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Celebration Story

We invite you to share with your congregation the following story from Christina Bartel Barkman, who is in Mindanao, Philippines with her husband Darnell Barkman for a ten month internship with Mennonite Church Canada. The story should take no more than 2 minutes to read aloud. You might also wish to include it in your church newsletter.

–Deborah Froese, ParyerNet Coordinator

A most beautiful way



Burned out homes, evacuees tenting along the beach, helicopters flying low overhead and soldiers patrolling the streets; hard evidence of a community devastated by war. These scenes greeted me as we drove into the municipality of Kauswagan in Mindanao with Peacebuilders Community Inc. (PBCI), a ministry supported by Mennonite Church Canada Witness. I was there to distribute relief to 270 internally displaced families.

Kauswagan is one of the many communities affected by the failed signing of an agreement that would have helped to settle long-standing land disputes. Throughout rural regions in central

Mindanao, a war that broke out in July has displaced about 400,000 people.

I thought I would encounter a solemn and gloomy atmosphere in Kauswagan, but instead I was welcomed with smiles and playful laughter. Soldiers carrying rifles grinned and waved as we drove through checkpoints. Local volunteers welcomed us warmly, preparing feasts and providing us a place to stay.

Amidst my disgust at the destruction, I glimpsed the beauty and wonder of the human spirit. What compelled an armed bandit to clean and bandage the gunshot wound of a young man he had just shot? And what made rebels show mercy to a pleading family who offered them food if they would be spared?

Despite their apprehension, the people of Kauswagan seemed remarkably joyful. Women chatted happily as they waited in line to receive their food packages. Youth giggled as they eagerly gathered around my 'foreigner' husband, Darnell, to have their picture taken. Even the face of an elderly woman, crippled by a recent stroke, shone with delight when we greeted her.

My 'Lonely Planet' guide to the Philippines refers to Filipinos as one of the world's happiest people. With 70 different dialects, it says that they don't have words for depression, anxiety, anguish or even boredom. How is this the case in a region stricken by war, poverty, colonialism and corrupt leadership?

As Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl writes, "Everything can be taken from a man, but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way." The Filipinos have a wonderful capacity to choose a most beautiful way.

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11