

Asia Pacific Mission Studies

Manuscript 1125

Our EAPI Experience—Participants' Voices

Ms. Cosmeden Tan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/apms>

OUR EAPI EXPERIENCE— PARTICIPANTS' VOICES

Ms. Cosmeden Tan

I am a layperson and formerly a member of the Philippine Catholic Lay Mission (PCLM). I had a chance to participate in EAPI programs three times, namely: Lay Discipleship, Pastoral Management and the Sabbatical program in 2007, 2011 and 2017 respectively.

My first impression of EAPI was when I joined the one-month Lay Discipleship program simultaneously with the Pastoral Management and Sabbatical programs. There were plenty of participants from different countries. I could see and feel the equality of our shared dignity as church workers as the programs progressed. I was in awe at the cultural diversity. We were diverse yet united in one goal. It enhanced my understanding of knowing myself more and others through active participation in cultural groupings. My listening skill was developed gradually. The language barrier was a challenge but I slowly overcome it through the camaraderie with the group.

I am a layperson and formerly a member of the Philippine Catholic Lay Mission (PCLM). I had a chance to participate in EAPI programs three times, namely: Lay Discipleship, Pastoral Management and the Sabbatical program in 2007, 2011 and 2017 respectively.

My first impression of EAPI was when I joined the one-month Lay Discipleship program simultaneously with the Pastoral Management and Sabbatical programs. There were plenty of participants from different countries. I could see and feel the equality of our shared dignity as church workers as the programs progressed. I was in awe at the cultural diversity. We were diverse yet united in one goal. It enhanced my understanding of knowing myself more and others through active participation in cultural groupings. My listening skill was developed gradually. The language barrier was a challenge but I slowly overcome it through the camaraderie with the group.

I found cultural groupings interesting and full of fun. Seeing each member try hard to express themselves in English as the medium of communication was reassuring. Aside from the input that EAPI provides, interaction with other participants was another important source of learning. It was very engaging to listen to the experiences of others about their respective work and responsibilities, their struggles with the ups and downs in their missions, and how they overcame them. I said to myself, "I'm not alone."

EAPI, for myself in that experience, was like a mission station you can come and put down your burden and rest. The lay discipleship program was fantastic. It strengthened my self-confidence as a lay worker. It was a gift from God, a preparation for my first foreign mission assignment in Cambodia, where I worked with a Maryknoll team of priests, sisters and lay missionaries that engaged with people infected and affected with HIV and AIDS.

After three years in Cambodia, I came back to EAPI to participate in the Pastoral Management program in 2011. I found this program to be like a give and take process. It was fascinating especially when there was active participation in the classroom. It was akin to a win-win situation. Surely the resource person gains new insights from the participants' point of view in

relation to their experiences from their respective areas, while the participants, as well, learned new things from the speaker. I learned here to be open to new things. I benefited very much from this program. Communal events were also a big help for me, as it developed my sportsmanship. In the middle of the program, we were requested to make our own Pastoral plan to be submitted towards the end of the program. It was a fruitful and refreshing 4-months stay in EAPI.

In 2017, I finished my contract in Cambodia. I longed to come to EAPI again for the Sabbatical Renewal Program. It was difficult for me to join because of financial constraints. I applied for scholarship, and they gave me 60% discount, but I still could not afford it. My heart's desire was so intense, that I didn't want to miss it. I prayed earnestly, asking for God's help. I started to save money, thinking what to do next to gather the funds that I needed to join the Sabbatical program.

God has His own ways, and put all things together for me. I arrived at EAPI but my heart was anxious, unsure if my money was going to be enough. When I went to the office to pay the fee, the funds that I gathered were more than I needed. I was overjoyed seeing how good God is. God is true to His words—“*ask and you will receive.*”

I was excited to meet new friends again. It was an opportunity for me to practice charity by trying to understand other participants who cannot express themselves well in English. I tried to be a good hostess so that they may also have a good stay at EAPI.

My experience in the Sabbatical program is still vivid in my memory. I was the only layperson in the group. During the first three days there was a joint recollection of both programs (Sabbatical and Pastoral Leadership programs). It was a good start almost similar to a ritual. It was a time to unload baggage before embarking on the journey. Points of reflections in the morning and personal reflection time in the afternoon were part of the schedule.

I realized then that God was waiting for me in EAPI. My heart's desire and God's longing met. I was in awe perceiving that this was God's doing, that

I was able to join the Sabbatical program. He solved my financial problem to ease my heart.

As the program continued, I felt that it led me emptying myself, a journey to my inner being. From time to time, I stopped, and an inner voice would guide me to the truth, but my heart was obstinate. There was a conflict inside of me. I felt as if God was asking me to “come home,” but I said no, I want to continue in mission. In the entire journey God was persuading me to “come home.” It disturbed me, but still I refused, and God respected my decision. I went to confession, and I sobbed, narrating to the priest what disturbed me, but the priest said, “Go.” I was at peace then.

The labyrinth is my favorite place for my morning daily walking meditation before the sun rises to begin my day. I strongly felt His presence in my Sabbatical journey. The program itself helped me to slow down and go deeper into my inner self. Though I am far from fully deepening, but at least I have started and continue my journey until the end of time.

After my Sabbatical program concluded, I was assigned to Myanmar in 2018. But six months later, our Maryknoll priest-in-charge got seriously ill and was sent back to the United States. They thought he would not survive, so the mission in Myanmar was aborted, and we were transferred to Taiwan. But again, when I was in Taiwan, the Lord in His gentle ways persuaded me again to “come home,” and this time, I paid heed and surrendered to His will. Hence, in 2019 I ended my commitment with the Philippine Catholic Lay Mission (PCLM) and came home to accompany my mother in her old age. We celebrated her 100th birthday last January 5, 2026.

“The Lord has done great things for me and Holy is His name (Lk 1: 49).”