

Island Echoes

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A Summer of Faith

How DVBS Is Shaping Young Lives Across Luzon

Each summer, as classrooms fall silent and students look forward to vacation, something beautiful begins stirring in churches across the Philippines. It's not the sound of textbooks flipping or bells ringing—but the joyful laughter of children, the rhythm of worship songs, and the faithful voices of volunteers sharing God's Word. This is Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS)—a cherished ministry that has been touching lives for generations.

DVBS has become a beloved tradition in Filipino churches, offering

children not only a fun-filled summer activity but also a meaningful encounter with the Gospel. Rooted in the global tradition of Vacation Bible School, DVBS found its way to the Philippines through efforts of missionaries who came in the 40's and 50's and soon became a vital outreach for local congregations. Over time, it developed its own rhythm and flavor—uniquely Filipino, deeply relational, and community-driven.

What makes DVBS so special is its heart: a desire to plant seeds of faith in young hearts. For one or two

weeks each summer, churches, tents or even a mango tree transform into joyful learning spaces where children sing, dance, listen to Bible stories, make crafts, and build friendships. Each day begins with a lively opening session filled with music and prayer, followed by age-level classes where children explore the Bible in creative and engaging ways. After a time of learning, they move into games, crafts, snacks, and plenty of laughter—each element reinforcing the message of God's love.

But DVBS isn't just for the children. It's also a time of growth for the

whole church. Teenagers take on leadership roles, parents and elders lend their time and resources, and communities rally around the event with enthusiasm. Many young people discover their calling to serve or teach for the first time through DVBS. It becomes a proving ground for future leaders and a unifying project that strengthens the church body.

In many barangays, especially in rural or underserved areas, DVBS may be the only form of structured biblical teaching that children receive all year. For some, it's the first time they hear the message that Jesus loves them. In this way, DVBS becomes not just a program—but a mission.

Though challenges like limited funding or unpredictable weather are real, churches continue to rise to the occasion. With creativity and faith, they decorate classrooms with hand-painted murals, craft teaching tools from recycled materials, and invite children with open hearts and warm smiles. The joy on graduation day—when children perform songs and memory verses before proud parents—is a testimony to the power of simple, faithful ministry.

Year after year, DVBS is a reminder that the Gospel is not only for scholars or adults—it's for children, too. And often, the most lasting faith is formed when we're young. That's why this ministry matters. It's more than a summer tradition—it's a spiritual investment in the next generation.

As the apostle Paul once wrote to Timothy, "From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are

able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). That is the vision DVBS carries forward each year in churches throughout the Philippines.

Let's continue to pray for, support, and celebrate this ministry that brings joy, light, hope, and lasting truth to so many young lives each and every day.

Vacation? What's that? Never heard of it!

April and May might be vacation time for students at NIA, SIA, and CICA, but that doesn't mean everything comes to a stop on campuses. There's still plenty happening—teacher appreciation dinners, end-of-year reports, deep cleaning, minor repairs, fresh coats of paint, and farewells to staff members who are leaving for another field of teaching. In short, the doors stay open and the work goes on.

These quieter months give the staff a chance to reset, regroup, and prepare for another year of learning. It's a behind-the-scenes season that helps keep everything running smoothly for when the students return.



During the summer, the staff at CICA transformed a barren space in the center of the U-shaped main building into a peaceful garden where students can unwind between classes.

Before the new main building was constructed, the area where the garden now sits served as a volleyball court, makeshift soccer field or a general space where students could hang out and have fun.



A Fresh Start

New School Year Begins at the PMCC Academies

A new school year is underway at the three academies of the Philippine Mission Churches of Christ—Southern Isabela Academy (SIA), Central Isabela Christian Academy (CICA), and Northern Isabela Academy (NIA)—and it has brought with it a renewed sense of excitement, anticipation, and hope. The joyful noise of returning students once again fills the classrooms, hallways, and campuses, as children and teenagers settle into a new year of learning, discovery, and growth. Whether nervously walking into kindergarten for the very first time or stepping into their final year of high school, students arrived with fresh notebooks, sharpened pencils, and expectant hearts.

This year's opening was marked by a particularly encouraging development: enrollment is up across

all three academies. SIA began the year with 718 students, CICA with 679, and NIA with 381. These numbers represent more than institutional success—they reflect hundreds of families choosing these academies for their unique blend of academic excellence and Christian character-building. In communities where educational opportunities can vary in quality, the PMCC academies continue to be trusted as places where children are not only educated but nurtured and prepared.



