

Protected *from* the Unexpected

By Fernando C. Pareja

After a 61-hour bus ride, our youth group arrived at the Manila Philippines Temple. In celebration of the temple's 20th anniversary, the Davao stake youth had spent nine months preparing for the trip, attending family history classes, being actively involved in Church activities, researching and preparing family names, and helping to raise funds for the trip. There was excitement in the air as the 63 of us got off the bus that Monday night. At the temple patron housing, we held a very large family home evening, with musical performances and spiritual messages, and then tried to sleep.

During the next two days the youth were baptized and confirmed for over 2,000 of their ancestors, giving those ancestors the chance to accept the restored gospel. We didn't feel hungry or tired as we worked hour after hour in the temple. The Spirit was very strong. Some youth had glowing countenances; others had tears of joy on their cheeks.

All too soon it was time to go home. A few minutes into

our journey, the peaceful quiet of the bus was interrupted by police sirens. Outside, we were surrounded by patrol cars, which forced us to a stop. Then we could see police snipers around us, aiming forward. In those tense moments, we learned that the passengers of a bus a few feet in front of us were being held hostage, and the police were using our bus as a shield!

We leaders did our best to keep everyone calm, but some began to panic. In the confusion the police ordered us all to drop to the floor. After several terrifying minutes, we heard a man yelling for us to evacuate the bus. Following orders, we hurriedly got off the bus and went to a nearby vacant building.

For over an hour, we sat in the dark building, praying and listening for gunfire. Then finally we were told we could go back to our bus. The shootout had ended; two hostages and two hijackers had been killed.

We were badly shaken as we resumed our journey. As the shock lessened, however, we realized

We knew the Lord would watch over us on our temple trip. But we didn't realize how much we would need His protection.

we had been protected. Not one of us had been injured, and we knew the hand of the Lord had been over us. We felt a divine presence and wondered if perhaps some of those for whom we had been baptized were close by.

I thought of the scripture that says, "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say" (D&C 82:10), and I was glad the Lord keeps His promises. As we keep the commandments and continue faithfully in our duties, including temple and family history work, we will be worthy of the Lord's blessings—including His protection when we need it most. **NE**

