

Diocesan Chancery

DIOCESE OF BOAC

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May 12, 2016

Sacred Heart Pastoral Center,
Bgy. Mataas na Bayan,
Boac, Marinduque

Dear Sir/Madam,

The peace of our loving God be with you always!

I am Most Rev. Marcelino Antonio M. Maralit Jr., D.D., the fourth bishop of the Diocese of Boac in the island province of Marinduque, Philippines. It is an island province with a land area of 952.58 sq km or 367.79 sq miles, and a population of around 230,000. I was installed as its' fourth bishop on March 17, 2015. And as early as my first week in the diocese, my predecessor, Most Rev. Reynaldo G. Evangelista, D.D., already spoke to me about the importance of the mission of the **MARINEL** Project. And of course my first question to him about this important mission was, "What does **MARINEL** mean or stand for?" And readily he explained that it is the acronym for **MARINDUQUE INTEGRATED NUTRITION EDUCATION LIVELIHOOD Project** which is a project in partner with Philippine charity groups like **Hapag-Asa**, and American charities **Risen Savior Missions (RSM)** and **Feed My Starving Children (FMSC)** that had this herculean mission of achieving **zero malnutrition** in this entire Diocese of Boac which is the whole island province of Marinduque. He informed me of how much help had already been given to the people specially the poor, as the province had a high malnutrition prevalence rate of around 25%; and how from 2012-2015, the extent of the three-year program, it has already had a significant impact in the lives of its' 43,369 beneficiaries (i.e. malnourished and starving children, elderly, pregnant lactating mothers & TB patients). But he also informed me that it was also already on its last year.

Thus, even before I really started immersing myself in my pastoral work as bishop, I decided to check on the situation of the **MARINEL** Project as one of the very first things on my to-do list. I instantly saw the importance and impact of this project in the lives of so many of the poor people I now serve as their shepherd. And I also saw some of the limitations and deficiencies of the diocese in some of its implementations. I knew there are things that could be done better and more efficiently. I also got to know of the stories of some of its beneficiaries which touched me and really made me appreciate more what the **MARINEL** Project had brought to our island. They were stories not only of people having their stomachs filled, but more so of people whose lives were changed for the better. And I know for a fact that it was also causing so much spiritual growth in the diocese because of the combined overall missionary programs evangelization effect.

And I was even fortunate enough to have the opportunity to meet with the heads and representatives of both the **RSM** and the **Feed My Starving Children** partners, who for me embody and exemplify what it means to care for God's little ones. I was truly impressed with their passion, commitment and genuine care for the people they have not even met nor are they related to. I highly appreciated also their honesty and their desire to really make things work more efficiently and that we all be accountable to our many partners and benefactors. I really took the opportunity to express to them my most sincere gratitude, but even more my earnest desire that the project be continued at the 235 well established holistic approach **MARINEL** feeding sites for at least another two years, as I continue to see how the situation of poverty has not really been changed yet permanently and the consequences of the same (ignorance, malnutrition, hunger, lack of medical care, etc.) continue to


prevail among thousands of the people in the province. I knew if the **MARINEL** Project ended then, many poor people will once again be left in a situation of crisis, desperation and helplessness. So I knew I had to try my best to request for its' continuation, which I called **Chapter 2**.

And God be blessed as our partners decided to continue working with us on the **MARINEL** Project for this second chapter. But we all knew and were unanimous in deciding that certain changes were necessary to make it more efficient and to make the help more **transformative** and **permanent** if possible. For one, I knew we had to change the management of the project on the part of the diocese and I saw the wonderful opportunity and blessing given to us with the presence and help of the Sisters of the **SFCC**. In the first three years of the **MARINEL** Project they were here in the official capacity as RSM Executive Missionaries representing **RSM**, assisting in the implementation, reporting and evaluation of the project. But now I offered to them the management itself of the whole project. It would immediately make communications between the many partners easier and quicker. I also believe that the kind of passion, commitment and love these beloved sisters have were what the project needed to make it more effective and transformative. Then, we also saw that an extra emphasis and a more strategic planning for the educational and livelihood components of the project should be made so that eventually the beneficiaries would not permanently depend on the **MARINEL** Project for their sustenance. And again, the **SFCC** sisters were the right ones for the job as their own professional competencies and experiences were in line with the educational and practical agricultural livelihood programs for this second chapter of the **MARINEL** Project. And in fact, as they started this second chapter we now have just enrolled an additional **9,028** new beneficiaries of the program, all of them not only being offered food but also the opportunity to escape from poverty and a chance to start a better life.

But as we made our planning and program assessments, we once again saw how immense the whole second chapter is, and thus how necessary it is for the assistance and help we have received from our various partners to continue for the success of this next chapter of the **MARINEL** Project. We consider the many help given by both **FMSC** and **RSM** as lifelines for the continuation of the implementation of the whole project. The help that they have already extended and sent to the diocese has already been immense and invaluable. One cannot even begin to think that if it was not for their help, the diocese would not even know where to start looking for the **2 million meals** a year that were given to our beneficiaries during the past three years. But the mission continues, and the need for the support of our American partners like **RSM** is as real as before, and even more so now, so we can continue in this second chapter as we desire to really go for the homerun as we desire to hit poverty in its roots and eradicate malnutrition while working to transform the lives of more people by not only offering them food for their empty stomachs, but also a better formed mind and a stable means of livelihood.

And it is also for this reason that I, as bishop of the Diocese of Boac, would like to express my most sincere appeal to you to continue supporting our partners in their untiring and relentless labor to help us feed our starving brethren and hopefully give them a better life. And regardless of the type or amount of help or assistance you give, we will always be most thankful for it, as it would surely make a difference in the lives of thousands of so many innocent children and their families in our diocese. May our good and loving God reward you for all your generosity and support to this mission of feeding the poor little ones of God. Be always assured of our prayers.

In Christ,

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+Most Rev. Marcelino Antonio M. Maralit Jr., D.D.
Bishop- Diocese of Boac