

**An Introduction by Pastor Nova Villa Vitug-Thomas
(Currently the Sr. Pastor at Calvary U.M. Church, Mohnton, PA)**

Bishop Sol was an inspiration to all pastors. He was a retired bishop, and yet never bragged about his status; rather, he shared his experiences about how God worked in his life. If I was Timothy, he would be my Paul. God uses people to teach us and show us His goodness and love. Bishop Sol was an image of God's power and blessing through his life, faith, and ministry. He greatly influenced the way I perceive things in life and how to serve the Lord with the ministry God has given me. As the apostle Paul said to the Philippians: I thank God in every remembrance of him.

**An interview with the Late Bishop Sol Toquero by Nova Villa Vitug on March 15, 2016,
as a requirement for M.Div. Pastoral Formation class under Dr. Gary Myers.**

Bishop Sol, as some of us call him, was one of my mentors. He convinced me to study Theological Education by Extension and finish my college course when I moved to a different denomination, not in UMC jurisdiction(1993). He later helped me become a United Methodist Pastor. He was our Senior Pastor and leader of the Mission team in our church in Bulacan, Philippines. *(In 2013, when I was lost and broken hearted, again God used him to help me go back to follow God's calling, he connected me with the Union Theological School in the Philippines to continue my ministry, and later on, I transferred to study Master of Divinity at Drew. Bishop Sol was a witness to my graduation at Drew Theological School in 2017).* He made a difference in my life, so I decided to interview him, learn more about him, and share with others how his life became a blessing to me and to many.

Professor Gary Myers said: "Nova, you are very fortunate to have Bishop Sol in your life. He seems to be a wonderful human being who has found his personal and spiritual fulfillment in his call to ministry. I think that this is key for us. Since ministry is a vocation and not an occupation-something that we can pick up or lay down as we desire. It's great when we find fulfillment in ministry itself."

Question # 1: Tell me about your call to the ministry and the ordination process you followed.

Answer: "I felt God's call to the ministry while I was studying in Manila at the College of Engineering of Mapua Institute of Technology (MIT). It was my first year, first semester, as a Mechanical Engineering student at that time (1959). My mother, Felicidad, was converted and became a Methodist when I was 9 years old. The three of us, her sons, followed suit: the eldest, Florvivo, 15, and the youngest, Hernani, 7, in 1951. In Manila, I found myself worshiping with a small congregation (a Wesleyan group called Pilgrim Holiness Church) through a distant relative who invited me. We used a small garage as a worship center. I had been with this group for a year already, enjoying their fellowship, when a visiting American missionary from Mindanao (presumably the head of the PHC at that time) preached on the Second Coming of Christ. I was so touched that I fully surrendered my life to Jesus and promised to serve Him with all my heart. I discontinued my schooling, returned to my hometown, and became active again in the local Methodist Church. After a year of serving as a youth leader in the Church, I was recommended by our pastor as a candidate for ministry. The District Superintendent appointed me, in an interim capacity, as a lay missionary to Casiguran, Quezon (now Province of Aurora), in 1961. The following year, 1962, I was formally presented in our church Charge Conference, in the District Conference, and finally in the Annual Conference through the Board of Ordained Ministry, as an approved Local Pastor. I returned to Casiguran to continue my pioneering ministry for another year, establishing four new Methodist congregations in that forest area. The Lord blessed my ministry; I was 19 years old when I started my ministry with no formal ministerial training. My experience in attending and joining crusades and evangelistic services, doing house-to-house visitation, distributing tracts, and personal evangelism with veteran local pastors and Elders of our District and Annual Conference ushered me into the world of local mission by our District Superintendent. Every summer then, I had to attend our Pastors School at Union Theological Seminary in Dasmarias, Cavite, 1964, '65, '66. I finished my pre-theological studies, Bachelor of Arts, at Philippines Wesleyan College (now Wesleyan University-Philippines) in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija. The experience of being the student pastor, intern pastor, and administrative pastor of the seminary congregation (with the local people), Ang Sambahan sa Nayon (The Church in the Village) has enriched my life. It was also here, that I met

my future wife, Alegria J, Hembrador, a public school teacher, in my first year of seminary studies; we tied the knot on April 12, 1970.”

Question # 2 What are the main biblical/theological/experienced-based resources for your ministry?

