

NAFAUM Connect

News Worthy of the Truth

Official Newsletter of the National Association of Filipino-American United Methodists

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On the Way to Clovis

Joys and Challenges Preparing for a Convocation

By Ben Vinluan

NAFAUM Convocations have emerged as an unique experience for Filipino-American United Methodists within the United Methodist Church in the United States. It is a family vacation type activity that combines wholesome recreation opportunity, in depth Bible Study on a carefully chosen theme; workshops and fora of a variety of subjects and issues that impact the life of participants. The involvement of worship, study and play activities are carefully designed to enrich faith in a manner that has made this major event a source of nurture and growth in our faith journey as a community.

Convocation settings have seen a variety of venues that's descriptive of the ambience of this beautiful land that is America. As if to set the tone for subsequent events or convocations, the very first one took place at San Diego's hotel row district, and at the Jesuit owned University of San Diego. This was followed by going to Epworth-by-the-sea, a 100 acre Retreat Center owned by The United Methodist Church, at St. Simon's Island, Georgia.

We have had the joy of using gorgeous churches and their facilities, universities and the like, all conducive to recreation, study, fellowship and worship and exploration of soul and values expanding issues relative to life and faith.

In 2001, during the time I had the opportunity to serve as President, we were at Simpson College, in Indianola, IA, near Des Moines. It was one of the most bucolic settings for the convocations. On the Friday that was usually set aside for formal dinner for the convocation, we decided instead to spend the whole day for a picnic in a corn farm setting. Delegates had a ball and enjoyed every bit of the experience in the farm, including having all you can eat “peaches and cream” corn fresh from the farm, so sweet, it’s out of this world.

Now here we are poised to go to Clovis! We really never thought of coming here, originally. We had thoughts of Vancouver, BC, but it didn’t work. Then we tried to settle for Seattle, WA, but it didn’t work out either. It’s been quite circuitous a process to finally end up where we never thought we would. But as the Scriptures say the stone which the builder avoided became the cornerstone of the wonderful edifice. Clovis may very well be our best Convocation venue as well as experience yet! Our host group under the leadership of Ruby Bago, is set to surpass every other host group with its decision to provide, pro bono, a sizable part of the meals for the convocation. If you wonder why, the reason is no other than Ruby Ramos Bago, who was raised by devout Methodists steep in Filipino hospitality and suffused by Wesleyan values.

I really look forward to Clovis. Like Indianola, Iowa, Clovis is located in California’s Central Valley, which is the nation’s food basket. It also represents wide open spaces, fresh air away from the stale atmosphere of our cities; and an opportunity to be close to the sights and conditions of where and how the food we eat come from. It will be one of a bucolic experience of sorts. It will also be an opportunity to rethink or reset our gathering and experience as a community of faith. The variety of amendments to our Constitution and by-laws, and the thoughtful input and deliberative gatherings around the table with our younger leaders’ participation represent a watershed moment for NAFAUM. Looks like the Lord has guided us all along to Clovis, CA as a place of something new for good and for a long time to come.



Rev. Ben Vinluan, formerly of the Northwest Philippines Annual Conference in the Baguio Episcopal Area, is a retired clergy member of the California-Pacific Annual Conference. In retirement, he remains actively involved in ministry, and edits the newly launched NAFAUM Connect newsletter of the National Association of Filipino-American United Methodists.

From the President's Desk

By Karen G. Prudente



Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Peace be with you!

During the first week of May 2025, the Council of Bishops with The Connectional Table shared the new vision statement of the United Methodist Church. This vision statement was formed from the thousands of United Methodist conversations held worldwide over the last four years. Together we will:

LOVE boldly, SERVE joyfully, LEAD courageously

The theme of our 18th NAFAUM Convocation and Young Leaders Summit is:

A More Excellent Way . . . LOVE!

From July 31–August 2025, we look forward to a joyous reunion at Memorial UMC in Clovis, California where we will gather as Filipino–American United Methodists to determine our roles in the changing vibrant environment of church growth and leadership roles in the United States and to strengthen our mission outreach ministries to the Philippines and other countries where Filipinos have been called to witness as God's disciples.

Our Convocation theme falls right in place with the UMC's new vision statement. How do we as Filipino United Methodists live this vision?

We believe one way is The Christmas Institute. It was brought to American shores 44 years ago and can be a gift to the whole UMC as youth and young adults commit their time and resources when God touches their hearts to serve in whatever capacity they feel compelled. The California– Pacific Annual Conference Christmas Institute is a role model of this endeavor. We look to Christmas Institutes in the USA and Canada to spark heartfelt flames.

As a member of the General Board of Global Ministries Asian American Language Ministries Committee, I am sure your ideas are needed on how to enrich local church experiences and to be justice seeking leaders in our communities. How do we together lead courageously? How do we serve joyfully? How do we love boldly? God is challenging us. Start these conversations in our church circles. The Kapehan sessions during the 18th NAFAUM Convocation will be a place where we would love to hear your voices and contributions. Come and be part of our next evolution of United Methodism. See you this summer in Clovis!!

