

I am Cristine Carnate – Atrero, a pastor of the United Methodist Church for 26 years, presently serving as District Superintendent of Zambales District, West Middle Philippines Annual Conference.

I believe in the hopes, desires, and dreams of the Christmas Covenant. Its vision gives me hopeful reasons to invest in the life and ministry of the church. I give the Christmas Covenant my strong support, fervent prayers, and all my best so that this “gift of hope” will be felt, seen, and experienced by our beloved church and society as a whole.

To my Philippines Central Conference siblings, why do we need to support the Christmas Covenant? How does it affirm and celebrate our mission context within the global UMC connection?

First, it empowers our voices. Everybody will be heard. All voices from lament, pains, sufferings, and longings of our people will be given affirming value by listening to our common hopes, dreams, and aspirations in designing the future direction of the church. When we are unmuted after a long time of being in “mute” mode at the general church level, our voices are full of energy and passion. Our voices will be fully recognized at the new table that the Christmas Covenant seeks to create.

Second, it enriches our ministries. I am serving in a district which includes an indigenous community - our Aeta siblings. I hear, feel, and see how they aspire for an authentic way of growth in all aspects of life. One time we appointed an Aeta pastor to a non-indigenous church. He tried his very best, giving it all he’s got, but to no avail. I strongly believe that the context of our ministry is our deepest identity that will make us bloom when we are planted and affirmed in our context.

These, for me, are the crucial concerns that the Christmas Covenant addresses at the grassroots level. As part of the team promoting this legislation, I believe we are planting the seeds of hope. In these challenging times for our church, let us be hopeful and pursue our dreams for a revitalized, mission-focused United Methodist Church - a true gift. As we say in the Philippines, let’s do it the “bayanihan” way - that we can do things together rooted in the spirit of community. Amen.