

David Feliciano and Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano**FAITH AND INCARNATION****Jophen Baui**

Ate Evelyn and Manong David, as they are fondly called, are both writers and voracious readers. They live in Adlas Village, Silang Cavite. Occasionally they host friends involved in Christian ministries here and abroad. Their guests enjoy the provincial breeze and have fun sleeping under a mosquito net. Aside from intelligent conversation the couple offers the best blend of passion fruit and calamansi juice. Meanwhile, they are also active in their local church. Ate Evelyn often speaks before women groups and conducts writing seminars. Manong David, on the other hand is a part-time seminary professor, a member of a pastoral team and a counselor. As senior citizens both are semi-retired, but what a truly busy retirement!

Manong David Feliciano and Ate Evelyn Miranda Feliciano live in a house made of wood and surrounded by lush trees and plants. Manong David planted his backyard with various lowland vegetables and fruits -- pineapple, papaya, santol, jack fruit and avocado. In season, he harvests *pamienta* and sells this in the market. He regularly cuts the grass around his plots so that they won't overwhelm his plants and choke them to death, and so that snakes won't thrive. There was a time when a snake swallowed whole a live chicken in his yard and it took a while before he was able to destroy the reptile.

The couple purchased the farm in the early 80s after they resigned from their full time teaching jobs at a seminary. At the time, they were financially bankrupt, and what they had was just enough to meet their daily needs. But a series of Divine intervention allowed them to have enough to pay for the lot. It has been twenty-one years since they moved to this blessed place. This house and lot is a testimony of God's timely provision and loving attentiveness to their prayers.

Along with the farm they got themselves a community. Instead of closeting themselves as some would do for fear of strangers getting too familiar and encroaching on their property, both husband and wife started greeting every one they met on the road, adult, children, men, and women. At first, people from Adlas eyed them suspiciously, unused to be being politely greeted by *mga bagong lipat*, but later, as people passed by their house, they too began greeting the couple with "*magandang umaga po, magandang hapon po, magandang tanghali*

po". Today, this exchange of pleasantries has become a ritual and a habit among villagers. Moreover, some village folks began sharing little details of their lives with Manong David and Ate Evelyn.

Early on in their farm, the couple raised chickens and let those roam around their backyard. But some of the village folks stealthily came at night or even during dead hours when the couple were having their *siesta*, and stole the chickens. It wasn't difficult to catch those thieves, but the couple decided to love the villagers first and help them in any way they could. The people recognized their sincerity. Later on even the "thieves" left the chickens alone. The village folks also began calling on either Manong or Ate to help them solve their problems. Sometimes the couple mediated between warring couples, giving them instant, on demand, marriage counseling. Sometimes, a friend or a relative of a sick neighbor called them to pray over their loved one. Their godchildren come by anytime for counseling or to ask for material help. Or folks come to simply enjoy the couple's wisdom and hospitality.

Husband and wife are involved in their community, not as mere attendees in social events, but as persons completely identifying with every villager's day to day struggle. Every morning, Ate Evelyn walks from her house and around Adlas village, stopping here and there as some members of the community greet her and engage her in some local talk. Every Sunday on his way to church, instead of riding a tricycle, Manong David walks toward the highway, and stops at a sari-sari store, or under a tree, or even in the middle of the road and have an instant *tete-a-tete* with a villager. The villagers are accustomed to seeing him walk by, with his ready nod of hello, his cowboy hat, farmer's boots, and Bible. They occasionally share some of their day's tidbits with him. They talk in a familiar manner with "Manong" whom they fondly refer to as "pastor".

In this community where each neighbor's cry will definitely broadcast itself over frail walls and fences, it is not surprising that "Ate" and "Manong" would immediately know of any domestic or community issue. Immersed in their local context, the couple can't help but be affected by what's happening in and around Adlas. Similar to tending their little farm and backyard and keeping it free from destructive snakes, the couple's choice to be involved sometimes meant either weeding out the choking elements or cultivating a cause that would help villagers forward their sentiments.

There was a time when a chemical plant threatened to pollute Adlas and the nearby barangays, so the people met together and decided to protest. Manong David and Ate Evelyn led the people in bringing the concern to the office of the Mayor of Silang. Wanting to stop this

chemical plant from spilling chemical refuse on open drainage polluting the land and air, the couple spent hours, and days with Adlas villagers, following up on the issue, writing letters and calling on support for their local advocacy.

Manong David and Ate Evelyn believe that the Bible upholds justice and stresses righteous government. The books of the Major and Minor Prophets* abound with demonstrations of God calling governments to stop oppressing the people, and for arrogant leaders to repent lest a whole nation suffer judgment. Without righteousness, there will never be true justice. But righteousness starts with each individual. It's difficult to expect righteousness from the highest authorities when the people they govern don't appreciate the clear line between right and wrong.

This stand is often tested as the couple relates with their neighbors. One day, Manong David lent his lawn mower to a fellow farmer in their village. Many days passed and the farmer did not return it. He had coveted it and lent it to another farmer. Finally Manong David went to this farmer's house and carefully rebuked the farmer. This action seemed to have alienated him from this neighbor. But it was one of many instances where he needed to say that a wrong act had been committed and it has to be made right. Yet he could have let that one pass for the sake of *pakikisama*. But he loved the farmer so much to let him believe that what he did was okay.

Ate Evelyn on her part has written about counterproductive Filipino cultural habits that give the nation a bad reputation -- traits such as *lusot*, *lakad* and *lagay*.¹ Her book underlines what the Bible says about Filipino values, but it wasn't a mere collection of words, rather, the couple has wrestled with those issues themselves and concluded that the Bible is not silent on values affecting a nation.

The couple lends a hand there, a pat here, a shoulder to lean on – since they are constantly touched by the plight of the poor in their village. They pray for them and help them especially in times of sheer desperation. They could have simply fenced themselves in, with a manicured lawn and enjoy complete isolation while they write escapist literature. But Manong David and Ate Evelyn chose to live, not in a city where neighbors are often living their lives incognito, but in Adlas, a barangay, a baryo quite far from the town populated by people whose daily struggles seems to represent the plight of every Filipino. Their decision to remain involved is anchored on their firm belief on the Word of God, which teaches incarnation, the living out of our faith in full.

¹ Feliciano, E.M. *Filipino Values and the Christian Faith*, OMF Literature Inc. 1996: Philippines

“Jesus came to earth and became one among us, and lived and breathed among the poor in society. He identified with every needy person he met on his way. We read it in the Bible, we believe it, we want to emulate it.”