

Reflection

January 25, 2026

Journey to a New Land

Deuteronomy 10:18-19; Matthew 25:35-40

On this freezing Sunday morning in January, I invite you to stay a while as I share a story that is special and close to my heart. It is a simple reflection on my continuing life and faith journey as a migrant person—a wandering Filipino—just like the more than 15 million of our *kapwa* Filipinos in diaspora around the world. We are men and women, and families, who have moved, worked, and settled wherever life has led us.

Some of you already know that my husband, my daughter, and I came to Canada as landed immigrants in 2012, from the Philippines. (Slide) This was a picture of our small family as first-time attendees at the First United Church worship service in 2012. To give you a bit more information about what I was doing before my family and I moved to Canada, I would like to mention that I have served as a full-time ordained minister at the North Bicol Conference of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. The decision to leave the said vocation and move 11,200 km away, with so much uncertainty about life in general, was the hardest decision I have ever had to make at that time. I still took the risk anyway. Upon arriving in the summer of 2012, we felt a warm welcome and acceptance of the community of Swift Current, and the country we now call home. We thank God for the life we have been given here. It is quite a journey to a new land, a venture we accepted, and it is a kind of life that comes with challenges, as well as weariness and loneliness.

It may surprise some of us that migration—and its effects—is a major theme throughout the Bible.

Just like in our time, people in biblical times migrated for various reasons. To name a few:

- Abraham was called by God to move to a new homeland and was promised to become a great nation.
- Jacob and his family migrated to Egypt to escape famine and reunite with Joseph.
- The Israelites journeyed for 40 days and 40 nights from slavery in Egypt to the promised land.
- Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fled as refugees to Egypt to escape King Herod, as he intended to kill the infant Jesus.
- Persecution of believers in the New Testament forced early Christians to leave Jerusalem and go to Antioch, Cyprus, Phoenicia, and many other places for safety.

In the Old Testament, we see clear descriptions of the life of immigrants—often displaced, deprived of justice, and lacking food and basic needs. In the New Testament, we see migrants facing emotional and physical stress as they traveled from place to place to avoid persecution.

The Bible portrays migration not as an easy sojourn but as a challenging journey where migrants depend on God's protection and the hospitality of others. Their experiences are similar to those of "people on the move" today face. Their stories can teach us lessons about migration that are relevant in our time.

As immigrants, life in another land involves significant difficulties. Adapting to a new culture, facing conflict or social exclusion, economic vulnerabilities, or the loss of identity is a real experience for many. Leaving your homeland and your family behind, losing social status or

jobs, encountering racism, hatred, exploitation, and even the threat of deportation and death—these are realities we hear in the news, and also lived experiences of many immigrants today.

People come to Canada for many reasons: family reunification, refuge, or better economic opportunities. Many come hoping for a safer, more peaceful life.

Allow me to share more about my immigration story. It began with my Auntie Elena, one of my Mama's ten siblings, who married a resident of Swift Current in the mid-90s. They had started as pen pals, back when love letters were a treasured way of communicating and of expressing affection. They fell in love, and the rest is history.

Upon moving to Canada and building her family here, she dreamed of bringing her extended family someday. She worked hard to make that dream possible. As more of us arrived in the late 90s to the early 2000s and became capable of supporting others, we continued her dream and helped one another. Today, three quarters of our clan from my mother's side have moved to Canada as permanent residents. Some have already become citizens. Their children were born and raised here. Among the many Filipino families in Swift Current, our immediate and extended family is one of the largest in number.

The latest to land in Vancouver in 2025 were my parents, who sit with us in this sanctuary today. That is how we came to be here. To my Auntie or Aunties and Uncles, and to all family members who helped make this journey possible, we are wholeheartedly grateful.

There is a poem that I would also like to share a portion of today, a beautiful poem by Wang Ping, a Chinese American poet and immigrant. The poem is titled "*Things We Carry on the Sea.*" For me, it captures the inner world of an immigrant—feelings we often struggle to express in our own words. She writes:

We carry soil in small bags: may home never fade in our hearts

We carry names, stories, memories of our villages, fields, boats

We carry scars from proxy wars of greed

We carry our islands sinking under the sea

We carry our hands, feet, bones, hearts, and best minds for a new life

We carry diplomas: medicine, engineer, nurse, education, math, poetry, even if they mean nothing to the other shore

We carry railroads, plantations, laundromats, bodegas, taco trucks, farms, factories, nursing homes, hospitals, schools, temples...built on our ancestors' backs

We carry old homes along the spine, new dreams in our chests

We carry yesterday, today and tomorrow

We're orphans of the wars forced upon us

We're refugees of the sea rising from industrial wastes

And we carry our mother tongues

As we drift...in our rubber boats...from shore...to shore...to shore...

An immigrant's life story is more than just adapting to changing seasons or holding onto our culture, language, or food—although those are important. Our story is one of growth, resilience, and daily courage.

In my own family's journey, I always speak of how grateful I am to First United Church for the acceptance, hospitality, and respect we received. We truly found God's family here—a place where our lives have been well. And here is our picture with our First United Church family in 2025. What a difference from the first one, 13, almost 14 years ago.

As newcomers to a new land back then and up to the present, we are grateful to those who shared food with us when we were hungry, who gave us something to drink when we were

thirsty, and who invited us in when we were strangers. When we needed clothing, you provided.

When we were sick, you cared. When we felt lonely, you visited and comforted us.

Amen

Work Cited

Ping, Wang. "Things We Carry on the Sea by Wang Ping - Poems | Academy of American Poets." *Poets.org*, <https://poets.org/poem/things-we-carry-sea>. Accessed 16 January 2026.