

Relevance of Pentecostal Practices and Missions to Overseas Filipino Workers in the Middle East

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Introduction

The diaspora of millions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) worldwide has significantly impacted the global labor market, with the Middle East being a key destination for short-term migrant workers from the Philippines. This migration has played a significant role in generating remittances for the government, which has increasingly depended on the earnings of these workers for foreign exchange.¹ Of the 1.83 million OFWs in the Middle East in 2021, 24.4% worked in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 14.4% in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 5.9% in Kuwait, and 4.8% in Qatar.² This diaspora has reached even those regions of the Middle East where strict limitations on expressions of Christianity pose unique challenges. Despite these constraints, Pentecostal practices among OFW Christians transcend geographical boundaries and serve as a vital component of their spiritual and cultural identity.

Pentecostalism offers a beacon of hope and resilience for many OFWs, providing them an emotional sustenance and a sense of community in a culturally different environment. The spiritual identity rooted in Pentecostal beliefs not only helps nurture their faith and allows them to live a victorious life but also empowers them to share the gospel with both locals and fellow expatriates, particularly those from unreached people

¹Robyn Rodriguez, "Philippine Migrant Workers' Transnationalism in the Middle East," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 79 (March 1, 2011): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547910000384>; Rappler.com, "History of OFW Deployment Bans in the Middle East," news, February 24, 2023, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/history-deployment-bans-middle-east>.

²Rappler.com, "History of OFW Deployment Bans in the Middle East."

groups. Central to this identity is a distinct spirituality that emphasizes the figure of Christ as Savior, Baptizer of the Spirit, and Healer, which is expressed through their oral liturgy and communal practices. William and Robert Menzies assert that Pentecostalism is the most successful social movement of the past century³ and Hwa Yung highlights its global impact, citing its mega churches, its penetration of the media, and its adherents' significant involvement in world evangelization.⁴

This essay aims to show the relevance of Pentecostalism for OFWs in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, where the intersection of faith and work creates a complex landscape for migrant workers. I will identify some Pentecostal practices (particularly among Assemblies of God believers), connect such practices to the compatibility of OFWs' spiritual, emotional, and social needs, and highlight how they enrich these workers' understanding of faith and community. Additionally, this paper will examine the role of church networks from the Philippines in strengthening the theological foundations of Pentecostal groups in the region. By evaluating the pressing need to equip OFWs with tools for intentional and culturally sensitive witnessing, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Pentecostalism's impact on the lives of migrant workers in the Middle East.

The Pentecostal OFW Church and The Book of Acts

In this section, I describe the common practices of four Filipino Pentecostal churches in the Middle East. I have had personal connections with the pastors of the said churches and have attended their worship services both in-person and online. The information I gathered about these practices was through personal conversations with the pastors and some members, verbal and written interviews with the same pastors and members, and participating in their onsite and online services.

Filipino Pentecostal churches in the Middle East are predominantly led by former Pentecostal pastors and workers originally rooted in the Assemblies of God or other Pentecostal traditions in the Philippines. Thus, these individuals have been significantly influenced by the practices that characterize the Filipino Pentecostal Church's historic background.

³William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2000).

⁴Hwa Yung, "Endued with Power: The Pentecostal—Charismatic Renewal and The Asian Church in the Twenty-First Century," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 6, no. 1 (2003): 64.

The Pentecostal revival began in the Philippines in the 1920s, with earlier efforts by the United Free Gospel Church and the Assemblies of God (AG). The first American AG missionaries to serve there—the Caudles—arrived in 1926.⁵ Dave Johnson highlights their ministry, which emphasized the manifestations of Pentecostalism, including signs and wonders,⁶ which played a crucial role in shaping Filipino Christianity’s spiritual landscape, particularly the AG.

One of the practices of ‘classical Pentecostals’ is the baptism in the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues.⁷ Doreen Benavidez emphasizes speaking in tongues as a prerequisite for ministry readiness as practiced in the 1920s by the Messenger-of-the-Cross Bible Institute in Northern Luzon under the Church of God (another classical Pentecostal denomination).⁸ Also central to their practices are healing through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit, both felt needs for connection with the supernatural power⁹ and a spiritual experience for many Filipinos.¹⁰ According to Johnson, field research among groups like the AG revealed that healing played a major role in conversions and spiritual experiences.¹¹ Having such relevance in their culture makes it an integral part of their identity and tradition, even as they cross the borders of the Middle East. An examination of these Pentecostal practices will connect them to parallel distinctions of the early Church in the Book of Acts.

