

## Woman on a Mission

Late last year I excitedly told a co-worker, “Hey, I’m going to visit your country in January!”

She said, “Oh wow, doing surgeries with Dr. Hamilton?”

And I said “No, this is a church trip.”

So she nodded, “Oh! It’s a mission!”

“Um, well,” and then I made a stuttering elevator speech about the UU partner church program. I vaguely recognized my aversion to the term “Mission” unless preceded by “Medical.”

This conversation happened over and over. I hoped to come home from the Philippines with a more elegant explanation.

We spent 11 wonderful days getting to know our UU sisters and brothers all around Negros Island. Life is hard for them, yet they radiate generosity, gratitude, and just plain fun! In my mind I have a family photo album of everyone I met, with the memory of something precious they said to me. I felt honored that they would share the details of their struggles and dreams with me, and I felt that I could be open, too.

I think a lot about how privileged many of us are here in San Mateo. No one here walks ten kilometers in muddy flip-flops to get to church. I know no elderly man here that ministers to four congregations, commuting many miles on a motorcycle that burns more fuel than he can afford. No one here has to worry about hiking for water or the safety of that water or being unable to plug in an appliance. Yet a lot of our time is wasted complaining about what we don’t have. I came home resolving to whine less, help more, and recognize the difference between a disappointment and a tragedy.

In my mind I have a picture of Victoria, with tears drying on her cheeks, having just talked about losing her business, home, and family. She is saying to us, “Do you want to meet my monkey?” So all thirty of us file out of the Cabiguhan chapel, up the muddy hill to a tree near Rev. Lopez’s house, where we all admire and giggle at Victoria’s monkey. Now that really breaks the tension after an intense meeting!

Everywhere we worshipped, Zinn Weller brought us all together by teaching a game called “Pass the squeeze.” It goes like this: Everyone in the room holds hands in a big circle. The leader squeezes the hand of his neighbor, who passes the squeeze on to the next person, and on we go until it gets back to the leader, who announces how long it took for the squeeze to go around the circle. Then we would try it again, and we would always get faster the next time. The giggling participants, Filipino and American, ages 3 to 80, would cheer as we all did our best to bring the entire group’s effectiveness to a new level. What a great metaphor for the work we do as members of partner churches! I was so proud of Zinn’s leadership!

I was surprised by the similarity of the UUSM and UUCP worship styles. All of us sang “Spirit of Life” with gusto and shared personal reflections about being UU as part of the service. The Offering Song is also one we know, which pretty much sums up what I experienced in the Philippines:

“From you I receive, to you I give;  
Together we share, and from this we live.”

We can share some more of what we have with our friends in the Philippines. They need our help to become financially self-supporting, and there are already programs in place to do that. The UUCP has been working hard to fight poverty and deserves our encouragement. They can help guide our effective action.

I guess it really is a “Mission” we are on with this Philippine Adventure. But the conversion that I am after is my own and that of my congregation. I want us to recognize how much we benefit from knowing these folks as real people, by helping their UU community to thrive, and living by our true values.