

# PLUM Pastoral Message March 2023

## Learning to Love Our Neighbors



*The Mission team of  
Pittsburgh Theological  
Seminary  
and Silliman Divinity  
School*

On Friday, January 6, 2023 at 6 am a group of students and co-leaders boarded the plane at Pittsburgh International Airport. We were going to Dumaguete, a city on the island of Negros in the Philippines. We arrived on Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup> after 25 hours in the air, several plane changes, and mad dashes through the airport. Our purpose? To meet with students and faculty at Silliman University Divinity School, to learn alongside them how God has called us to care for creation, and to support our neighbors who were at risk of losing their homes and livelihood due to proposed development. This was one of the mission trip opportunities that Pittsburgh Theological Seminary provided for its students.



*The Fisherfolks, community organizers,  
and students in the village.*

There were many opportunities for telling our stories as well as experiencing the hospitality of good food and friendships. The heart of our engagement was our visit with the fisherfolks – our neighbors whose homes were in danger. Developers with support from the local government wanted to reclaim land (artificially building land) along the seashore for mixed-use commercial and residential areas to include malls, condominiums, businesses, and hospitals. Such a development would disrupt and damage marine life along the coastline. We learned how they had

organized themselves to advocate against and get an injunction to stop the proposed development. Their concern – climate changes were already impacting the number of fish they caught. Their ability to catch enough fish for food and to sell to take care of their families was already in jeopardy. Additionally, they believed as stewards of the ocean they were called to care for the marine life that had sustained them and were necessary for the continuation of what God had created.

We also had the opportunity to spend two days and a night in their village. During the night we experienced a severe storm that had us considering whether we should evacuate or not. The fisherfolks kept assuring us we were ok. This storm that reached a level red in their weather pattern was “not dangerous” because the tides had not risen and it was not a tsunami-level storm. Their calm attitude and continual assurance allowed us to survive that night. I have a new appreciation for the disciples in the boat when they cried to Jesus for help (Matthew 8:23-27). We were greeted in the morning with smiling faces and hearty breakfasts with our host families and then a celebratory lunch with the whole community.



Our experience and the stories we shared are too numerous to record. Know that we were profoundly changed. We were like vessels being poured into. We left full and overflowing.

This exchange with students, families, and all those who taught us in the Dumaguete community affirmed “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13) Advocating for the land, the creatures in the sea, and for each other are truly amazing ways to show God’s love. And what a wonderful reminder of this during the season of Lent when we intentionally remember the greatest gift we have received because of love – Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection.

Beloved siblings in Christ may you be reminded of God’s love. May you encounter God’s love for us even more deeply as we journey through Lent together and with our siblings around the world.

Walking together with Jesus,  
Pr. Brenda  
on behalf of your pastoral team