Natural and Spirit-Led Gatherings

What the Filipino Pentecostal churches in the Middle East had seen and practiced in the Philippines were continued throughout their journey in the Arab region. This is in parallel with the purpose of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, where God envisioned the establishment of a community

⁵Dave Johnson, *LED BY THE SPIRIT The History of the American Assemblies of God Missionaries in the Philippines* (Pasig City, Philippines: ICI Ministries, 2009), 7, https://www.academia.edu/34297392/LED_BY_THE_SPIRIT_pdf.

⁶*Ibid.*, 8.

⁷Dave Johnson, “Pentecostal Spirituality and Traditional Practices in the Philippines,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (2023): 186-199, 194.

⁸Doreen Benavidez, “The Early Years of the Church of God in Northern Luzon (1947-1953): A Historical and Theological Overview,” *Asia Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8, no. 2 (2005): 255-269, 268.

⁹Lora Angeline Embudo Timenia, *Third Wave Pentecostalism in the Philippines: Understanding Toronto Blessing Revivalism’s Signs and Wonders Theology in the Philippines* (Baguio City, Philippines: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press, 2020), 102-103.

¹⁰Johnson, “Pentecostal Spirituality,” 193.

¹¹Dave Johnson, *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publisher, 2017).

where believers would care for one another and reflect the essence of his kingdom's life to the world around them.¹² Although traditions are passed from one generation to another, this culture is patterned from Acts 2, which Robert Menzies describes as 'the apostles' story being our story.'¹³ That story includes the unique Pentecostal contributions to spiritual formation.¹⁴

In the concluding portions of Acts 2, Luke narrates the early Christian community's commitment to several key practices, including devotion to the apostles' teachings, fellowship, communal meals, miracles, sharing of possessions, and collective worship through singing and prayer (vv. 42-46). Furthermore, this community placed strong emphasis on deepening its understanding of the apostles' teachings by diligently studying the Scriptures.¹⁵ As noted by Ladd and Glasser, Luke illustrates how fulfillment of the promised hope through the Messiah (as foretold in the Old Testament) is now manifesting within the Gentile church.¹⁶ This dynamic is echoed in contemporary contexts, including within the Pentecostal OFW churches in the Middle East, where Jesus remains the focal point of their gatherings and where a vibrant sense of hope thrives. Menzies wrote: "Any event in history cannot be repeated, but many events in the narrative of Acts are clearly presented as models for Luke's church. They are recorded by Luke precisely so that they will be repeated in the lives of his readers."¹⁷

Gathering Under Restrictions

The churches have successfully secured spaces for Filipino believers to gather, even in the face of various restrictions, particularly

¹²Craig S. Keener, *For All Peoples: A Biblical Theology of Missions in the Gospel and Acts* (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2020), 69-70.

¹³Robert P. Menzies, *Pentecost: This Story Is Our Story* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2013), 20-21; Robert P. Menzies, "Missional Spirituality: A Pentecostal Contribution to Spiritual Formation," in *A Theology of the Spirit in the Doctrine and Demonstration*, ed. Theresa Chai, (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2014), 45.

¹⁴Robert P. Menzies, "Missional Spirituality: A Pentecostal Contribution to Spiritual Formation," in *A Theology of the Spirit in the Doctrine and Demonstration*, ed. Theresa Chai (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2014), 41.

¹⁵Kenneth L. Barker and John R. III Kohlenberger, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary—Abridged Edition: New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017).

¹⁶George Eldon Ladd, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 270; Glasser, Arthur F. *Announcing the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 265.

¹⁷Menzies, "Missional Spirituality," 46-47.

experienced during their establishment. For those OFWs who are Pentecostal believers, coming together for worship, prayer, and study of Scripture is a deeply ingrained practice, despite awareness of potential risks associated with such gatherings. This reflects the early Church's experience—namely, empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2 and 4), the disciples boldly gathered to worship Jesus. Their courage amid adversity inspires believers to uphold faith and community in challenging times.

