

# The Servants of the Word

Easter &amp; Pentecost 2006

## Grasped from the Jaws of Death

**Luis Manuel Bravo: Brother, Accountant, Leader of Men**

Who could have imagined such a good man finding himself in such a horrifying civil war? Luis Manuel—better known to many of us as Luisma—was born in Nicaragua. But in 1985, at the age of 19, he fled his native country with hundreds of other youth who feared that they would be taken and forced against their will to fight for the Sandinistas. Refusal to join this Communist-backed regime meant certain and cruel imprisonment or death.

Luisma and a band of 80 young men marched through the jungles of Nicaragua, heading south to Costa Rica and freedom. Many were their close brushes with bombs and bullets—and hostile rebels from whom they hid. To survive this ordeal and satisfy their wolf-like hunger, they sparingly raided farms along the way; more than one rancher woke at dawn to discover chickens or an occasional herd cow missing.

Luisma arrived in San José, Costa Rica, and quickly found employment as a door-to-door salesman. Later, he was hired to work in an auto repair shop, where he learned the skills that enabled him to make a modest living.


Motivated by his hunger for God and deep gratitude for what God had done in his life, Luisma joined up with other Christian university students in a movement called *Cristianos en Marcha* (Christians in Action), sponsored by the local Sword of the Spirit community, *Arbol de Vida* (Tree of Life). After a few months, he became a member of this covenant community. Desiring to please the Lord further and realizing the all-out nature God had given him, Luisma began to seriously consider living single for the Lord.

**Luisma is a brother who can bear much for the cause of the Lord and for his people.**

When Luisma asked to join The Servants of the Word, he was initially rejected and encouraged to finish his undergraduate degree first. Not being one to take “no” for a final answer, Luisma persisted—and soon he was living in our formation house in the United States. He moved to our household in Monterrey in 1993 and made his life-long commitment to The Servants of the Word in August of the following year.

Currently, Luisma’s responsibilities include

- being an elder in-training of The Servants of the Word
- leading a house of 10 men in Monterrey as well as offering formation to other young men in the process of their vocational discernment
- heading up the university outreach branch of *Jesed*, our community in Monterrey
- traveling frequently on pastoral visits anywhere from Mexico to Ecuador and points in between
- as a capable accountant, serving as the financial controller for our house in Monterrey.

With so much to do and having only two hands to do it, Luisma is a brother who can bear much for the cause of the Lord and for his people in the Latin American Region. Quick to laugh and make light of his many duties, he is a model and an example of a disciple of Jesus for our current times: a “true soldier” for the cause of Christ. 



—Pepe Vasquez



## The Hope That Is Ours

Beloved family and friends,

I write to wish you all a joyous celebration of Easter, filled with all the hope that is ours through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead! In our Lord Jesus' triumph over sin and death lie the hope and the promise of our own victory over these ancient enemies, as well as the victory of all those whom we love. For us in The Servants of the Word, as in many of our Christian traditions, Easter is not merely a day's rejoicing, but an entire season of grateful celebration—a festive season stretching from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday fifty days later. May your Easter season be filled with the joy of Christ's victory, and with the certain hope of the resurrection from the dead.

As we celebrate God's infinite love for us revealed so fully in the death and resurrection of his Son, we also thank him from the depths of our hearts for the countless ways in which he shows us his love. You are such a manifestation of God's love in our lives, and we thank him, and you, for all that you are for us. We pray that you also may be overwhelmed by his love and goodness to you! 🙏

In Jesus our risen Lord,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "John".

John Keating  
Presiding Elder

### For Your Reading Interest

Dan Keating, our North American regional elder and Ann Arbor-based professor, recently appeared in the Winter 2006 edition of *Mosaic* magazine, a publication of Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, where he teaches.

The article, entitled *Single for the Lord*, may be read online at our website: [www.servantsoftheword.org](http://www.servantsoftheword.org) or may be accessed at [www.shmsonline.org](http://www.shmsonline.org).

## God's Exciting Work in the Philippines

Talk about stirring times! The excitement in our country's current political scene—protest rallies, leftist congressmen holed up in the Legislative Assembly building, coup rumors and nipped-in-the-bud coup attempts ad nauseam—cannot, however, match the excitement of God's work among the many young people our brothers are serving. The past months saw a flurry of activities in our youth work (Lingkod ng Panginoon, Christ's Youth in Action, Tahanan, and the Ligaya Young Adults) and community-building efforts in the Asian Region (the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, India, and Australia). And with the hot Philippine summer already here (March to June), we expect even more exciting things—summer is *the* youth work season. Just take a look, and catch your breath as you read along (see page 3).

## Action, and More Action!

Mon Samson took over the reins of leading Lingkod Ng Panginoon (our nationwide outreach to single people, found in 31 cities) from Francis Iturralde, who is currently on sabbatical leave. Last October Mon led a national training conference of more than 300 leaders, highlighting the regionalization of Lingkod's work.

