



MISSION CHRONICLES

THE SOCIAL-ANALYTICAL

Our first module as part of the Training in Mission Program was on the Social-Analytical understanding of mission. Professor Luisito Saliendra and Rev. Jarwen Reyes brought us on a journey of intrigue, revelation and challenge. *More on page 6*



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PRAYER

by Vanchhuangpuii

MIZO

Lalpa, keini TIM member-te tun dinhmun min hruai thlennaah lawmthu kan lo sawi e. Hmabak tam tak kan la nei a, i rawngbawl tur atan min lo chher zel ang che. UTS faculty, staff, zirlaite leh CWM member-te mal lo sawmin lo venghim la, kan in lama kan kohran te pawh lo chenchilh ang che. I thlarau thianghlimin min kaihruai tlat la, Lalpa Isua Krista hmingin, Amen.

ENGLISH

Heavenly Father, we TIM members thank you for bringing us where we are today. We know we have a lot more to face during this journey, we pray that you mould us to carry out your mission work. Bless and protect the UTS faculty, staff, students, CWM members, and we pray for our home churches as well. May your Holy Spirit guide us always. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

POLITICS AND MISSION

Our experience of the Philippines thus far has been influenced by the political outlook of UTS, and UCCP, and the programmes they have created for students and young missionaries. We are yet to enter the mission field ourselves, however, we realise that our current learnings give us an insight into how Filipinos are doing missions in their context. *More on page 8*

ADJUSTING TO THE PHILIPPINES

by Rebecca Wrights & Njarasoa Francisco Rakotonirina

Adjusting to a new environment involves adapting to changes and challenges while embracing new opportunities and experiences. It can mean navigating different cultural norms, building new relationships, and finding your place in an unfamiliar setting. Whether it's starting a new job, moving to a new city, or beginning a new educational journey, the process of adjustment requires resilience, openness, and a positive mindset.

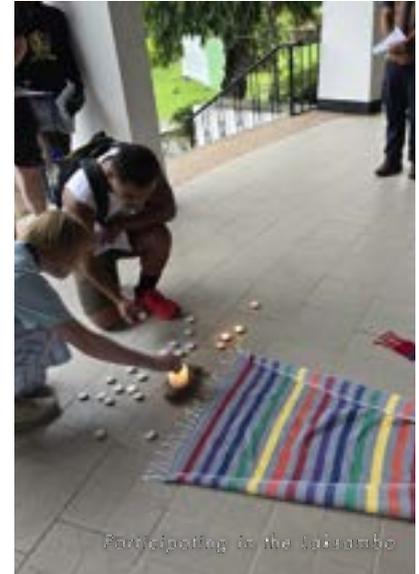
At Union Theological Seminary, Philippines (UTS), new students and faculty members alike experience this transition. In this edition of our newsletter, we explore stories of adjustment and adaptation within our community. From personal anecdotes to practical tips, we aim to provide insight that can help anyone facing the exciting yet daunting task of settling into a new environment. Additionally, we highlight the support systems, challenges, cultural adaptation, social integration and resources available at UTS to ensure that everyone feels welcome and equipped to thrive in their new surroundings.

Adjustment Experiences

Each of us brings a unique perspective and set of challenges, but we are all united in our pursuit of growth and understanding in this diverse environment.

Climate and Environment

Adjusting to the Philippine climate has been a varied experience for all. Sheree from Jamaica and Rebecca from Guyana finds the weather similar to home, making their transition smoother. However, Taobe from Kiribati faces new challenges with the time difference and the intensity of Philippine thunderstorms. These are unfamiliar to her but a regular occurrence here.



Participating in the Lakambini



TAM follows participating in communion

ADJUSTING TO THE PHILIPPINES CONT.



TIM fellows playing UNO with
Rev. Dr. Amelia Kot-Bulder

Cultural Adaptation

Chpi has adapted quickly to the local cuisine but has noted slight adjustments in meal timings compared to her home country. She appreciates the camaraderie among TIM members from diverse backgrounds, which has made the initial overwhelming feeling manageable.

Academic and Social Integration

Hastings initially struggled with the time zone difference and the rigorous orientation schedule. However, he found solace in the flexibility of subsequent lectures and bonding activities with his peers, fostering a sense of belonging and comfort.

Community and Hospitality

Francisco, coming from Madagascar, draws parallels between the Philippines and his home country's east coast in terms of environmental and societal norms. Despite travel delays and jet lag, he feels welcomed by UTS and appreciates the sociable nature of the people here.