In a restricted Middle Eastern country, Lem (pseudonym), a pastor, led over fifty OFWs after the senior pastor's absence.¹⁸ He and a co-pastor organized church activities, but their gatherings drew unwanted attention. Authorities raided a Friday service and detained ten participants for questioning. Some were held for three weeks, while others were imprisoned up to three months as officials investigated alleged illegal violations tied to their worship. The main accusation was simply holding a Christian gathering, which was prohibited in that nation.¹⁹ Since the worship event did not involve any locals, the authorities struggled to build a case against them. Eventually, all ten were released from detention. Understandably, they became more cautious in their actions and strategic in planning their gatherings.

The incident, instead of creating fear, built courage (Acts 1:8, cf. Acts 4:31), with the pastor in charge feeling encouraged to bring more believers together to strengthen their faith and guide them in discipleship.²⁰ Elsewhere in this paper, I have highlighted that such persecution can be endured as part of the effort to fulfill the Great Commission, enabling more people to come to know Jesus as well as experience his transformative power.²¹

The Spiritual Gifts and The People of the Spirit

Jerry (pseudonym), a pastor, recounts his experiences upon arriving in a country in the Middle East and meeting some members of his congregation back in the Philippines.²² He recalls the beginning of some small groups and notes that these communities mostly emerged from

¹⁸Lem, "Interview on Raided OFW Church Service in the Middle East," FB Messenger, March 1, 2024.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰According to Lem, he became more courageous and diligent, which also encouraged other OFWs not to allow fear in worship gatherings.

²¹Jay Q. Angeles, "A History of Protestant Missions in East Timor," *Journal of Asian Missions* 15, no. 2 (2014): 113.

²²Jerry, "Interview on Gifts and Spirituality of OFWs in the Middle East," FB Messenger Online call, April 9, 2024.

spontaneous gatherings characterized by the active practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Jerry emphasizes that these believers possess a deep yearning for and openness to the move of the Spirit within their individual lives and their communities.²³ This follows the model of how Luke describes the experience of the early Church, which was led by God supernaturally.²⁴ It goes along with how the Holy Spirit prompts them in fulfilling what Jesus had promised in Acts 1:8—to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. This phenomenon aligns with Gordon Fee’s characterization of “people of the Spirit,”²⁵ wherein the Church embodies a spiritual essence primarily due to the presence of the Spirit among them. Furthermore, the Church adopts a Charismatic identity by actively engaging in the gifts of grace that the Spirit bestows upon the members, as articulated in 1 Cor 12-14. Being Charismatic, believers are encouraged to share their spiritual gifts according to the Spirit’s guidance and inspiration. In this context, Anderson asserts that Pentecostalism is more accurately understood within a broader context as being a movement focused primarily on the experience of the Holy Spirit’s activity and the practice of spiritual gifts.²⁶

The Gift of Faith

The gift of faith manifests in various ways, starting with the Holy Spirit’s inauguration in Acts 2. After Peter’s sermon (v. 40), 3,000 people believed in Jesus and were water baptized (v. 41). This faith was evident as believers gathered, worshiped, prayed, and supported one another (vv. 42-46). Faith for a personal relationship with God or Jesus is established and then nourished through “first-hand experience.”²⁷ Such faith is a foundation for Pentecostal OFWs who come together to express love and support, particularly for the needy within their community. It is faith to meet God in their fellowship and corporate worship (Matt 18:20; 1 Cor

²³Ibid.

²⁴Menzies, “Missional Spirituality: A Pentecostal Contribution to Spiritual Formation,” 51.

²⁵Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 38-39.

²⁶Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18.

²⁷Martin Lindhardt, “(PDF) ‘Introduction’ Practicing the Faith: The Ritual Life of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians” in *Practicing the Faith. The Ritual Life of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians* (n.p.: Berghahn Books 2011), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371965413_Introduction_Practicing_the_Faith_The_ritual_life_of_Pentecostal-Charismatic_Christians_Berghahn_Books_2011.

