

# Diaz, Paterno Matulac (1927–2013)

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Paterno Matulac Diaz was a pastor and church administrator from the Philippines.

## Early Life

Paterno Matulac Diaz, fondly called Pater, was born November 12, 1927, in Balasan, Iloilo, Philippines<sup>1</sup> to Consorcia Bartolome Matulac and Severino Lachica, both Roman Catholics.<sup>2</sup> Pater was the third child in a family of five boys and three girls. Life was hard for them because his father's pay as a policeman was not enough to provide for the basic needs of the large family.<sup>3</sup>

During his early years Paterno and his family lived in an unfinished nipa shack along Bonifacio Street in Balasan. The hut had a dirt floor, with roof and walls made of woven nipa leaves. The hut had no furniture—no table, chairs, or even a bed to sleep on. They had no electricity, running water, or indoor bathroom. They had to fetch water from a kilometer away from the well of a friendly farmer. They gathered firewood for cooking by going two kilometers away to a coconut plantation of a wealthy family who was mean to them.<sup>4</sup> To earn a little money to add to the family income, the four oldest children did housework for sympathetic neighbors. Paterno also sold newspapers in the street and polished shoes in the market place. None of the family owned shoes. They walked to and from school and everywhere else in bare feet. But all of these hardships did not deter them from pursuing their studies.<sup>5</sup>

One time his father was asked to guard a cottage meeting held by the Seventh-day Adventists in a neighboring town. He relayed to his wife everything he heard from the preacher about last-day events and the prophecies of Daniel 2. Paterno's mother was eventually baptized as a Seventh-day Adventist, but it would take a few more years before she actually became a practicing one. His father never accepted Adventism.<sup>6</sup>

When Paterno was only 12 years old, his father died due to an illness. With his father gone, he and his older siblings took odd jobs while the younger girls (still in elementary school) helped their mother weave baskets and mats to sell. Their hopes for further education, a better life, and a brighter future were all dashed. Paterno had to quit school after finishing his elementary education to help support the family. During those hard times their efforts were all focused on feeding the family. In spite of the difficulty of life, their mother did everything within

her means to raise Paterno and his siblings in the Christian faith. She was able to save 75 centavos (a day's wage for most) to buy a well-worn Bible in the local dialect. Although parts of Genesis and Revelation were missing from both disintegrating ends, it became their textbook, bedtime story book, and life-reference book. Their mother read from it for morning and evening worship. She led them in singing hymns loud enough for all the neighbors to hear. On Sabbath mornings, they were up at 4 am, to pack little lunches before walking 15 kilometers to attend church. In the eyes of the people who watched them, they were a weird little cult. This did not bother them at all.<sup>7</sup>

Because they could not afford to buy books, Paterno's mother borrowed an English Bible and other books from church members. She required the children, especially Paterno who showed a keen interest in the Bible, to memorize verses and chapters, especially from the Psalms and the gospels. He memorized verses from the *Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly* and morning devotional (Morning Watch) readings, the Ten Commandments, and hundreds of other biblical passages. Bible Bowl-type competitions were popular in those days. He participated in them and he never lost one. One day a church member lent him two books that helped shaped his spirituality during his formative young years: *Messages to Young People* and *Early Writings*. This was the beginning of his love for reading Ellen G. White's writings.

Beginning when he was young, Paterno loved to preach. When doing his farm chores, he would take the Visayan Bible and from his perch between the carabao's (water buffalo) horns, he would preach to the sprouting rice seedlings amidst the rice paddies. Neighbors who already thought they were odd because of their religious practices could only confirm this oddness from watching him preach and gesticulate atop the carabao. When their local church hosted a series of cottage meetings, he was asked to preach on one topic. He was ready. His practice sessions on top of the carabao paid off. The brethren were so impressed with his dynamic preaching that he was designated as one of the child preachers for the entire series. He was only 13 years old then and was not yet even baptized. Under the guidance of his mother, Paterno studied the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs. Later he was baptized on April 4, 1942, in Estancia, Iloilo, by Pastor Gil de Guzman, president of South Philippine Union Mission.<sup>8</sup>

Due to the hard, daily toil, the aging Consorcia could not bear the long walks to church, so they decided to form a small group, in those days called a home division church. Their shanty became the Sabbath meeting place. His mother held multiple church positions, such as: church elder, church treasurer, Sabbath School superintendent, lay activities leader, youth director, and deaconess. The children were her only members. However, it did not take long for the church to grow. Their first convert, a cousin—Ernesto Bartolome, was a student at Siliman University, Dumaguete, Negros Oriental, a prestigious school run by the Methodists. The cousin's mother, Monica Araneta Bartolome, academic dean of Siliman, was livid that her intelligent son would fall under the influence of his uneducated barrio cousins. In spite of the many challenges, the church continued to grow. Eventually it was organized as a church, so it could be said that Paterno's mother, Consorcia Bartolome Matulac

Diaz, had established the first Seventh-day Adventist Church in Carles, Iloilo. Unfortunately, the hard labor and the difficulty of raising a large family had taken their toll on his mother. She fell ill and died a few years later. The children were left to care for each other.

