

Dana's First Mission Trip...continued from the May 2026, Laurel Leaf

As reported last month:

I joined the Volunteers In Mission International (VIMI), a non-profit connected with the Illinois Great Rivers Conference, to help Sagbayan UMC, in Bohol, Philippines, and its pastor, the Rev. Lyster Patigdas, launch the soon-to-be Santa Cruz UMC, making it only the second UMC in this large island of 1.5 million people.

The Mission

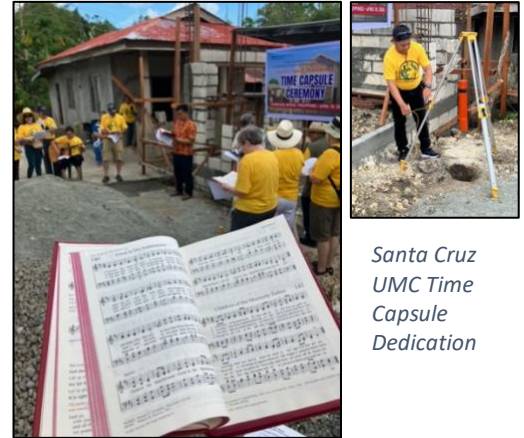
The mission's purpose was to be the UMC faces, hands, and feet behind the financial support. We wanted the congregants of both churches to know our hearts, not just our pocketbooks, are supporting them.

The mission started long before I joined the team and construction of the future Santa Cruz UMC had already begun.



We buried the time capsule during a lovely

service held in the construction dirt. It was attended by the District Superintendent, SUMC's pastor, Santa Cruz congregants, and our team.



Santa Cruz UMC Time Capsule Dedication

We also wanted to support them in ways that would benefit them after we left. Our mission activities did just that.

Learning to Sew for Skill Building and Future Income

VIMI shipped eight sewing machines*, lots of fabric, all the necessary notions and tools, and some patterns. Many women learned to sew and now have access to the sewing machines that might earn them income. They were thrilled with their projects and we enjoyed a fashion show on our last day. *Thank you [Midwest Mission](#) for helping with that.



Left. Each step of the sewing process was taught deliberately and coached so they could repeat it after we were gone. The women quickly learned and helped each other as needed. Right. The sewing room. Crowded, but happy.



Dana's Holy Spirit Moment #1

As other volunteers taught sewing to the women, I found a friend in Sky*, age 8, who spoke perfect English (“because I’m the top student in my English class”) and loved learning (“I’m a fast learner”). She certainly was. She and I designed and made a dress from scratch, using a basic running stitch by hand. She surprised me the next day with a handkerchief she had sewn at home, on her own.

**Almiah Sky is her full name.*



Sky, the new seamstress and her new dress.

Prioritizing Wellness

Both adults and children received mental health services. During our Children’s Day, the children learned basic tips for managing stress.

Our Medical Day included patient intake/consultation, mental health checks and tutorials, vision screenings, vitals screenings, and OTC medication distribution. Those with concerns — i.e., vision worse than what could be corrected with readers; high blood pressure — were referred to appropriate care. We had 47 patients who were served by four medical professionals (physician, nurses) and two non-medical assistants.



Above left: OTC meds distribution, including melatonin, acetaminophen, vitamins, toothbrushes and paste. Right: Vision screening with an eye chart. Which way are the fingers pointing?

Dana's Holy Spirit Moment #2

Sky’s mother, Cheche, and her other children participated in many of our ministries. We got to know each other while I entertained Summer, her 2-year-old daughter so she could chase Moon, her 4-year-old son. In between the chases, she bravely shared her concern that Moon might have ADHD. My family has lots of experience with AHDA and Cheche and I talked for a long time. She sent me a note saying that I helped her immensely; she had been overwhelmed.

Cheche and I now have an ongoing email relationship. She’s planting cucumbers, ampalaya (a bitter cucumber-like gourd), radish, upland kangkong (a leafy green), pechay (Chinese cabbage), tomatoes, Philippine spinach, carrots and string beans. I’m planting tomatoes and herbs.



Cheche and her children — Sky, Summer, and Moon (and me)

Children and Teens

We hosted 80-90 children on Children's Day. Past mission trips have topped at about 15. We sent a passenger van to pick up the future Santa Cruz UMC children. Maximum capacities are pretty much ignored and many very happy children spilled out of the van when they arrived at Sagbayan UMC for the day. They heard the story of Joseph and his coat and then made crafts they loved showing off.

On another day, teen choir members enjoyed singing lessons.



A colorful coat for Joseph on Children's Day.



Stringing beads for necklaces on Children's Day.

The Food

I love eating, especially foods from other cultures. I'm hungry most of the time and am a brave eater. This delighted our hosts whose gift of hospitality is feeding people. Prior to my trip, I was concerned whether I'd have access to enough to eat. I packed lots of my back-up protein bars and hoped for the best. We had breakfast, morning snack, lunch, afternoon snack, and dinner. Dana's in heaven!

They served goat's head soup and seaweed; organ meat and plantains. A highlight was lechon (roasted suckling pig) a Filipino delicacy. This photo was labeled Dana and The Pig, which one of my companions said was a great book title.

Other than interesting meat, we had lots of vegetables and fruits from land and sea, both fresh and in soups. Everything had great seasoning, so even if I didn't care to eat the goat's head meat or the organ meat side dish, the broth and seasonings were fabulous.



From left: Dana and The Pig. (lechon), seaweed salad, vegetable salad, fish and vegetable soup.

Dana's Holy Spirit Moment #3

Our fabric shipment included materials for a banner, so I asked Pastor Lyster if he'd like one for his sanctuary. He was thrilled. From a random Google search, I chose several designs I was confident we could produce. One was "exactly what he had been praying for." Amazing.

Several local women, a couple of teens, the District Superintendent (who loved sewing it), his wife, the pastor, and I completed it 15 minutes before our Evangelism Concert started. The last-minute need for a hanging rod was answered by Vicki, Sky's grandma, who harvested a piece of bamboo from her yard and recruited a friend with wire and a drill to hang it. It was a moving backdrop *for the concert*.



Left: DS Max and Myrna, his wife, sewing the banner. Above: The new banner, a prayer answered.

Reflections

I learned what you'd expect, but being immersed with people from a different culture who are just like us — United Methodists, Christians, smart, kind, creative, resourceful, passionate, heavy-hearted, happy-hearted — made me feel the Holy Spirit at work in our midst. I felt it moving through me; through us. It made me proud that I was truly upholding my UMC membership pledge to give my prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.

Thank you for praying me through it.

Dana

Dana Saal