3:16). Through prayer, they actively exercise their faith, trusting that God will fulfill his promises. Gathering together serves as a manifestation of corporate faith, invoking his blessings upon the community.

Empowerment of the Holy Spirit enables these believers to become channels of faith and courage for others. They convene in large groups on Fridays for vibrant worship and participate in smaller gatherings on other days for Bible study and discipleship activities. This communal engagement not only strengthens their individual faith but also fosters a supportive network among members. Moreover, OFW believers acknowledge that the spiritual gifts they possess (plus all other gifts) are imparted by the Spirit, as Paul articulated in his first letter to the Corinthians—“the Spirit is the source of them all” (1 Cor 12:4). Consequently, it is essential for the OFW church, (both collectively and individually) to engage in frequent interactions with God, thereby deepening their spiritual experience and enhancing their communal faith journey.²⁸

The Gifts of Healing

The Pentecostal belief in healing is frequently grounded in the testimonies of those who have personally experienced miraculous recoveries, which they interpret as direct acts of God’s intervention.²⁹ According to the pastors of the OFW churches, it is one Pentecostal practice that they exercise either collectively in the church services or individually as the need arises. Luke presents it as a result of Pentecost, when Peter instantaneously healed a lame man, which caused that man to praise God and those who witnessed it to be filled with wonder (Acts 3:6-10). In effect, healing demonstrates the Spirit’s power to bring back a person’s wholeness.³⁰ Also, it is confirmed by Paul as a gift given by the Spirit to the Church (1 Cor 12.9), emphasized by James as part of the Church’s function when there is a need to pray for sick people (Jas 5:13-20), and Pentecostals have carried on this tradition.³¹

Dahlia, a migrant worker in the Middle East, had for months been struggling with chronic shoulder pain, which affected her both physically

²⁸Andrew Murray, *Experiencing the Holy Spirit* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2000), 61.

²⁹Allan Anderson, “Pentecostal Approaches to Faith and Healing,” *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 363 (Jan. 1, 2002): 523.

³⁰Commentary on chapter Acts 3:1-10, Wayne McCown, *Asbury Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

³¹“Spirit and Power—A 10—Country Survey of Pentecostals,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), October 5, 2006, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2006/10/05/spirit-and-power/>.

and emotionally.³² A demanding work schedule made it difficult to visit a doctor, so she relied on church friends to help apply an intercare therapy device to her shoulder. Even simple tasks like lifting her arm became daunting challenges. In January 2023, Dahlia attended a church retreat, seeking solace and a fresh encounter with God. As the group sang worship songs, the atmosphere became filled with hope. At that moment, the senior pastor received a strong impression from the Holy Spirit that someone in the gathering was suffering from chronic pain and needed healing.³³ Without hesitation, he called for that person to come forward.

Feeling a stirring in her heart, Dahlia stepped out of the crowd and approached the front, where the church leaders laid hands on her and prayed for healing. As they did so, she felt an overwhelming warmth and sensed her shoulder becoming lighter. When the prayer concluded, she stood in awe of what had transpired, and with tears of joy testified to the congregation about her miraculous healing.³⁴ For the first time in months, she could raise her arm freely, without discomfort. In that moment, she experienced not only physical healing but also a renewed spirit that reminded her of both God's power and the caring community around her. The laying on of hands and healing not only strengthens one's faith by providing tangible evidence of divine intervention but also fosters communal ties among believers.³⁵

Janno (pseudonym), a Filipino manager in one of this region's prominent companies, attests to the Holy Spirit prompting him to engage in prayer for healing.³⁶ He expresses firm belief that, when he experiences a compelling urge to pray, it means God intends to effect healing in someone, albeit not necessarily through Janno's capability. Additionally, he acknowledges that there are instances when healing does not occur in individuals for whom he prays, which may indicate either a lack of faith or that God will do so differently. Janno's and other believers' testimony that "Jesus healed all who came to Him" is taken as a current indication of God's will to heal all now.³⁷

³²Jessica Lay, "Interview on Healing," FB Messenger Chat, September 3, 2024.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵David Han, "Healing in the Pentecostal Tradition," *Spiritus ORU Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (2024): 239.

³⁶Janno Aberda, "Chat with Carlo." *WhatsApp*, April 20, 2024.