EDITORIAL

NAFAUM: Forty Years and Counting

By Ben Vinluan, Editor

NAFAUM was organized in late December, 1984 at Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco. Filipino leaders, both laity and clergy, were in attendance at the assembly of the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists, an experience that allowed them the opportunity to organize themselves – first, as a National Fellowship of Filipino Americans. NAFAUM became our official name at the second convocation held in St. Simon's Island, GA. It went on as our corporate name when we became a non-profit corporation, located in the state of Illinois.

NAFAUM has strengthened our collective identity as United Methodists in America and in diaspora. We have become more aware of our ties as a group to the connectionalism of our church, through our active interactions with the general boards. And in our activities as a group and as individual United Methodists, we were and are part and parcel of United Methodism's total ministry. One aspect of that identity is deeper appreciation of our intra-tribal backgrounds and a deeper realization of our inter-connectedness, across years of ignorance, bias or prejudice that may have been part of our growing up years back home. In the Apostle Paul's words we could more honestly say, it seems to me, "...there's no longer Bisaya, Ilonggo, Gaddang, Ilocano, Tagalog or Pangasinanse, and more, for you are all one in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Without a doubt, part of the collective hope of those who labored to frame NAFAUM as we have it today was for there to be a means for interaction and even common ministry with The United Methodist Church in the Philippines. It wasn't just collective emotional ties to the past. It was even deeper, it seems to me, than Dr. Jose Rizal's well known adage about regard and respect for one's heritage.

Our desire to be in some way significantly connected with our home church was rooted in our sense of calling – on top of everything else. So in 1986, Rev. Art Capuli, as then President of NAFAUM, asked me on his behalf and of the Board, to visit the Bishop in Manila, while my family and I were on vacation in the Philippines. I had sent a letter ahead to the Bishop, inviting him to come and give the keynote address, or preach at the first NAFAUM convocation on August 5-8, 1987 at the University of San Diego. I saw the Bishop in his office – there was another member of the college of Bishops visiting as well, who stayed through our conversation.

Unfortunately, my call was a failure. On top of the excitement I shared with the church leader, I was lectured about our collective abandonment of our home church, and the resulting brain drain. I had with me my wife and our son along to the Bishop's office, but I had asked them to wait outside after the introductions. It was a long visit, and I soon was able to asked to be excused, left the room and collected my family and went out to a late lunch.

I was deeply disturbed at the time over the possible bases for the response to what we in NAFAUM were seeking – a connection, and a relationship with our home church. In time I ascribed it all to what perhaps a personal bias or a blind area. NAFAUM did not retreat from our aim and purpose. We continued to keep abreast of developments back home, provided assistance wherever feasible institutionally and in various sectors of the church in the Philippines. In 1998, Cal-Pac Annual Conference, in recognition of the significant contribution of the Filipino Caucus and of individual Filipino-Americans in our church's ministry, our Conference decided to observe and celebrate 100 years of Methodism in the Philippines. For some reason, I was in a position and became instrumental in the decision to formally invite Bishop Emerito Nacpil to come and give the keynote address and sermon to the Conference.

In recent years, there has been a profound appreciation of that connectedness between our home church and our expatriate clergy and laity now in America, especially those involved in ministry and those close enough to the church and its ministry. What we at the beginning had fervently hope but could not effectuate sooner, is becoming a reality, as there continues the inevitable cooperative and collaborative endeavors across the water from both sides. As evidence of this, we are being blessed by the sharing of vision for ministry by both the Baguio, and Davao Areas of The United Methodist episcopal leaders. The significance of this is that those of us this side of the pond are made aware of the hopes and dreams of our leaders back home and the effect these dreams have on the rest of the church. And developing ministries become a connectional endeavor on significant levels, affecting the life and ministry of all of us Methodists world wide. This is being made possible through our website, and our newsletter, NAFAUM Connect. Along this line, we are hopeful we will get some response as well from the Manila Episcopal Area, which we have reached out to as well.

NAFAUM will, by the grace of God, continue to forge along in ministry. Our upcoming convocation will afford some opportunity to consider our vision for ministry in the coming years. We have able and visionary younger leaders poised to lead along in that area. This makes our convocation in Clovis, California on July 31-Aug. 2, 2025 a truly watershed event. For NAFAUM and for all of us, the best is yet to be!

Comments, Reactions, & Suggestions

Send us an email:

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Resilience Amid Transition: The United Methodist Church's Journey Through Separation, Global Regionalization, and Renewal

by Rev. Sergio E. Arevalo, Jr., Ph.D., ThD.