Similarities and Differences

While each participant faces unique challenges, there are common threads in our experiences. The warmth and hospitality of the Filipino people have helped us adapt, making it easier for us to integrate into daily life and form meaningful connections. We are also united in our appreciation for the academic and spiritual opportunities provided by UTS, which enrich our theological understanding and personal growth.

Conclusion

As we continue our journey at UTS, we anticipate further growth, both individually and as a community. We look forward to deepening our understanding of theology, forming lasting friendships, and contributing positively to the UTS community and beyond.

MEET LALRAMDINTHARA



Mingalarbar,

My name is Lalramdinthara, often called LAL by my TIM fellows. I am a member of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM), a denomination comprising 245 congregations with more than 33,000 members. Our congregations are spread over a vast area of Myanmar, often located in remote mountainous regions. The missions of the PCM focus primarily on evangelism and social work. This includes providing food to socially disadvantaged groups, building hospitals and wells in rural areas, and responding to natural disasters by donating to those affected. Additionally, we place a significant emphasis on church education and the empowerment of youth and women. Our worship styles vary, encompassing Sunday gatherings in churches as well as smaller house gatherings where cell groups meet and pray together.

We are now in our third week of TIM 2024 in the Philippines, having completed our first module of study on Social Analytics. This journey has been nourishing as we experience different aspects within the contexts of ecumenical, social, political, ecological, and environmental dynamics. The Philippines has treated us well, with its wonderful food, the seminarians, and the faculties from Union Theological Seminary.

As we continue to learn, I am aware that many challenges and struggles lie ahead. I praise God for His evident goodness and I pray and hope that He helps me to open my spiritual eyes to the visions of His mission and grants me the courage to stand against injustice, empires, and oppressors.



TIM Fellows after the Closing Convocation of TIM

MEET TAUBE ROBOAM

Kam na bane ni Mauri,

My name is Taobe Roboam from the Kiribati Uniting Church. I am grateful to be part of TIM Fellows this year 2024 in the Philippines and Jamaica. I am a student at Tangintebu Theological College pursuing a diploma.

I'm from Kiribati, an island country located in the central Pacific Ocean, made up of 33 islands. Only 20 of these are inhabited. Although the land area is small, the islands are scattered widely. Most of the islands are very low-lying atolls (ring-shaped coral reefs). We are Micronesians and the language we speak is Gilbertese (Kiribati) and English as our second language.

My journey to the Philippines was an extremely exciting experience. I came with an expectation that participating in TIM 2024 may enable us to study theology and global missions along with issues that the Church faces- Learning and sharing thoughts and actions as our mission to address such issues to fight against injustice and inequality.

During our third week stay in UTS Campus, we had a chance to celebrate the 45th Independence Day of Kiribati on the 13th July, 2024. I had a chance to talk about where Kiribati is, how we live, and the meaning of our national flag. It was an exciting time for my TIM Fellows and the core staff of UTS who joined the celebration. We had the opportunity to do the Kiribati traditional dance and eat fruits of the island as well as coconut juice.

Being part of the Union Theological Seminary has been a great experience for me. I am able to meet the students and lecturers and become immersed in their culture, even learning their language, Tagalog. We may be far from our homes, but UTS has become our second home where we find love, friendliness and smile to brighten our days.

I pray and hope that we will continue to learn and share, to fulfill our mission to work towards the better future of our people and our churches, to stand firm to fight against injustice, and bring joy, peace and love to all. KAM BATI N RABA, THANK YOU, MARAMING SALAMAT PO



THE SOCIAL ANALYTICAL MODULE

by Sheree O'Connor

Our first module as part of the Training in Mission Program was on the Social-Analytical understanding of mission. Professor Luisito Saliendra and Rev. Jarwen Reyes brought us on a journey of intrigue, revelation and challenge.

Coming into the module, we were asked to answer a series of questions related to our context. These included things like current challenges in our context, how churches are responding and standing for justice, and what ecumenical partnerships exist. We also learned the term “Oikoumene.” Oikoumene is a Greek term and refers to the whole inhabited world. The questions gave us an opportunity to assess our context in a way that we perhaps had not done before. It allowed us to consider how or even if our churches address challenges in our communities and/or countries. We were allowed to articulate our opinion on the matter as well, which some of us might not have considered before.

We were able to see how our social location informs our perspective. Our lecturers helped us to realize that in doing an assessment of a context we most first identify our biases. These would affect how we do missions.

Examining a context without identifying our biases allows room for misinterpretation and an incorrect critique.



THE SOCIAL ANALYTICAL MODULE CONT.