³⁷Ibid.

The Gifts of Tongues and Prophecy

Believers of the OFW churches readily hold to the doctrine that ‘tongues’ (just like in Acts 2) is the initial manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and is an important gift. One local church says its members both believe and openly exercise it in the church. Other fellowships emphasize Paul’s statement in 1Cor 14:4 to use tongues privately to edify personally. Still others say that they do not know if their tongue is for everyone or for personal use, and thus speak it for personal hearing only. However, they do not disregard the gift, for Paul practiced it himself and encouraged the Church to desire it (1 Cor.14:18)³⁸ This one thing I note in my observations— that even though speaking in tongues is not the center of the church’s spirituality, it is nonetheless a significant part of the identity of the Filipino believers in the Middle East. Menzies muses that “It is rather an empowering experience that enables its recipient to participate effectively in the mission of God.”³⁹

On the other hand, OFW churches certainly practice the gift of prophecy both congregationally, in small groups, or in one-on-one settings. It is a powerful means to uplift one another and reaffirm God’s words to them as a personal revelation or *rehma*.⁴⁰

The Relevance of the Pentecostal Practices of OFWs

Having provided some examples of Pentecostal practices of the OFWs, I will now discuss their relevance in the everyday lives of our Filipino migrant workers. What are the values and advantages of being in a Pentecostal church? What does it mean to them to be surrounded by fellow Filipinos who follow Pentecostal traditions in a faith-challenging environment?

Lennox, in his article on Filipino Labor Migration, highlights the reality of the Filipino diaspora—“Migration is a dominant economic strategy in the Philippines, but migrants often struggle to overcome challenges and achieve the success that they hope for.”⁴¹ Family

³⁸Menzies and Menzies, *Spirit and Power*.

³⁹See the discussion on this issue in chapter nine of William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2000), 179.

⁴⁰Bill Hamon, *Prophets and Personal Prophecy*, vol. 1 (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1987), 33. It would be interesting to have a separate study on tongues for the OFW churches in the Middle East.

⁴¹Amie L. Lennox, “Precarity and Improvisation: Challenges and Strategies in Filipino Labour Migration,” *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (Nov. 13, 2019): 188, <https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-id439>.

members are often compelled to make significant sacrifices for the well-being of their loved ones by pursuing migration; and doing so, they can send remittances, which unfortunately come at the cost of their physical presence and emotional connection.⁴²

Some become successful and can handle financial obligations at home while living peacefully amidst busy schedules. However, despite their accomplishments, the daily realities of loneliness and homesickness are apt to weigh heavily, as the emotional toll of being separated from loved ones can be profound. For many, sending money home regularly is a priority, yet they frequently encounter uncooperative employers who may exploit their vulnerabilities. This can lead to a cycle of abuse, particularly for those in low-paying jobs, with their employers' lack of support and understanding exacerbating their struggles.

The challenges faced by OFWs are not just financial; they also likely encompass emotional and psychological hardships that require attention and compassion. Menzies proclaims that the Pentecostal movement is “a powerful and dynamic force impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of people.”⁴³ How does this power link to the everyday living of our OFWs?

Relevance to Spiritual Growth (Even in Hardship and Personal Struggles)

Thus, the eschatological kingdom of God is actualized already in part but not yet in the whole. Therefore, Pentecostalism is a Spirit empowered movement that seeks a divine encounter, bringing heaven to earth, creating an environment of love, joy, peace, holiness, and power in which the Holy Spirit reveals God's glory, transforms lives, heals the sick, delivers those who are bound, and forms faithful Christian community⁴⁴

Despite the challenges faced by many OFWs, the Pentecostal church gathers the believers and attracts non-believers to itself because of its unity, which Gina (pseudonym), describes as ‘the OFWs’ second family.’ In other churches, the pastor is considered the father (especially spiritual father) who provides guidance and mentoring as necessary. This Pentecostal church creates a healthy relationship that, like the early

⁴²Ibid., 189.

⁴³Robert P. Menzies, “Missional Spirituality: A Pentecostal Contribution to Spiritual Formation,” in *A Theology of the Spirit in the Doctrine and Demonstration*, ed., Theresa Chai, (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2014), pp. 39-56, 39.