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is negotiating a pivotal period filled with significant opportunities and challenges. The denomination is rethinking its identity and mission, considering the rise of the Global Methodist Church (GMC), worldwide regionalization, dwindling membership and financial support, and adopting a new vision statement. The UMC in the Philippines is well-positioned to contribute meaningfully to the church's worldwide future amidst these changes.

The Pain of Separation: The Rise of the Global Methodist Church

A significant upheaval in the UMC's history occurred with the founding of the Global Methodist Church in May 2022. The GMC emerged primarily as a conservative response to the UMC's evolving position on LGBTQ+ inclusion. By 2024, more than 6,000 churches, mainly in the US, had disaffiliated under Paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline because traditionalists claimed the denomination had strayed from biblical orthodoxy (UM News, 2024). This separation hurt communities and local congregations, which was not just administrative but also deeply emotional and spiritual.

For instance, churches in Florida and Texas experienced congregational splits as longtime members left because of varying theological beliefs. The loss of entire churches threatened the viability of district ministries in some rural regions.

Though some churches have split, the disaffiliation movement has not taken off in the Philippines. Despite international tensions, Filipino United Methodists have primarily expressed a desire for unity and mission, as evidenced by the numerous annual conferences that decided to stay with the UMC (UM News, 2023).

Worldwide Regionalization: A Way Forward for Contextual Unification

In response to its worldwide diversity and the drawbacks of a governance structure centered on the United States, the UMC has proposed a plan for worldwide regionalization. This model seeks to preserve doctrinal unity and connectional accountability while giving regional conferences, such as the Philippines Central Conference and other Central Conferences, equal legislative autonomy (Bledsoe, 2023).

For the UMC in the Philippines, this action is significant. Filipino Methodists can contextualize governance, social ethics, and ministry strategies through regionalization without being unduly constrained by cultural discussions in the United States. Recognizing essential components of its mission, it affirms the specific difficulties faced by Filipino communities, including disaster relief, poverty alleviation, and human rights advocacy.

Worldwide regionalization, according to Filipino Bishop Rodolfo Juan, "will allow our voices to be heard and our context to shape our witness more effectively" (Juan, 2023).

Declining Membership and Financial Challenges

Particularly in the U.S., where membership has dropped from 12 million in the 1960s to fewer than 6 million, the UMC faces dwindling financial resources and declining membership (Pew Research Center, 2022). Due to the pandemic and the GMC exodus, financial contributions have also decreased, resulting in significant budget and program cuts.

Despite the Philippines' relatively stable membership, problems still exist. Financial limitations hinder efforts to support the clergy and maintain church facilities, and some congregations report declining attendance, particularly among youth and young adults. However, Filipino churches have demonstrated resilience by embracing digital evangelism, house church models, and lay empowerment to sustain and expand their ministries.

A Reimagined Vision: Hope via Action

Amid these challenges, the UMC has adopted a new vision statement to guide its future: "The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections" (UM News, 2025). Scripture inspires this vision and supports the long-standing mission of making disciples for the world's transformation.

Keeping with the UMC's Wesleyan heritage and dedication to social justice, the new vision emphasizes fearless leadership, joyful service, and bold love. It acts as a catalyst for change, inspiring United Methodists everywhere to embody these values in their local communities.

This vision aligns with current ministries in the Philippines. For instance, the Davao Area participates in interfaith peace initiatives within Muslim-Christian communities, while the Baguio Episcopal Area has initiated agricultural cooperatives and microfinance programs for indigenous populations. With support from Wesleyan University-Philippines, the Manila Episcopal Area enhances its discipleship program. These endeavors embody the call to love, serve, and lead within local contexts.

Actions Needed: A Philippine Reaction

What steps should the UMC in the Philippines consider regarding these changes occurring worldwide?

Affirm Connectional Identity: The Philippine UMC must embrace the autonomy that comes with regionalization while still honoring its commitment to the worldwide UMC. By doing so, it can address local needs without severing the worldwide ties that provide theological depth and a common goal.

Invest in Youth and Digital Ministry: The church should prioritize growing digital ministry and cultivating youth leadership. This involves theological podcasts in regional languages, discipleship applications, and hybrid worship services.

Reorganize for Sustainability: To ensure financial stability, churches need to explore mission-driven asset management, shared ministries, and bi-vocational clergy models.

Promote Wesleyan Public Theology: Using Wesleyan theological resources that emphasize social holiness, the church can address public issues like human rights, environmental degradation, and corruption.

Embrace the Laity: Local ministries can revitalize and reduce dependence on clergy-driven models by training lay leaders and decentralizing decision-making.

Conclusion

The UMC's story is not hopeless despite institutional exhaustion and painful divisions. The General Conference in 2024 was marked by a cooperative and revitalizing atmosphere. In addition to affirming regionalization and approving new missional partnerships, the delegates celebrated growth stories from Latin America, Africa, and the Philippines. The church is returning to its roots by becoming less institutional and more movement-oriented.