Answer: “Even before I entered the ministry, as a youth, I began to read the Bible, three chapters in the NT in the morning, beginning in the Gospel of Matthew, and five chapters of the OT, starting from Genesis, with reflection and prayer, morning and evening. I finished reading the whole Bible every year, underlining verses that spoke to me. I also read books written by John Wesley and the early Methodist leaders on Evangelism and winning souls, etc. When I finally entered the ministry, the American Methodist missionary, the Rev. Richard Wehrman, lent me more books to read while on my mission work. By God’s grace, God blessed my ministry. Every year or two, a new church was planted or organized in a place where there was no United Methodist Church. I was also a member of the Ten Brave Christian Movement as a student of the Seminary. My spiritual life was sustained and strengthened with this small group. After my seminary studies, I became involved in spiritual growth seminars. We organized the United Methodist Aldersgate Renewal Fellowship, Inc. in the Philippines which emphasizes the Aldersgate experience of John Wesley and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I am still a member of its governing board. It conducts annual retreats in Baguio attended by more than a thousand youth and adults.”

Question # 3: What is a week in your life like? What do you do?

Answer: “Fast forward: I am a retired bishop of the United Methodist Church since 2009. I was elected by the Philippine Central Conference in a special session on April 17, 2001, and consecrated the following day. I served for two quadrennial terms, (reelected after my first term) assigned in the Manila Episcopal Area. I wake up early in the morning, at 4:00 am, and do some Bible reading and reflection, prayers, and intercession. Also walk with Gilas, my German shepherd dog, for 10-15 minutes. I teach at UTS, Part-time, every Tuesday, then teach at the IEMELIF Bible Seminary, a UTS On-Line Seminary program (UTOS) every other Monday in Novaliches, Quezon City. I am also involved in the D.Min program every other Friday, Manila UTS-PCU Campus, and three to four Saturdays are spent handling Theological Education by Extension (TEE) classes at UTS Dasmarias. I handled Christian Social Ethics for four years (now handled by another), also Ecumenism and Mission, Mission and Evangelism, Church Administration, Church Management, Methodist Polity, Stewardship and Resource Generation (now handled by another), and presently, Biblical Models of Leadership to BTh students. The above courses are assigned to me in a three-year, six-semester span, 1-2 courses each semester.”

Question # 4: How much time do you spend each week on worship leadership, pastoral care, preaching, counseling, Christian formation, prophetic community work, administrative fundraising, community relations, or other tasks?

Answer: “My family, children (son- Mervin married to Raquel and daughter-Ria) and grandchildren (Awit, Himig, and Sining), are involved in organizing a small congregation in our village: KIJISI UMC Mission, Biga 1, Silang, Cavite, Philippines. I preach once a month, preferably every first Sunday (with Communion), and usually do the pastoral prayer and benediction almost every Sunday. Our pastor is usually a Middler or Senior student of UTS. Other seminarians come regularly to help. I meet with them every Tuesday at lunchtime, at UTS Canteen, to discuss the past Sunday liturgy and the sermon, evaluate, and suggest some improvement. They/we learn in this weekly evaluation. Last year, we commenced our COINS project/program (Coins Offered to God for Indigent Children’s Nurture and Support). A piggy bank is given to each member family/child and they fill it up with coins: 5, 10, 25, etc. centavos. The accumulated amount is offered to the church every quarter, and deposited in the bank. A specific amount is withdrawn for feeding, vitamin supplement, and meeting other basic needs of selected indigent/poor children in the community. We are partnering, too, with other Christians and Methodists in our place and overseas (like Nova’s group in her mission work!). Coins, when gathered in bulk (like the widow’s mite in the Bible), can be a blessing to many poor children. Part of my larger mission work is membership in the Ecumenical Bishops Forum (EBF). I was co-chair of this group of bishops for more than five years, (individual membership, without committing his/her denomination) from the Roman Catholic Church

and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) member churches. We meet every quarter and have a National Convention every two years. We promote ecumenism and human rights, advocate for justice and peace, especially among the urban poor, peasants, working masses, and political prisoners; and, work with the indigenous peoples, against destructive mining, and the protection and integrity of creation/environment.”

Question # 5: How do you balance the many duties?

Answer: “I pace myself. I spend only one day in the Seminary. I schedule my days and time for the other activities, which are in Manila and other places with organized groups.”

Question # 6: How is your ministry integrated into the life of your church community, local civic community, or the world?

