

August 2020 — God’s great gift: Showing up with Jesus

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As we social distance during COVID-19, we all seem to be going places “virtually” we never thought we would go!

We have visited other countries on Zoom, peeked into our co-workers’ living rooms on Skype and worshiped with our friends on Facebook Live. There are a few visits, however, where it is crucial to show up with others in our community in person. Some of these visits are protests against racism that honor innocent lives lost and advocate for a future free from violence.



The late Dalit liberation theologian Theophilus Appavoo with Mary C. Nebelsick at the Union Theological Seminary Chapel in the Philippines in 2002. (Photo provided)

Helping create a more inclusive, less violent world is part of God’s great gift. As the late Theophilus Appavoo, a Dalit liberation theologian, often said, showing up together is the key to creating a more loving world.

According to Appavoo, when we show up together, we show up with Jesus.

Showing up together takes many forms. It involves risks; it involves trust. When my husband and I lived in the Philippines as mission co-workers, I learned how trust is basic to the fabric of life. One Wednesday, at chapel, a friend asked me to attend his uncle’s funeral. “Where is it?” I asked. He gave me the name of a church in a suburb of Manila. “How do I get there?” I asked. “You just take the metro train, get off at Araneta Center Cubao, and it is not far from there.”

The next Saturday, I got up at dawn, hailed the first bus and sat comfortably chatting with my seatmate. At the metro station, I threaded my way up the stairway, greeting people here and there, and purchased a ticket. Half an hour later, I got off at the Araneta Center and found myself under a tangled concrete web of intersecting train lines. I finally realized that I didn’t really know how to get where I wanted to go.

Undaunted, I knew I could depend on the friendliness of the street vendors, so I began to ask, “How do I get to ...?” With smiles and helpful tips, I was instructed to walk a little further, “over



Don Pitts and Mary C. Nebelsick took part in a protest in Louisville in June. (Photo provided)

there,” and to ask for further instructions. So, I did. When I got “there,” I realized I didn’t really know how to get further, so I asked a gentleman walking in the general direction I had been instructed to go. “Oh, you are a missionary,” he remarked, noting my general appearance, the cross I always wore and my accented Tagalog.

“Yes po (sir), I am,” I replied, “I have been invited to a funeral and I don’t know exactly how to get there.”

“I will show you,” he said, “Just walk with me.”

Together, we walked through the crowded streets for a half hour. We talked about how wonderful the Philippines is, how my godsons are pastors and how devoted the members of the church are to Jesus. He told me that he, too, is a devoted Christian and loves his pastor. I had the distinct impression that Jesus was walking with us, enjoying our conversation and this unexpected encounter.

After the funeral, I told my friends of my happy adventure and of the many people who had helped me along the way.

“It is a miracle,” I recounted. “It is always like that here in the Philippines — I don’t always know where I am going, but I do know who I am going with. I am going with Jesus and with all of you. And that is God’s great gift.”