Bishop Thomas Bickerton succinctly summed up this hope by saying, “We are not just a church in conflict; we are a church in Christ. Our best days are not behind us. They are ahead of us” (UM News, 2024). This is a clear call to action for Filipino Methodists to lead a revitalized Methodist movement in Asia rather than observe a global shift.

The Paschal mystery—death, suffering, and resurrection—reflects the UMC's journey. Separation, decline, and restructuring represent the birth pangs of a new future rather than merely indications of failure. Hope will not let the church down if it remains rooted in Christ, guided by the Spirit, and true to its purpose.

In summary, the UMC's experience with regionalization, renewal, and separation exemplifies a transformational process. Adopting the new vision statement represents a dedication to a future characterized by fearless leadership, joyful service, and bold love. The Philippine church's embrace of these ideals facilitates a hopeful and successful future for the worldwide UMC. (drsergz@gmail.com)



The Rev. Sergio E. Arevalo, Jr., PhD, ThD, is a theologian, educator, and author dedicated to mission, leadership and values-based education. An ordained clergy in the United Methodist Church, he currently serves as Dean of Wesley Divinity School at Wesleyan University-Philippines. He is a widower with grown-up children: Paolo and Shaira.



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
FILIPINO-AMERICAN UNITED
METHODISTS (NAFAUM)**

18th CONVOCAATION

Online Business Session (via Zoom)

July 19, 2025

3:00 – 5:00 PM Pacific | 5:00 – 7:00 PM Central

6:00 – 8:00 PM Eastern

6:00 – 8:00 AM Philippines (July 20, 2025)

Convocation Proper

Jul 31 – Aug 2, 2025

Memorial United Methodist Church

1726 Pollasky Ave, Clovis, CA 93612

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Church Withdrawals Rock Philippine United Methodists

By Rev. Dr. Ben Vinluan

In recent weeks, the United Methodist Church in the Philippines has been rocked by the withdrawal of a good number of churches. Some churches in Zambales District, in the West Middle Philippines annual Conference have reportedly withdrawn from the connection. That includes the churches of Cabangan and San Narciso United Methodist churches; Wesley UMC in Olongapo. In some instances, some of those churches involved were simply split down the middle. This does not include churches that have withdrawn from the connection in the Bataan District, like Orani UMC; and another church involving alleged loss of sizable amount of church funds to local church officers.

Other local churches elsewhere in the Manila area reportedly involved a number of substantial local units lost to the Puno – Torio group. In the Baguio Area the same holds true with regard to the reported loss of San Esteban UMC in Ilocos Sur; and Bani UMC in the West Pangasinan district.

In most of the cases, self-aggrandizement on the part of local church leaders seems to be part of what drives this disturbing development. In a reportedly high ratio, the withdrawing groups seem able to take the church property along with them, at least for now. We are all aware that local churches are stewards expected to keep the local church property in trust for the Annual Conference. But a more disturbing development involves the reported skepticism, even distrust on the part of the withdrawing groups of the United Methodist Church regarding Regionalization and the promised benefits it is supposed to accrue The United Methodist Church over the long haul. Those involved in schismatic activity and their leaders are using the LGBTQ issue as a recruitment tool so highly effectively, given the results.

We are all part of one another, being part of the connection as the nature of our church's life all the way around. As NAFAUM members or supporters of it, and as member of the connection this side of the Pacific, we have seen and suffered the havoc that withdrawals or separation has wreaked upon our beloved United Methodist Church. Now we are again called to bear the burden of another wave of separation, albeit and at most vicariously, since we too are somehow still part of the United Methodist Church in the Philippines, as part of the connection. I hope and pray we all do our part praying for our church siblings for there to be peace that passes all understanding in the Philippines among people called Methodist – United Methodists and those against them, for the sake of the Christ. AMEN.



Rev. Ben Vinluan, formerly of the Northwest Philippines Annual Conference in the Baguio Episcopal Area, is a retired clergy member of the California-Pacific Annual Conference. In retirement, he remains actively involved in ministry, and edits the newly launched NAFAUM Connect newsletter of the National Association of Filipino-American United Methodists.

