



Witnessing Christ

Our Church at Work: from the Philippines to the Czech Republic

**So then,
as we have
opportunity,
let us do good
to everyone,
and especially
to those who
are of the
of household
of faith.**

Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

Just before Thanksgiving 2014, I made my first long international trip, traveling to Manila, Philippines. I was apprehensive because I was traveling alone. Yet I found fellow travelers helpful and caring, despite an occasional grin or look when they realized I was a novice international traveler. When I arrived in Manila, I met Deaconess Grace Rao, Director of LCMS Deaconess Ministry, and was greeted by Deling Balsat, Office Administration—LCMS Philippines, affectionately known as “Mama Del.”

I was immediately struck by seeing Christmas lights everywhere. Mama Del explained that decorating for Christmas starts September 1 in the Philippines. I was pleasantly surprised by the many Nativity scenes in windows and yards as well as very large, ornate scenes on lawns of many businesses. I giggled when I heard “Frosty the Snowman” over loud speakers in business places; the people of the Philippines likely have no idea what a snowman is! I fell in love with English-speaking natives, in their indigenous dress, who would always beam you warm, loving smiles, holding doors and always offering assistance.

While in Manila, Mama Del took us to the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial, which occupies 152 acres of 17,201 white crosses, representing the graves of military who lost their lives in World War II. It takes your breath away! As we walked the grounds, I was struck by the peaceful surroundings and reminded that we, as Christians, have work to do: How many of those soldiers died not knowing that God gave His own Son to die for them?

On Saturday afternoon, we boarded a “super bus” and traveled four-and-a-half hours to the Lutheran Theological Seminary and Training Center in Baguio City, a beautiful city in the rolling mountain range of the Cordillera Central. We traveled through village after village, mile after mile of shanty homes of plywood walls and tin roofs, with clotheslines of clean clothes hanging outside to dry. Children played alongside the roads. As we traveled through small areas of farmland, there were no four-wheel-drive tractors but many *carabao* [water buffalo] pulling the single-bottom plows through the fields.

The seminary, purchased with an LWML Mission Grant over fifty year ago, is located in beautiful wooded area in the middle of Baguio City. The \$80,000 grant purchased approximately 2.5 acres of property and helped build at least two buildings on the seminary grounds that are still used as seminary faculty apartments, a library, and classrooms.

I was thanked for the mission work the LCMS has done through church planting in urban and very rural areas of the Philippine Islands. Over and over, they expressed their love and appreciation for those missionary pastors who have diligently given of their time and talents to plant churches in the Philippines.

Seventeen seminary students shared their hopes and dreams of one day serving as pastors in a Philippine parish or being a church planter in the mission field. I listened as Deaconess Grace patiently taught the deaconess students; one deaconess student prayed she is able to work with young adults who one day,



See President Kay's video of *Silent Night* sung in Czech at www.lwml.org.

by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, will share their faith in Jesus Christ with the lost and erring, wherever God leads them. These children of God live on pennies a day. Tuition at the seminary costs them 10,000 Pesos [approximately \$230] per year and the monthly expense is 2,000 Pesos [approximately \$45]. The students' churches are supportive, but finances are often a concern.

Soon after I returned home, Typhoon *Hagupit* hit the Philippines. Four of the women who attend Deaconess Grace's classes are from the island of Leyte, which had already been battered earlier in the year by Typhoon *Haiyan*. All of their homes were either lost or heavily damaged. Irene, one of these dear ladies, and I shared Facebook communication. She requested prayers from the LCMS church family. We continued to chat by Facebook until *Hagupit* hit. What joy it was to receive a message telling me the typhoon had passed! Irene told me, "God really hears our prayers. He's so good. Thank you for giving time to pray for our safety. *Maam* [madam], can you also tell all the people there who prayed for us that we are so blessed and thankful to be included in their prayers. We're so grateful to have all of you as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you so much."

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (Thessalonians 5:16–18).

In the midst of a typhoon that was taking homes, businesses, and many earthly possessions, Irene gives thanks for our prayers. A witness to all of us, she is sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

A trip to the Czech Republic provided me a second opportunity to travel, flying first into Amsterdam and then on to Prague. The mission of this trip was human care, particularly to those dear people with disabilities.

The Silesian Diakonia, an organization whose purpose is mercy work, is closely linked to the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (SECAC). It provides social work throughout Silesia, with 102 programs in 60 centers (orphanages, homeless shelters, and sheltered workshops), benefiting over 8000 needy people.

One afternoon we were blessed to meet and talk with some of the volunteers and their leaders. The volunteers told how they share their faith with the disabled and, often, the disabled touch the lives of the volunteers with their child-like faith. In addition to presenting at a conference, we visited a factory that employed people with disabilities and a home for the disabled. We saw the many opportunities intentionally made available to the disabled of the country.

In Cieszyn, Poland, we toured Jesus Church, one of the largest and most important Protestant churches in Poland. Constructed between 1709 and 1950, the church is rich with history. The Silesian Lutherans did not always have the freedom to worship; in 1654, the Lutheran churches were taken away. For over six decades, Lutherans secretly met and worshiped in forests "up the mountain." Today several thousand meet annually to celebrate their Lutheran faith "at the stone" on Mt. Równica.

In two very different surroundings, I saw our church at work in missions and thank God for both.

In the Philippines, I saw what LWML mite dollars have provided and keep providing, such as the vehicles that are still, twenty-five years later, the main source of transportation, and the LCMS–Philippines office, which the LWML Ohio District built with their mite offerings years ago.

In the Czech Republic and Poland, I was amazed by the history and the culture. I saw opportunities for future mission work in mercy. With God's help, our influence in Prague will make a difference in the SECAC.

My friends, **The Time is NOW** to serve our Lord in missions — to bring the Gospel to those who do not know Christ as King, Savior, and Lord! Pray without ceasing for our LWML Mission Grant recipients, our missionaries, and give mightily to mites! To Him be the Glory!

Kay Kreklau, LWML President

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Irene, Deaconess student, Philippines