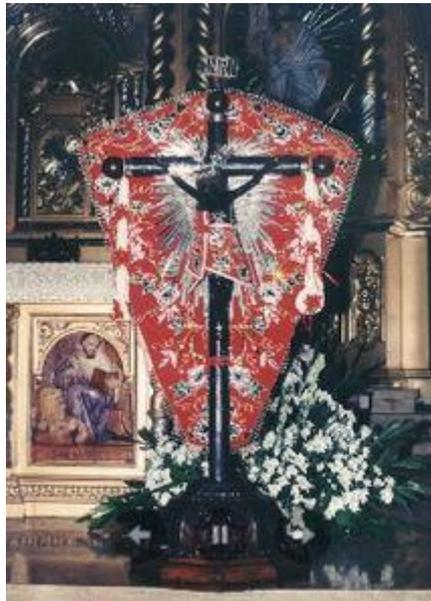


## History of the Holy Cross Parish Church in Sta. Cruz, Lubao, Pampanga



STA. CRUZ is synonymous to Lubao. It is also the ancient political nucleus of the Kapampangan sphere; hence, the birthplace of the Kapampangan empire and civilization.

Historical documents indicate that Sta. Cruz bear the ancient name Balas due to the sandy nature of the village. Aptly, the cradle of Kapampangan civilization was born along the riverbanks of *balas* (today the sadsaran in Balantacan and Calangain which were former villages of Sta. Cruz) and later on developed as a powerful and prosperous settlement in caongotan (now called Lalam Ungut). Hence, the people of Sta. Cruz with the entire sphere of *Kababan* (Lubao) and the Kapampangan Kingdom and its Empire had already an advanced system of government and a mixed religion of paganism and Islam even before the arrival of the Spaniards. The civilization was introduced by the ancient Malays (today called Austronesians) to the aborigines (Aytas) through barter system.

Providentially, the best legacy of the Spaniards to the people of Lubao, specifically Sta. Cruz, was Miguel Lopez de Legaspi's resolution to decree Martin de Goiti, his nephew, to explore and later on, subjugate the inhabitants of the kingdom of Lubao. Datu (or Rajah) Macabulus, the chieftain of the Kingdom of Lubao, after accepting submission to the Spanish conquistadores had forged friendship with Martin de Goiti on September 14, 1571 in behalf of the inhabitants of the village.

As a religious practice, the Spanish conquistadores together with some Augustinian missionaries presented to the village's chieftain Rajah Macabulus, together with the Council of Elders and the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Lubao, a black wooden Cross of the Crucified Jesus Christ as a gift for their amity, goodwill and fraternity. Muslim by heart, he left his kingdom in Balas, buried the gift somewhere and afterward proceeded to settle in the mountains of Malakamias in Purak (Porac) and later, settled in the village of Tarlak.

Traditionally celebrated as "fiestang malati" since then, September 14 is becoming a special celebration in Sta. Cruz today because of its historical and religious significance.

After Macabulus left, he was succeeded by Don Agustin Cubacub who received the same traditional gifts from Martin de Goiti when he was baptized as a Christian convert together with his wife Mulao and 4 children Bunduc, Abayo, Licas and Pilis on December 18, 1572.

Later, the village of Balas was fittingly Christianized “San Bartolome” by the early Agustinian missionaries. San Bartolome is a Christian saint who holds a jungle bolo in his right hand and a chain tied around the neck of a demon in his left.

According to oral accounts, the loss of the Cross caused miserable experiences to the people’s economic life: famine (*danup, sakit*), floods (*albug, bulus*), and division (*pamisagsagan, pamipatepate*).

After the great mudflow and floods in the middle 1700, the image of Jesus Christ was miraculously found by an old man along the thick thrashes (*gala*) of the Sapang Palay river of barrio San Bartolome. Hence, the finder of the sacred black image became its keeper. Three years later, after another strong flood struck the village, a bevy of young boys (with surnames Lascano, Manganti, and others) were playing along the banks of the same river when they spotted a black Cross drifting on the stream. Unbelievably, the darkened Cross fitted exactly the image that was earlier found by its keeper.

Soon after the keeper of the image had learned about the finding of the Cross, the elders of the community lost no time in fixing it and immediately decided to put up a thatched chapel (*santungan or bisitas*) made of light materials such as *dutung* (wood), *kwayan* (bamboo) and *pinaud* (nipa) to serve as the sacred image’s sanctuary near the spot where it was discovered.

The miraculous rediscovery of the black crucified image of the Lord Jesus Christ was His homecoming after almost two hundred years of disappearance. Oral accounts indicated that the discovery of the Holy Cross might had happened in the middle years of 1700, some years after the citadela and Fortaleza de Mamalas in Lalam Ungot were covered by terrible mudflows.

