

Reflections on our Visit to our Partner Church in Cabiguhan

I wish every one in this congregation could see and live what our little group did on our pilgrimage to our partner congregation in the Philippines! We were told that we would be warmly welcomed and that we would be glad that we went. We were told that our partner congregation lived in great hardship and their lives were a struggle. All of this is true, but words cannot begin to convey the actual experience.

I found the Philippines, and especially Negros Island, to be a land of great contrasts. The land is very beautiful and obviously rich in natural resources, but it is very hilly and the roads are hard to build and maintain. Our partner congregation lives in an area where running water and electricity are not generally available. It is an area of plowed hillsides and deeply rutted, rocky, muddy roads that sometimes cling to the edge of a precipice. Small homes made mostly of bamboo, sometimes of concrete blocks, dot the roadside in small clusters. Farm animals wander the area: chickens, pigs, and goats, all three of a variety of colors and patterns I had not seen before, horses, scrawny dogs and cats. Brahman cattle and caribou can also be found nearby. The animals do not have pens or barns but often have ropes about their necks which may or may not be attached at the other end.

Sometimes the crops are plentiful, but the weather can be unpredictable and sometimes it causes a crop to be lost. Local lenders charge 6% a month for the money the farmers borrow for seed and fertilizer. A bad crop can be disastrous under those terms. Also, even a good crop will sell for much less if the farmers are unable to transport the crop to market themselves.

The members of our partner church congregation are very gracious, open and welcoming, although some of them tended to be a little shy at first. They are hard workers and slow to complain.

I was especially taken by the children. They are beautiful, bright-eyed, friendly and cooperative. They played and worked well together; the older children naturally helped the younger ones without being asked. They are well-loved by their parents and their community.

I had brought along a little paper craft project for the children that I hadn't actually planned to present myself, so I felt a bit awkward. However, you can see in the photos of our trip how attentive and receptive all the children were. There is so much potential in them. It is a tragedy that most of them have to abandon their educations early.

It would take so little for us to make a big difference in their lives.