

Divine Intervention

An act of generosity writes a new chapter in a story begun 20 years ago on the other side of the world

IN THE LATE 1980s, Nizzi Santos Digan, who had trained as a teacher, worked for a refugee-resettlement program headquartered in Manila, in her Philippine homeland. At the time, the U.S. government, collaborating with the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), was preparing Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian refugees to succeed in new lives in America.

Among Digan's coworkers was a young Filipino cultural-orientation instructor named Nory Leachon. The two struck up a friendship, often comparing notes about their experiences on the front lines of resettlement.

Digan (STH'02) had vacationed in the United States every year while working with the Indo-Chinese refugees, so she understood America. On a trip to Chicago in 1993, she got an out-of-the-blue job offer through a former ICMC colleague working at a Christian school in Boston that desperately needed two teachers. It happened that Digan had a sister, also a former teacher with the ICMC, who was vacationing in Seattle. Would the sisters consider relocating to Boston and filling in for a year?

So Digan began a new life, teaching biology, math, and Bible studies in Massachusetts. One year turned



Nory Leachon (left) and Nizzi Santos Digan on Marsh Plaza.

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into two, then three, and ultimately five. In 1999, she responded to a call to ministry that she had been resisting for 17 years. A fourth-generation Methodist—her great-grandfather had been brought into the faith by American Methodist missionaries—whose grandfather and father were Methodist pastors, Digan enrolled in BU's School of Theology.

After graduating from BU in 2002, Digan served at a church in Lynn, Mass., two congregations in Everett, and a church in Saugus.

At about the same time, unbeknownst to Digan, her former ICMC colleague Nory Leachon felt called to the ministry. After ICMC, Leachon had gone on to work in an architectural office in Singapore, where she became a naturalized

citizen and explored a number of faiths, including Methodism. "I was raised a Catholic," she explains, "but it was at a Methodist church in Singapore that I finally decided that I wanted to be involved in ministry and mission." She enrolled in STH in spring 2008.

By early 2011, still in Saugus, Digan faced a welcome problem. Her pastoral budget for the upcoming year included a \$5,000 raise for herself. She didn't want to accept it. "I'm not rich," she says, "and I don't have the necessities of life. I've received wonderful blessings since I've been in this country—including when I was at the School of Theology." Chief among those blessings was a generous scholarship that made it possible for her to

afford her seminary education. So she decided to use her first raise to create a scholarship at STH for students following in her footsteps.

Digan wanted her scholarship to be awarded to a minority woman, preferably aged 35 years or older, who had embarked upon the ministry as a second career. "I wanted to encourage someone in tough circumstances, who might feel alone," she says.

School of Theology officials readily agreed to Digan's offer, and went looking for a deserving student who met her criteria. Using a blind selection process, they came up with a candidate: Nory Leachon.

Leachon recalls being "more than a little surprised to get an email from the school telling me that I had received a scholarship from the Reverend Nizzi Digan Fund!"

Digan was delighted.

Since then, Digan has moved on to the Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, in Malden, Mass. Leachon (STH'12) expects to earn a degree next year.

Both Digan and Leachon refer regularly to God's grace as a powerful force that has continuously shaped their lives. Clearly, both believe that it was God's grace that brought them together in Manila years ago—and reunited them, through an act of generosity, almost two decades later. ■