The growth in enrollment also brought the need for new teaching staff, and each school responded with enthusiastic appointments. SIA welcomed eight new teachers, CICA added two, and NIA brought in two new faculty members. Notably, many of these teachers are alumni of the schools where they now serve—returning not just as professionals, but as people with deep roots and personal stories shaped within these very walls. Their presence is a powerful testimony to the lasting impact of a Christ-centered education and a reminder of the generational vision these schools pursue.

The new teachers bring fresh energy, ideas, and passion to the classroom, joining a veteran staff committed to academic rigor and spiritual formation. In faculty



CICA students listening to their principal talk about “Making this school year a productive year for you”

Where Talents Grow: The Role of School Clubs

School clubs are an important part of student life in the Philippines. They offer students a chance to explore their interests, develop new skills, and participate in activities beyond the classroom. At the PMCC academies, students can choose from a variety of clubs such as the Glee Club, Drama Club, Dance Troupe, Sports Club, Computer Club, Christian Youth Fellowship, Rescue Team, Communication & Arts Club, and Mathematics Club.

These clubs allow students to express their creativity, build friendships, and gain hands-on experience in areas they enjoy. Whether performing on stage, working on a group project, training for competitions, or serving their peers, students learn the value of commitment, cooperation, and using their talents for something greater than themselves.

In Christian schools like the PMCC academies, clubs also help students grow in character and faith. Groups like the Christian Youth Fellowship and Rescue Team focus on leadership, service, and spiritual growth, while others encourage excellence in academics, the arts, and athletics.

Through their involvement in clubs, students become more engaged in school life and gain experiences that help shape their identity, confidence, and sense of purpose. It's one more way the academies support students in becoming responsible, Christ-centered young people ready to impact their communities.



orientation sessions and classroom preparations, there has been a palpable sense of unity and shared calling. These educators understand that their work is more than just a job—it is a ministry. They are shaping future leaders, community builders, and faithful disciples of Christ.

Whether instructing in math, literature, science, or music, the goal remains the same: to lead students toward wisdom, excellence, and godly living.

At the heart of the PMCC academies is the belief that education should nurture the whole person—

mind, heart, and soul. Academic lessons are delivered with high expectations and careful planning, but the broader learning environment also encourages students to grow in character, integrity, and compassion. Each school seeks to create a space where values like honesty, service, humility, and perseverance are not only taught but modeled in daily life. Teachers, administrators, and even upperclassmen are encouraged to live out the love of Christ through their relationships and responsibilities.

As the year progresses, there will be more than just lessons and exams. Students will participate in school-wide activities, explore creative projects, join in sports and service initiatives, and deepen friendships that often last a lifetime. Many will encounter moments—big or small—that shape their identity and ignite new dreams. In each of these moments, the prayer of the PMCC academies is that Christ would be at the center, guiding students not just in their learning but in their lives.

There is tremendous joy in seeing the school year begin so strongly, thanks to the dedication of teachers, parents, donors, and prayer partners who make this ministry possible. The fruit of this ministry is not always immediate, but it is lasting. As these students grow in knowledge and in faith, they become lights in their families, churches, and communities. With God's help, this school year will be one of deep growth, renewed calling, meaningful connection, and lasting transformation for every student who walks through the academies' gates.

Jet Lag for Jesus:

The Blessing of Being There

A recent visit to the Philippines in June highlighted the continued growth and impact of the ministries supported by the Philippine Mission Churches of Christ (PMCC). The trip was led by B. James McElroy, Executive Director of PMCC, who was joined by Steve Rowland, minister at Rising Sun Church of Christ, along with his wife Mandi and their son Joe. Their presence brought encouragement as they fully engaged with the people, culture, and ministry work.

A key moment during the trip was a one-day leadership workshop held at the Lucban Church of Christ, part of the Shoreline and Islands Mission (SLIM). This first-time joint effort between PMCC and SLIM drew 104 attendees from various church plants, including elders, deacons, deaconesses, and ministry leaders. Impressively, nearly half of those present were young adults in their 20s. Steve Rowland served as keynote speaker for both morning

and afternoon sessions, followed by breakout groups led by SLIM evangelists. With strong participation and a full day of teaching, the success of the event has sparked plans for a follow-up gathering.

The Rowlands' visit also deepened Rising Sun's ongoing partnership with PMCC. Rising Sun has supported PMCC for five years, thanks to the efforts of longtime minister Dave Bouchard. Encouraged and inspired by the trip, the Rowland family expressed a desire to engage more deeply in the mission's future.

Visits to the PMCC-supported schools—SIA, CICA, and NIA—were another highlight. Each school hosted special convocations, showcasing student and staff talents and welcoming messages from the team. These moments reinforced the mission's strong commitment to Christian education.

