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Dear Friends,

One question I am often asked is if I plan to bring the Lingap kids to the U.S. for school or for career opportunities. The answer is that I hope they will stay in the Philippines and become agents of change within their home country. The entire focus of the Lingap Center is to enable children to grow up in a place of safety and security, with food to eat, people to love them and to be able to attend school and church. A number of years ago, we expanded our education program to include vocational training and college. As of this writing, we have had 36 wards who have gone on to receive vocational licenses or college degrees. At the Center, we also teach them welding, cooking, music, the arts – many things that are not available in the schools. So, if they have all these skills, why don't I want to bring them here?

Poverty in the Philippines is rampant and cyclical. Many of the children who come to us believe that since their grandparents and their parents lived in poverty, they undoubtedly will too. It becomes a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. We are working very hard to help them to develop a belief in themselves. Since we continually reinforce the message that “helping others is the greatest gift that they can give themselves,” they clearly understand the significance of helping others. But now, combined with a renewed belief in themselves, it is our hope that they will in turn, become role models for the other Lingap wards and people in the community to follow.

It is my wish that the Lingap kids will grow up to be the leaders in their community, passing along Lingap values to future generations. I am very hopeful that they will be the ones who will ultimately help to break the seemingly endless cycle of poverty that abounds in their country. So, how do we do that? How do we get them to believe in themselves and then strive to make their communities a better place to live and want to continue to live there? It takes pride in their culture, pride in their community, and pride in themselves!

The Philippines has a very rich and colorful culture. We strive to involve the children in as many community activities as possible. They are very actively engaged with the church as acolytes (*altar servers*) and the choir for the Sunday morning Masses at St John de Sahagun Parish. On the 3rd Sunday of January each year, the annual Sinulog Festival is celebrated. It is the grandest festival in the Philippines with the island of Cebu at the center of the celebrations. Similar, smaller versions are held in other cities and municipalities (*such as Toledo City*). Sinulog is a dance ritual to praise, worship and honor Snr. Sto. Nino (the Baby Jesus), the Patron of Cebu. It commemorates the time Filipinos first embraced Christianity when a statue of the Santo Nino was given to the chieftain of Cebu, Rajah Humabon, by the Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. It is an



*Sinulog Honors Santo Nino - the baby Jesus*



*Sinulog Dance - the forward and backward movements resemble the flowing of a river and yes, they made these costumes*

into the dark mists of history. As a result, the festival was reinstated this year. The kids (*and staff*) were more than excited. They made all of their own costumes (*except the dresses*) and marched in the parade. The kids danced with flowers and candles and making it even more special was that it was the first such event in three years! The kids were terrific representatives of the Lingap Center. This helped to generate a sense of pride in themselves, pride their community and pride in their culture.

Sinulog is just one example of the proud heritage and rich culture of the Philippines. It is a culture that I want the kids to fully understand and embrace. I want them to be able to proudly step forward to become the leaders of tomorrow. I hope they will work within their communities to implement change, which is the first step in breaking the relentless cycle of poverty to make the Philippines a better place to live for everyone.

I have always enjoyed studying other cultures and I remember a quote from one of my classes many years ago that went like this:

***“The greatness of a culture can be found in its festivals.”***

The Lingap Center and the kids are a ‘work in progress’ but we have come so very far from where we started. It is thanks to people like you who have made it all possible. Thank you so much for helping to give the Lingap kids a chance at a brighter future in their home country.

Sincerely,

John Drake

incredibly spectacular display of colorful costumes and flowers, floats and special Sinulog dancing, including parades throughout the cities. Thousands of visitors flock to Cebu for the event. The colorful costumes are symbolic of pleasing the baby Jesus. The forward and backward dance movements are said to resemble the flowing of a river, in fact, the word Sinulog comes from the Cebuano word ‘sulog’ which means “like water current movement.”

Sadly, due to COVID, Sinulog has been canceled for the past few years. But I am delighted to report that the pandemic and the ravages of the horrific December 2021 Typhoon Odette are now fading



*Dancing in the Parade*