Vision/Mission of the Davao Episcopal Area

By Bishop Israel Pinit

Resident Bishop, Davao Episcopal Area

Ever since my first election during the special session of the Philippines Central Conference 2024, I never promised any program, instead, I gave a framework, dubbed as the CALL, which is an acronym for Collaborating, Advocating, Liberating, and Leadership Empowering, the core values which will guide the church in the pursuit of ministries and programs appropriate to their context. I initially set consultations in Annual Conferences called PAGUUSAP (Purpose-driven and Accountability Gathering for Unification, Updating, Sharing, Assessment, and Planning) in the first few months of my election as resident Bishop of the Davao Episcopal Area. The series of consultations allowed me to hear from the grassroots what aspects in the ministry need to be prioritized. My team and I were also able to create a vision for the DEA, which is “A Self-sustaining and self-sufficient; Self-growing and self-propagating; and Self-governing Davao Episcopal Area,” and a Mission which is ***“To make disciples of Jesus Christ empowered to establish faith communities that are Self-Determining and Contextual.”***

The Davao Episcopal Area is geographically the biggest Episcopal Area though we only have five annual conferences (plus an additional conference which was recently approved in the PCC 2024), however, the DEA covers the islands of Visayas and Mindanao, and part of Luzon (Bicol region). The mission field is vast, and yet it is challenging to lead in this area due to the distance of one conference to another. Additionally, there are certain areas that give minimal workers’ support.

Amid these difficulties, there are also several strengths and opportunities, and we focus on them so that DEA will reach its full potential as an Episcopal Area.

In order to achieve our vision, the “CALL” framework will be used by Annual Conference, Districts, and Local Churches as a roadmap to create and implement programs and ministries that are relevant to the contexts of the Annual Conferences. It is important that programs are contextualized because in the situation of the Davao Episcopal Area, each Annual Conference is significantly different than the other. In Bicol, I cannot speak my native language Bisaya because they can only understand Tagalog, and Bicol itself has 11 dialects.

Though belonging to one conference, the three districts in BPAC differ in terms of dialects and cultures. How much more in Mindanao, which is a home to 18 Lumad tribes, 13 ethnic-linguistic Moro tribes and 64 settler groups who have lived in the island for over a century already. Mindanao is an island of peoples with diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultural differences. It is not advisable or helpful to propose a “one-size-fits-all” program because what may be relevant in one conference may not be applicable in another. Therefore, instead of imposing programs, I offered a framework and a template of program areas (Nurture/Discipleship, Outreach/Church and Society, Witness, Resource Generation and Accountability-Temporal and Human Resource) where they can design programs in these areas that fit to the need and will address concerns particularly in their Annual Conferences, Districts, or Local Churches.

Let me explain further about the CALL.

The Bishop's office encourages Collaboration guided by the principle that the issues and concerns of the Episcopal Area are not solely the responsibility of the Bishop's office, rather a collaborative effort. We also give importance to Advocating ministries that will create greater impact in people's lives and communities. We also give weight to Liberating ministries that promote social consciousness. Lastly, we hold conscious and cautious efforts for the Leadership empowerment of clergy and lay alike.

As I enter into a new quadrennium of shepherding the Davao Episcopal Area, I am emboldened to continue to embrace in my servant-leadership the core values of the CALL and will continue with the same vision for the Davao Episcopal Area.

During my two-year tenure as Bishop after being elected in the special session of the PCC and to this day, we focused on developing and solving problematic properties, and pursuing income generating projects. Through this, our dream of having a standardized workers' support and to have self-sustaining faith communities will be realized. In fact, two of the Annual Conferences are ready to have standardized workers' support. We are also proud to say that there are no more church workers who have a salary below P5,000.00, and this is through subsidies from the office, support from generous individuals, and schemes done by Annual Conferences.

This is said to increase in the next years. P5,000.00 is a very little amount if we consider the cost of living and the inflation rate, however, this is much better than the previous conditions of our church workers, wherein some are receiving as low as P500.00 from their local churches. In Bicol Philippines Annual Conference, the minimum compensation for church workers in P7,000.00.

Heavily influenced by John Wesley, who believed that "The world is our parish," efforts have been made by DEA Disaster Management Office, Church and Society, and Local Churches, to make The United Methodist Church relevant in communities by means of mission works, quick response, sustainable programs, and other kinds of support, reaching out to people in need who do not necessarily belong to our denomination. In fact, some areas where we extend our support have no United Methodist members; sometimes it is even a Muslim-area. This shows that our ministry is not selective, but it is for all.

As a recipient of National in Mission programs by the General Board of Global Ministries, we continue serving the communities through Ecological Concerns and Ministry, Socioeconomic projects, and Ministry with the Lumads. At present, an NIM program on Discipleship for Women and Children in the Indigenous Communities, which aims to empower the IP communities not just in the spiritual or leadership aspect, but most importantly, the economic aspect. Being a culturally-rich Episcopal Area, we aim to give special attention to the ministry to our Lumad brothers and sisters.



Bishop Israel Painit was re-elected to the episcopacy during the recently concluded session of the Philippines Central Conference in Cabanatuan City, Philippines. He was reassigned to his previous assignment, The Davao Area of The United Methodist Church.