Answer: “I see it as a whole ministry. The Great Commandments and the Great Commission are the twin imperatives of Jesus Christ. We must not separate the two. They are integrated and interrelated. And it is not only for humans but for the whole creation. The Ephesian and Colossian vision is “to unite/gather/bring all things together in Christ, the things in heaven along with the things on earth.”(Eph 1:10 CEB); “and he reconciled all things to himself through him—whether the things on earth or in the heaven,” (Col 1:20 CEB). Jesus, himself, said, “I have come in order that you might have life--life in all its fullness,” (John10:10 GNB). All powers and structures that impede, thwart, prevent, or destroy the growth of life in all its fullness (LIFE not only for humans but for the whole created order), are to be confronted, to stand against, to struggle against, to fight against, and be subject to the rule and reign of God in Christ. Injustice, oppression, pollution, environmental destruction, global warming, depriving others of the fullness of life, and other personal and corporate sins of humans, including systems and structures that humans have put up, have to be done away with and may be transformed, so that ALL may experience the fullness of life promised by Jesus. I see, then, my work in the local church, in the community, and in the world as a ministry to people, especially to the poor, the deprived, and the oppressed, for them to have the opportunity to partake and have a taste of the fullness of life, building a community where God rules and reigns.”

Question # 7 How do you keep yourself physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually healthy?

Answer: “I walk every day; I don’t have a car. I prayer-walk, morning and evening with personal reflection and Bible reading. I also garden every day when I am free. I have the company of my three granddaughters. I spend time reading books in various fields, especially on health, and eat organic healthy foods now in my adult years, (74 years old on May 31). I read new periodicals, and books in the UTS library, once a week, to keep up with current knowledge, and research on various biblical, and theological issues. I have my quarterly regular check-ups with my doctors. We have a regular Sunday worship in our small church, with luncheon fellowship every last Sunday of the month. Each family with packed lunch, putting them together and sharing with one another’s food including those who have nothing. We also have a family dinner with my grandchildren every Sunday, and go out for a three-day vacation and relaxation every year. I keep regular company with friends and co-workers once or twice a month on common ventures.”

Question # 8: Would you choose the same vocation again?

Answer: “I believe it was God who called me to this vocation. I have to obey and be faithful. And I enjoy my ministry.”

Question # 9: What would you do differently?

Answer: “I might have become a mechanical engineer had I not experienced God’s call. Or if I heeded the advice of my high school teachers, I might have become a lawyer. I consistently participated in argumentation and

debate in all my four years in high school, and also in oratorical and declamation contests. I believe these experiences prepared me for the future call of God to ordained ministry.”

Question # 10: What advice or word of encouragement would you share with me as I seek to clarify my call to ministry?

Answer: “Seek to follow God’s will and purpose for your life. The greatest thing you can do is to be obedient and faithful to God’s call. Prepare yourself for that calling. Be humble and develop your personal relationship with God. Jesus said, “You can do nothing without me” (John 15:5 GNB). And Paul testified, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13 KJV) (“endure all things,” CEB). Be part of an accountability/cell/care group. Always update your knowledge and be open to new things and new learnings. We keep on learning as long as we live. Have time with your family; do not neglect your fellowship and relationship with your loved ones. Have a time of rest and relaxation. Pace yourself in your ministry. Be healthy and have regular exercise. Above all, let God rule your life, in your family, and in your ministry. You will be a blessing to others. There are trials, temptations, struggles, and oppositions; you cannot evade them. Face them head-on, and God will never leave you nor forsake you. You will overcome and be victorious with God’s help and strength; and you will succeed.” As the Apostle Paul exclaims, “But in all these things, we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. I am convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.” (Rom 8:37-39 CEB)

BIO OF BISHOP SOL SEPTEMBER, 2017

Solito K. Toquero was born in a small barrio in Nueva Ecija, Philippines. He graduated from Wesleyan University-Philippines with an A.B. degree and earned his Bachelor of Divinity degree from the Union Theological Seminary-Philippines (UTS), magna cum laude. He earned his D.Min. degree from Christian Theological Seminary.

Solito was elected to the episcopacy in 2001, assigned to the Manila Episcopal Area, and was reelected in 2004. He served the Connectional Table as the President of the Commission on Archives and History. He retired from the active episcopacy in 2008.

Retired Bp. Toquero is former co-chair of the Ecumenical Bishops’ Forum of the Philippines and vice-chair of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP). He is currently a Bishop-in-Residence at Union Theological Seminary–Philippines.

The bishop is well known in the Philippines as a staunch advocate for human rights and peace. His appearance before the tribunal is to continue his advocacy for human rights and peace.