We were also treated to field trips. We joined the youth of the United Methodist Church in Manila where we observed presentations on History of Christianity in Asia, Women in Missions, Digital Ministry, the political state of affairs, disability and mental health, good governance, and disaster program. It was especially alarming to learn that there are people living in the Manila North Cemetery and that the “War on drugs” claimed the lives of thousands. We also met with members of the labour movement who told us of the injustice they face in their efforts to lobby for fair wages and just treatment. The plight of the “jeepney” drivers was easy to sympathize with. The livelihood of these drivers is at risk due to new policies which require them to change their vehicle to something new and significantly more expensive. However, this would have a great impact on the people who also rely on this service.

The socio-economic and political history in the Philippines certainly makes the country rife with struggles. This continues with the country scoring 34 out of 100 on the Corruption Perception Index where 0 means highly corrupt. It is easy to see why many of the issues of the people are perpetuated. It is clear that some are very complex. It is easy to see why the people are frustrated and the church in the Philippines is seeking to answer the call.



Professor Luisito Saliendra teaching the TIM fellows

POLITICS AND MISSIONS

by Harley Brister and Hastings Kayenda



From Unsplash- Lance Lozano

Our experience of the Philippines thus far has been influenced by the political outlook of UTS, The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and the United Methodist Church in the Philippines (UMC), and the programmes they have created for students and young missionaries. We are yet to enter the mission field ourselves, however, we realise that our current learnings give us an insight into how Filipinos are doing missions in their context. Though not a standard for all missions in all contexts, this may encourage us to read into how missions can/should function within our own contexts.

One of the issues that currently affects the Filipinos centres around the current president of the country, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos Jr. He is the son of the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos (1978–1981), whose regime in the Philippines led to the deaths and political suppression of many people. We learned that the students and faculty of UTS historically stood against Marcos Sr.'s regime; the university's publication, Union Voice, published articles which were against the regime, which was an example of the sacrificial discipleship of those involved here. UTS today condemns the indirect succession of Marcos "Bongbong" Jr., as many older Filipinos still remember the sins of his father.

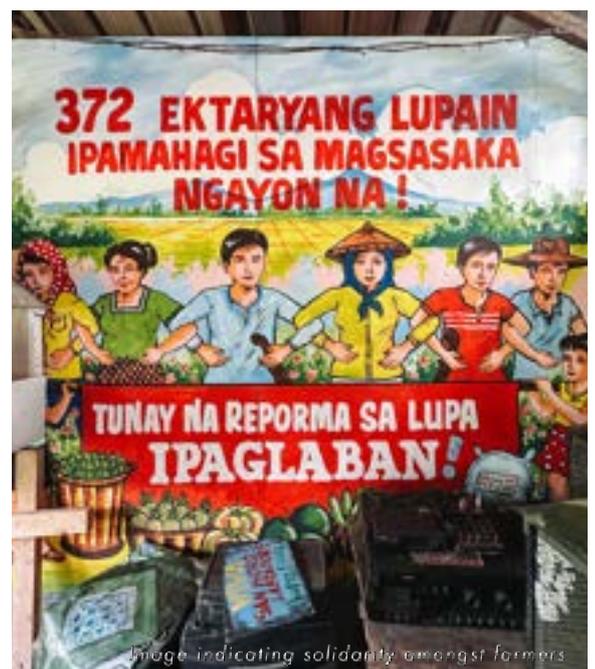


Image indicating solidarity amongst farmers

POLITICS AND MISSIONS CONT.



School of Mission for Young People

Much of the church's teaching has been towards young people who'll be entering the church and politics. This has been to equip young people to stand against the political and colonising powers in the Philippines as they manifest themselves. This is critical for young people who need resilience if entering into the political field and into political critique. On Wednesday 10th July, we attended a School of Mission for Young People programme which was about bringing political awareness to future missionaries, to help them to actively participate in the Philippine political issues and concerns, especially from a grassroots perspective.

During the programme, our group of Training in Mission Fellows were split into break-out study groups. Hastings took part in the Youth Engagement for Good Governance interest group, which exposed the group to the current political landscape of the Philippines; the Philippines is in the middle of a scramble for political and especially military influence by China and America. Many military bases are being established in the Philippines by the Americans and also across the whole of South East Asia in countries like Japan and South Korea, in a strategic move against China. Meanwhile, China is claiming the disputed "South China Sea" near Manila to be theirs, and using battleships to turn away Filipino fishing boats.

