

# *Church Triumphant*

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## ***“I WILL SING A NEW SONG TO YOU, O GOD...WHO GIVES SALVATION TO KINGS” Ps. 144:9-10 NKJV***

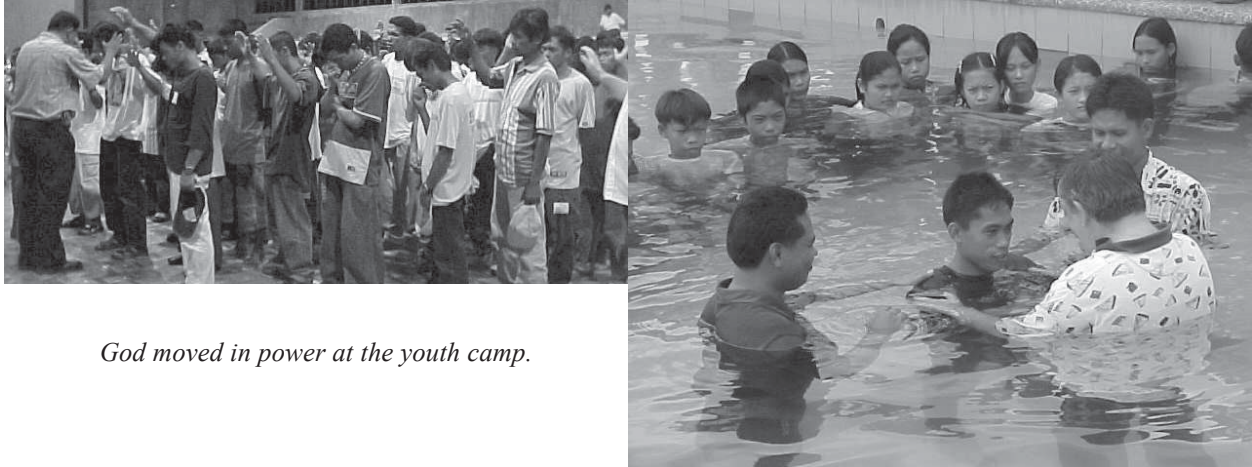
Our hearts are literally overflowing with a song of praise and worship to God for what He has done and is doing on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. We are also filled with gratitude for you, our partners. Your faithful prayers and sacrificial giving have made all the difference in the spiritual battle for the heart and soul of that island.

### *The Opposition Was Great...*

We have just returned from Mindanao. It was one of the most challenging trips we have ever made. Nothing worked as we expected it. Never have we battled such great opposition to our plans. We held our third annual youth camp, this time in Kabadbaran in northern Mindanao, the safest part of the island for a large gathering of young people. The camp was held the week before the presidential elections in the Philippines because it was the only time the facilities would be available. Because political campaigners were renting nearly all the buses, vans, trucks, and jeepneys, we could not find transportation for all the young people who wanted to come. The housing ended up costing four times what we were expecting. The buses we did get cost three times the original rental cost. The price of rice had doubled since last year. In short, the youth camp cost over \$4,000 when we had budgeted for \$2,000. Attendance was limited to 400 when we were expecting 700 – 1,000+. The first night there, Howard slipped on a wet floor, injuring his left knee. (It is still stiff and sore more than a month later.) The gymnasium where we held all the meetings had the worst acoustics we've ever heard and was occupied by hundreds of small white moths that caused just about everyone there to break out in an allergic rash. There was a general atmosphere of discouragement that permeated the entire campus.

### *...But Our God Is Greater*

On the surface it looked like nothing was happening but God was doing a deep work in the lives of these young people, most of whom were new Believers. Only later did we hear the testimonies of young people who looked like they were listening politely when in fact they were so under conviction by the Holy Spirit that they were shaking inside. 21 came forward to dedicate themselves to prepare for full time ministry and 30 others followed the Lord in water baptism.