⁴⁴Martin, “Pentecostal Identity: Embracing Heaven Below” (Unpublished).

Church, promotes and brings unity amidst living in a strange land. It entails supporting one another in the following five ways.

Serves as a Safe Space

The Pentecostal OFW small-group gathering, often held at members' homes, becomes a safe space for individuals to express their frustrations and struggles at work. Many face challenges in multicultural workplaces, encountering issues like discrimination or the need to bolster self-esteem when criticized by superiors. These life groups serve as support networks, offering prayer, wisdom, encouragement, and spiritual gifts that help members navigate their challenges. The groups foster deep relational connections that improve their sense of belonging and support.⁴⁵ As a result, the groups have become an essential part of OFWs' weekly routines, even if they meet after 9 o'clock at night. This community support plays a crucial role in helping them move forward and face their difficulties.

Cultivates Divine Encounters

Just as the early Pentecostals coming together for worship was central to their lives, so is the OFWs' focus on their gatherings after a long day of work. They meet mostly in homes where food is available for those who come straight from their jobs. Pentecostal gatherings are intentionally crafted to create an environment conducive to spiritual encounters and profound experiences with the Divine.⁴⁶ These encounters are facilitated by a heightened awareness of the presence of God, which paves the way for worship with individual and group debriefing. It teaches the believers how to lean on God, of the Lordship of Jesus, and of the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, which is available even in this generation. Hence, through the Spirit, God becomes directly accessible

⁴⁵Terence Chong and Daniel Goh P.S., "Asian Pentecostalism: Revivals, Mega-Churches and Social Engagement," in *Handbook of Religions in Asia*, digital (Routledge, 2014), 402-17, https://www.academia.edu/127369443/Revivals_mega_churches_and_social_engagement.

⁴⁶Daniel E. Albrecht, "Pentecostal Spirituality: Looking Through the Lens of Ritual," *Pneuma* 14, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1992): 121, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007492X00104>.

to those who earnestly seek him, eliminating the need for any form of external mediation.⁴⁷

Strengthens Faith and Molds Character

As individuals grow in their dependence on God, they become more aware of the diverse characters and cultures around them, which can lead to frustration and bitterness. Often, they will avoid conflicts with coworkers or employers in order to prevent workplace friction. However, by engaging with God's Word in the spiritual gatherings, they expand their understanding of others, which helps to release them from unforgiveness and foster a more compassionate outlook.⁴⁸ This reflects from Peter's sermon in Acts 2 that forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit are now available to those who repent (vv. 36-40).⁴⁹

Ignites a Passionate Pursuit of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 14:1)

When OFW church's pastors and workers were imprisoned (as noted by Lem), the congregation came together to fervently pray for their protection. During this time of seeking the Lord, Gina joyfully reported the Holy Spirit descended upon many members, filling them with his presence and empowering them to speak in tongues. Testimonies from the congregates revealed that being baptized in the Spirit instilled in them greater courage to follow God and boldly share their personal testimonies with fellow migrant workers. Additionally, other spiritual gifts began to manifest as members sought guidance on how to minister

⁴⁷Juan Sepúlveda, "Reflections on the Pentecostal Contribution To the Mission of the Church in Latin America," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 93-108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096673699200100107>, 100.

⁴⁸Elizabeth Gassin, "Meaning, Function, and Performance of a Christian Forgiveness Ritual," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 22, no. 1 (2008): 29.

⁴⁹Four basic themes from Peter's sermon (Acts 2:16-40): 1. Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit (vv 16-21); 2. Jesus of Nazareth has been vindicated as Lord and Christ (vv. 22-28); 3. Death has been overcome as evidenced by the presence of the Spirit (vv. 29-35); and 4. Forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit are now available to those who repent (vv. 36-40)—Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 266.

to one another through these gifts, all of which fostered a profound sense of joint participation with Christ.⁵⁰

Offers Vital Support in Times of Need

The church serves as a place that offers support when most needed. Reflecting the spirit of the early Church, a congregation in the Middle East assists OFWs who have been laid off or whose contracts ended. The church provides temporary housing in rented properties, ensuring a safe place to stay. During this time, members receive daily meals and free accommodation while searching for new jobs. Additionally, experienced members and senior workers generously share insights that guide newcomers through the challenges of finding employment.

