

JOURNALS POSTED ON MARCH 13, 2019

The 75th Anniversary of the Hopevale Missionaries



CATHERINE NOLD

The following article was authored on December 23, 2018 by the Rev. Dr. Elmo Familiaran, interim executive minister and senior regional pastor at American Baptist Churches of New Jersey (retired January, 2019), and used with his permission. An excerpt of this story is available in the [IM Annual Report 2017-18](#).

Familiaran attended this event with the Rev. Leslie Turley, IM area director for Southeast Asia and Japan, and a group of eight from IM. She shares, "It was a sobering time for the IM group as we attended this commemoration to look back at the tragic deaths of 11 American Baptist Foreign Mission Society missionaries who had given their all in service to God and the people of the Philippines." Read on for the amazing story of tragedy and ultimate triumph of God during WWII in the Philippines.

I returned just last night from the Philippines, where I represented ABCNJ at a historic event for both Filipino Baptists and American Baptists. The occasion of my journey was the 75th Anniversary Commemoration events of the executions of 11 American Baptist missionaries in the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army in the Philippines during WWII. I also came to bring greetings on behalf of the Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer, American Baptist Churches USA General Secretary, who was also invited but was unable to attend.

I also came as a son of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, and a grandson of the pastor whose journey became intimately intertwined with the journeys of the Hopevale missionary martyrs.

Here is a very brief synopsis of this historic event.

The first American Baptist missionary, Eric Lund, arrived in the Philippines in May of 1900, only two years after Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States. By November of the same year, the first Baptist church in the Philippines was founded. The work of American Baptists among Filipinos flourished, raising up local leaders, founding schools and hospitals, that by 1935 the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches was organized. On December 8, 1941, one day after it attacked Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Imperial Army invaded and occupied the Philippines as part of its grand strategy to dominate and rule the Pacific. The Philippines immediately became one of the battlegrounds between the USA and Japan. There were 21 commissioned American Baptist missionaries serving in the Philippines at that time, mostly in Iloilo City which served as the center of the mission work of American Baptists.

Sometime in April of 1942, 11 of these missionaries decided not to surrender but instead fled to the mountains in the northern province of Capiz several hours drive from Iloilo City in order to hide and wait out the war believing it was going to be short-lived and in which the Americans will prevail.

There was only one Baptist mission in the mountains during that time, the Katipunan Evangelical Church, a church plant founded by my grandfather to reach indigenous uplanders with the gospel. He did not know the American missionaries were coming. But when they arrived and indicated their purpose, he took them deep into the jungle to show them options where to hide. They chose a narrow valley between two hills covered by giant trees and thick forests near a river, about 6 miles from Katipunan Evangelical Church. They called their hideaway "Hopevale." They built a beautiful chapel made of river rocks and wood from native trees and called it "The Cathedral in the Glen."

There they lived in grass and bamboo huts on both sides of the slopes of the little valley and hid safely for 20 months, supported and protected by my grandfather and his congregation, until their location was disclosed by an American soldier who had been to Hopevale but was later captured and tortured by the Japanese army. The soldiers surrounded and cordoned off the valley, and executed them one by one on December 20, 1943. Their names were:

James and Charma Covell

Dorothy Antoinette Dowell

Signe Amelia Erickson

Frederick and Ruth Violet Schacht Meyer

Francis and Gertrude Coombs Rose

Erle and Louise Cummings Rounds, and their 9-year old son, Erle Douglas

The story of the courage and serenity with which they faced their deaths has become the inspiration that lies at the core of the spirituality of Filipino Baptists, and Hopevale its rallying cry.

In commemorating the 75th Anniversary of their martyrdom, I have never seen all the affiliated institutions of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches – its universities, seminaries, Bible schools, hospitals, and ministers' councils, and the national office – come together in a massive show of collaboration to commemorate this historic milestone. With the added participation of delegations from American Baptist International Ministries and the Japan Baptist Union, the living presence of Jesus Christ was truly glorified.

I was honored to be asked to preach at the opening worship service held at Central Philippine University in Iloilo City, founded by American Baptist missionaries in 1905 as an industrial school for orphan boys that nurtured my then orphaned grandfather until he graduated.

The Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches did not end this milestone with the commemoration events. Moving forward they resolved to do the following:

1. To institutionalize the legacy of the Hopevale missionaries by designating a Hopevale Memorial Sunday every year.
2. To build a Museum of Baptist History on the campus of CPU.
3. They established a Hopevale Trust Fund designed to develop and protect the Hopevale site to accommodate future pilgrimages.
4. They are proposing to make the history of Hopevale a required curriculum subject in high school and the seminary.

Perhaps this was the most unforgettable 7 days of my ministry career. And as I retire after the end of this month, I cannot but be grateful to God – the Lord of the Journey – for weaving the conclusion of my professional ministry career, my final official act, in the land of my birth, in my spiritual home, paying tribute to the missionary legacy that gave the Baptist faith to my ancestors.