

## COVENANT DISCIPLES: “HEART AND LIFE” FOR THE PHILIPPINES

Steve Mankar knows firsthand that our U. M. connectional giving changes people’s lives. Mankar coordinates Covenant Discipleship Groups through the General Board of Discipleship, based in Nashville. But he doesn’t limit his work to Tennessee.

Take his experience in the Philippines, for instance. At the request of the Board of Laity of the Philippines Annual Conference East (PACE), in 2001 Mankar began a training U. M. leaders in John Wesley’s group system for spiritual nurture and accountability. In February-March of 2002, he returned to the country and co-led three workshops there with Romulo Sison, PACE Associate Lay Leader. The 2002 round of seminars brought a total of 144 church leaders and pastors to Bagio City, Atimonan UMC in Quezon Province, and a U.M. camp called Tagaytay.

“We don’t need committee members who don’t attend meetings. What we need are committed disciples,” said PACE Lay Leader, Ka Emil Cruz. “With Covenant Discipleship we expect more commitment from our leaders in the local churches.” After attending the Covenant Discipleship seminars, notes co-leader Sison, Cruz was convinced that the Philippines Annual Conference East had found a way to focus on making disciples while developing leadership skills.

So what is the Covenant Discipleship program? It is a group of no more than seven persons covenanted as Jesus’ disciples for Christian nurture, support and accountability. Based on Wesley’s model, each group meets weekly to encourage following Jesus’ teachings and practicing the basics of discipleship through specific acts of compassion, justice, devotion and worship.

That’s a tall order anywhere, including in the Philippines. There the vast majority of the population lives in poverty, the Filipino population is very young, and there are many small-membership U.M. churches.

But Mankar’s connectional work is already bearing fruit. By 2002, Covenant Discipleship Groups had been introduced at a Christmas Institute of the Methodist Youth Fellowship in the Quezon-Laguna Missionary District. Antipolo UMC also has chosen Covenant Discipleship Groups as its emphasis through 2005. Antipolo now has nine class meetings based on geographic clusters, learning the benefits of Christian community. The largest of the clusters includes 18 families and meets in different homes.

“The joy on the faces of the group members told me that the Cluster groups had indeed become a means of grace of these people and for this congregation,” said Mankar. “They have recovered the essence of the early Methodist class meeting. They have experienced new life and vitality for mission and ministry.”

To learn more about Covenant Discipleship Groups, get Gayle Turner Watson’s book, *Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups* (Discipleship Resources 2000), or write to [smankar@gbod.org](mailto:smankar@gbod.org).