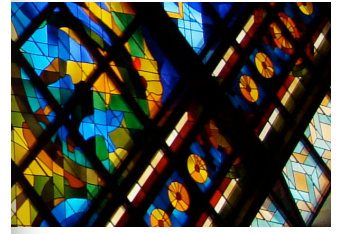


40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 38

Fresh Off the Boat



Learning

Ariel Siagan

While I have certainly experienced discrimination in many different ways, none of my experiences can be compared to the horrors experienced by Filipino migrant workers. Definitely, one of these horrors is not having guaranteed social safety nets, which makes them more vulnerable. At least for me, I have my school and the church I go to as sanctuaries. Thankfully, I have not experienced life-threatening incidents. But migrant workers are more vulnerable to abuse because of the absence of social safety nets.

I had the opportunity to connect with Filipino labour contract workers when I attended a gathering of the migrant-advocate group Migrante Ontario. A Filipina narrated her experience of working long hours on a farm in Ontario. She was in tears when she said they were housed in dilapidated buildings, and that their employer refused to justly compensate their

long hours working on the farm. As a temporary foreign worker, her visa might not get extended if she complained. It had already cost her thousands of dollars in visa fees, the “recruitment service,” and airfare. If she was sent back home early, she would never recover the money. She blurted, “Where will I get the money to feed my children and to pay for the medicine and high cost of hospitalization for my ailing father?”

She isn’t alone. The government of the Philippines made a national industry out of the bodies and skills of Filipinos by sending them abroad to work, mostly as domestic workers and labourers. Migration is forced for the majority of us. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 6,000 Filipinos a day flew out of the international airport in Manila to provide cheap labour in other countries.

One may have the impression that since a migrant escaped poverty at home, a new life here would be better than what was left behind. But chasing the Canadian or American dream is not all sunshine and butterflies, however vital and noteworthy the contributions of Filipino immigrants are to the economies of these countries.

Churches can learn more about the situation of Filipino labourers by [watching](#) our video, *Fresh Off the Boat*.



Faith Reflection

Ariel Siagan

The Bible is full of stories of sudden exile and migration. Rarely a choice, mostly a tactic of survival, the biblical stories are lived over and over every day across the world. It's my story also. As an international student in South Korea, Hungary, and now in Canada, I have experienced the gnawing feeling that I do not belong. It was difficult to build a sense of belonging since most locals are either uncomfortable and threatened or find me inferior because of the colour of my skin or the sound of my English.

The gospels emphasize treating a stranger as if it were Jesus you were serving. One of the parables of Jesus says, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in..." (Matthew 25:35). In the concluding statement of the parable, it says that whatever you

did to the least of your siblings, including strangers, it is as if you did it to the King. Furthermore, the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us "to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." In the biblical imagination, migrants or strangers are embodied as images of God and angels. And in the book of Exodus, it says, "do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt" (Exodus 23:9). With this, the Pentateuch or the book of laws contains a comprehensive prescription for how to treat migrants.

In the light of these scriptures, our theological and ecclesial responsibility toward migrants becomes clear: we cannot be quiet and indifferent to their situations of precarity, instability, and exploitation.



Children's Activity

Ariel Siagan

This is an interactive storytelling. Instruct the child/children to express their emotions while listening. When they hear certain words (listed below), they can respond by expressing that emotion.

- *sad* (could make a sad face)
- *surprise* (could gasp, open mouth, or widen eyes)
- *happy* (could clap hands, jump up and down, or say Yay!)
- *cold* (could shiver or give themselves or each other a hug)

Gina's Story

Gina is a woman who dreamed of a better life. There was always war where she lived. People in the government took money for themselves. Forests were cut down or burned, and mining operations polluted rivers. Gina was always looking for a chance to leave her country.

One day somebody called Gina on the phone. She picked up the phone and heard a woman's voice on the other line. The woman told her to get ready, because her flight to Canada will be in a few days. She would have a job when she got there. At that moment, she felt so *happy!*

She also felt *surprise*. Was it really happening?

She was also *sad*.

If she left, Gina would have to leave behind her husband and children. Her oldest son was named Kang, and Gayeng was still a baby.

