

“I just Want to be a Driver, but ALS Helps Me to Dream More”

Story by Mr. Marco Balanquit

I come from Samar, a province in the eastern part of the Philippines, notoriously known for strong typhoons (like Typhoon Yolanda and recently Typhoon Odette), that torment the people throughout the year. At an early age, I saw what poverty really means. Subsistent farming and fishing just gave something to live on for the day.



So, I went to Manila with my uncle, a jeepney driver, to try my luck. I was 11 years old then. The normal day means helping my uncle collect passenger fares on his jeepney plying the Dasmariñas- Baclaran route. On one occasion I accompanied my uncle in Jesus the Nazarene Parish (a parish run by the SVDs) to fulfill his yearly devotion to the Black Nazarene. Beside the parish was Sagip Dunong (Literally means Save Knowledge or perhaps better Save the Mind/Person) ALS learning center.

So, I went to Manila with my uncle, a jeepney driver, to try my luck. I was 11 years old then. The normal day means helping my uncle collect passenger fares on his jeepney plying the Dasmariñas- Baclaran route. On one occasion I accompanied my uncle in Jesus the Nazarene Parish (a parish run by the SVDs) to fulfill his yearly devotion to the Black Nazarene. Beside the parish was Sagip Dunong (Literally means Save Knowledge or perhaps better Save the Mind/Person) ALS learning center.



This is Arnold Janssen’s first learning center for the non-literate adults and out-of-school youth. I saw some learners of my age but mostly young adults and elderlies sitting under the trees wrestling with some kind of modules. I was inspired with what I saw, so I enquired then enrolled in the ALS program. I was 13 years old then. My classmates came from various ages and enrolled in Basic Literacy, Elementary or High School. I felt so welcome.

In one ordinary day, the parish priest then (Fr. Jerome Marquez, SVD) started a casual conversation and asked: “What do you want to become Marco?”. “I just want to become a driver Father”, I think those were the exact words that I said. After a year, I passed the Accreditation and Equivalency Test of the Department of Education, a nationwide aptitude test for the Elementary program. During graduation, Fr. Jerome invited me to a corner: “Do you want to continue your studies?”.



I was enrolled in the (formal) High School just across St. Jude Catholic School where he was assigned after his parish work. I became the errand boy of the resident priests in the school, got my drivers' license and worked as their official driver. In one engagement, Fr. Jerome asked me to drive him to Christ the King Mission Seminary. My curiosity opened more doors. Perhaps, a consecrated life is better than a driver.

I finished my philosophical studies in the seminary in 2014 and discerned through my Postulancy the year after. I decided to take a leave and was fortunate to have been invited as an ALS Teacher in SVD ALS Learning center in Tagaytay while taking units in education at the same time.



I taught ALS for 2 years then continued my teaching career in Senior High School (formal school) after passing the licensure exam for teachers. Once again, fate dragged me yet to be a police officer. I took the training and currently assigned in one of the penal facilities of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology as a Jail Guard. I am at present groomed to lead the educational program for inmates. ALS has given me a chance to dream bigger than a driver. I will do the same, and more meaningfully, to inmates who perhaps had not seen an opportunity to dream again.