Raoul Roncal concurrently serves as CYA national director and as a coordinator in the local community, handling its University District, so he is leading the charge to integrate all youth work in the community and the outreaches, with the University District as the base. Jim Orbe, who took over Mon's role as sector leader for CYA Metro Manila, assists Raoul in this work. CYA, with more than 1,500 active members involved in its mentoring programs, presently reaches out to some 10,000 young people nationwide.

Marlo Valencia is leading several brothers in their service to the community's young adults. Last year's summer camps drew a record attendance of more than 200 kids of community members. Many were also involved last December in a project sponsored by Gawad Kalinga (a local version of Habitat for Humanity). Regular men's and women's events, sports camps, and relationship-building activities keep our brothers busy year-round.

Mark Aycocho and Jojo Baquiano continue to serve the youth in Tahanan, our community's outreach to the marginalized areas of Metro Manila. Retreats, tutorials, sports fellowships, prayer meetings, and mentoring programs were among the many events that Tahanan youth members participated in during the course of the past year.

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Servant of the Word elders and community coordinators Ken Noecker and John Yocum lead our community-building work for the Asian Region of The Sword of the Spirit. Mission travel is a constant feature of life as our brothers take trips visiting communities throughout the Philippines and abroad.




Not to be outdone, our resident theologians (Jake Yap and John Yocum) had a busy academic year. Jake was once again chosen by the students as "Professor of the Year" (his second year in a row) and awarded a professorial chair in Marian studies.

## Expanding Our Households

This year, we expanded into three separate households, two of which are located in the same Scout Tobias compound while the third is located in a rented apartment at nearby Scout Fernandez Street. The smaller number of residents in each household has worked very well for the brothers practically.

Also, for the past three years we have been considering the possibility of establishing another Servants of the Word household on the southern island of Mindanao. As part of this discernment process, this past January we sent a three-man team to live in Cagayan de Oro City, a large city in northern Mindanao, for six weeks. With God's guiding hand, it will become clearer to us whether we should establish this

household, thus enabling us to further the work of the Lord in this part of the Philippines. 

—Francis Iturralde

## International Controller Keeps Brotherhood On Track

Stuart Ferguson is not bashful of work—and he’s quite capable of creating it for others as he makes sure that we in The Servants of the Word meet our financial and administrative goals for the year. Wherever he is—holding down our central administrative office in Chelsea, Michigan, or traveling to London, England; Monterrey, Mexico; or Manila, Philippines—many things are happening.

Having grown up in the forests of northern Minnesota along the cold shores of Lake Superior, Stu (as his friends call him) is no stranger to hard work and long days. As a result, many and varied are the skills and life experiences that he brings to his work each day. These, along with a strong dose of God’s grace mixed with a robust, Minnesotan work ethic, help Stu summon the energy he needs each day to fulfill his financial and administrative duties for The Servants of the Word. These duties include serving as our international financial controller, risk manager, and brotherhood center property manager—all of which he does with an eye for excellence and precision. Just ask anyone who has worked for him.

Stu is responsible for giving financial oversight to our four regional controllers in London, Monterrey, Chelsea, and Manila. Traveling much of the globe to fulfill his responsibilities, he usually manages to find relaxation and fellowship with the brothers and close friends in these regions. After all, “all work and no play makes”... well, you get the idea. And, just in case Stu lacks things to do, he also has oversight for all Servants of the Word real estate acquisitions and sales. In addition, he serves on the board of directors for several outreaches connected with our mission in The Sword of the Spirit.



**Stu provides daily growth experiences for young men in various training phases within The Servants of the Word.**

Also known as “The Big Meanie,” Stu provides daily growth experiences (read into that what you may) for young men in various training phases within The Servants of the Word. Many are employed in service and work projects around the brotherhood center in Chelsea, where they quickly learn the importance of not cutting corners, doing their best work, and not shirking their responsibilities. Stuart is also responsible for the long-term direction and management of property-related developments at the brotherhood center.

Nary a day passes that one of the brothers doesn’t think or say, “Thank God that Stu Ferguson is doing what he is doing.” If you’re looking for someone to shoulder a heavy work load and want to have it done just so, you need not look beyond this direct, God-fearing Minnesotan. Something tells us Stu wouldn’t have it any other way. 🏔️

—Mike Kramer

### WE APPRECIATE YOUR HELP

The Servants of the Word gets its support through the financial earnings of the brothers as well as by donations from our benefactors. Many of our brothers work for sacrificial wages or for no pay at all. Please consider if you can become a financial sponsor of The Servants of the Word. Your prayers and support are appreciated in our work with young people and our community development work.

**THE SERVANTS OF THE WORD**  
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