Gina packed her clothes and other things she would need. She made sure to bring some pictures of her family, and hid them in her pocket. As she packed, she felt very *sad*. But Gina said to herself, "I need to go so that Kang and Gayeng will have a better future." She felt *happy* with the thought that she would be able to provide for her family.

Gina took an airplane to go to Canada. She was *excited*. It was her first time on a plane!

Gina was also *happy*.

And Gina was *sad*, and thought that she would really miss Kang and Gayeng and her husband so much.

When Gina arrived in Canada, it was winter. She felt so *cold*. Where she came from, it's always warm. Gina had been told that a man would meet her at the airport to help her. She waited and waited, but no one came. Gina realized that the woman who had told her there was a job for her in Canada had fooled her. She had taken Gina's money for the trip but had not helped her at all.

Gina felt *sad*. She walked from the airport to find a place to eat and rest. She walked and walked

with her luggage and small backpack. She was hungry, afraid, and *cold*. But no one seemed to notice her. Gina was afraid to ask for help. She was afraid that people might reject her because of her skin color and accent. She was very *sad*.

Then Gina saw a church with a big cross. She was *excited*. At home, a church was a place where kind people gathered. She entered the church and found a woman pastor. She felt relieved. And she felt *happy*.

Gina told her story to the pastor. The pastor cried. The pastor was *sad* too. Suddenly they were both crying. But Gina was crying because she felt that someone was listening to her story, and they could help her. She felt *happy* and comforted.

The pastor gave Gina hot chicken soup and poutine. She also gave Gina a place to stay, with a nice bed and a warm bath. The pastor told her that she could stay there until she found work. The pastor also said she would take Gina to a government office to help her find assistance. When she was ready, she could meet more church members.

Gina felt *surprised* by the pastor's kindness.

She was also *happy* to be warm and to have help.

And she was *sad* because she missed her children.

But Gina also felt confident about her future. Although she had been hungry, afraid, and *cold*, she now had a place to live and to be part of a great community.



Group Commitment

Ariel Siagan

Perhaps we need to consider offering our buildings (when we reopen after the pandemic) as places of sanctuary for migrants. Let us reflect on whether our churches can become a true sanctuary for them. Why not use the [video](#) and these questions at your next online or in-person gathering?

- Do the dynamics of our church polity and programming enable us to host and provide safety for migrants, or are they hostile to them? What can we do to foster safe space and belonging?
- Outside the four walls of the church, have we advocated for migrants, or have we been complicit in the injustices done to them by our silence? What are the organizations that can help us better understand the experience of migration?



Advocacy

Adele Halliday

The United Church is a member of [KAIROS](#): Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. KAIROS is engaged in a wide range of justice work, including being “committed to work addressing the causes of forced migration, while promoting a climate of dignity and welcome for uprooted people.”

KAIROS is engaged in advocacy around the implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers

and Members of their Families. [ILO Convention #189](#) recognizes domestic work as work.

As advocacy, consider:

- engaging with your Member of Parliament and encouraging them to help work towards the implementation of the “[International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and ILO Convention #189](#)”;

- viewing and sharing this [video about migrant justice](#);
- [signing up to receive news](#) from KAIROS (select “Migrant Justice” to receive updates and calls to action).

Additional Resources

Watch [Fresh Off the Boat](#), a video co-produced by Ariel Siagan and Ming Yung (Ibi) Chuan.

[Migrant Worker Solidarity Network](#)

[Migrante Canada](#)

[KAIROS Canada](#)

[Migrant Resource Centre](#)



Ariel Siagan is a doctoral student of theology at Trinity College of the University of Toronto. He is an ordained minister of the Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en Las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF) or the Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines. Prior to coming to Toronto, he was a staff member of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, where he assisted on programs related to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and Indigenous people’s concerns. He currently chairs the newly established Filipino Network in The United Church of Canada.



Adele Halliday uses she/her pronouns and serves as the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead staff at the General Council Office of The United Church of Canada. She staffs the United Church’s Anti-Racism Common Table, and has been involved in anti-oppression work with churches in Canada and beyond for many years.