## Education and Marriage

Paterno finished elementary school at Balasan Estancia, Iloilo. He stopped attending school when his father died because he had to help his mother support the family. In 1946, one evening after midweek prayer meeting, church member Flora Sagrado suggested that he should go back to school, for West Visayan Academy which was closed during the war was reopening that school year in Molo, Iloilo. She suggested that he visit Romulo and Angelina Ferrer who were residing 40 kilometers away in the next town, for Romulo Ferrer would be the treasurer of the academy that year. The following morning Paterno walked 40 kilometers to see the couple. They received him gladly and Mr. Ferrer gave him a detailed plan for how he could finish his high school studies while working at the same time. He was filled with ambition and optimism as he took the 40-kilometer walk back home.<sup>9</sup>

That summer Paterno, only 19 years old, was at West Visayan Academy, more than 100 kilometers from home, to pursue his high school education. He worked hard and studied harder. In spite of being a working student, he was able to finish high school in five years.

In April 1951, he received his high school diploma.<sup>10</sup> A month later he began work for the denomination. While working as the treasurer of the Southern Mindanao Mission, he pursued his college studies. He graduated from the Harvardian University in Davao City Philippines, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in commerce.<sup>11</sup> He then did two summers of post-graduate studies at Philippine Union College in Silang, Cavite. On June 21, 1952, Paterno married Lilian R. Cometa who was born in Romblon Province on October 10, 1932.<sup>12</sup> Lilian was the daughter of Columba Romero Recto and Joaquin Roco Cometa, both Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>13</sup> They had four children: namely, Hellen, Paterno Jr., Jasper, and Marjorie. Paterno Jr. died in their home in Romblon when only 18 months old due to bronchitis.<sup>14</sup>

## Career and Ministry

Following his high school graduation in 1951, Paterno started his denominational service as an accountant for West Visayan Mission in Iloilo, City.<sup>15</sup> Due to the lack of church workers, it was not uncommon in those days to hire high school graduates to work for the church. In 1954 he became the Book and Bible Periodical Agency manager for the same mission. While serving in that capacity, in 1957 he and Jose A. Corpus, Publishing secretary, and Antonio G. Hilado, Sr., district leader and part-time office translator, conducted the first religious cottage meeting in the history of the West Visayan Mission.<sup>16</sup> During his early denominational work the family moved frequently.

In 1958 he was called to serve as an accountant for Miller Sanitarium and Hospital, based in Cebu City.<sup>17</sup> From 1959 until 1963 he served as the secretary-treasurer of the Southern Mindanao Mission which was based in Davao City.<sup>18</sup> He was ordained to the ministry on January 6, 1962, in Cebu City.<sup>19</sup> In 1964 he was appointed as the treasurer of Southern Mindanao Academy, Matanao Davao del Sur.<sup>20</sup> In 1965 he was called work as secretary-treasurer of Western Mindanao Mission, in Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental.<sup>21</sup> A year later he became president of the same mission, serving in that capacity for two years.<sup>22</sup> In 1968 he was appointed as the Lay Activities secretary of the South Philippine Union Mission,<sup>23</sup> which was then based in Davao City.<sup>24</sup> Diaz was the Lay Activities secretary of the South Philippine Union when the first Layman's Congress for Mindanao was held.<sup>25</sup> In 1970 the Stewardship Department was added to his responsibility as the Lay Activities secretary. In 1972 the Sabbath School department was added to his other responsibilities.<sup>26</sup> In 1973 he was appointed treasurer of the South Philippine Union Mission, a position he held until 1975. When M. M. Claveria retired in December 1975, Paterno Diaz, who was serving as the union treasurer, succeeded him.<sup>27</sup> From 1976 until his retirement in 2000 he served as president of the South Philippine Union Mission. During his leadership the South Philippine Union attained conference status in 1997. His other responsibilities as union president included chair of the board of Mountain View College and Mindanao Sanitarium and Hospital (now Adventist Medical Center, Iligan).

## Later Life

After his retirement in 2002, he continued to serve as the pastor of the Garden SDA Church in the union compound at Cagayan de Oro until 2010.<sup>28</sup> He continued to participate in many church activities such as conducting evangelistic meetings and planting churches all over the territory of SPUC. He continued to travel around Mindanao and Visayas for speaking engagements and other ministerial functions. Paterno Matulac Diaz died on January 21, 2013.<sup>29</sup>

## Legacy

Diaz' dedication and service in the various departments of the church organization goes beyond what his service record reveals. Diaz was the longest serving president of the South Philippine Union Conference, having served in that capacity for 25 years until his retirement in 2002. Altogether he served the church for a total of 50 years. During his tenure as president, the church membership grew rapidly "from the smallest of three Philippine unions to the seventh largest union in the world."<sup>30</sup>

As president of the union he chaired various nominating committees of different institutions in the South Philippine Union Conference,<sup>31</sup> and he was a member of many other committees during General Conference sessions. He made many valuable contributions in discussions about soul winning activities and leadership issues.<sup>32</sup> Through his initiative many churches were planted and church buildings constructed.

He was instrumental in upgrading Southern Mindanao Academy to a college known now as South Philippine Adventist College.<sup>33</sup> Under his term, a small medical clinic was started in Valencia Bukidnon that has now become the Adventist Medical Center, Valencia.<sup>34</sup> He was also instrumental in building the Literature Ministry Seminary building at the union headquarters at Cagayan de Oro City.<sup>35</sup>

He wrote a number of articles regarding soul-winning activities published in both the local and international church papers. He also wrote the *Ladga*, a Bible study guide in the Visayan dialect which is still being used, especially in Mindanao and the Visayas, as an effective Bible Study tool. He is known as a tireless church worker, dynamic preacher, and a spiritual and visionary leader. He was a fearless warrior for God and a loving shepherd of his flock.

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