Spirituality of Mission

By Rebecca C. Asedillo

Whenever mission events are celebrated in churches, some hymns which are understood to express the spirit of Christian mission are usually sung, including “We’ve a story to tell to the nations,” “Rescue the perishing!”, or “O Zion haste!” These are rousing songs set in spirited tempo that are meant to challenge, inspire and infuse faith and confidence in the God who calls, and in the mission to which God calls the church. This is the type of hymns that I grew up with, that nurtured my faith, and which I will always love.

But as I reflect on the topic I have selected for this article – “Spirituality of Mission” – I found myself veering away from the robust, almost triumphalistic spirit of such hymns towards a more reflective sensing of the essence of mission as I understand it now. Some words and concepts come to mind – words such as reverence, respect, hospitality, friendship, mutuality, humility, solidarity and dialogue. Such words describe for me the spirit of my still growing understanding of mission.

Mission as engaged presence

A couple of years after Mt. Pinatubo erupted, I visited with some friends an Aeta community on the foothills of Zambales. The Aetas had fled their homes which were near the volcano and with help from some Roman Catholic sisters, were starting their lives anew eking out a living from what they could plant and harvest from the hillsides.

We got there late in the afternoon, so after the community leaders welcomed us, we had merienda, took a quick tour of the site, came back together for supper, and were then assigned to our respective hosts. The homes were mostly nipa huts with slotted bamboo floors built low on the ground. My hosts gave me a banig and a kerosene lamp, and showed me my spot on the floor on which to spread it. I took this gesture to mean that it was time for bed. I was tired from the trip, and was only too happy to oblige.

The next day, we had our breakfast, then went to see the gardens and farms. We listened as the Aetas told us their stories -- of escape from the fury of the volcano, of moving from one resettlement site to another, and of coming finally to this place where they were able to get organized so that each member had a role and a responsibility within the organization.

Before our visit ended, they asked us how they could do better as hosts since doing evaluation was a part of their organizational process. So we gave them our input. Then to my big surprise, the group facilitator turned to our various hosts, and said: “Now it is your turn to evaluate your guests’ visit with you.”

My host said, “Well, after our guest spread out her banig, she just went to sleep. So we weren’t able to talk with her!” I felt my face turning red.

What I had considered to be a polite gesture – getting out of the way, and thus being an easy guest to please – had the opposite effect from what I had expected. I had understood my presence in this community as a way to be in solidarity with a group of people who were overcoming the traumas of dislocation and of centuries-old discrimination and marginalization from mainstream Philippine society. But I failed to read the cultural cues that would have revealed to me what my hosts were looking for in this encounter. They were looking for a relationship, some type of friendship, maybe, at least a pair of listening ears, and a more engaged presence.

I realized that I had come to this community with a set of expectations that did not include being held accountable by my hosts in such an unexpected way.

Mission is building relationships and being mutually accountable.

“Mutuality in mission” is a catchphrase that has been around for decades now. Mutuality implies a two-way street, a symbiotic relationship, a give and take process, a sense of equal partnership with each party having a say in the ways that such relationship may be nurtured and maintained.

“Mutuality in mission” becomes a tricky proposition however when one party is seen as the “have” while the other is seen as the “have not.”

Last year, Bishop Samuel Azariah, Moderator of the Church of Pakistan visited Global Ministries and asked us, “What can the Church of Pakistan give to you?” It was an intriguing challenge that pointed out to us how Pakistani Christians living in an Islamic society have unique insights to share with U.S. Christians who sometimes react with panic to the realization, “There is a mosque in my neighborhood!”

Bishop Azariah shared about a model of learning that brought together Muslim and Christian clergy in Pakistan in a program of peace, reconciliation and justice. In this program, an equal number of clergy from each faith tradition lived together, worshipped together, ate meals together, shared sleeping quarters, and dialogued with each other within a certain time frame. *(To a limited extent, this model was also tried in the Philippines during the 2007 Muslim-Methodist Conference on Peacebuilding see <http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=1wL4KnN1LtH&b=4611913&ct=4171843¬oc=1>).*

In one of my visits to Pakistan, Bishop Azariah hosted a Muslim-Christian dialogue that was concluded with an iftar meal served at sundown when Muslims broke their fast, as it was Ramadan. Christians providing hospitality in a spirit of reverence, sharing a meal with their sister and brother Muslims, was a beautiful sight to behold.

As I write this article, controversies are raging over the building of a mosque in New York several blocks from Ground Zero. It is heartening in the midst of it all to learn about Heartsong UMC in Memphis, Tennessee which opened its doors to their Muslim neighbors who have been worshipping at their sanctuary while waiting for their Islamic center to be built (see <http://www.commercialappeal.com/photos/2010/aug/27/184110/>). In New York City, members of St. Paul and St. Andrew organized a candlelight vigil on the eve of the 9th anniversary of 9/11, when Pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Florida threatened to burn 200 copies of the Qur'an. Not too far from Jones' church, Rev. Dan Johnson, senior minister of Trinity UMC hosted a "Gathering for Peace, Understanding and Hope" in conjunction with the Gainesville Interfaith Forum which was created as an interreligious response to Jones' hate-filled rhetoric (see <http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=1wL4KnN1LtH&b=5723441&ct=8651183-oc=1&tr=y&auid=6971183>).

