

As I Look Back at those years at United

I thought it was only yesterday when I started teaching at United Seminary. Committed to going back to the Philippines to serve the land of my birth, I thought that I would only stay for a couple of years, but the couple of years became five and the five turned into almost three decades. This explains why deep inside I was always longing to go back to the Philippines, which I have fulfilled, even as I was immersed in the life of teaching and writing at United that I hardly noticed the passage of time and now I'm retiring. I'm thankful for United, even though not without challenges, for its generosity.

No one could stay this long and possibly thrive without becoming "rooted" to one's current location, but this is the rootedness of a diaspora. After a long hesitation, I have learned to accept that I have become a diaspora and, in spite its challenges, has been a blessing not only to myself but to others as well, including my students and the wider community.

As a diaspora person I will forever cherish the country of my birth but I have also found home in the journey, and I have found home in other lands. I still love to sing the Bayan Ko (My Native Land), but my diaspora has been equally nourished by a new song/hymn: This Is My Song (tune: Finlandia). My heart beats with hopes and dreams for my adopted land, while I continue to affirm that "other hearts in other lands are beating with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine." To my mind, this is what it means to have a diaspora heart, a heart that has found a home in the journey and has found home in every place. A diaspora heart is one who has become as wide and as large as the world.

Diaspora has defined who I am, what I have become, my teaching and scholarship, and my dream for the world. Looking back, it is no wonder that for several years I have enjoyed leading global/global immersion trips for my students (Philippines, Israel-Palestine, Hawaii, and globalization at our doorsteps) and interfaith religious engagement courses. It is no accident that I accepted teaching assignments and lectures in other parts of the world: Cameroon, Myanmar, Philippines, Honduras, Germany.

As I close my years at United, I can only hope that my diaspora life—my teaching, speaking, writing, and yes, my living—has helped broaden our horizons, deepen our compassion, and widen our connections to the world around us.

Thank you United for your generosity and hospitality. May your decisions and actions be not guided by your fears, but your hopes. Sail boldly and confidently in the direction of your dreams!