



## MESSAGE

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USTMAAA Executive Director

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### **The Arc of USTMAAA in the 21st Century**

**W**e have recently witnessed the revelry behind the UST FMS celebrating its 150 years of service to our beloved country. Over the years our Alma Mater has bestowed the degree of Doctor of Medicine to over 40,000 of us. Dr. Jose P. Rizal being our most prominent alumnus continues to inspire every Thomasian medical graduate to serve the Filipino as well as the rest of humanity. The professional diaspora that started after the WW II and having gained momentum at the outbreak of the Vietnam war has resulted in thousands more Thomasians emigrating to North America – the land of opportunity. It took another 30 years for various groups of Thomasian alumni to coalesce to give birth to the USTMAAA. Thanks to the visionary work of Dr. Jose L. Evangelista. We have grown stronger the past 30 years to become what we are today. In return, bestowing back the gift of giving in perpetuity to our alma mater as envisioned by Dr. Jose Vjungco was a by-product of the synergy that resulted from the collective determination of our US based alumni to heed the clarion's call. This is the USTMAAA and Foundation that we see today! Through the years its growth has influenced our UST FMS' sustainability. It too has become a formidable force of transformation. As it has reached a milestone, USTMAAA occupies a special place in the arc of the UST FMS' history.

Fifty years ago, the pent-up demand for physicians to provide primary care to the US population was enabling to our profession. So, the 50's, 60's and 70's saw a rapid influx of Thomasian graduates into the US. A palpable shift in policy has tempered this flow - only to gradually reverse the following decades. The resulting constraints could explain the remarkable drop in the number of practicing physicians attending our annual conventions today. Notwithstanding, we still have quite a few who are able to get into residency training programs. Many of whom end up with distinct academic appointments in prominent teaching institutions. Yet for the rest of our colleagues who are not fortunate enough to be accepted – end up doing alternative healthcare careers. Prominent among these are mid-level health care professionals, NP's and RN's, PhD's in physical and occupational therapy as well as in the field of research. We know of a few who have pursued business careers and have become highly successful CEOs in small businesses – and let's not forget. They are all proud Thomasians at heart!

It was prescient that since the outset, the wisdom and prudence of our Thomasian leaders codified in our bylaws the privilege to welcome non-practicing Thomasian medical graduates residing in the US and Canada to join us. We see the relevance this section as it narrowly finds its way knocking at the door of each alumnus – regardless, so long as he/she finished medicine at UST. Albeit a non-clinician that never found his/her way at the patient bedside, shall comprise part of that heterogeneity. The new face in USTMAAA is now a mosaic of health care related careers – practicing and non-practicing physicians alike. It adds credence that the quality of our medical education with all its inherent nuances, has no bearing on this outcome. There is no need to sound the alarm! Save for the

disruption in medical students and trainees' clinical exposure during the pandemic the UST FMS has come out as a winner. The long-recognized need to reinforce the Thomasian brand of compassionate bedside care at the Charity Hospital has already been addressed. Collaborative work between us and our alma mater will continue to gain steam. The UST FMS shall continue to competitively deliver the highest quality of medical education in the Southeast Asia region for years to come.

The past two generations USTMAAA has witnessed the continued influx of Thomasian medical graduates entering the US and Canada in many ways. Our journey continues as we adapt to the changing face in USTMAAA. It certainly has evoked concern as we get anxious each time, we see a dwindling number of alumni graduates participate during homecomings. We have reached an inflection point. We all need to deliver the welcoming message of inclusivity – to each and every member of each class residing in the US and Canada – as our respect for the dignity in the work one has chosen supersedes whatever career path has been taken. “We love to see you join us!” So, that it reverberates, hear yeah, all - each and every alumnus has a special seat on the table. We've been waiting!

So as our journey continues on today. Recall that important date in USTMAAA's formation. It was on May 26, 1987 in Detroit, MI when the unification of various chapters in America heralded what was then incipient - leading to the birth of USTMAAA. In 1993 it finally set sail. After 30 years, though our journey has at times been buffeted by the rigors of the high seas, it has proven to be formidable. And not even by a second, a minute or a degree off, it has maintained quite a steady course. We owe our deep sense of gratitude to our founder and leader – Dr. Jose L. Evangelista and the framework that its ensuing leaders have pursued. Today, we have come to realize that the boundaries set as originally drawn in our bylaws - shall remain sacrosanct! USTMAAA was born in North America. It will continue to live, breathe and stay within the boundaries of its place of birth. Nothing more and nothing less!

We have seen USTMAAA's arc take off. As we witness its glorious rise. How far shall it go before we see it bend?

As we wear our far-optic lenses we would love to see it travel far enough so that it leaves a lasting foot print underneath UST's iconic Arch of the Centuries. Forty thousand sets of footprints have taken this symbolic walk as a right to passage. That took over 150 years. Among those many, shall we start distinguishing how many among those took the 10,000-mile journey across? Correctly, it is admirable. However, rightfully, is it really worth the exercise? Or shall we simply set this aside for the next generations of alumni to figure out?

USTMAAA and USTMAAA Foundation are still young. We have just started our second generation of leaders. We all feel the need to have a fresh infusion of young blood. We need to see youthful faces around with new ideas – to charter the next solid steps for future generations to come. But only with pause – as we have to continue to respect and practice the traditions already instilled. This way we can say with confidence that many among our future members shall keep the promise of the 10,000-mile journey so they can leave more lasting footprints over succeeding generations. Along with this the capacity to be able to stay nimble. Change happens all the time.

Finally, where will USTMAAA's arc bend? It shall likely bend only when the current and the future generations of UST medical graduates residing in the US and Canada continue on with the task of translating USTMAAA's mission into action. Incredulous as it gets, good outcomes left as evidence will be USTMAAA's indelible footprint left behind UST's arc. Only to sustain and transform!