



Dear Friends of ACAY,

I recently arrived in the Philippines and will be volunteering in Manila for three months with ACAY Missions. Originally from Cologne, Germany, I recently completed my law degree and came to Manila in search of new experiences and meaningful work. My first assignment is to share an account of the Christmas celebrations enjoyed by the girls of the School of Life, along with the sisters and staff of ACAY. Since I was not present during the festivities, I interviewed some of the girls to gain insight into how Christmas is celebrated here. Through their responses and accompanying photos, I hope to provide you with a glimpse into their experience.



Can you paint me a picture of how your Christmas celebrations unfold?

Vanessa (18): On December 20, we held a Christmas party at the School of Life alongside the ACAY staff. We played games and exchanged gifts with our assigned “angel.” On Christmas Eve, we gathered at the sisters' house, joined by some staff and alumni. The evening began with a Holy Mass in the chapel, followed by a shared meal that we had prepared throughout the day. After dinner, we exchanged gifts, adding to the festive atmosphere. Christmas morning was spent with the sisters, enjoying games and activities with a lot of laughter and joy.



What traditions do you have at Christmas?

Jhaycel (17) We have a special tradition that begins in the first week of December, where each of us secretly picks an "angel." Throughout the Christmas season, we show extra kindness to this person by giving compliments, writing secret letters, and preparing a gift. On December 20, the mystery is revealed, and we finally find out who our angel was.

Vanessa (18): On Christmas Eve in the chapel, we each draw a piece of paper with the name of a saint who will be our protector for the coming year, along with a corresponding prayer. During the festive meal, everyone shares which saint they have received.

Pauleen (17) There is always a competition on December 25. Each department presents a movie about the work of ACAY. This year the sisters won.

Gina (16) On Christmas morning, we go to children who have to live on the street and give them sweets.



Can you tell me more about the Christmas party?

Rain (18) The Christmas party had an 80s and 90s theme, so we all dressed up in colorful clothes and put on matching make-up. That was really fun. We sang karaoke songs and played lots of fun games.





Tell me about the Christmas dinner?

Pauleen (17) We prepared the meal together with sister Sophie. There were so many different dishes, including a French meat dish as well as cakes and sweets.

Elea (17) I couldn't eat any more dessert on Christmas Eve because I had eaten so much. The food was just too good.

Khayllie (16) I ate so much that I had a stomach ache later.

Edel (18) There was lasagna and I helped prepare it. I am so happy here. I feel like the people here are my family.

How can I imagine the decoration?

Vanessa (18) We decorated on the first and second of December. Both in the School of Life and in the sister house. It looked really nice with the lights everywhere. There was also a big, colorfully decorated Christmas tree in the Sisters' House with lots of presents underneath”

Elea (17) I really liked the decorations, because my own family never had anything like that.



What did you get for Christmas?

Gina (16) It was the first time I had ever received a gift. Clothes and a bag. I am very happy that the sisters are with us and celebrate with us. For me, 2024 was a gift from God, because it was the year I joined ACAY.

What do you like best about Christmas?

Elea (17) My favorite part of Christmas Eve was the prayer in the chapel. Opening my heart and feeling the arrival of Jesus. I felt welcome and had the feeling that all my problems had disappeared. God helped me through all my problems

Paueen (17) I like the tradition of 'Saint Picking' in front of the altar in the chapel best.

Jhaycel (17) I felt the love of a family at Christmas. Jesus touched my heart.

Rain (18) My favorite thing about Christmas is strengthening the bond with the sisters, the other girls and the ACAY staff. Christmas isn't about the food or the presents, it's about the family.



God's blessings and all the best!

Maria and your ACAY Team