The late *Apung* Ponciano “Pocia” Manganti and *Apung* Teofilo “Ilo” Vitug, who were both natives of the place, ascertained that these accounts were told and retold by their elders, hence, had proven the ancient truth about the Holy Cross. Henceforth, the village became serene and calm.

From its original site, the chapel was moved into a site near *Pagaga* (campo santo or the Catholic cemetery) because of intermittent and torrential flooding. The thatched chapel was destroyed by fire, yet, the Holy Cross was amazingly untouched and untainted by the said raze. This incident might had made the Cross darker in color.

Apparently, the villagers thought of transferring the chapel in Loban Escuela for the second time. Obviously, the wooden and thatched structures of the chapel were also frequently swamped and destroyed by torrents and floods, yet, the image of the Holy Cross always stood miraculously on its altar without receiving any damage.

Finally, the people eventually decided to house the image of the Holy Cross in its permanent site in 1922 after the national highway was built. The site of the chapel was generously donated by Dona Camila Bamba vda. de Bamba and Dona Juana Uyguangco-Manganti. The chapel was initially made of light and thatched materials. Similarly, it was still frequented by floods.

Scores of mystical apparitions and miracles were witnessed by the people of the community. Nowadays, the increasing size (from 2 feet to about one meter today) of the Holy Cross is the most visible manifestation noticed by the elders of the community. Recollections of the elders of spectacular brightness inside the church during impending calamities were told. To most elders, any apparition observed from the holy image serves as a reminder for the people to come to deep devotions and prayers.

Today, the miracles of the Holy Cross have been evidently seen and heard. People come to the Holy Cross to lovingly touch its image and seek His holy miracles to heal the illnesses of their loved ones, for financial blessings, guidance, safe travel, successful endeavors, resolution of problems and difficulties, and other petitions.

Immemorially, the people of Sta. Cruz and Lubao and its devotees lovingly called the sacred image as Apu Santo Cristo de Lubao, or simply, Apu Santo Cristo, or “Apu.”

If the black image of Sto. Nino de Cebu was Ferninand Magellan’s present to Rajah Humabon on April 7, 1521, the black Crucifix of the Apu Sto. Cristo de Lubao was Martin de Goiti’s gift to Datu Macabulus to the “Capangpangans” on Septemebr 14, 1571.

According to Fr. Pedro Galende, the Museum Director of the San Agustin Church Museum in Intramuros, Manila, the wooden image of Apu Sto. Cristo de Lubao originated from Mexico, North America. Its wood is probably from the sacred fir (*Abies religiosa*) which are traditionally used during religious festivities in Mexico.

Dr. Lino L. Dizon, a prominent Agustinian historian said that the cross of Apu Sto. Cristo may be one of the four sacred crosses registered in Lubao in the inventory of images made in 1774 when administration of churches in Pampanga was transferred to the clerigos.

In like manner, other religious images presented by the Spaniards to Filipino natives in other parts of the country who peacefully submitted themselves to the crown of Spain were mostly black in color. As giving of religious images to the converts was an established Spanish tradition, it was also a cultural reminiscence of the Malayan pigment of the inhabitants of the country. Some of those presented as gift by the Spaniards as a seal of their friendship are: the images of Sto. Nino de Cebu (Sugbu), Sto. Nino de Tondo (Tunduk), Sto. Cristo Nazareno de Quiapo (Maynilad), and Nuestra Senora Buenviaje de Antipolo (Morong) among others. The fine quality of the images, their being hard and smooth black in color, were distinct. Probably, the black motif of the images was meant to indicate the Spaniards’ sign posts of the pioneering provinces where the seeds of Christianity were first planted and later on propagated to the people.

Because of its loving mercy, blessings and flowing miracles, the Holy Cross was the people’s savior and sanctuary, then, and now, and prayerfully, forever.

The feast day of the image of Apu Santo Cristo de Lubao is annually celebrated on May 3. May 3, 1572 is the date when the Lubao Church (San Agustin) was accepted as a visita of Tondo which at that was a dominion of the huge Kapampangan sphere ruled by Rajah Lakandula. At that time, the San Agustin Church de Lubao was built along the riverbanks of *gato* (Sta. Catalina), which is a few distance from Lubao’s political nucleus and the Fortaleza de Mamalas (fortress) in Lalam Ungot (now a sitio of Sta. Cruz).

