

SUMMER 2026



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Thirdmill as a Harbor for the Call

The Story of RMTI Philippines

PLUS:

Thirdmill Graduates
Around the World



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The Story of RMTI Philippines



⤴ Rev. Ben (far left) and Ernesto Mombay Jr. (center) with RMTI leaders.

Sometimes the Lord will guide us to places we never expect to go, on a journey we do not know how to navigate. It can feel as if we are in a rowboat in the middle of the sea, paddle-less. Yet, when we seek God's provision, he usually sends far more than just a paddle to help us.

Reverend Ben Gonzaga experienced something like this on October 20, 2013, when he was assigned the role of chairman for his denomination's theological education committee.

As a recent Bible college graduate and newly ordained pastor, he felt entirely inadequate to lead a theological education ministry, and he had no resources. Still, knowing that the Christian Reformed Church in the Philippines had tried several times to develop a Bible school or seminary for Filipino pastors, and none had lasted more than three years, he said, "I have to do this."

The religious and cultural realities were not in his favor. According to Rev. Ben, the Philippines has a spiritual climate permeated by Roman Catholicism, with a culture informed by something he describes as "utang na loob," a cultural hallmark where one feels indebted to a person or group that does something good for them. Many in the area feel this way about Catholicism.

Cultural traditions and a lack of resources may have been significant obstacles, but Rev. Ben was determined to build something sustainable. Perhaps he felt like he was on a rowboat without a paddle initially, but he dared to trust in the Lord, and the Lord provided a safe harbor.

God led Rev. Ben to Birmingham Theological Seminary (a Thirdmill partner), where he was introduced to Thirdmill's biblical and theological training materials. These went far beyond his expectations, and they became the foundation for building the Reformed Ministry Training Institute (RMTI), a ministry to equip pastors, church planters, and church leaders across the Philippines.

RMTI began with six students. Today, it continues to see enrollment grow — evidence of its sustainability. According to Rev. Ben, RMTI's training program not only focuses on academics, but also on practical pastoral ministry.

"All of this, if not applied in practice — and especially with the people we are dealing with, who are not familiar with theological terms and doctrinal language — if it is not communicated in layman's terms, then it means nothing. It's just an academic achievement. So that's part of my advocacy: that we communicate contextually," he said.

Each student who has completed training at RMTI is the living fruit of God's abundant provision through Thirdmill and the effort Rev. Ben put into building his curriculum and ministry. What started as a single man in a metaphorical rowboat, became spiritual transformation for many.

Rev. Ben shared that among graduates of the Advanced Diploma in Biblical Studies at RMTI, eight have already been ordained to pastoral ministry. At present, nine students are completing internships as part of the ordination process.

Numerous students have now passed through RMTI, but there is one student in particular that Rev. Ben says he will never forget. Ernesto N. Mombay Jr. was a professional seaman. While working onboard ships, Ernesto pursued his Advanced Diploma in Biblical Studies virtually.

"What made Ernesto's journey unique was that he became the first student with whom I explored the possibility of facilitating the Third Millennium Ministries curriculum [remotely]. Prior to that, our training was conducted primarily through classroom instruction, group learning, and modular studies. ... Together, we discovered that distance need not be a barrier to theological education," Rev. Ben said.

Before graduating, Ernesto shared with Rev. Ben that one day he wanted to leave his seafaring life and plant churches.

"Today, by God's grace, that aspiration has borne fruit in the establishment of Balasan Christian Reformed Church," Rev. Ben told us.

Ernesto is no longer at sea. And neither is Rev. Ben. Through God's gracious provision of Thirdmill's resources, RMTI continues to spread the good news of the gospel across the Philippines by equipping church planters and ministry leaders for faithful service.



≡ Ernesto N. Mombay Jr. working onboard his ship.



"Together, we discovered that distance need not be a barrier to theological education"

—Reverend Ben Gonzaga

Join us in praying for the Reformed Ministry Training Institute and Reverend Ben, that:

- » Rev. Ben's strength continues as he is currently struggling with several serious health issues.
- » Those pursuing training, ordination, church planting, and ministry leadership remain faithful and effective in their callings.
- » There is continued growth and impact across the Philippines and that RMTI continues to reach church leaders where theological training is needed.
- » God provides the necessary resources to cover printing costs, equipment needs, and vital technology while serving students.
- » Future translation and contextualization efforts flourish, making theological education even more accessible across the Philippines' diverse languages and cultural contexts.

Thirdmill Graduations Around the World

In quiet towns and vibrant cities, Thirdmill is providing sound biblical and theological training to thousands of students. We were recently blessed to be alongside some of these students as they celebrated their graduations. Although separated by many miles and vastly different cultures, these graduates share a common purpose: to learn God's Word and serve him faithfully wherever they are.

In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, a group of 140 people gathered at Living Hope Church to break bread and celebrate the graduation of 42 Thirdmill students.

During the event, many students led worship, and two shared testimonies. Nkosana Nyoni, a former seminary graduate and program leader, hosted the celebration, and Dr. Chris Hatch, Associate Professor of Missiology at Thirdmill Seminary, spoke.

We are grateful to our friends and ministry partners, Jorum and Evah Mugari, whose uncompromising dedication to educating rural pastors in Zimbabwe led to this moment and many others like it.

