

Friends in Faith,

Hello from the Philippines!

It's hard to believe that nearly a year ago our family was starting to say our goodbyes while preparing for our new call to international mission service. It's been a bit over six months since we moved to Quezon City, with many things to learn and to get accustomed to with culture shock slowly giving way to cultural assimilation.

Yet culture shock still persists such as two weeks ago when trying to understand a bombing that happened in the southern Philippine city of Davao City. News reports in the U.S. might attribute the explosion to ISIS, but there is another alleged reason and group behind this explosion: in the ongoing drug war, "narco-terrorists" might have been trying to send a message to the current Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte who previously served as the same city's mayor, that he has made some enemies because of his tactics and strategies.

Sadly many other individuals and families became victims through that explosion and through the ongoing drug war. Our family has not experienced any of the direct impact of this ongoing drug war, although because we live here we are troubled by the government's actions and impact on society as a whole. This drug war is an ongoing prayer concern and cause for action among the many churches and Christians here in the Philippines.

In the spirit of gratitude for the many individuals and congregations who invited us to share about God's calling and God's mission in southeast Asia throughout fall 2015 and winter 2016, we would like to share a video with you. One of our supportive congregations in Indiana asked us to prepare a brief video for World Communion Sunday. This video is a good reminder of our connections, specifically through our local church Pastor Gane Deslate of the National City United Church.

Many of you are lifting us up in prayers and providing us with financial support, not to mention the occasional email or Facebook post, all of which help us to stay connected with one another. We're thankful for your support and pray that you will continue your support throughout these next 3 years of our term of service.

Please drop us a line and let us know how you are doing and how God is at work in your respective communities. Let us know how we can pray for you!

Grace and peace, Cathy, Juan & Aurélie

Special Note: in order to facilitate effective communion, I have also prepared a transcript for each video. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at cathy.chang@pcusa.org

Video Background: This is general video of the church sanctuary, through a view coming down the center aisle and up the chancel to the communion table.

Introductions – of self and Pastor Gane Deslate

Note: For this video, feel free to use either one—depending on which one better suits your needs.

Video #1:

Cathy: Blessings to you on this World Communion Sunday, brothers and sisters in Christ at the Faith Presbyterian Church of Kokomo, Indiana. I had the privilege of meeting many of you last April. Again my name is Rev. Cathy Chang, and this is also a new friend and colleague in ministry: this is Rev. Isagani Deslate of the National City United Church, NCUC, for short. Pastor Gane has served as the local church here previously and returned in June.

Video #2:

Cathy: Brothers and sisters in Christ of the Faith Presbyterian Church of Kokomo, Indiana, it's great to be with you this Sunday. Again I am Rev. Cathy Chang, your mission co-worker. I'd like to introduce you to a new colleague and friend in ministry: this is Rev. Isagani Deslate, a United Church of Christ pastor and now specifically a local church pastor of National City United Church.

Pastor Gane's self- introduction

Video #3:

Gane: Good day, everyone. It's my pleasure to be here today. I'm also happy that Cathy and Juan and their daughter are worshipping with us at National City United Church. As Rev. Cathy said earlier, I'm the local church pastor of this church, National City United Church. I've been here only since June 1 this year, but prior to that, I was the pastor of this church for 19 years. Then I was moved to another church and another church. They were in need of a senior pastor so they invited me again to serve. It's my joy and privilege to be back here, to fellowship with Rev. Cathy, Juan and their daughter.

Previous celebrations of World Communion Sunday

Video #4:

Cathy: Brothers and sisters in Christ, as part of our World Communion Sunday celebration, I will be interviewing Pastor Gane. After your extensive ministry especially in the congregations, I'd love to know what are some of the ways that you have celebrated World Communion Sunday.

Gane: My first church assignment was in the province up north. It's a farming community, and most of the members there were farmers and peasants, with three or four teachers in public school. Because their foremost concern was eking out a living, they felt no need to celebrate World Communion Sunday. Most of the struggles of farmers were to make both ends meet in between harvest seasons. They have harvest seasons twice a year, and one harvest season falls in October. They are very busy in month of October with harvesting the crops or either planting new crops.

Then in 1997 I was transferred in Quezon City as pastor of the National City United Church. I found out that they are celebrating World Communion Sunday here. At that time they were inviting Christians from other countries who are living in Quezon City to sit around the communion table in their national costume. And in some instances, those invited have a gift in singing or reciting poems, or they sang Christian songs in their native language. Some of them shared what they are going through in their home church. Those were opportunities for us to pray with one another [during the congregational prayers]. That's how we celebrated World Communion at National City United Church.

In my immediate previous church assignment before coming back here, October is their church founding anniversary month. They have been very busy preparing their anniversary, and we have no time to celebrate World Communion Sunday.

So far the three churches that I pastored, ministered to, this church [NCUC] is the only one that is celebrating World Communion.

Special significance of World Communion Sunday in the Philippines, as the only Christian country

Video #5:

Cathy: It sounds like based on your previous experience, sometimes life is more important. In fact, as you said in the farming community and even with other church-wide celebrations, sometimes World Communion Sunday gets crowded out. That sounds natural for church life. I'd like to think a little bit more broadly about only the narrow concerns and think only now about the Philippines as a country, as a whole. The Philippines, as I know, is the only Christian country in Asia. When you think about World Communion Sunday, being the only Christian country in Asia, does World Communion Sunday carry any special significance?

Gane: Well I think that one of the valuable lessons we can be reminded of, when we celebrate World Communion Sunday, is that we live in solidarity with one another. We are not a church on our own. The concerns of Christians of other countries are also our concerns, and vice versa, our concerns are also the concerns of Christians of other countries. Here in our country we have a saying, "The pain of the pinky finger is the pain of the whole body." So even the smallest church in a far-flung area is the concern of the whole church.

One of the concerns that we have in our country, pressing concerns, is corruption. Connected with that is poverty. Another pressing concern is the illegal drug trade. So those are some of the concerns that our country faces now, again that Christians in our country are also facing. The two, as I said, are interconnected with corruption. While we pride ourselves as being the only Christian country in this part of the world, with 93% of the population professing Christians, ironically corruption and poverty are prevalent. Christianity is just a name, it's not something that affects our values or lifestyle. The challenge now to our churches in our country, is what can we do as Christians who bring about transformation in the lives of people. How can church life affect our everyday life?

One other problem that we have now is the drug problem. While the Philippine Statistics Office said some years ago that – let me backtrack a bit, 14 to 15 drug enforcement agencies in our country tasked to monitor the drug problem, said 93% of the barangays (barangays are the smallest administrative areas) in metro Manila are drug-affected. That means either there are drug dens, drug factories, drug pushers. According to one United Nations report, Philippines is now the biggest user of methamphetamine hydrochloride, the local name is shabu. Philippines is now the biggest user in east Asia. Not only that Philippines has become the hub of transportation for nearby countries.

Now we are thankful that the government is addressing this problem, but however there are alleged summary executions in the implementation of drug efforts. The challenge now is what can the church do to help address the problem. Since there are now around 600,000 drug users who have surrendered and have come out in the open, and since there are not enough government solutions to rehabilitate them, the challenge now is what can we do to help rehabilitate/eradicate the drug users.

Tomorrow, as an aside, the pastors in this area, of Quezon City, will have a brainstorming meeting. We would like to know where we can come in. It will be interdenominational, there are Baptists, other Protestant groups, I don't know if there will be a Roman Catholic present, but hopefully we can come up with something positive and effective.

I would like churches and Christians in the United States, such as the ones that are supporting you, to please pray for us. These are the challenges. We are living in challenging times in how can we make our faith relevant.