Relevance to the Family in the Philippines

Living away from loved ones, family, and friends presents significant challenges. One member of an OFW church emphasizes that having a spiritual support group is crucial for protecting oneself from attacks of the enemy and various temptations. Regular spiritual gatherings foster a deeper connection with God, strengthen faith, and enhance awareness of spiritual battles.⁵¹

Many Filipinos turning to migrant work due to economic necessity experience working alone as well as being separated from spouses and children. Gubat et al. describe the experience of a mother who is an OFW and faces profound loneliness due to isolation.⁵² Time zone differences hinder her ability to maintain regular communication with her children, which, in turn, affects her ability to guide them in their decision-making processes.⁵³ Another respondent shared that her greatest struggle is being

⁵⁰Pentecost represented something unheard of under the old covenant, apart from Moses' wistful prayer: "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them" (Num 11:29 NIV 2011); Glasser, 264.

⁵¹Ruth Marshall, "Destroying Arguments and Captivating Thoughts: Spiritual Warfare Prayer as Global Praxis," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2, no. 1 (2016): 92-113.

⁵²Maricel T. Gubat, M. Ed, et al. "BEYOND MOTHERS LIGHT: THE ADAPTATION STORY OF OFW MILLENNIAL MOTHERS IN QATAR," *International Journal of Research Publications* 69, no. 1 (Feb. 2021): 185, <https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP100691120211683>.

⁵³Ibid., 185.

apart from her husband, which significantly impacts their joint decision-making in various aspects of their lives.⁵⁴

The church has become a vital family for OFWs, offering protection and guidance as they manage their families from afar. One leader from a regional church said that their intercessory team collects prayer requests from life groups in order to foster openness and accountability in spiritual journeys. Additionally, the church organizes family seminars to strengthen bonds, helping members maintain connections although physically separated from loved ones. As a Pentecostal congregation, they emphasize empowerment and support, fostering an environment where they anticipate signs and wonders in their relationships with one another.⁵⁵ Through consistent prayers within this church, they can uplift and intercede for one another, reinforcing the sense of community and shared faith.

The OFWs' immediate or extended families back in the Philippines are also part of the church's ministry. To help alleviate the burden of the OFWs, the church sees to it that they regularly pray for their families. Through this spiritual act, the Holy Spirit also ministers to those families so that they themselves likewise experience the Spirit's working.

An OFW named Christy (pseudonym) sought prayer from her church for her mother, who was suffering from COVID-19, had breathing difficulties, and was a diabetic. During an online service, a speaker emphasized trusting in God's power and encouraged the congregation to experience it. Christy prayed for her mother, believing in divine healing. Remarkably, that same day she learned her mother's breathing had returned to normal. This bolstered the faith of Christy, her mother, and the family. In another church, the members who compile monthly prayer requests have witnessed healings from such conditions as strokes, pneumonia, and psoriasis. These miracles have strengthened their faith, deepened their trust in God, and helped them resist temptations and negative influences. Menzies muses that their commitment to the Lord drove them to bring light into dark places,⁵⁶ prioritizing spiritual engagement above all else.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Robert P. Menzies, "Missional Spirituality: A Pentecostal Contribution to Spiritual Formation," in *A Theology of the Spirit in the Doctrine and Demonstration*, ed. Theresa Chai (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2014), 43.

⁵⁶Ibid., 47, 56.

Relevance in Missions

Linda (pseudonym) prayed for her friend in the workplace, a Hindu lady from India who suffered from a severe ankle sprain, which could have been a bone fracture. Having no local insurance, the woman used crutches. Linda sought her permission to use the name of Jesus in praying for her, to which she agreed. After the prayer, they went their separate ways and did not see each other for almost a week. When they met again, the lady, now without crutches, not only thanked Linda but also asked her about Jesus. God used that incident to open the door for Linda to share the gospel with her fellow workers, who are mostly from South Asia region.

