

# St. Michael's, Vancouver & the BIBAK BC Organization Renew Partnership Agreement

CEASAR CASTRO

St. Michael's Multicultural Church, Vancouver

B-I-B-A-K is an acronym representing the five provinces found in the Cordillera Mountains of the Northern Philippines: Benguet, Ifugao, Bontoc, Apayao and Kalinga. Before division, these five provinces were one, and they are comprised of several indigenous cultural groups, the largest are called the *Igorots* (meaning people of the mountain) and the *Ifugaos*.

There are BIBAK organizations all over the world, located in places where groups of folks with this heritage may settle or gather. It is good for the Igorots to have an organization that keeps their cultures and traditions alive. A good, local example is the BIBAK BC organization chapter. Having chapters all over the world is very comforting. If Igorots or Ifugaos get lost or are lonely and disconnected perhaps in Moscow or London or anywhere, they can search out the local BIBAK.

There are two principal components of the original agreement between St. Michael's Church and BIBAK BC.

1. It is understood that this partnership carries with it no financial obligations to either partner.
2. It is a declaration of intent to jointly support new Filipino immigrants to Canada and to jointly develop specific programs to achieve that objective.

The declaration that was signed this past September 7th is one that has been updated to reflect the times.

To provide some background we go back to the signing of the original joint declaration, August 12th, 2007. Everyone involved agrees that it is a blessing from God that brought the two communities together. Prior to the 2007 signing, St. Michael's, Vancouver was on the brink of closing its doors and the core group of officers and members of BIBAK BC were looking seriously at buying a property to house the organization. But after the signing, St. Michael's started to come alive and BIBAK BC was and is happy to have found their *dap-ay* (which translated means a common place to gather and bond), in the City of Vancouver.

God is good, and with God's guidance BIBAK BC was directed to St. Michael's, a faith community that strives to create an environment with zero tolerance for racism and all forms of discrimination. St. Michael's greeted BIBAK BC members with a warm welcome and open arms. The church became like home, especially for new arrivals from the Philippines, who felt comforted during their transition period.

Thanks go out to those early BIBAK members of St. Michael's. I don't want to mention any names in fear of missing someone, but you know who you are. On behalf of BIBAK BC and the membership, thank you very much for being the *instrument* that enabled the agreement between the church and BIBAK BC. God listened and granted your prayers.

In the past, BIBAK BC spent a lot of time, effort and money securing venues for our major events, four to five times a year. Now St. Michael's, in spite of a busy schedule

of programs and activities, does their best to ensure that the church hall is available for important BIBAK events. A special thank you goes out to the church staff.

The 125th anniversary of the church in the fall of 2014 is an appropriate time to renew the agreement with new signatories, which was a great idea from our brother, Greg Tatchell. The Rev. Wilmer Toyoken (Fr. Wilmer), and I agreed with him that we should renew the joint agreement

every so often, perhaps every seven years as the leadership and membership of both groups will change over that time period. This is also a good reason to party every seven years and celebrate with the members of St. Michael's

Finally, with the help of God, may this win-win agreement between the church and the BIBAK communities continue forever with more success, for the good of all. ✠

Folks representing BIBAK signing the agreement in St. Michael's Chancel entrance (September 7th, 2014). Left to right: Ramon Busing, BIBAK BC President; Helen Stewart, representing *Bontoc*; Mary Leger, representing *Ifugao*; Clifford Belgica, representing, *Benguet*; Pena Taloza, representing *Apayao*; and Tino Layugan, representing *Kalinga*. PHOTO Cesar Castro



The signatories and others relax and pose for a photo at Coffee Time in the Parish Hall after renewing the agreement. SEATED: Ramon Busing, Bart Alatan, Moses Kajoba, Greg Tatchell, Cesar Castro, Elisa Castro and Solidad Shah. STANDING: Brigitte L. Busing, The Rev. Fr. Wilmer Toyoken and Agnes Alatan. PHOTO Cesar Castro



## OPINION



The Rev. Michael Fuller.

### How Can I Approach Sharing My Faith?

MICHAEL FULLER  
Rector, St. John's, Shaughnessy

The title of this piece is a question that I'm often asked. So, how are we to approach the question of sharing that which we believe? So, a few pointers:

- 1. We should avoid sharing more than is necessary.**  
We want those we are talking with to accept Christ and live good lives right there on the spot! It *ain't* going to happen! I think sometimes we trip ourselves up by taking the conversation along a route that leads away from the gospel and answers questions not being asked. You don't have to prove that you know more than you really do. Also you don't have to explain Noah's Ark or Jesus walking on the water. Just keep it simple and to the point.
- 2. We need to be careful of the language we are using.**  
Don't use spiritual language that makes you appear as some sort of religious freak. Avoid words

and phrases that have great meaning for you but to others are simply inane. For example saying to someone, "let the Holy Spirit flow over you," is just plain creepy. Worse still is saying, "Let the arms of God enfold you." Make sure the words you use are understandable and not just religious. Sometimes we get caught up in the spirituality of words and phrases just because they sound good, but honestly they don't explain anything. Just use everyday language

- 3. Avoid the temptation to get involved in a debate/argument.**  
There are always people who want to ask about your faith just so they can get into an argument about something. These people aren't looking to enter a dialogue. They're looking for a verbal fight; don't entertain them. No one has ever come to a knowledge of Christ after losing an argument about religion. We're told in scripture that there

are people who don't receive the Good News, so we need to do what Jesus tells us in Luke's gospel, "If people do not welcome you, leave their town, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." We were not told to defend our faith; we were commanded to share it.

- 4. We do not have to know it all.**  
This is the most difficult point. I always thought I had to know everything in order to share. It's okay if you don't know all the answers to their questions. You can say, "I don't know, let me get back to you." Those are genuinely seeking the truth will understand. I would also point out that there're some questions you won't find the answers to until we get to heaven. So, know that it's alright to admit not knowing and go and find the answer. You could even say, "Because I can trust God concerning what we do know. We believe by faith the things we don't know yet." ✠