What gifts do we bring to the table of mutuality?

I recall another incident during the time spent with the Pinatubo Aetas. My friends and I had come to this community bringing some snacks that were common fare in Manila, like candies, cookies and chips high in saturated fat and sodium content. The nun who lived with the Aetas took a look at what we had brought and politely declined. "We have already prepared something for you – some boiled camote," she said. "Really, they are better for you."

People with the best intentions in the world oftentimes make mistakes in discerning needs and priorities of communities in need. A popular story is told of a group of church women who wanted to do something for an urban poor resettlement community. They visited the area and decided that it needed more toilets. So they collected money and had toilets built. The following year, they visited the community only to discover to their dismay that some of the toilets were filled with soil and planted with vegetables. So they asked the people, "Why did you do this?" And some of the people answered, "Well, first of all, we need food. Later we will worry about what happens to that food after we have eaten it."

The principle of "mutuality in mission" involves a responsible and respectful assessment of the missional context, and in respectful collaboration with the partners.

When Typhoon Ketsana hit the Philippines in 2009, one of the local partners of UMCOR-Philippines provided book bags and school supplies for the children affected. Thinking to tap available resources for the Philippines, I checked with UMCOR if they were continuing to distribute school kits to needy areas in the world. Melissa Crutchfield, assistant general secretary for international disaster response told me, "Yes, we do, but it is UMCOR's objective to develop a localized kit ministry in the Philippines." Such approach, according Crutchfield, "would ensure that locally appropriate and relevant supplies are used, the local economy is supported, shipping costs are saved, local volunteers and churches are directly engaged in UMCOR kit ministry, and if a stock of kits could be stored at the UMCOR office in Cavite, they could be available to be sent throughout the country and region as needed in response to emergencies more quickly than if they were shipped from the Sager Brown UMCOR depot in Louisiana."

What gifts do we bring to the table of mutuality?

Despite its diminished capacity to provide funding for mission projects, church groups continue to turn to Global Ministries as a funding source. But the gifts that Global Ministries bring to the table of mutuality may not always be described in dollar terms. To name a few examples:

- Global Ministries mobilizes people to serve in mission – missionaries, deaconesses and home missionaries, church and community workers, and community developers. Regional missionaries organized through the Women’s Division engages mission partners in ministries with women, children and youth. Global Health missionaries focus their ministries on poverty-linked health diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV-AIDS.
- Leadership development and mission opportunities for youth and young adults, such as the US-2, Global Justice Volunteers, Mission Intern and Summer Intern programs continue to call and challenge young people to cross cultural, racial and geographic boundaries, learn about and develop skills in responding to missional needs in various contexts.
- Volunteers in Mission teams, the Individual Volunteer program, the UM Fellowship of Health Care Volunteers, the Amity Teachers program, the Ubuntu Explorer Journeys, offer opportunities for individuals, local congregations and annual conferences to be involved in short term mission work.
- UMCOR provides training in sustainable agriculture and sponsors a coffee project which links congregations with small farmers and their families through fair trade.
- The Schools for Congregational Development bring the experiences and expertise of people who have started churches and helped them to grow, or who have revitalized congregations, sharing inspiration and tools with those who are involved in the ministry of renewing and growing local congregations.
- Through the Mission Initiatives program, Methodist churches are emerging and growing in Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand), Mongolia and Nepal, as well as in Africa (Cameroon, Senegal, Malawi), Latin America (Honduras), Europe (Latvia, Lithuania), and in Russia/Eurasia and Central Asia.
- The program offices for the various racial ethnic ministries resource and facilitates networking among various racial ethnic ministries in the denomination.
- Global Ministries engages in advocacy for peace, justice and freedom on various social issues such as immigration, the Israel-Palestine conflict, racial discrimination, economic justice and other forms of injustice.

The missionary and the missionized

I used to hold a position within the General Board of Global Ministries as the Executive Secretary for Mission Relationships in the Asia Pacific region. It doesn't seem so long ago (though in fact it has been more than 30 years!) when I found myself face to face with Dr. Edwin Fisher who was an executive with what was then the World Division of the General Board of Global Ministries. As Executive Secretary for the Philippines Central Conference Board of Education, I was explaining to him what we had done with a grant that his office had provided for a church school curriculum project.

Then later I held the job he once held, linking the United Methodist Church constituency with mission partners in China, the Philippines, as well as with most other countries in Asia.

My colleagues covering United Methodist mission partnerships in Africa, Latin America and Europe also come from those regions respectively. There is definitely increasing ethnic diversity in the staffing of Global Ministries. And for the first time, the General Secretary of the denomination's mission agency is from a Central Conference.

