

March 22, 2016

Sisters and Brothers of the Lake Huron Presbytery,

Greetings from Quezon City! It's been almost two weeks since we've arrived, and our days have been filled with lots of activity and waiting. Exciting as it is to start this new chapter in our lives, it has also been physically and emotionally exhausting with the many things to do before leaving Michigan, and the many things to do here and now. As if the time difference of thirteen hours was not enough, we've also been initiated into our new Philippine life through the heat and humidity, noise, and dirt. Waiting to talk with our US-based banks and cell phone provider when their customer call centers are open, causes to wait until early morning or early evening to make these phone calls.

During our first few days we stayed in an apartment/hotel, known as an "apartelle" until our apartment was ready. With the help of different staff members from the national offices of United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), our church partner, we shopped for major appliances and furniture, and most importantly, A/C units. To help us make the apartment more livable, two colleagues from the national offices gave their extra time and energy to set up additional electrical wiring for new A/C unit and washing machine. What a blessing for the ways in which these two men went out of their way to help us!

Our new apartment is within walking distance of two mega-malls equipped with everything from department stores to Starbucks, Dunkin' Donuts, Mister Donuts, and other fast food chains. Both malls are within walking distance or a short taxi or "tricycle" ride. Picture a motorcycle with an umbrella over the driver, equipped with a souped-up sidecar which includes a roof and resembles something more like your "car" on a ferris wheel ride with an opening where the door should shut, that fits two or three people.

When we're not fixing up, cleaning up, and shopping for the apartment at the mega-malls, we're also doing things such as visiting our landlord who lives two doors down (thankfully Aurélie gets to watch Disney Jr. TV shows), meeting neighbors and walking through the neighborhood, and visiting a potential church-based preschool. Earlier today, we ventured out to the Ninoy Aquino Wildlife Refuge Center which houses many different birds and reptiles, along with research centers committed to preserving biodiversity in the Philippines.

This past Sunday, we worshipped with a local congregation called UCCP Cosmopolitan that was celebrating its 83rd anniversary and Palm Sunday with a unified worship service in English. Surprisingly the order of worship was very similar to a Presbyterian church, but a few elements of the liturgy were in different places. This congregation is probably among the largest UCCP congregations. Among the members are several who have served in politics, most notably during and after the People Power Revolution of 1986. Over lunch, we visited briefly with the pastor of the church whose hometown is in Dumaguete, the same city that we visited back in January. We also met with another pastor who serves as a convener for major ecumenical efforts to present the Philippine presidential candidates with a common agenda about land reforms and workers' rights. Elections for local and national officials will take place on May 9.

During our drive to church this past Sunday, we observed once again that we are living in a Christian country. Traffic is somewhat lighter than usual, but most people are on their way to church. Outside

the major Catholic churches, several stalls were filled with elaborate Palm Sunday palms, decorated as if they were flowers. One of the first things that I noticed at the mega-malls were the fast-food restaurants with posters promoting their Lenten menu offerings of fish, seafood and other simpler fare. Summer vacation began this week for school-aged children, and offices and mega-malls will be closed on Thursday and Friday. This Easter Sunday, we expect to participate in an ecumenical sunrise worship service at a local park, starting at 4:30 a.m. It'll be a new experience to wake up that early for worship, but we're looking forward to the experience!

For all the days and holidays and all that we face now and going forward, we are confident that God continues to lead us in this adventure. We're grateful for your friendship, prayers, and financial support to support God's mission in the Philippines and southeast Asia. Blessings on your Holy Week and Easter, as you walk with Jesus in sacrificial service and onto the glorious resurrection!

Grace and peace, Cathy, Juan & Aurélie