*God moved in power at the youth camp.*

The last night was supposed to be an awards night for the winning sports teams and a brief parting challenge on the camp theme “Destined To Serve”. But in the midst of the final challenge, the presence of God suddenly filled that concrete gymnasium and the young people began running to the altars in total surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

### *Reinforcements Arrive*

We knew the schedule set for the month of May was more than we could handle on our own so we had invited others to join us. We had a pastors’ conference in South Cotabato the week after the youth camp. Darlene Bolen, a missionary/pastor from Dallas, Texas, with a heart for the least, the last, and the lost as big as the prairie skies, joined us just in time for the pastors’ conference, together with her son Preston, a preacher in his own right. With their help, we were able to minister to the needs of these pastors reaching the tribal people in an area that is predominately Muslim. We were expecting an evangelist from Canada to join us the following week but he got cold feet when faced with opposition from the enemy and cancelled his trip the day he was scheduled to leave. So we faced the next three conferences with almost no finances, Howard limping, Barbara itching from head to toe, and one man short. But God...

### *Breakthrough...*

The opposition to our next gathering was probably the most intense of all. We had promised to speak at a gathering of tribal leaders being sponsored by our friend Rev. Constancio Roda, the president of the ministerial fellowship and founder of Shepherd’s Hand Ministries. The three day conference was the fruit of an effort that began less than a year ago when a young man named Alan Clarin hiked into the mountains to bring the Gospel to the Matigsalog Ata tribe for the first time. A chieftain responded to the message and received Christ as Savior, opening the door for the Gospel to be shared with the rest of the tribe. Pastor Clarin then went to Pastor Roda for help and so this gathering was designed to bring the salvation message to all the tribal leaders of this unreached group.

When our finances were all used up by the youth camp and the pastors' conference and the evangelist from Canada who promised to help changed his mind at the last minute, a strange and wonderful thing happened. The Body of Christ in Tagum City and the newly elected government officials came together in unity to make this dream a reality. Churches loaned chairs, local pastors donated large sacks of rice, the city provided a training center rent free, and the Philippine National Police even provided transportation down from the mountains. God's people came together as one so that 72 leaders of the Matigsalog Ata tribe could come together to hear the Gospel, most of them for the very first time. Darlene and Preston were such a blessing as they shared the preaching and teaching responsibilities with Howard and Barbara Gard, cutting the burden by half. What a joy and a challenge to share the message of salvation with hungry hearts who are hearing it for the very first time! When Howard challenged the people to turn from serving other gods to enter into covenant with the Creator God through His Son, Jesus Christ, the response was unanimous. He then led 10 chieftains in a special prayer as they dedicated themselves, their land, and their people (about 30,000 souls!) to enter into covenant with the Creator God. The presence of God filled that training center. Faces were transformed before our eyes as the joy of salvation flooded their souls.



*Left*

*72 tribal leaders raised their hands for salvation at the tribal conference*

*Above*

*27 were baptized as the conference ended with a victory celebration.*

The conference ended with a baptism service in the Gulf of Davao. Howard taught about baptism then limped out into the breakers to help baptize 17 candidates. But the presence of God again fell on the group and, in the end, 27 tribal leaders including one of the leading chieftains were baptized in total surrender to the Lordship of Christ. By the grace and provision of God, the conference ended with every bill paid in full and a new level of unity in the Body of Christ that will bless the churches in Tagum City for years to come. God knew exactly what He was doing. In our weakness, His strength was made perfect.

## *...After Breakthrough!*

The following Sunday morning, Darlene and Preston Bolen preached at Pastor Roda's church while we traveled six miles down a narrow dirt road from the city of Mawab to preach in the village of Calabcab where 80% of the people worshipped idols. Pastor Virgil Roche, one of our graduates, started the church there less than a year ago. The mayor let them use the community center, a carport like structure next to the basketball court in the village center, for the service that Sunday because he heard that some Americans were coming to speak. A small crowd of about 40 people gathered to hear the Gospel as Howard preached over the portable sound system. He challenged them to turn from their idolatry to serve the Living Creator God. All those who came stood to receive or reaffirm Christ as Savior. When Howard put down the microphone to pray for those who had needs, people began coming from every direction. They had been listening in their homes and didn't want to miss out on the prayer time! Again the presence of God filled the gathering place. Every person who came under the shelter of that simple roof seeking prayer was totally healed by the power of God! God was showing His authority over their heathen idols. Salvation had come to Calabcab.