From my vantage point, I could see that we have come a long way from the 19th century images of the missionary movement, as described by Tracey K. Jones, Jr. thus:

1. The mission field, seen as a rural area where smoke rose in the morning sky from villages that had never heard the gospel;
2. The missionary, seen as a white man who went to a distant land to save souls from a perishing world;
3. The word liberation meant westernizing Asians, Africans, and the American Indians, for Christianity and Western culture were identified as two sides of the same coin.
4. The restless explorer seen as the pioneer of civilization who could not be quieted until every geographical barrier had been crossed.

Indeed we have come a long way from the time when Christian mission was seen in dualistic terms – one is either a sender or a receiver; one has an exclusive claim to the truth, while the other has nothing or has a false claim to the truth; one is civilized, while the other is primitive. One is from the North or West; the other is from the South, or East.

In today's global missionary movement, the mission senders and receivers are from across continents. "We live in a new mission age, the age of the global ministries of the whole Church moving into the whole world," wrote John E. Nuessle, formerly Global Ministries Associate General Secretary for Mission Relationships. Nuessle further asserts that contextualization "calls us from everywhere to go everywhere as faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ, and to make disciples through involvement in the context of people's lives through partnering with rather than mission to."

Or as Darrell Guder puts it, “The church of every place is a mission-sending church, and the place of every church is a mission-receiving church.” Sherron K. George yet puts it another way: “Mission is everything the local-global church is sent into the world to be and do as a participant in God’s mission and every person and gift the local-global church receives in Christ’s name and way.”

Currently, about 40% of Global Ministries missionaries are from countries outside of the United States. Among these are three Filipinos in Japan, two in Cambodia, two in Laos, one in Liberia and three in the Philippines. Persons-in-Mission (PIM) grants mostly support local mission personnel in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The Filipino diaspora has given impetus to mission outreach to Filipinos wherever they may be found – in Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, in the United Arab Emirates, in Canada, etc. through the initiatives of Philippine churches, including the United Methodist Church in the Philippines. In many instances, these churches work in collaboration with existing mission partners in these countries. I like to imagine that we prayerfully accomplish our missional goals in these various settings with an attitude of humility, bearing in mind that as we enter into other cultures, we are also entering other peoples’ sacred spaces in which God resides.

Mission is about accompaniment and solidarity

During the historic 1910 Edinburgh conference on world mission, one of the most memorable speeches given was by V.S. Azariah of India, who said:

“Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labors of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS.” (*Quoted from Dana L. Robert. Joy to the World! Mission in the Age of Global Christianity. Women’s Division, 2010, p. 27.*)

As I pointed out in my story about my experience with the Aetas, I learned that being in mission is not about giving out unneeded hand-outs, or being invisible in their presence. To be in mission is to be in relationship. Sometimes such relationship calls us to accompany those with whom we are in ministry where they are. Speaking about her work with the Dumagats, a deaconess told me how she and the Person-in-Mission working with her oftentimes eat what the Dumagats eat “or not eat when they do not eat.”

Mission as accompaniment is journeying on the same road as the friend. While self-sacrifice has been downplayed in more recent years, accompaniment could demand sacrifice as shown in the story just described. Most of us have stories to share about our first church appointment somewhere in the “boondocks,” about how our salaries were paid in kind -- a bag of rice here, a bunch of bananas there, perhaps an egg or two -- about the many kilometers we had to walk under the hot sun to visit our sick member, and so forth. That self-sacrificing spirit of mission lives on.

But again, we are called not just to sacrifice but to be friends. When V.S. Azariah raised the challenge, “Give us friends!” I wonder if in the back of his mind, he had Jesus’ words to his disciples, “I do not call you servants ... because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father.” (John 15:15)

This is a tall order. When viewed in the light of differing missional contexts, priorities and perspectives of the parties involved, how do we demonstrate friendship? How do we accompany each other on our common and separate journeys? How are the resources of time, personnel, and finances to be allocated given the too obvious reality that material disparity does exist between and among mission partners?

We can’t presume to know and understand our partners’ needs, as those church women did in the story narrated above. But we can listen well and keep ourselves open to what others have to say to us. Our missional context might be different from them, but in this age of globalization, it is amazing how similar issues such as the ones we confront in the United States also arise in very different contexts. We all live on the same planet, similarly affected by the natural consequences of human neglect and abuse of the environment. We long for peace in the world. We want to eradicate poverty. We are passionate about bringing justice where there is injustice and liberation to the oppressed. We want to cross boundaries of class, race, age and sexual orientation! In the midst of it all, we strive to live and witness to Jesus Christ’s message of salvation and the life abundant! For our mission is God’s mission fully demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ!



Rebecca Asedillo, or *Becky* as many of us call her, has since retired from GBGM and now lives with her husband in quiet retirement in New York City.

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