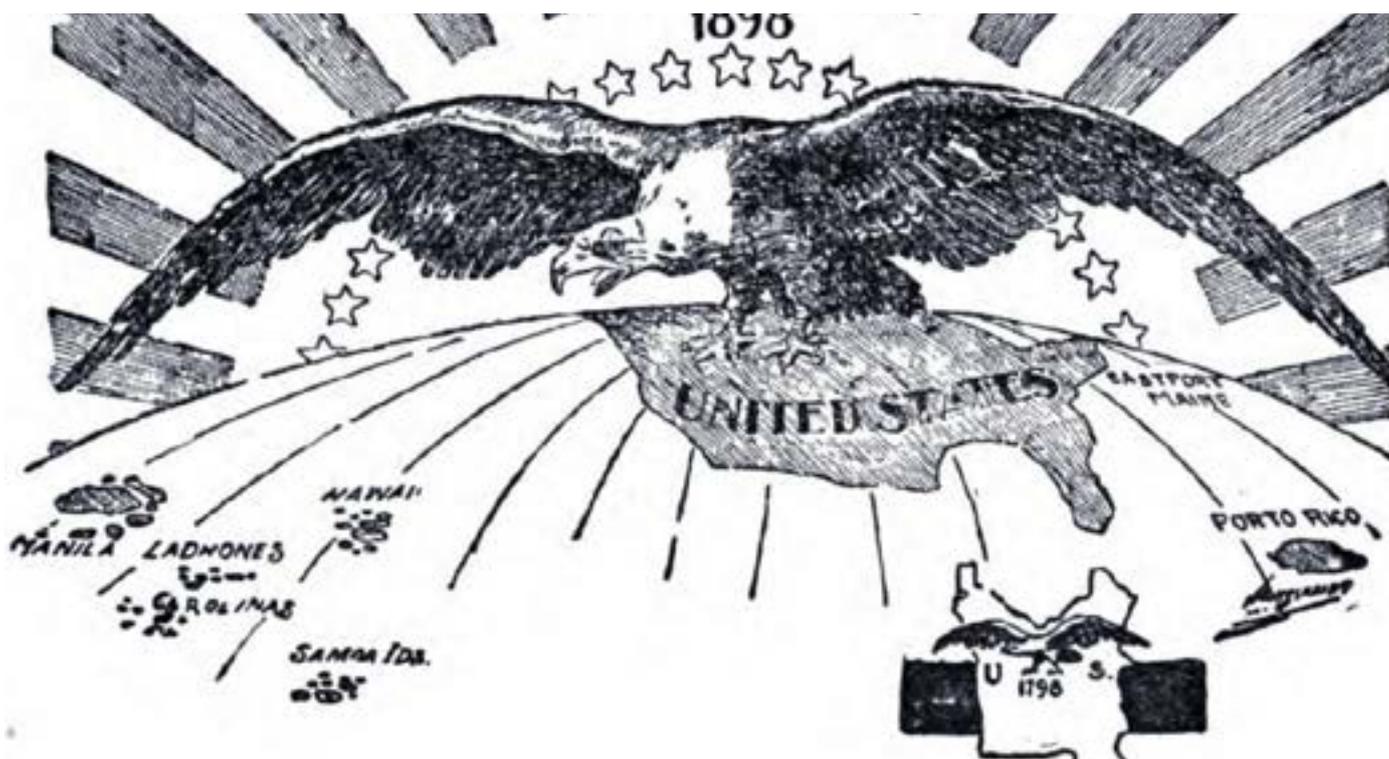
China and America both strive to influence Filipino politics.



POLITICS AND MISSIONS CONT.

China has been giving grants to political leaders and parties to increase Chinese influence in the region. If said leaders rose to power, the policies they'd introduce would benefit the Chinese. However, the current president Marcos Jr. is considered to be in the pocket of the United States of America. His government's fiscal policies significantly reflect the interests of the US- economically, militarily, and in terms of general political influence.

There are innumerable other examples of the ways in which imperial power structures play a role in the Philippine political context and what Filipinos in the church are trying to do in response from a grassroots, political, missiological perspective. We're looking forward to further understanding the Philippine context so we have a basis of comparison for our own context for when we practise mission.



GET TO KNOW UTS



by Luisa Kappes and Tapo Vaiola

The moment you step onto the grounds of the Union Theological Seminary, Philippines (UTS), you'll realize that it's not just a school - it's a place of transformation, a beacon of love and service. UTS is the home of today's Prophets, a welcoming, inclusive space where everyone can find their place.

