

## **Mariannet burial Saturday; Church in dilemma**

### **Mariannet committed suicide!**

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DAVAO CITY--The death of 12-year-old Mariannet Amper has not only shaken the government, it appears to have placed the Catholic Church in a dilemma.

Mariannet, who committed suicide because of her family's poverty, will be buried Saturday but she may not get funeral rites, despite her being a devout Catholic at a very young age.

Fr. Zenon Ampong, head of the St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Barangay Ma-a here, was uncertain about the request of the family of Mariannet for her to be brought to the church for funeral rites, citing the policy of the Catholic Church on suicide.

Historically, a person who committed suicide would often be denied funeral rites and even burial in a church cemetery.

However, Fr. Elias Ayuban Jr. JCD (doctor of Canon Law), rector of Claret Theology House, said the new Code of the Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, does not explicitly deny a Catholic funeral to people who committed suicide.

In the case of Mariannet, "I do not see any reason or justification for prohibiting the observation of Catholic funeral rites," Ayuban said in a phone interview Friday.

While suicide is and always will be objectively and gravely wrong, the Catholic Church now considers the psychological disturbances that may influence a suicide--circumstances that mitigate personal culpability, Ayuban said, citing Catechism No. 2282.

#### **Up to the Archbishop**

Ampong, St. Francis parish priest, said he found it difficult to act on the request of Mariannet's family. He said only Archbishop Fernando Capalla, who is in Manila for a week now, can actually decide on the matter.

'Mananghid sa ta kay Archbishop Capalla. Ug misahan man gud nato, basig makaingon ang mga tawo nga OK lang diay ang mag-suicide...pero pangitaan nato na ug paagi [We still have to ask (Davao) Archbishop Capalla. If we say Mass for her, some people might think that it's OK to commit suicide...we will try to look for a way]," Ampong told the family.

Ampong said there was another option: The final blessing of the dead could be done in a chapel but not in a church.

Unlike a funeral Mass, blessing of the dead does not require the exposure of the Holy Eucharist or the giving of Holy Communion.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer Friday tried but failed to reach Capalla, who had turned off his cell phone, but was able to reach Lingayen Archbishop Oscar Cruz, another canon law

expert. Cruz said that in recent years, Church law has changed.

"After years of study, the Church realized that people who commit suicide are not themselves, therefore, they are not deliberately committing a mortal sin against God."

### **No rites for manifest sinners**

For his part, Ayuban said the following cannot be granted ecclesiastical funerals, according to Canon Law;

Abortionists or murderers who never showed even the simplest signs of repentance.

Notorious apostates, heretics and schismatics (those who rejected Christian faith).

Those who chose cremation for reasons contrary to Christian faith (like the refusal to believe in resurrection).

Other manifest sinners who, if granted ecclesiastical funerals, would cause public scandal among the faithful.

Ayuban stressed that a simple sign of repentance, like holding a religious symbol, before dying would allow a person to have a Catholic burial.

"This is because the Church puts the highest importance on the salvation of a person," he said.

### **Canon 1184**

The Catholic web site [www.zenith.org](http://www.zenith.org) also said that the Canon Law no longer lists suicide as a reason for the Church to deny someone of funeral rites.

Fr. Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University, who answered a query about suicide on the website said Canon 1184 only prohibits funeral rites for a "notorious apostate, heretic or schismatic; those who requested cremation for motives contrary to the Christian faith; and manifest sinners to whom a church funeral cannot be granted without causing public scandal to the faithful."

"These restrictions apply only if there has been no sign of repentance before death," McNamara said adding that "the local bishop weighs any doubtful cases and in practice, a prudent priest should always consult with the bishop before denying a funeral Mass."

McNamara explained that an unrepentant sinner is someone who committed suicide following another act of grave crime like murder.

### **A good girl**

Marisol, Mariannet's eldest sister, said that if the Catholic Church denies her sister the final funeral rites, they would rather not have her remains blessed in the chapel.

"My sister did not commit any grave act of murder except that she decided to end her own life. We are praying that the Catholic Church will reconsider, after all, she was a good child and she did not commit anything bad against others," Marisol said.

But even Mariannet's Bible teacher expressed doubts over the possibility that the Church would give the 12-year-old girl funeral rites. Based on past experience, she said, those who

committed suicide were always refused funeral rites.

"I would be happy if the Catholic Church would give in to the [family's] request but the Church has its own policy. I cannot do anything except to follow it," said Aurora Lariosa, the community head who saw how Mariannet actively participated in every Church activity in the village.

Marisol said her family remains hopeful that the Church will be more lenient with her sister's case.

'Maybe they will understand. She's just a girl who snapped because of our condition in life...she was not a bad person," she said.

### **Job offers, wishes come true**

Meanwhile, more and more people have expressed their willingness to help the family of Mariannet. A number have offered the girl's father, Isabelo, employment.

Isabelo said he was grateful and welcomed the work opportunities.

A woman and her American husband have offered Isabelo a job as caretaker for a store in Manila. Another businessman has offered him work as a utility man.

In her diary, Mariannet wrote about her dream for her father and mother to have jobs. She also wished for a pair of new shoes and a bicycle, which were granted by the GMA 7's "Wish Ko Lang" TV program, along with 11 goats.

The program also gave the Ampers a "sari-sari store" showcase.

The family also received one-and-a-half sacks of rice from city councilors, P5,000 cash from the Department of Social Welfare and Development, which shouldered the funeral expenses.

### **UN visit**

Officials of the UN Millennium Campaign said Friday the suicide of a poor 12-year-old girl in Davao City was a reminder to the group to double its efforts in rooting out poverty in the country.

'It sends a cruel reminder that we need to redouble our efforts, move twice as fast," said Salil Shetty, UN Millennium Campaign director, during a program honoring its local partners.

The Millennium Campaign plans to work with the UN in the Philippines to build on the gains made by the campaign through a longer term advocacy toward alleviating poverty and meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

Despite this incident, Nileema Noble, UN Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Program Resident Representative, said the country was on track on meeting its goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015.

### ***With reports from Beverly T. Natividad, TJ Burgonio in Manila and Cyril L. Bonabente, Inquirer Research***

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