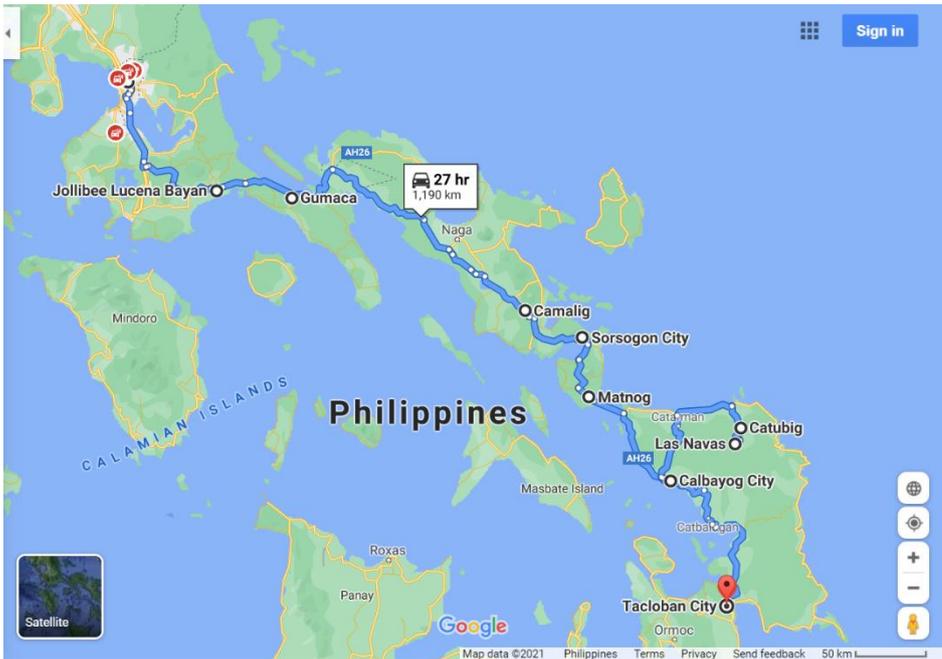




Bishop Chito Ramos, the head of ABCCOP, invited me, Irene, to attend the dedication of the new training center in Gumaca. He then arranged for me to spend time with the new missions directors, Pastor Ed Macdon and his wife Minda visiting the ABCCOP/ACPLAN missionaries and pastors in Sorsogon and Samar, the least reached regions of the Philippines. ACPLAN stands for ABCCOP Church Planting Network.

According to google maps it is a 27-hour journey, but there are no trucks, ducks or trikes on google maps! For most of the journey we travelled on the Pan-Philippine Highway which is known as the country's principle transport backbone between Manila and Mindanao.<sup>1</sup>



## ABCCOP

When CIM missionaries were expelled from China in 1951, one of the places several missionaries relocated to, was the Philippines. There they worked in partnership with SEND International (then Far Eastern Gospel Crusade) planting churches in lowland areas. These churches were independent of denominations in the area and eventually united to form the Alliance of Bible Christian Communities of the Philippines in 1972.

Today there are more than 500 churches affiliated with ABCCOP, predominantly located in the northern island of Luzon. ABCCOP has its own mission arm, AGPLAN, and it was these missionaries that I had the privilege of visiting during this trip.

ABCCOP have a church in Davao city, OBCM, where we worship on Sundays. It is a cell group church where several members disciple new members in cell groups in barangays throughout the city.

I learned a lot about ABCCOP and these least reached, hard to live areas of the Philippines. It was encouraging listening to the testimony of what God is doing during the pandemic. Stories of gathering women for devotionals on Friday afternoon, raffling vegetables and laughing together. One pastor used to run a student center, but with no face to face classes, the center had to be closed. To his surprise the Lord opened up another door and he is conducting values teaching with squads of young PNP recruits. Many church buildings are closed and it was fascinating to hear the creative responses of the leaders, testimonies of delivering Bible studies, modular style, door to door, and having an opportunity to pray with individuals while adhering to social distancing regulations. Other churches are meeting in small groups in nipa huts; other leaders have been training their church members to host home group Bible studies for their families and neighbors. However, a downside of the pandemic has been that many families are separated as husbands or wives have moved to Manila in search of work. It is evident, however that God's Word and God's work are unrestrained by the pandemic.

When I eventually got to Tacloban I had to take a swab test in order to fly home to Davao City. Unfortunately, my result turned out to be positive despite my not having any symptoms. Thankfully I was able to continue to live with the Macdons on their farm and enjoy the fresh produce and freedom to be outside. As I write this I am awaiting the results of a second swab test to determine if it was a false positive or if I am asymptomatic. I thank God for the time to rest and read and reflect on what He has taught me over these past months. If anyone would like to read a more detailed report, we have attached it to this PNB. Thank you for your prayers. Irene

<sup>1</sup> In 2002 several Roll-on-Roll-off ferries were introduced which reduced the travel time by up to a week and reduced the cost of transporting goods by 33% in some cases. The government have been improving and widening the roads and bridges in Samar and we benefitted greatly from these improvements.

## Koinonia Theological Seminary

I, Wilson, while waiting for my wife to get back from Tacloban continue to teach and serve at KTS. I am currently teaching the course Church Planting which has a great class of 16 keen students who like to get discussions going on the topic. It is also time to be thinking about the new academic year and we are delighted to have so many applicants for places at the school. We have already accepted nine new students and welcomed another four who have returned to their studies after a hiatus of a few years.

We are also working on reviving something that was a part of KTS before we arrived back in 2019. The KTS Leadership Institute, or KLI, was a non-formal program designed for people, serving in their home churches, who wanted some training in theology, bible interpretation, preaching, spiritual formation and other topics. We have found someone we believe has the skills to lead this program for us and we are going to propose their appointment and the restarting of the program at our Board of Trustees meeting on Tuesday July 13. We don't envision any obstacles to our proposal. This program provides us the opportunity to serve and bless the wider church in Mindanao.

In closing, can I ask you to pray for us at KTS as we try to help students who struggle to make it to the end of the semester. A few have stopped submitting assignments and do not respond to attempts to contact them. We are failing these students, and the circumstances of the pandemic mean they can keep us at arm's length. We need some spiritual wisdom on how to re-connect with them and provide some pastoral care.

Thank-you everyone for praying,

*Wilson & Irene*

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