The roots of UTS can be traced back to the year 1907. Its rich history has shaped UTS into a diverse and vibrant community of faith and learning we can experience today.

Today at UTS, students with diverse experiences and backgrounds from the Philippines and around the world come together to learn how to preach the word. It's a welcoming place that brings together 235 students from 24 different denominations. They are enrolled in programs like Master of Divinity, Bachelor of Theology, Master of Theology, Doctor of Ministry, Master of Ministry, Theological Education by Extension, or Certificate in Theological Studies. From July 1st to October 1st, you can find us here, joyfully participating in the Training in Mission (TIM) program.

Living in the UTS context for almost three weeks, we have become familiar with the core values of the institution, which are Christ-like Faithfulness, Ecumenical Openness, Prophetic Boldness, Contextual Timeliness and Compassionate Witness.

As a self-sustaining place for transformation of the church and society, UTS follows its mission in providing theological education according to the gospel of Christ and the needs of the world in dealing with concrete contexts such as the farms that are also part of the UTS 97-hectare campus.



TIM fellows with students and staff of UTS

The UTS farm calls everyone here to remember their being tillers of God's beautiful garden and God's promise of abundant life - their hope amid mass poverty, hunger, and suffering in their world. Their journey toward an abundant life, a livable world, depends on how we till and keep the land. We must liberate the land and its people. We must allow the land to bring forth fruits for herself and let the land also breathe, and recover.

GET TO KNOW UTS CONT.

Part of the UTS campus also includes the prayer life, which is truly diverse and meaningful. In our first week, we experienced a special kind of worship called Laksamba. It is a blend of "Lakbay," which means journey, and "Samba," meaning worship. As we gathered early in the morning outside, we walked around the UTS Campus, pausing at different stations like the Totem, Farm, or Playground to pray, sing, dance, or simply reflect in silence.

Besides that the regular Worship services, which are quite varied due to the ever-changing liturgy, are held on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday in the Salakot Chapel. The chapel design is inspired by the traditional Filipino Salakot hat, symbolizing protection and shelter, both spiritually and culturally. This architectural choice connects the structure to Filipino identity and heritage. Constructed to serve the spiritual needs of students, faculty, and staff, its distinctive roof makes it a recognizable and iconic structure within the campus. The chapel stands as a symbol of the university's commitment to providing a holistic environment for its community. It emphasizes the importance of spirituality and cultural identity in the academic experience. The Salakot chapel remains a beloved landmark at the UTS, known for its unique architecture and the important role it plays in the spiritual life of the university community.

The prayer life at UTS also includes the fact that students, professors and staff actively participate in the Thursday in Black movement- a movement that raises awareness about gender-based violence and advocates for a future without violence and rape.



The UTS campus offers an excellent opportunity for learning and studying. The classroom and the library are spaces of academics and learning new things. We discuss the word of God and His mission. This brings us into a brighter future where we know about the real calling and purpose of God in our individual lives, that we may learn and teach the upcoming generation or to propose the will of God to our fellow non-Christians, that they may repent, follow and do the will of our Saviour. However, studying and learning at UTS is not just limited to the classroom and the library, but it also includes interactions with one another in different settings. Whether we are eating in the refectory, waiting for our laundry in at Spring Clean, or playing card games in the common area known among us as "the hut", we have the opportunity not only to exchange the experiences we each bring from our home but also our impressions of the day.

UTS is the place where you learn to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and where you're inspired to serve others.



TAGALOG 101

The following are greetings and common words and phrases in Tagalog

- Magandang umaga- Good morning
- Magandang tanghali- Good noon/day
- Magandang hapon- Good afternoon
- Magandang gabi - Good evening
- Kumusta ka?- How are you?
- Mabuti naman- I'm good
- Hindi mabuti- I'm not feeling good
- Pagod ako- I am tired
- Maganda ako- I am beautiful
- Maganda ka- You are beautiful
- Gutom ako- I am hungry
- Kain tayo- Let us eat
- Oo- Yes
- Hindi- No
- Salamat- Thank you
- Walang anuman- You're welcome
- Mahal kita- I love you
- Hesus- Jesus
- Magkano ito- How much is this?

“Po” is added when being polite, formal or respectful. For example- Magandang gabi Po.

It can also be added when speaking in English. For example- Hello Po or Thank you Po.

MESSAGE FROM THE FELLOWS

We greatly appreciate all your thoughts and prayers. While we are adjusting, the Philippines is still new. We each have our own challenges that we must work through for the successful completion of TIM 2024. We crave your continued prayers and kind words of encouragement. Salamat po!