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## A DIFFICULT JOURNEY

*It's with mixed emotions that I inform you that PAMI field director, Pastor Chito Mendizabal was called home to be with the Lord Friday, June 15, after a long battle with lung cancer. Although we are happy for him to now be free of pain and with the Lord, we miss him and his good leadership very much.*

If you're wondering why it's been so long since the last PAMI newsletter, it's mainly because I was gone over a month on an impromptu visit to the Philippines. When I heard that Ptr Chito had gone to the hospital on May 23rd, with potential end-stage symptoms, I scrambled to find a way to use frequent flier miles to get there as soon as possible. I wanted to be an encouragement to Ptr Chito and his family, and to help the mission to cope. I left on May 31st, with the intention of returning June 19th. But after Ptr Chito passed away June 15th, I managed to get my visa and flight changed to stay until July 2nd. That way I was there for the 10 days of visitation and memorial services, and a few days more to help facilitate a smoother transition for the mission.

This trip was exceptionally challenging in many ways (little preparation time, little sleep, hot with no a/c, rain, traveling alone, emotionally draining, cultural differences, unforeseen obstacles, took a lot of personal finances, & hard on my wife Sue to balance both work and kid activities without me). I'm still decompressing from it all. Yet I feel God kept me safe and healthy, and gave me insights due to many people praying. Although difficult, I strongly feel it was precisely the right time and place to be. It seemed like God was orchestrating everything, and that I just needed to be available to play the part that he had already written.

Although it's hard to understand why God allows a good & productive pastor to get cancer, and why He did not bring full physical healing, I still praise Him for many miracles along the way. It's good to see the glass half full rather than half empty. For one thing, we can praise God for the miracle of almost a year of ministry and nice times with family and friends after being diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer on July 1, 2011, when less than 6 months is more typical.

Miracles especially seemed evident during my visit. When I first arrived in Sorsogon on June 2nd, I went to

the hospital to pray with Ptr Chito. He was especially encouraged that I came and really seemed to rally. The next day he surprised us all by being well enough to come home. Although still very gaunt and frail, he then had about 1 1/2 weeks of relatively good health at home. He was eating and sleeping well, his leg swelling and back pain was better, he was off oxygen and IV, and even walking a bit.

I praise God that during this 1 1/2 weeks we had several encouraging prayer and worship times with all the visitors stopping by. We also had several good conversations about mission matters, where Ptr Chito gave input and suggestions. He was able to stand at the blackboard and explain organizational changes at a June 7th meeting for all PAMI workers. He also sat at the computer and typed up the teaching schedule for the June 12th start of the Emmaus Bible Institute school year. It really seemed like he would have a few more months, until he had a set-back on June 14.

It was impressive that Ptr Chito had a strong faith and positive attitude right up to the end. Many who visited to encourage Ptr Chito, would be encouraged themselves. This was the same with me. At the various memorial services, it was nice to hear many people say how Ptr Chito was so full of grace, always giving people a second chance, and never speaking harshly. As Ptr Chito would often say, "To God be the glory!"

Although Ptr Chito didn't quite make it to his 44th birthday on July 1st, there is a touching epilog. It just so happened that PAMI Pastor Redgie's wife Aireen gave birth to a son on July 1st, and they named him David Chito. Where one life ends, another begins. By the way, Ptr Pio & Juvy Garduque, and Ptr Winston & Espie Fresto are also expecting.



For more info, please see *The PAMI Post* at [www.pamimission.org/blog](http://www.pamimission.org/blog). A 12 minute video that was shown at his funeral can also be viewed at Youtube.com: *Remembering Pastor Chito Mendizabal* (<http://youtu.be/jtfBqlRdxr0>) -Mike Thorud

## ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Since Pastor Chito was overall field director, EBI director, and bookkeeper, his passing left a big hole in the mission. In retrospect, this was too much responsibility for one person. In turn, we've decided to split up these responsibilities amongst different people.

In part, we decided to go back to the system we had 8 years ago, when the overall field director and EBI director were separate people. We decided to go back to having Ptr Virgilio Fulo be overall field director, like he was before 2004. We had switched it to Ptr Chito back in 2004 when Ptr Virgilio was busy with an English degree.

