

Concert kicks off 'House of Prayer Project'

Visiting nun helps raise funds for Verbum Dei apostolate center

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"For You I live, for them I give; For You I speak, for them I believe. . ."

SO echoed the opening song of Sr. Maeve Louise Heaney of the Verbum Dei Missionaries during the fundraising concert *For You, For Them: A Night of Inspiration and Music* on January 31 at the Albertus Magnus Auditorium at the University of Sto. Tomas.

Sr. Maeve was visiting us here the Philippines for the first time to perform in our fund raising concert for a new apostolate center in Pasig, Metro Manila. The event was attended by over 250 people. She shared that her opening song, "For You, For Them" is a composition that "goes to the heart of what being a missionary is about. It is about doing things for God and doing things for others." It was a fitting way to launch Verbum Dei's "House of Prayer for All Nations" project.

Verbum Dei is actually an international Catholic Community of consecrated missionaries and lay people dedicated to praying, living and sharing the Gospel of Christ to others. Since its arrival in the Philippines in 1977, it can now be found in Metro Manila, Tagaytay, Cebu and Cagayan de Oro.

To nurture and sustain this growth, Verbum Dei recognized the need for a permanent apostolate center where youth, singles, working people and married couples can participate in prayer, theological formation, spiritual direction according to their diverse needs, towards being "missionary disciples for the world and the Church".

Groundbreaking for the site of this apostolate center in Pasig is scheduled for August of this year.

Sister Maeve herself was born in Dublin, Ireland and met the Verbum Dei Community in the university where she was studying. In 1984 she joined

the community and this year she will celebrate 31 years as a missionary. She completed her Bachelors in theology at the Instituto Teológico San Pablo Apóstol, in Madrid, Spain before being assigned in England and Ireland with apostolic work in university chaplaincy. She also undertook her Licentiate and Doctorate degrees at the Pontifical Gregorian University, in Rome in the area of Fundamental Theology and Theological Aesthetics. After her studies she taught in Rome (Gregorian University), United States (Berkeley, California) and currently she is teaching theology at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane.

One of her main interests is the role of music in evangelization. She reflects "I think we are quite aware of the importance of words in Christian faith—mission and theology—but the power of music is less understood, and therefore not always well-used. Going deeper she continues, "In Christian faith, the Word is someone—and something of that Someone we believe in can be communicated through words, but music is also a human form of expression—and it is expressive of Christ in ways words can't. Music is very powerful—it moves us. It touches more than our minds and heads, but our whole person—body, feelings, and understanding—for a faith that is rooted in an incarnated God, this is important."



■ 'The Manila Times' columnist Fr. James McTavish with Sr. Maeve Louise Heaney of the Verbum Dei Missionaries in Dublin



■ Sr. Maeve joins the musically gifted members of Verbum Dei in the Philippines

This desire to more fully grasp the role of music in the expression and transmission of faith drives her research at ACU as well. "I am on a quest to understand how we make sense of music, and the role it can play in our faith life, in helping us connect with God and enriching our lives. God gave us the gift of music—it is one we are called to enjoy, celebrate and develop. Theology needs to understand that better."

And how about her experience of the Philippines? Well apart from the excitement of her first ride in a tricycle, she sees that the people here have so much raw, natural and at times untapped potential. She said, "In the Philippines—I sense tremendous receptivity to and capacity for musical creativity—perhaps it is a culture that can help theology re-

gain its balance in how we approach knowledge. Despite the richness of so many aspects of our tradition, Western culture left theology that is bereft of wholeness: I believe music can help us access the presence of God in our lives and with that live fuller Christian lives." She commented, "It has been a pleasure to perform in Manila—and with such talented musicians. The welcome and reception of my music was so very warm."

One concertgoer and active lay member of the Verbum Dei community, Tess Lee expressed her experience of the concert in this way: "I always hear people say 'singing is praying twice'. Never have I doubted this because many times I have been moved by beautiful music to praise and thank God. Many



■ Blessed with a beautiful voice, Sr. Maeve came to Manila to help raise funds to construct Verbum Dei's apostolate center in Pasig City

times, I give in to music to lead me to a deeper encounter with God. But what if it turns the other way? Our prayers pave a way for beautiful songs to be borne? What if our prayers blended with rhythm can lift up spirits, transform hearts and leave our minds believing? Sr. Maeve led us to this awakening experience in a concert of love and music. Sr. Maeve's songs are a lifting up of her life in prayer. Prayer then becomes a fount of her beautiful songs that touch and inspire people who are longing and searching for our God who loves so immensely. The concert of Sr. Maeve left me reassured of God's love and mercy. Music definitely has power especially when we are led to prayer. Through prayers in our songs we are lifted up. We ask and we receive, we seek and we

find. Through our songs God listens and He answers. Thank you, Sr Maeve for a night of music that inspires, reassures and transforms."

Sr. Maeve closed the concert with a prayer: "We place into your hands this evening that plans that lie behind our coming and the vision and dreams that You have that we cannot even begin to imagine." As the audience joined her in the closing song, the sense of hope and optimism was palpable: Verbum Dei's "House of Prayer" project was on its way to reality.

For information on how to help the Verbum Dei apostolate center project, call Fr. James McTavish at 0908-9029115, or other members of team at 0918-9182374 and 0917-8970712, or email friendsofverbumdei@gmail.com.