The Mugari's ministry continues to train up sound leaders to teach sound doctrine, with approximately 40 more students currently active in the program.



In India, an impressive 608 students from various towns, celebrated completing their Thirdmill Institute Foundations Certificate, after studying Thirdmill's materials in Telugu.

Not only have these students' ministries been impacted by their studies, but they have also seen profound change in their personal lives, both in their jobs and at home.

By removing language barriers and increasing access to biblical education with Thirdmill's materials, our partner ministries in India are educating leaders who would otherwise be limited by location and finances.

Today, new learning communities are forming, helping pastors, ministry leaders, and believers deepen their understanding of Scripture and strengthen their service to the church.



In Northern Uganda, 8 students received their Thirdmill Institute Foundations Certificate, 6 received their Certificate in Biblical Studies, and 50 completed the entire program, receiving their Certificate in Theological Studies and Diploma in Christian Ministry.

Jennifer Amucu of New City Bible Church reflected on the program: "Most of us have not gone to a theological school, but we have a theological college right in our hands, right in front of us, and we are really utilizing it very well."

For these students, access to formal education had been hindered by financial and geographical challenges, but then, Rev. Hal Farnsworth, Founder and President of Edgewood Ministries, discovered Thirdmill. Today, the program is thriving.

Thanks to Rev. Hal, Cloud Roman (Thirdmill's Area Director for East and Horn of Africa), Jeremiah Ocen (Edgewood's Training Coordinator and Thirdmill's country representative in Uganda), and many others, more and more Christian leaders are being equipped to lead the growing church in Uganda.



Story From the Field: Russia

At a Pentecostal church in Glazov, Russia, more than 50 believers have spent the past two years studying with Thirdmill Institute. Sunday school teachers, ministers, and missionaries gather together to study God's Word and to share with one another what they're discovering along the way.

For many, concepts that once felt out of reach have become clear. Students describe a

better grasp of historical context, a newfound ability to think more profoundly about Scripture, and real spiritual growth.



One student put it simply:

**"A lot becomes clear.
I'm starting to see
everything in
bright colors. And
now I can adapt
this knowledge to
my life."**

Hear more
from these
students by
scanning the
QR code:



Thirdmill Institute Awards 1,282 Foundations Certificates

Since its initial launch in 2021, Thirdmill Institute has had a profound impact on the expansion of sound biblical education, equipping pastors and leaders to lead their congregations and communities faithfully and confidently.

This past year, 1,282 Thirdmill Institute students from around the world earned their Foundations Certificate in languages ranging from Telugu to Spanish to Hindi to Chinese to Kiswahili and more.

The Foundations Certificate is the first certificate in Thirdmill Institute's training program. It aims to help students develop a deeper understanding of God's Word and the essential truths of the Christian faith. It equips them not only with biblical knowledge but also with practical ministry skills to share the gospel, disciple believers, teach Scripture, and strengthen the church in their own communities.

"It was such a blessing to be overwhelmed by that many certificates," said Steve Kammer, Director of Thirdmill Institute. "To see that many people finishing, and the impact it had, was pretty cool."



The Benefits of Monthly Giving

Right now, most pastors around the world are leading their congregations without any formal biblical training. The church is growing faster than ever, but growth without grounding leaves congregations vulnerable to false teaching from well-meaning but under-equipped leaders.

Your monthly gift changes that. Knowing that your monthly gift is coming gives Thirdmill the freedom to focus less on fundraising and more on expanding seminary-level resources in multiple languages for pastors and leaders who need them most.



Joel Cornelius, one of our monthly donors, put it this way:

“I love knowing that my monthly support provides steady fuel for this global mission rather than one-time spikes that are harder to build upon.”

A recurring gift provides consistent theological education to pastors who

would otherwise go without it, equipping them to lead well, teach faithfully, and disciple their communities with confidence.

Joel told us, “Monthly giving has become one of the most satisfying parts of my stewardship because it turns generosity into a reliable habit that multiplies over time. I encourage every believer who values sound biblical education to consider joining me as a monthly partner.... If you haven’t tried monthly giving yet, I promise it will bless you as much as it blesses the ministry.”

We are grateful to Joel and to all of our monthly donors! We couldn’t do this work without you.

If you aren’t already a monthly donor, join us! Your recurring gift ensures that this work will continue far into the future.

Become a monthly donor at thirdmill.org/give or scan the QR code:



Staff Spotlight: Advancement & Generosity



ADAM POLK joined our Thirdmill staff as a Gift Officer in June of this year. He is a graduate of Southern Seminary (MDiv) and has served in pastoral ministry for the past 25 years in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Maryland. Having served as a pastor, he understands firsthand the blessing of biblical education and its impact on the health of the local church. He has a pastoral heart and is excited to assist churches and individuals in expanding their vision to serve the global church by providing resources for pastors and church leaders.

Originally from East Tennessee, he and his family have called Southern Maryland home for the past 15 years. He and his wife, Jennifer, have been married for 29 years, and they have five children (Cody, Rachel, Collin, Rylee, and Sophie) along with one granddaughter (Lillie). In his free time, Adam enjoys spending time fishing the waters of Southern Maryland and is an avid college football and Washington Nationals baseball fan. He’s excited to get to know Thirdmill supporters and be a resource as we partner together.



To give to Thirdmill, scan the QR code or visit: thirdmill.org/gift

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