

## Subanen People Arise Project



The call of Pope Francis to “go to the peripheries!” was an inspiration for Sister Andrea Catubig. It was particularly inspiring during the COVID-19 pandemic when it was a challenge to respond to the marginalized people of Alicia, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines, where the sisters had ministered for years. The pandemic brought suffering to many, including the Subanen community, the Indigenous people of the area. Through the Subanen People Arise Project, the sisters empower the Indigenous people to move forward, despite their many struggles. The project fosters opportunities and the skills for them to live independently through farming and the cultivation of their artistic talents, including dance, song, and craftsmanship. With the support of sisters, members of the Subanen community have newfound confidence, becoming chapel leaders and council members in the Barangay region.

The sisters also organize groups of women to help cultivate their beading and cooking skills and begin small-scale businesses (including online) through the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization’s Livelihood Support Program. As an eco-spiritual community, the Subanen people nurture organic home gardens. They plant fruit trees and vegetables using sustainable farming practices, with the coordination and generosity of the agriculture department of the local government of Alicia. This engagement in interculturality, leadership, business and sustainable farming helps the Subanen people support themselves.

“Palad-palad,” which means “thank you,” is the phrase Sister Andrea hears each time she visits a Subanen family. Those words and the gratitude in them are a gift of inspiration, allowing her to still smile and laugh after an exhausting day of service. Indeed, as Pope Francis said, “Mercy is the first thing the Catholic Church is called to bring to those peripheries.”

*This article was first published in Mercy Now, the newsletter of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. For more information on the work of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, please visit their website at <https://sistersofmercy.org/about-us/>. This article is part of a series about Mercy Fund for Ministry grant recipients and how their funded work lives out Mercy’s Critical Concerns and Works of Mercy. This ministry provides perspectives and programs in nonviolence and meets people where they are in a spirit of community.*

