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## **Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Shrine Parish**

*by Raymundo Regua, C.M.*

*Province of Philippines*

### **I. History**

In the beginning of the year 1978, Fr. Teodoro Barquín, C.M., then National Director of the Marian Center Inc. and of the Miraculous Medal Apostolate announced the plan of building a church in Sucat, Muntinlupa, Metro Manila. It was envisioned to be the New National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. It was his dream that this shrine would be a monument to the love of the Filipinos for the Blessed Virgin Mary to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Apparitions to St. Catherine Labouré.

The dream started to become a reality when a charitable devotee, Mrs. Estela Marfori Posadas, donated a piece of land in her subdivision in Sucat, Muntinlupa for a church and a convent. That same year, Architect Jose Zaragosa executed a very extraordinary design for a church: ruggedly circular at the base with a twirling dome, projecting an obelisk 70 meters up in the sky and crowned with a cross. It strikes the imagination as an artistic symbol of human hands joined in an eternal gesture of prayer.

The following year, in July 1979, His Eminence Jaime Cardinal Sin, the Archbishop of Manila, laid the cornerstone together with the testament with the names and intentions of the donors, sponsors, affiliates and promoters of the Miraculous Medal Apostolate. In August, construction has started. It was finished in August of the following year.

On 7 September 1980, their Eminences Jaime Cardinal Sin and Julio Cardinal Rosales, Archbishops of Manila and Cebu respectively, together with two bishops and around 30 priests blessed the new church. It was dedicated as the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. That same date was the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré.

### **II. The National Shrine of the Blessed Virgin Gave Birth to a Parish**

In view of the growing size of the Catholic population in the parishes of San Roque in Alabang, St. Martin de Porres in Taguig, Rizal and San Antonio de Padua in Parañaque Rizal, it was recommended to the Archbishop that a new parish be erected. On 2 February 1981, His Eminence Jaime Cardinal Sin erected by canonical decree the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal as

a parish. The parish was inaugurated on 15 February 1981 with Rev. Fr. Victor Elia, C.M., as its first parish priest and as superior of the Vincentian community in the presbytery. The community members: Fr. Exequiel Galeron and Eulogio Coello, all CMs, were assistant parish priests. Fr. Ruperto Guiritan, CM, a newly ordained Filipino priest joined the community. Due to the heavy workload in the parish, Fr. Rufo Diño, CM, from the Vincentian Central House in San Marcelino, Manila, came to help on Saturdays and Sundays, not long after Fr. Eulogio Coello, CM, went home to Spain for health reasons while Fr. Exequiel Galeron, CM, was missioned to a parish newly accepted by the Vincentians in Olongapo, Zambales.

Others who have been assigned to the parish are Fr. Adolfo Losaria, CM, Fr. Nicasio Dinglasa, CM, Fr. Norberto Carcellar, CM, Fr. Danilo Carolino, CM, Fr. Vic Velasco, CM, Fr. Toribio Macazo, CM, Fr. Dave Dulfo, CM, Fr. Frank Vargas, CM, Fr. Rolly Santos, CM, Fr. Roland Tuazon, CM, Fr. Antonino Libutan, CM, Fr. Amado Caballero, CM, Fr. Dario Pacheco, CM, Fr. Joseph Magdaong, CM, Fr. Ranny Mahumot, CM, Fr. Vince Robles, CM, and Fr. Gregg Kim Yong Ki, CM.

At present, the Parish Priest is Fr. Raymundo A. Regua, CM. He is assisted by Fr. Quirino Raut, CM, Fr. Macario Cristobal, CM, Fr. Rogelio Cardenas, CM and Rev. Raul Buen, CM.

### **III. Boundaries and Population of the Parish**

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Parish covers a big area consisting of Barangay Tanyag, Purok 7, Perpetual Village, Daang Hari, Sitio Pagkakaisa, Posadas Village, Doña Rosario, Don Juan, Sucat, Purok 5, Purok 6, Purok 13, SMI, Perpetual Village X, Purok 14 and Doña Rosario Heights.

The Shrine Parish is now part of the newly established Diocese of Paranaque, inaugurated last 28 January 2003 with Bishop Jesse Mercado, DD as its first Bishop.

As of June 2002, there were about 100,000 parishioners. They are divided into three categories of people, namely, those who are very poor who live along the railroad tracts and the lakeshore, the low-middle class who live along the old national highway, and the average-middle class who live in the seven subdivisions.

### **IV. Parish Services**

#### **A. Miraculous Medal Family Center, Inc. (MMFCI)**

Originally the Miraculous Medal Family Center (MMFC) was an affiliate of the Children's Fund, Inc. (CCF), an international funding organization, through the Vincentian Fathers. It started operations on 16 May 1984 with Rev. Fr. Victor Elia, C.M., as its first Project Superintendent.

The first clientele to be served were 325 indigent children. These beneficiaries lived in dilapidated, makeshift houses made of light materials such as scrap iron, recycled paper boxes and pieces of wood and built quite closely together. Sanitation was very poor. Most of their families could not afford electrical and water facilities for they were just casual factory/construction workers and laborers.

