

An Unexpected Journey

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It started with a simple desire to go on mission many years ago. The excitement of learning a different culture, language and even encounter other people is a great avenue to appreciate more God's wide vineyard. God's timing was not always there every time I asked, prayed and discerned over the years. I was often so fast to process things, thinking that God is still leading me to where I am as of the moment, not outside the country. Thirst and excitement are always there, but the hope that it would happen appeared fading every single minute.

Last February 20, 2019 someone called me, telling about mission opportunities that I should pray about. I was about to board the aircraft on my way to Iloilo when I received a phone call. My heart was beating so fast after that phone conversation. A brother in our community told me that I would be out for short mission in Myanmar; there were no specific details but just assurance of trust and prayers. Hearing the news somehow gave me some goose-bumps and quietly surprised me. I could not imagine myself to be on mission outside the Philippines in that very urgent situation, but with God's grace I was able to slowly absorb the gift of being sent! Praise God for that!

I thought that what I am doing in my mission area would nearly be the same in Myanmar—until such time my leaders stated the objectives and specific details. Everything was different and far away from what I was thinking. Our mission was purely teaching in their Summer English Program offered by the Diocese of Loikaw. I was a little surprised, but at the back of my mind I was also happy, knowing that maybe this way I could practice my teaching profession. I graduated college with a Bachelor of Secondary Education. My reaction at that moment was somehow to refresh my mind with my earlier learning and quickly apply it on this mission. In a short span of time, I had enough preparation and quite a lot of extra baggage that bothered me: my family, my loved ones and, of course, the people I was serving with. Well, two months might be short time, but I had high hopes. More than my longing to see and be with them, there was the far greater plan of God ahead of me on this mission, especially the very thing I was praying for.

Indeed, everything came as a surprise! We arrived in Yangon and talked only to a few people who could understand and communicate with us. So, the first few hours were purely introduction and familiarization with people. Thank God for the generosity and willingness of Father Nene who accompanied us and brought us to our area of assignment. I could not imagine myself without someone guiding us in a foreign place. My prayer then was for God's constant presence and assurance that He would always be at our side every single day of our mission. My first week experience was tough because of the way we communicated with our students in English; everything had to be translated into their local language. Oh well, I thought, that would take a lot of time! I thought that if this would always be the case, somehow two months would

never be enough for them to respond to us using the same medium. Even simple greetings were so hard to achieve.

I thought that maybe we needed some other way to relate to them. Lo and behold, I realized that I was too conscious of teaching the lessons I had prepared for them, rather than seeking an opportunity to build their self-confidence. I was led to a realization about how Jesus did his ministry. He did not say a lot to start with; he was introducing a sincere and genuine friendship anchored in the very truth about God's love for humanity. So I started all over with the pure intention of appreciating their capacity to learn and speak the language slowly. It became a daily encounter of fun and eagerness to discover potentials according to their own pace. Patience and sympathy were not just virtues, but a hope that what we planted for a short time would soon grow and develop into something good and valuable for them.

Truly, part of the learning process is being able to journey with them every single moment of the process and disregard one's personal high expectations. They wanted to learn a lesson; however, the ability to overcome fears and instill inspiration in their minds began to motivate us in teaching every day. Ending the Summer Class was indeed a joy at seeing one's students trying to communicate in English in spite of all the difficulties (accents, proper pronunciation, etc.). What is important is that they achieve the first step in learning: being confident and motivated to know and learn more of the English language.

What I learned from this experience is that God's mission is not just about giving formation about our Christian identity. Sometimes it is about building up one's character and being ready to learn more of the other's Christian identity. Beyond that simple desire to go to mission overseas, I was suddenly overwhelmed and even consumed with fears. But, God's grace alleviated the fear within me and made me certain that I am really called for this. I felt anxious along the way, but still God's undying love validates my intention to be and bring Christ wherever I am. In our unexpected journeys, God is always expecting us to love and to trust Him in the process!

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