Another testimony is shared by an OFW who works as a nurse in the hospital. Prompted by the Spirit to pray for a local child in need of healing, she courageously sought permission of the father to do so. After the prayer, she sensed that a certain power had entered the boy. This initiated her connection with the family that she believed could pave way for her to present the gospel in due time. Such is the Acts 1:8 promise of a missiological power for every believer⁵⁷ so the gospel will be heard by every person on earth. According to Menzies, this is the product of the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, where he highlights that Pentecostal spirituality is missional spirituality.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Wonsuk and Julie Ma call it “mission in the Spirit.”⁵⁹ This recognizes the great need of the Holy Spirit not just as an accompaniment but also the power that makes it possible for the Church to continue Jesus’ mission to save the world.

Joel (pseudonym) says that having the power of the Spirit gives him boldness to share the gospel through casual conversation. He explains that his office mates became curious about him being a Christian and about some of the Christian teachings, such as the atonement and why a need for a sacrificial lamb. What a great chance if the questions are right and do not cause him to be paranoid. This could strike a people’s

⁵⁷Menzies and Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, 217.

⁵⁸“This is Lukan and missiological emphasis, transmitted largely through the stories in the book of Acts, and that Pentecostal spirituality also points to a significant difference distinguishing the Pentecostal movement from the Charismatic movement.” Menzies, “Missional Spirituality: A Pentecostal Contribution to Spiritual Formation,” 44.

⁵⁹Wonsuk Ma and Julie C. Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (with Julie C. Ma, Oxford: Regnum, 2010) (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), https://www.academia.edu/7837941/Mission_in_the_Spirit_Towards_a_Pentecostal_Charismatic_Missiology_with_Julie_C_Ma_Oxford_Regnum_2010_.

minds, thinking that being bold in their witness is their primary calling. “Mission is woven into the fabric of their DNA.”⁶⁰

The theme of bold, Spirit-inspired witness is prominently featured in Jesus’ teachings. In Luke 12:11-12, he sets the stage for the events that will unfold at his second coming by sharing this significant promise, which emphasizes the Holy Spirit’s role in guiding believers during challenging moments,⁶¹ empowering them to speak with confidence and clarity (John 14:26 and John 16:13-15).

Thus, we must not limit the Holy Spirit’s role in awakening faith (justification) or perfecting it (sanctification). He is the vital force propelling God’s people into action, moving them beyond personal faith into global mission.⁶² He empowers believers to boldly share the gospel with those who have never heard it, breaking through cultural and geographical boundaries. The Spirit ignites a passion that transforms individuals and mobilizes communities for kingdom of God purposes. Through his guidance, boldness, and power, they are assured that the message of Christ will reach every tribe and tongue—bringing hope, life, and the fullness of God’s love to all who receive and believe.

Conclusion

Pentecostal traditions play a vital role in the ongoing formation of communities that embrace and perpetuate essential Pentecostal practices, such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, vibrant worship, and the operation of spiritual gifts. This commitment to their denominational heritage is not merely a tradition; it is a fundamental aspect of their identity as Pentecostal Christians.

Pentecostal practices have proven essential in nurturing the spiritual life and resilience of OFWs in the Middle East. In environments where Christian expression is restricted, these practices provide emotional support, spiritual empowerment, and a strong sense of community. Continuation of classical Pentecostal expressions such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues reinforces OFWs’ identity and sustains their faith. Their fellowship gatherings mirror the early Church in the Book of Acts, offering both a spiritual home and a safe space.

⁶⁰Menzies, “Missional Spirituality,” 42.

⁶¹Moses Wibowo, Jamin Tanhidy, and David Ming, “The Role of the Holy Spirit for Church Believers in the Hermeneutic Context between Biblical Authority, Illumination and Interpretation,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103, no. 2 (2022): 7, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.103.2039>.

⁶²Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 17.

Beyond personal growth, Pentecostalism equips these believers for mission, enabling bold witness to unreached people groups. Stories of healing, conversions, and Spirit-led encounters reveal the tangible impact of the Holy Spirit in their lives. OFW Pentecostal churches also extend care to families back home through intercession and spiritual support. As a second family, these churches bridge the gap of loneliness and cultural displacement. Spirit-empowered life transforms not only individuals but also entire communities in foreign lands. Ultimately, Pentecostalism empowers OFWs to live purposefully as active participants in the Great Commission wherever they are.

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