to SULADS is seen in its alumni, many of whom are now serving as conference administrators, pastors, and teachers of the Adventist Church in the Philippines, who have determined to regularly give a part of their salary for the support of SULADS.⁵

Perhaps the spirit of the SULADS program is best summed up by student missionary Desiree Mercier: “We must not only give what we have; we must also give what we are.” ☞

For additional information, contact John Wesley Taylor V, Chair of the Education Department at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS), Silang, Cavite, Philippines at taylor@aiias.edu or Fred Webb, Finance and Development Consultant at Mountain View College, Bukidnon, Philippines, at flwebb@mlbly.philcom.com.ph.

NOTES

1. SULADS stands for “Socio-economic Uplift Leading to Anthropological and Development Services.”

2. During this time, some of the Manobo tribesmen enrolled for further training at MVC and have now returned to teach their people.

3. “In my dream,” says the datu of the Higaonan village of Bagasbas at Mt. Salayan, “I saw a Man in pure white floating in the air. With smiling face, He gave instructions with authority in His voice. ‘Aren’t you tired of the troubles in your village?’ He asked. The Stranger was referring to problems in our village of killings, stealing, immorality, and disease. ‘Follow my instructions, so that there will be peace in your village. First, worship on the seventh day which is the day you call Sabado. Forget

Picture Removed

Children from SULADS schools on parade at jamboree.

your old ways—worshipping the spirits in the caves, rivers, and trees. Worship only the God in heaven. Second, eat only the right kind of food for the health of you and your people. You get sick by eating anything you want to eat. Eat no more unclean things. You should eat more fruits, vegetables, grains, and nuts. Third, tell your people to stop buying alcohol and cigarettes from the lowlanders. These are the things that bring trouble to your village. Fourth, prepare now because very soon you will be visited by some lowlanders who will teach your children and your people more about many things you do not know yet. You should start making a school building now.” The villagers of Bagasbas have been worshipping every Sabbath since the datu had this dream. A school has been built and Miller Orbeta, a second-term MVC student missionary, is now living in the village. Similar incidents have taken place in other villages over the past few years.

4. The stipend of approximately US\$40 per month must cover all expenses—food, lodging, travel, health insurance, personal items, materials for the school, and medical supplies for the villagers. A scholarship to MVC amounts to about U.S. \$600.

5. The SULADS program has been funded primarily through individual donations. If you would like to support this ministry, send your contribution to: SULADS, Mountain View College, 8709 Valencia, Bukidnon, Philippines. If you would like a U.S. tax-deductible receipt, you may send the donation through the Quiet Hour (Box 3000, Redlands, CA 92373) or the Adventist Mission Society of America (c/o Atty. John Tulio, 2411 S. Azusa Ave., West Covina, CA 91792). The leaders of SULADS will be happy to send you *Uplift*, the program’s official quarterly publication.