



## **JULY 2015: BARISTA FINISHES COLLEGE THROUGH COFFEE FOR PEACE SCHOLARSHIP**

*Reported by Jonathan Cranston, Information and Communications Team*

*This month we celebrate the graduation from college of Rassiery Ramos, one of our longest-serving Coffee For Peace baristas. As we pray God’s blessing on the next chapter in his career, we also recognize the contribution Rassiery has made to our mission work here in Mindanao.*



At the close of 2007, young Rassiery Ramos was near to despairing. Unable to pay his college tuition, he had been forced to drop out. Rassiery’s family had always been poor. He and his siblings longed to earn college degrees and find professional employment so as to help their parents. But the wages from Rassiery’s job in the kitchen of a Jollibee fast food restaurant were pitifully low. He felt exhausted, unappreciated, and trapped.

Rassiery called on the Lord. He asked to be shown a way forward – a way to use his talents to raise his parents from poverty and bring rest to their autumn years. About a month after this prayer, he received a text message from a church friend who worked at the Coffee For Peace (CFP) café. CFP was looking to hire another barista, but Rassiery figured that his chances of being hired were slim. He knew that the barista’s trade requires special skills, and he had no background in it. Still, he submitted his application, and to his surprise he was soon training at CFP, while continuing to work fulltime at Jollibee. He learned quickly, and after a month of barista training he finally left Jollibee to join the CFP staff.

Rassiery flourished in his new job. At CFP he gained a community and, equally important to him, he found that in working at the café he was taking part in a ministry. Rassiery learned how the fair trade business of CFP complements the conflict resolution work of CFP’s sister organization PeaceBuilders Community, Inc. (PBCI), and how the CFP and PBCI teams work together to promote economic and social justice in the Philippines. Rassiery was proud to contribute to this mission. In particular, he was glad to be helping to improve the lives of poor and marginalized farmers “Especially their children,” he tells me. “They have to go to school.”

Rassiery understands too well how hard it can be for the very poor to send their kids to school. His parents, having no higher education themselves, broke their backs to enable him and his siblings to stay in school. His father walked the streets selling taho – a soy curd snack that vendors hoist from place to place in heavy tin buckets hung from a yoke. His mother sowed dresses on a machine at home. For one three-year period, from Rassiery’s third grade to



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

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sixth grade years, she plied her trade in Dubai, as one of the hundreds of thousands of Filipinos laboring outside the country in order to send money home to their families.



Rassiere with CFP coworkers in front of the café.

had enabled him to return to school, and now, after seven years at CFP, he is beginning a career with the Philippine National Police. He hopes to serve as a positive influence and a peacemaker within that organization. He is profoundly grateful to CFP, which he likens to a car that came along and gave him a lift when he was walking towards his distant goal. All three of Rassiere's younger siblings have graduated from college as well, and his hard laboring parents should finally have the financial support to enjoy some rest. Their neighbors, who witnessed the family's sorrow and struggles, are astonished at what the Ramos kids have achieved. "You mean they all finished college?" they ask Rassiere's mother. She answers, "They worked hard. They studied." Rassiere is extremely proud of his parents and siblings. "Family" he tells me, "is what you fall back on."

The Ramos family's poverty had one even more tragic consequence, which Rassiere's parents could do nothing to prevent. When Rassiere was seven years old, he contracted measles. Soon his other four siblings were infected, and one sister, older than Rassiere by a year, became especially ill. His parents had no money to take her to the hospital. They put out a box by the front door to collect donations, and his father went door to door looking for work or money. Rassiere remembers sitting by the door, watching the donation box and staring at the sky while his sister lay inside growing weaker. He was watching the box when he heard crying in the house and knew his sister was gone. From that time he was the eldest – a hard adjustment, but a responsibility he took seriously. His older sister had helped him with his lessons, so that he won awards in school. Rassiere was determined to help his three younger siblings succeed.

This Spring Rassiere graduated from the University of Mindanao with a degree in Criminology. A scholarship provided by CFP