*The people of Calabcab listened intently to the Gospel. Later they all raised their hands to receive Christ as Savior.*

## *Salvation Comes to Kings*

The very next day, we watched in awe as God brought salvation to kings that literally represented the heart of Mindanao. Church Triumphant joined with the city of Kapitalong to sponsor a Peace Convention that brought together the "kings" of the tribal people that live in the southern and central mountains of Mindanao. Close to 300 tribal leaders gathered to hear the Gospel. The government of the Philippines is in the process of establishing a Tribal Autonomous Region in central Mindanao just as they established a Muslim Autonomous Region in western Mindanao. This will be like a nation within a nation. All the future leaders of this "nation in waiting" came to our convention, including the Provisional Governor, the Deputy Mayor, and all the members of the Tribal Council. The head chieftains of four different tribes were there, along with leaders from ten different tribes in all, two of which were Muslim. These powerful men represented well over one million people and their authority was absolute. They were kings in every sense of the word.

As with the gathering the week before, most of these chieftains or “datus” were hearing the Gospel for the very first time. Some of these men had walked for two days just to get to the end of the road. Because we had very little finances, God again moved on the hearts of government leaders and others to help us. Again, by His grace, every need was met. Again we shared with them the Biblical account of Creation, Adam’s sin, God’s promise of a Redeemer, and the coming of Jesus Christ as a result of God’s covenant with Abraham. Howard challenged them from Joshua 24 and Deuteronomy 28 to choose between the Creator God who wanted to enter into covenant with them through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, or to choose to continue to worship the gods of their ancestors who have given them nothing but death and destruction. Then he gave them two hours to think about it over lunch. Our Filipino Director, Pastor Allan Asang, himself the grandson of the former head chieftain of the Dibabawon tribe, then called the head chieftains and other major tribal leaders to share their thoughts with the others. One by one these pagan leaders confessed their need to turn from the old ways to embrace the Creator God who loved them in spite of their sin. One of the leaders nicknamed “the Killer of the Mountains” declared, “We have always known there was a Creator God, but nobody told us about sin before. We did not know that was why we could not find Him. Our land is under a curse because we have worshipped other gods. We need to repent and choose life instead of death.”

*The “Killer of the Mountains” told the other chieftains, “Nobody ever told us about sin before.”*



After lunch, Darlene ministered about deliverance and, led by the Holy Spirit, broke seven curses off those who would enter into covenant with the Creator God. These included the curses of idolatry, murder, violence, and poverty. When Howard asked them if they had reached a decision, the entire gathering of “kings” shouted “yes”. They had decided to

turn from the gods of the past and embrace the salvation so freely given by the Creator God of the Bible. In a literal way, the “heart” of Mindanao bowed the knee to Jesus Christ as Lord and God honored His promise in Psalm 144:9-10 to give salvation to kings. Once more the spiritual atmosphere over the gathering changed completely as the Holy Spirit made Himself real to these hungry, hurting hearts.

*Howard joined hands with the Provisional Governor as 300 chieftains stand to receive Christ as Savior. Their smiles at the end of the convention speak of souls that have been set free.*



During lunch one of the chieftains came to Pastor Allan asking for money so he could take his seriously ill wife to the hospital. Allan told him he did not have any money then but to come back at the end of the day. After the final gathering the chieftain returned to Allan to say he no longer needed the money. As Howard had led the chieftains in a covenant prayer, God had touched and instantly healed his wife! Again God was showing forth His faithfulness to answer the prayers of those willing to walk in covenant with Him. Not only did the tribal leaders receive Christ as Savior but the mayor of Kapalong and several of his department heads who were there also prayed to receive Jesus Christ as Lord. Allan has already made arrangements to meet monthly with these tribal leaders to provide discipleship training in their new found faith and to help them teach God's Word to their people.