The project operates within the limits of the Miraculous Medal National Shrine Parish. Areas of Tanyag, Daang Hari, Sitio Pagkakaisa and Sucat are targeted for development particularly because there are more compact families in need of assistance and these families have potential to influence the community toward expected desirable changes. As a whole, these communities are totally depressed and deprived of the necessities basic to life, thus resulting in problems such as poverty and unemployment, malnutrition, out-of-school youth and drug addiction.

While the Project's goal is to develop these families into self-reliant members of the community motivated by spiritual values and commitments, the clientele will be provided with opportunities to meet their immediate basic needs as well as to develop themselves and to prepare them as future leaders of their respective communities through the following developmental programs and services:

1. Educational (Formal and Non-Formal)
2. Health and Nutrition
3. Economic Productivity Program
4. Value-Formation Program
5. Socio-Cultural
6. Community Building Program

Today the Miraculous Medal Family Center, Inc. has evolved into an NGO, Non-Governmental Organization, based in the parish. The center was conceived to uplift the living condition of poverty-stricken families through an "integrated social development approach." The objective of the organization is to pursue the integral development and evangelization of the less-privileged through various programs, projects and services done with genuine Christian humility and love. It is managed through the collaboration of the Vincentian Fathers, Daughters of Charity and laity.

Among its present services to the parish are the following:

- 1. Assistance to poor but deserving youth of the parish*

They are also known as Vincentian Marian Scholars (VMS). They study in different high schools nearby. They are provided with school fees, supplies, uniforms, books and other school-related needs. There are 103 grantees (first year–fourth year). There are 56 local sponsors. Non-formal education like typing is offered to them to help them in their academic performance. Spiritual/Value and Socio-Cultural Formation are given to them by the parish catechists and lay formators through ongoing monthly formation and annual days of recollection.

## *2. St. Vincent Foundation for Children and Aging (SVFCA)*

There are 260 foreign sponsors assisting 209 children enrolled from grades 1-6, 31 youth studying from first–fourth year, and 19 elderly (60 yrs. and above).

## *3. Economic Productivity*

"Samahan ng Mananahi ng Kababaihan ng Sucat." This is a sewing program organized by MMFCI of skilled sewing women from closed factories; some are already advanced in age. With the help of the Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE) grant of P 120,000.00 for equipment, training and materials, it started operating in July 2000, selling by piece or by the dozens school uniforms, T-shirts, clothes, etc.

## **B. Joint projects of MMFCI and the Miraculous Medal Parish:**

1. Medical and Dental Mission – 1000 families as recipients in the year 2002
2. Gift-giving during Christmas – 1700 poor families as recipients in the year 2002

## **C. Vincentian Family Multi-Purpose Cooperative Miraculous Medal Branch**

Inaugurated on 27 September 2002 in line with the International Project of the Vincentian Family: "The Globalization of Charity: The Fight Against Hunger," the project was initiated by the present parish priest to assist poor families in their day-to-day needs. It offers not only low prices on commodities but also has a savings program, educational benefits and shelter/housing services for its members.

## **V. The Shrine's Activities**

### **A. Feast of the Miraculous Medal**

1. Number of Masses in the Church – Six Masses; main Mass in the evening with 1000 + pilgrims and parishioners.
2. Novenas celebrated – one in the morning at 6:15 and one in the afternoon 6 with guest Vincentian priests and Vincentian-trained priests as celebrants/homilists. Attendance: average of 300-400 parishioners daily.

3. Number of medals distributed – 400 medals daily

**B. Devotion to the Miraculous Medal** – Every Saturday after the 7 a.m. Eucharist.

**C. Famous clergy and lay people who have visited the Shrine**

Cardinals Sin and Rosales, Bishops Gabriel Reyes, Jesse Mercado and Socrates Villegas, and poor people and families frequently visit the Shrine, as well as people from all walks of life, pilgrims from North to South of the Philippines, Children of Mary from different provinces, Marian devotees, especially during the month of May and November.

**D. Other Services**

Weddings – 120 (in 2002); Baptisms – 1,700 (in 2002); Catechism – 6,000 children (grades 1-6) administered by 4 parish catechists (in 2002)

**E. Organizations**

Children of Mary (JMV), Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP), Vincentian Ladies Auxiliary Council (VLAC), Knights of Columbus, Legion of Mary, Cursillo Movement, Catholic Women's League, Homeless Peoples Federation of the Philippines (HPFP), El Shaddai, Mother Butler, FAMILIA, Couples for Christ.

**F. Events:**

1. Pilgrimage Site – Jubilee Year 2000
2. Venue for the Fourth World Meeting of Families Linguistic Mass and Barrio Fiesta – 25 January 2003; Pilgrimage Site of the Fourth World Meeting of Families – 27 January 2003.

Last 25 January 2003, the Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal hosted a Linguistic Eucharist Celebration and Barrio Fiesta for some of the delegates of the Fourth World Meeting of Families. The 125-member delegation from English-speaking countries (like the USA, Canada, Ireland, Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Saipan) was led by Bishop Elden Francis Curtiss, Archbishop of Omaha, Nebraska, USA. The Vincentian and the Daughters of Charity community and the parishioners of the Shrine enthusiastically prepared and participated in the event by donning their Filipino attire, coming in for the Eucharistic Celebration and performing various Filipino dances and songs. The success of the celebration certainly gave a new meaning to “World Meeting of Families.”

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