Celebrated by the converts since time then, it is traditionally marked as a Thanksgiving Day. It is Sta. Cruz' fiesta celebration, the most popular occasion not only in Sta. Cruz but also in the town because of its vibrant, festive and lavish mood. It was popularly called "fiestang de Leon" whose ancestors probably descended from the pioneering inhabitants of Sta. Cruz who played important part in the spread of Christianity in the area.

The celebration is culminated with the traditional procession of Apu Santo Cristo which is originally participated by eleven patron saints of the barrios under the Holy Cross Parish. These barrios are Balantacan, Dela Paz, Remedios, San Jose Gumi, San Pablo I and II, San Pedro Palcarangan and Saug, Sta. Maria, Sta. Rita and Sta. Teresa I until some of them were transferred to the newly created Parish of Saint Paul in San Pablo Matua.

The procession is joined by a magnitude and unparalleled devotees which traditionally begins at five o'clock in the afternoon and ends at almost midnight. From the parish church, the processional march commences and moves towards the western direction. Well decorated and lighted *carosas* of the patron saints coming from the different barrios of the parish are devoutly carted along the extensive stretch of the McArthur National Highway. Accompanied by five to six brass bands, the devotees and their children carry candles and pray the rosary during the procession. Houses along the processional route display holy images and lighted candles in homage to the holy Cross of the crucified Lord.

When the procession reaches the boundary of Sta. Cruz in barrio San Roque de Arbol, it returns eastward towards the Sta. Cruz Bridge, which is the boundary in the east. From this area, the traditional *curaldal* begins. A huge number of devotees, from all ages and walks of life, joyfully and invigoratingly dance with spectacular awe and breath.

The national road is wrapped and filled with huge devotees. The intensity of the *curaldal* becomes passionate and spirited when the image of Apu Santo Cristo de Lubao is getting close to the church to mark the end of the procession. As the marching bands play the *batalla* tunes, the fervent devotees' lavishly cry in endless unison "Viva! Viva! Viva! Apu Santo Cristo! Viva! Apu Sto. Cristo!"

As the devotees' *curaldal* becomes heightened; the marching bands delightedly charm the devotees with their inspiring *batalla* tunes. The power of the music and the passion of the *curaldal* are simply phenomenal, remarkable and incredible. The street dance is simply irresistible and unexplainable. Its spirit is so human, yet, so emotionally divine. As fireworks zoom and boast into the sky, their radiant glitters add power and gaiety to the sounds and sights of the phenomenal *curaldal*.

The *curaldal* is an ancient dance ritual commonly celebrated by the aboriginal Aytas of the barrio after plentiful harvests. The tradition was later adapted by the Spanish missionaries to integrate the inhabitants into the realms of the Christian faith.

When the image of Apu Santo Cristo is restored into its altar, the sights and sounds of *curaldal* recede. It ends at almost midnight. Without the feeling of fatigue and qualms, the devotees go home with high spirit, ever ready to prepare again for the next year's festivity.

As curaldal revelry is beautifully done in Sta. Cruz to honor Apu Sto. Cristo, this tradition is also celebrated in almost all of the barangays in the town of Lubao. The devotees piously dance their patron saints as a thanksgiving to God for the favors received. Generally, it is held in every barrio fiesta.

Since the erection of the church as a parish on May 22, 1951, the following had been resident priests who immensely contributed to the spiritual growth of the parishioners and the improvement of the parish church as well:

Rev. Fr. Wilfrido V. Baltazar	1951-1959
Rev. Fr. Cipriano Gopez	1959-1960
Rev. Fr. Florencio Tumang	1960-1973
Msgr. Alfonso Ducut	1973-1981
Msgr. Eugenio P. Mercado Jr.	1981-1988
Msgr. Antonio M. Bustos	1988-1995
Msgr. Rustico C. Cuevas	1995-2001
Msgr. Joel Tubig	2001-2007
Rev. Fr. Diosdado Austria	2007-present.

It was Fr. Baltazar who led the people in the construction of the church using concrete materials since it was founded on May 22, 1951. Fr. Baltazar started organizing different church organizations such as the Children of Mary, Catholic Women's League, Adoracion Nocturna Filipina, Altar Boys, etc. Subsequently, he started raising funds for the construction of the convent. After the completion and blessing of the convent on May 3, 1952; thereby, announcing the structuring and building of a new parish church with stronger materials. Hence, the small chapel (*bisitas*) which was made of light materials was demolished to pave way to the new one in its present site.

Concerned village folks started to initiate fund raising activities to generate resources for its construction. These included the concerted efforts of the following: Antonio Diwa, Francisco Guintu Sr., Fausto Chingcuangco Sr., Simeon Anicete Sr., Salvador Paule, Ponciano Manganti, Luis De Leon, Francisco "Roy" Paule, and Arch. Anastacio Bernal, and many others. When the church was finally completed through volunteerism, it was inaugurated on May 3, 1955 during the barangay fiesta.