### *Abiding Under the Shadow of the Almighty*

Two days later we headed for the end of the road to the village of Sua-on for a three day conference on "Spirit Filled Living". Five denominations had tried to start churches in this village but ours was the only church that has survived. Pastors and their people from miles around gathered for encouragement to grow in their walk with the Lord. God met with them in a special way as times of refreshing came to hungry hearts struggling to serve God in the hard places. At dinner the second evening, Pastor Allan shared with us that two communist rebels had come to his uncle's house in a neighboring village the night before, expressing their intention to kill the owner of the house where we were staying because they blamed him for the murder of some young people that had happened near his village. The uncle Datu Amado Owambay, a local chieftain who is greatly respected throughout the region for his skills as a peacemaker, asked them to wait for at least a week because his nephew and family were staying at that house while a conference was being held at the church. He then tried to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the feud. Pastor Allan told us that he had to leave that evening to perform a wedding the next day on the northern coast but that Datu Amado would spend the night with us to make sure we were safe.



*This chieftain's wife was instantly healed when her husband entered into covenant with the Creator God.*

*Datu Amado Owambay was willing to risk his own life to protect us from danger.*



That night the communist rebels did come to the house prepared to kill the owner and anyone else who got in their way. Datu Amado heard them coming and met them at the front door about 3 AM. When they insisted that they were going to kill the owner of the house right then, Datu Amado looked them in the eye and said, "Then you will have to kill me first". The communist rebels backed down and left the village. The angel of the Lord was

protecting us through your prayers and the courage of this village chieftain who three years ago told Howard that absolutely he and his people wanted to enter into covenant with the Creator God. The enemy had tried everything he could to stop us but God's faithfulness and your prayers gave us a total victory. God's people pressed in and experienced the refreshing, renewing, restoring presence of God in the closing service. Pastors and people returned home with a fresh anointing and a deeper understanding of God's eternal Word that sets the captive free.

## *A Wide Open Door*

Through the gatherings of tribal chieftains, God has given us a wide open door into the mountains in the heart of Mindanao. Bible school classes have started up again as we begin training a new group to become church planters. We are committed to a goal of seeing a church planted in every tribal village on Mindanao but we need to do more than that. We also want to teach farming skills to these people so they will no longer starve or kill one another over hunting rights. We want to teach literacy to the children so they have a chance for a better, more productive life. We want to teach basic sanitation and health care. The local government has offered their help but their finances are limited. We are looking at a major investment in five regional training centers to take this life changing Gospel to where the people are. These regional training centers will include a show farm where our workers can teach the people how to grow their own food, a nursery where we can grow seedlings for fruit trees, a fish farm where we can teach them how to grow their own fish, etc. There will also be an educational center where literacy teachers will go out to teach the children in all the surrounding villages. Those who show the necessary aptitude will then come to the training center to attend high school. The government has already committed to providing full university scholarships to all qualified graduates from these tribal high schools. We also want to include a medical clinic at each of these centers.

We hope to begin the first community center in Melale, Laak as soon as we can raise the necessary finances. We have already calculated that this one center will impact 16 villages representing nearly 10,000 families. The land has already been donated and the workers are standing by. We are just waiting for God to release the finances to start building. With your help, 10,000 families can learn how to grow their own food, care for farm animals, purify their water, and receive the health care they so desperately need. With your help, their children can learn to read and write instead of dying from measles or chicken pox for lack of vaccines.

Each of these centers will cost \$50,000 to start and another \$50,000 to become fully equipped and operational. That is a total investment of \$500,000 for all five training centers. The sooner we can begin the work, the more lives can be saved, healed, and transformed for the glory of God.

The first priority is to bring an end to starvation, malnutrition and disease. This can begin happening 90 days after the crops are planted. The second priority is to bring literacy and education throughout all the tribes. The third priority is to teach them how to become productive and earn an income from their produce. This can begin happening within six months. The fourth priority is establishing an ongoing discipleship program, training the people to disciple others.

By three years, the tribal people should be able to generate enough income to become self supporting, sending out missionaries to take the Gospel to other tribes and even to other nations.

Yes, God has given us a wide open door to bring the transforming power of the Gospel to these tribal people. Will you help us walk through these wide open doors through your prayers and continuing financial support? God has blessed all of us with the chance to be history makers. Join us in making an eternal difference in the lives of these tribal people who are finally getting the chance to hear the Gospel for the very first time. Pray and ask God what He would have you to do to be a part of this miracle. God bless you abundantly.