

## **A History of Our Philippine Partnership**

This Partnership spans nearly a quarter of a century, beginning in 1986 with an overture from the Rev. Lloyd Van Vactor of the United Church Board for World Ministries to the Rev. Robert L. Bergfalk, an Associate Conference Minister in Minnesota. The following year, in response to a proposal from the Stewardship/OCWM Committee, the Board of Directors approved a "Partner in Mission" relationship with the Mindanao Jurisdiction of the UCCP. The stated purposes were: to raise the consciousness of our churches and members about life and ministry in third world situations; to give local churches opportunities to have personalized relationship with local overseas congregations; and to exchange leaders between the two churches. In summer 1987, while on sabbatical leave, Rev. Berkfalk toured the Mindanao Jurisdiction. Following that visit, a Philippines Partnership Task Force was established to develop and coordinate Partnership activities, including a visit to Minnesota by Bishop Lorenzo and Amelita Genotiva, who came as Missionaries in Residence in 1990-1991. Visits to Mindanao were made by Rev. Don Britt (First Congregational, Princeton), Rev. Jeff Steinhelfer (former Conference Minister), and Rev. Jerry Hankins (retired, First UCC, Northfield), who in 1992 participated in a six-week pastoral exchange. These visits, along with the donation of books to the theological library at Southern Christian College in Mindanao were the fruits of the first years of the Partnership.

A proposed covenant was introduced to our 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in 1992 by the Stewardship/Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) Committee. With several amendments, this was approved as a "working draft." Information about what happened next has been difficult to ascertain, but it does not appear that there was further formal action by the Annual Meeting on the proposed covenant.

Beginning in 1997, the Rev. Eleazar Fernandez (UCC New Brighton and United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities) began leading exposure and immersion trips to his native Philippines. Rev. Glen Herrington-Hall (Cherokee Park United Church, St. Paul) participated in the first trip.

In 1998 the Mindanao Jurisdiction was divided, and the Philippines Task Force of the Minnesota Conference (a subgroup of the Our Church's Wider Mission Committee) decided to continue our partnership with and through the Southeast Mindanao Jurisdiction (SEMJur).

In the intervening years visits to Minnesota by SEMJur Bishops Serafica and Claro have taken place, and numerous students from SEMJur have studied at United Theological Seminary. A 12-member delegation from the Minnesota Conference UCC traveled to SEMJur in 2001. This group included Rev. Forrest Hoppe, then Western Association Minister, and members from churches across the Conference. In 2006, Rev. Tim Johnson (Cherokee Park United, St. Paul) and Rev. Rick Wagner (then at Union UCC, St. Louis Park) and Rev. Glen Herrington-Hall (then at UCC New Brighton) represented the

Minnesota Conference UCC at the Quadrennial General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Through the Philippines Task Force, the Conference has continued to collect books, which are sent to SEMJur's office, in the expectation that they will be distributed fairly among the various libraries that can benefit from them. We have worked through our Wider Church Ministries staff of the UCC North America to provide other resources for relief and support. Peter Monkres (First Congregational, Grand Marais) has provided excellent ministry with and through the Partnership. Peace UCC, Duluth has also formed congregation-to-congregation partnerships.

In 2005, the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference passed a resolution submitted by the Philippine Partnership Task Force that called for timely, full, and impartial investigations into human rights violations in the Philippines. That resolution was forwarded to the General Synod in Atlanta where it was affirmed.

In 2009, the Philippine Task Force became a part of the Conference Global Partnerships Team, which is the entity initiating this current partnership statement. Members of the Global Partnerships Team are: Rev. Al Thompson, Convener (First, Mankato); Karen Evenson (member, Pilgrim UCC, Benson, serving First, Graceville and Congregational, Ortonville); Rev. Dr. Eleazar Fernandez (UCC New Brighton); Rev. David Lindsey (Lynnhurst UCC, Minneapolis); Rev. Kathy Nelson (Peace UCC, Duluth); Renee Pfenning (First of Minnesota, Minneapolis); and Mariana Shulstad (Plymouth, Minneapolis).