During the term of Rev. Fr. Florencio Tumang, he was assisted by the following priests in leading the parishioners into deeper awareness and realization of the need and importance of evangelization: Fr. Gregorio Binuya (1964), Fr. Francisco Lansang (1965), Fr. Andres Serrano ((1970-1971), Fr. Jose Bengco and Fr. Honesto Ongtioco (1972), and Fr. Joel Tubig (1973).

With their administration of the parish, the Holy Cross Parish Church has grown as it is today.

The parish is situated at barrio Sta. Cruz in front of the town market. Barrio Sta. Cruz has 21 sitios and each has a chapel (Bona, Biclung, Centro, Control, Dau, De Leon, Lalam Ungut, Looban 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, Licu, Magsaysay, Maligaya, Mangga, Mansanitas, Micacalugud, Osmena, Palcarangan, Osmena, Roxas, San Gregorio, Sapang Palay).

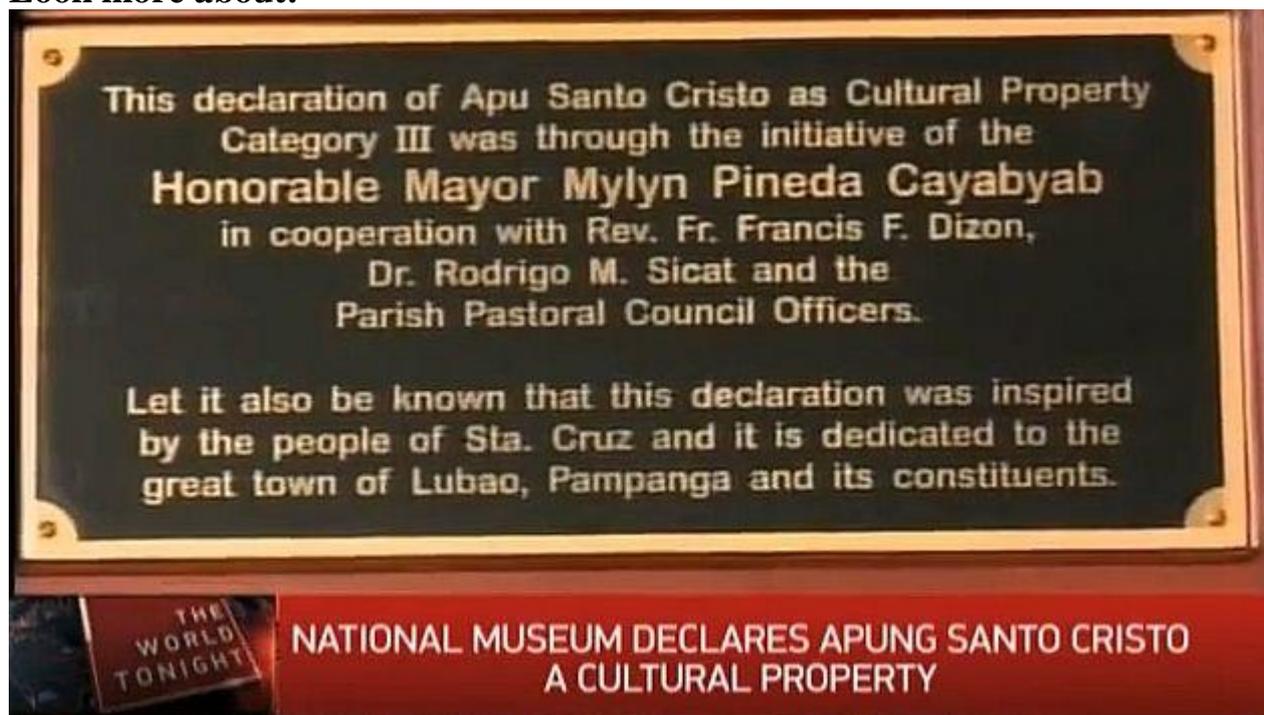
The parish presently administers the following barrios: Balantacan, Remedios, San Jose Gumi, Sta. Maria, Sta. Rita, and Sta. Teresa 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.

At present, the Holy Cross Parish is one of the most stable parish churches in the Archdiocese of Pampanga which is largely attributed to the solidarity and fidelity of the faithfuls in faith to the Lord God Almighty.

With its spiritual historicity, it will grow in greater in the future to better serve the purposes of God who destines all things to become.

Ref.: <https://rodrigocat.wordpress.com/2011/07/14/history-of-the-holy-cross-parish-church-in-sta-cruz-lubao-pampanga/>

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