We look back and remember a year of transitions, drawing us to reflect on the Christmas story from the perspective of transitions. We remember the birth of the Christ child as marking a transition from the ways of oppressive leaders who ruled over others to a new Leader with new rules of compassion and healing in the service of others. The birth of the Christ child was the marking of a transition from the old ways and lifestyle, of finding the courage to let go, and of embracing a new reality. A New Year is a time of transitioning, letting the past be lessons for a brighter future.

Transition was a recurrent theme for our lives in the Philippines in 2010. A national election transitioned us to a new President, Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III, ending an era marked by violence unleashed against critics of the State and tainted with corruption and misuse of power. A General Assembly of our receiving church, the
United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), marked a transition to new leadership and program priorities for the UCCP.

A sudden departure of its Program Director marked a transition for Cobbie to be temporarily moved from his role as Spiritual Formatter of the Divinity School to assuming the role of Program Director of the Justice and Peace Center on the campus of Silliman University.

The evolving maturity of the Youth Advocates through Theater Arts (YATTA), which Dessa organized five years ago, marked a transition for Dessa from being parental over YATTA to being more facilitative, enabling the youth to embark into writing, directing and performing their own works in 2010 on the subject of children’s rights and the plight of street children. This evolving role has also allowed Dessa to reach out to groups outside of the Philippines. Last May Dessa conducted a theater arts and leadership training in Cambodia for young people and development workers from Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, China and Laos on the issue of child trafficking.

The transitioning process ushered in by the national elections in May 2010 involved
Cobbie as an Election Observer in the Province of Negros Oriental. It was an exciting election to observe since it was the first automated election in Philippine history. The role of an international election observer is to be both a deterrent of violence and foul play by being able to report any misconduct in the course of the election process.

The post-election transition inspired Dessa to rejoin the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) for a short series of performances in October as a guest actress in a play based on the classical novels of national writer Jose Rizal set in the present Philippine context. The play was performed for schools and government offices, sending an inspirational message that hope lies in the integrity of each individual when manifesting the courage to uphold a higher moral standard as a Filipino citizen.

The transition to a new president opened up the window for the resumption of the Peace Talks between the Government of Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front, a conflict that has been waged for 42 years between two opposing visions of a just society. Cobbie has been involved as a member of the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP), facilitating workshops around the country with a mandate to generate the support of faith-based communities to encourage and promote the resumption of the Peace Talks. New Peace Talks are scheduled to resume February 15–20, 2011, in Norway.

The transition to new leadership in the UCCP through its General Assembly held at Silliman University in May involved Dessa and Cobbie in the production of a cultural presentation on the mission history of the UCCP. With Cobbie creating the script on history and Dessa transforming the script into a creative fusion of music, dance, and audiovisuals, the production “Partnering: A Glance through Dance” became a significant contribution to the General Assembly and was performed for the whole body to see.
The transition to new leadership in the UCCP has further encouraged a role that Cobbie provides for the national church in training pastors in the skills of public speaking and evangelistic preaching. Under the auspices of the Evangelism and Church Development office of the UCCP, Cobbie is facilitating training seminars throughout the Philippines on enhancing the skills of pastors in ways that enable them to communicate the gospel more effectively and persuasively.

The transition to a new responsibility in the University as Program Director of the Justice and Peace Center has challenged Cobbie to conceive of new forms of educating and advocacy. The Justice and Peace Center is active in organizing in three communities community organizations that are equipped to facilitate conflict mediation, paralegal services, peace education and alternative livelihoods. The past several months have occupied Cobbie with advocacy and education activities on the campus of Silliman University for Peace Month in September and Human Rights Week in December as well as with training seminars in the communities nurturing the community organizations toward self-reliance, self-governance and self-development.

The transitions are not always marked by such big leaps, but also by those that lead to incremental steps that are part of our everyday life:
• We are blessed to be embraced by the Silliman University Church, where we have in different years offered time and energy to leadership roles, Cobbie is presently deeply involved with the process of defining the relationship of Silliman University Church to Silliman University. We are also blessed by the Silliman Park Bible study cluster in which we receive the regular nurturing friends reflecting together on Scripture.

• We are inspired by our involvement with Silliman Water, a ministry of Silliman University in partnership with Advent Church (a PC(USA) church) in Cordova, Tennessee, providing clean drinking water to communities in need and developing local appropriate technologies in producing clean drinking water.

• We are nourished by the community of friends that draw upon our gifts. In the arts and cultural affairs of our community, Dessa has been coordinating the celebration of the National Arts Month for the City of Dumaguete, bringing the wealth of the arts to public spaces. Dessa also sits on the Silliman University Cultural Affairs Committee, offering her gifts for the enhancement of the arts in this area. In the social affairs of the community, Cobbie participated in the Dumaguete City invitational mountain bike race, and after a 38 km. race through mountain trails and across streams, is proud to be the 2010 champion in the Golden Boys category.
Finally, we are strengthened in our life and work knowing that we have all of you, a community of friends and family around the world who celebrate our shared triumphs, empathize with our disappointments, support our efforts, and pray for our wellbeing. Not a day passes without our hearts being reminded of the blessings that God has provided through each one of you.

May this New Year be light to our journey and strength to our endeavors in creating a world where peace, love and righteousness reign across cultures and peoples.

Cobbie and Dessa Quesada-Palm

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Write to Cobbie Palm
Give to Cobbie Palm's sending and support