

March 2021

Dear Faithful Friends and Prayer Partners,

Greetings from the Philippines!



On the first of February this year the military junta took the power from the elected civilian government in Myanmar for alleged election fraud. The country has once again plunged into political crisis with several deaths recorded due to civilian protests all over the country. As it is our assigned field, we feel what our church and friends there are feeling right now, although we are not currently with them physically.

We arrived back in the Philippines on March 15 last year, just a day before the national lock down was imposed here due to the COVID 19 pandemic. The plan was to come home just to attend Kelly's high school graduation, then give our second daughter in marriage and finally attend the TCM Southeast Asia Grace Conference then get back to Myanmar. Since the lock down was extended due to the heavy wave of the pandemic, our stay in the Philippines was extended too. Kezia and Dov's wedding took place in spite of crowd restrictions with only 11 people in attendance. The mission conference was canceled.

In the middle of May, Gardner's father, Antonio fell very ill with hypertension stroke. It was painful for us, especially for Gardner who took care of him the most, to see him gradually losing strength daily until the Lord took him home on July 28. At least we know the reason we had to stay away from the field longer for that time was to take care of our father during the last few days of his entire life that was fully given to serve the Lord.

We are praising the Lord that Kelly qualified at Xavier University to study management accounting. Because of the lockdown, she hasn't experienced that special moment as a high school graduate marching across the stage to receive her diploma. But we are glad she is now taking online classes in one of the best universities in the Philippines. She has completed one semester already and is currently working to complete the first year.

After our father's death, we started to wonder how long the pandemic would last. It had already been months and months of waiting, and both of us started to miss our place in the mission field. The situation is slowly making us feel out of place, even in our home town. In 20 plus years of mission work, we were never held up this long away from the field. We started to search for God's direction in prayer during this long wait. Then one day a young pastor came to me (Gardner) asking to be mentored. All of a sudden, we felt a call and purpose for why we are being held here this long. We remember the ministry we did best while we were in Kenya was mentoring and training.

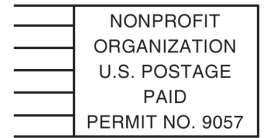
The TCM-Philippines leadership at the national level responded with excitement when we presented Gardner's proposal to create an online mentoring curriculum for all pastors aged 49 and below. The weekly online "bonding sessions" will focus on the subjects of innovative leadership, intentional stewardship, contextual outreach and applied distinctives. The entire program will cover 4 alternate quarters in two years with practical evaluations of the mentees. Our goal is to enhance the personality and ministry of all young Grace pastors in order to significantly respond to the vision of planting and leading more churches in the Philippines. Currently, Gardner spends a great amount of time in research and study of all possible materials that deal with these four subjects.

While waiting, we still keep ourselves involved in the ministry in Myanmar. Thankfully we can use technology to continue being part of our training and prayer fellowships there. This keeps our hearts and minds set with our brothers and sisters in the Lord even though we are still away, especially now with both the pandemic and political unrest in the country. We are also heavily involved in various church ministries here of helping young pastors and ministering in churches that don't have pastors. Gardner is also teaching in IGBI (International Grace Bible Institute) Online, handling Bible doctrines and Missions.



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GARDNER & LEDITH
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Friends and partners, please help us pray for Myanmar persistently. Our colleagues, Dan and Amy Banac, are still in the country with their children in order to encourage our church members. This time is one of the worst that the people are facing. Most of the civilians are involved in resistance to the military takeover. Their resistance continues to cost lives due to violent clashes happening all over the country.

Before we left, I had a chance to talk to a friend who is leading their vocational training about what would happen after their national election (last October 2020). He responded with a sigh, "I don't know, Saya (Sir)," and an empty look ahead. I feel what he saw in advance, is happening and the worst of it is still coming. If the junta wins, there will be a lot of hardships that the people will face in the future, first and foremost, freedom. This will affect the social, economic, and for our part, religious freedom. We are not involved in the physical aspects of the resistance, but we are in its spiritual implications. The enemy is trying to hold back the momentum of our mission to bring people to Christ through this crisis.

In closing, we would like to express our appreciation for your faithfulness in partnering with us. Your support in prayers and logistics means so much for us and the field to which we have dedicated our lives. We want to share our thoughts while we are on a long wait. "I do not concede to things I don't understand, I concede to my God who cannot be mistaken. I do not concede to the things beyond my control, I concede to my God who is in control."

All for the glory of God, *Gardner and Ledith Improso*