We also decided to expand upon the concept of semi-autonomous partitions. Up until now, we've had three semi-autonomous partitions--(1)Bulan churches (includes main Bulan church, Fabrica, Monte Calvario, and Lapinig) headed by Ptr Virgilio Fulo, (2)Samar churches (Allen, San Isidro, and soon to include Catarman) headed by Ptr Randy Rivera, and (3)EBI campus with the rest of the churches headed by Ptr Chito.

Now we'll have four semi-autonomous partitions. In addition to keeping (1) & (2) like before, (3) becomes just the EBI campus, headed by Ofel Mendizabal (including the Bible school, Compassion program, Emmaus church & cell groups, Sirangan outreach, and E2E film showings), and (4) becomes the rest of the churches (Irosin, Bulusan, Barcelona, Castilla, and Donsol).

For several months, I've discussed contingency plans with Ptr Chito via email. It was nice to further discuss these plans with him in person--especially to get his recommendations and endorsement. Even if he got better, he admitted that he and Ofel in charge of the EBI campus partition was a big enough responsibility. He recommended Ptr Gumer Gile to be head of partition (4), since Ptr Gumer has been doing a good job pastoring the Irosin church. Like Bulan and Emmaus churches, Irosin church is the most developed in terms of disciplined elders and deacons that help with ministry. And Irosin has already started weaning. Ptr Gumer's Irosin church is a good role model for the other churches to follow.

Praise God that Pastor Chito was able to confer his blessing upon Ptr Virgilio to be the new field director and Pastor Gumer to be a new partition head, and explain the four partitions at the June 7th meeting of all PAMI workers. This all contributed to a fairly smooth transition.



Here is Ptr Gumer with wife Ofel and 2 year old adopted son Moses. I left a digital camera and laptop with Ptr Gumer, & taught him to use them for sending reports. I was glad to stay overnight at their house on my way to Bulan & see where he does radio. He's experiencing on-the-job training as we've already worked through a couple issues in his partition.

## OTHER CHANGES

Since Sister Ofel Mendizabal has been quite involved all along (speaking, teaching Bible school and Sunday school classes, and leading cell groups & Compassion groups), it's natural for her to replace her husband as the new EBI director. But we recognize that she could easily get overloaded, since she's also single-parenting her kids. Fortunately, there are a lot of other workers on EBI campus to help with things. In addition to Sis Espie, Bro Elmer, and Sis Mariz working full-time for Compassion, Sis Imee, Sis Dioveta, Sis Thelma, and Bro Paul Jethro work part-time for Compassion and part-time for PAMI. Furthermore, Ptr Lorenzo and Ptr Rolly are fairly recent EBI graduates that are also involved. And EBI interns (Bro Marlon, Sis Lea, and Sis Virgie) are also a big help.

Nonetheless, we felt EBI really needed a more senior pastor to head Emmaus church, the cell groups, and be an advisor to the Compassion program. So we asked Ptr Rafael and his family to move from Casiguran to EBI. Since Casiguran is a small municipality with several other churches, we just had Ptr Raf endorse his work to another mission. It's good to have Ptr Raf at EBI, since he is smart and humble (just like Ptr Chito, Ptr Raf was a top EBI graduate many years ago). Furthermore, Ptr Raf and Elsie used to work at EBI years ago, back when they were single. So it's sort of like they are returning home.



Ptr Raf (far right) and Sis Elsie (far left) moving their things from Casiguran to the former bakery building at EBI. This building was available after moving bakery equipment to Donsol to be used by Ptr Abner for self-support & weaning, since Ptr Abner is a former baker.

When Ptr Chito got sick a year ago, his eldest son Paul Jethro felt called to follow his father's footsteps. So he stopped pursuing an accounting degree, and did a semester of seminary. Then he came to EBI to keep taking Bible classes and help out. Since he was already doing bookkeeping for Compassion, it made sense to have him start doing bookkeeping for PAMI too.

One other change at EBI happened when Sis Espie got married in December & started living off campus. This freed up her former quarters for the 3 student computers donated from the Netherlands last spring. Ptr Mario Gacis (an ABCCOP pastor with a computer center in Casiguran, & brother to Elsie) is now teaching computer classes at EBI to students & PAMI workers. We're planning to move the library books into the same room.