The team also visited the Charles W. Selby Memorial Hospital (CWSMH), where they were warmly received and updated on projects and



Joe Rowland and B. James McElroy

staff morale. In light of a recent tragedy involving a team member, a voluntary staff gathering was held to process grief and offer support. The emotional time allowed staff to express feelings and begin healing together. The following day, the group visited the home of the staff member's family, offering comfort and demonstrating solidarity.

The trip was filled with meaningful engagement, strengthened partnerships, and renewed vision. Under the leadership of B. James McElroy, PMCC continues to support and empower Filipino-led ministries through integrity, compassion, and deep collaboration.



A breakout group being led by several of the evangelists from SLIM

Rescuing the Next Generation

Church Planting Among Former Rebels in Northwest Luzon

*By Mark Maribbay, Hospital Chaplain
Charles W. Selby Memorial Hospital*



What began as a simple coffee fellowship in 2023 among our Haggai leaders turned into a calling. We shared one burden: to reach remote, poverty-stricken communities in Northern Luzon, especially among the indigenous people.

Prompted by the head of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), we focused on Calayucay, Marag—a mountainous area in Apayao Province, once known as a stronghold of the New People's Army (NPA), a Maoist group formed in March 1969 with the aim of overthrowing the government

through protracted guerrilla warfare. Few dared to go because of the difficult terrain, but we stepped out in faith.

We carried with us basic medicines, hygiene kits, school supplies, and Bibles to every student we met. What we thought would be a small act of kindness stirred something deeper—a hunger for hope in them, and a stronger burden in us to keep going and bring Jesus where He's least known.

Calayucay is located deep in Apayao, a mountainous region in Northern Luzon that is home to the Agta and Isneg—indigenous communities who live simply amid

untouched forests and rivers. While life in the area is peaceful, it is also marked by significant challenges, including poverty, limited access to healthcare, and spiritual isolation.

Despite its history as a former rebel base, Calayucay is slowly becoming a place of peace, revival, and hope—one step, one visit, one prayer at a time.

With God's grace and guidance, we were able to carry out several meaningful efforts that brought both spiritual and practical help to the community:

• DVBS and Crusade

Children and youth were gathered for fun, interactive, and

The **New People's Army (NPA)** was established on **March 29, 1969**, as the armed wing of the **Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)**. Inspired by Maoist ideology, it aimed to wage a protracted people's war to overthrow the Philippine government. Starting with a small group of fighters in Central Luzon, the NPA gained support from rural communities frustrated by poverty, land inequality, and authoritarian rule under Ferdinand Marcos.

By the 1980s, the NPA had grown significantly, reaching an estimated **20,000 combatants**. However, internal conflicts, strategic errors, and government counterinsurgency programs led to its decline. Today, while still active in some rural areas, the NPA's influence has diminished, and it remains classified as a terrorist organization by the Philippine government and several international bodies.

gospel-centered activities. Praise and worship echoed through the mountains as many young hearts encountered Jesus.

- **Bible Studies and Discipleship**

Bible study groups were launched among students and parents. Local believers were encouraged to grow in faith, with some being trained to lead future gatherings.

- **Community Service**

We offered basic healthcare support and distributed food, clothing, and essential supplies. Families also received prayer and counseling as part of our outreach.

God moved mightily. Five individuals were publicly baptized, boldly declaring their faith in Christ. Many more expressed a desire to follow Jesus and have continued to join our activities each time we return. A church building is now in progress of being built to give believers in Calayucay a permanent place of worship, and regular Sunday services are being planned in partnership with a local pastor from Apayao.

The journey to Calayucay was not without challenges. Reaching the area required boat rides and travel across difficult terrain. Unpredictable weather often caused delays and interruptions. Yet through every obstacle, God made a way. The team remained joyful and determined, trusting Him every step of the way.

As a chaplain, this mission deeply opened my heart to life beyond the rush and noise of the city. Surrounded by nature and the gentle spirit of the people, I experienced



Volunteers from the Charles W. Selby Memorial Hospital ready to take their 45 minute boat ride.

how God speaks through quiet places and simple moments. One moment I'll never forget was watching the children sing and praise God with pure, joyful hearts. In that moment, I was reminded of Jesus' words: "Let the little children come to me..." (Matthew 19:14).

This mission is far from over—it's just beginning. With construction of the church building underway, Sunday services will soon begin, and more follow-up trips have already been

planned to support discipleship and local leadership development. We continue to pray for more workers, supplies, and partners to join us as we walk alongside this growing church.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who has supported this mission through prayers, resources, encouragement, and partnership. Your faith and generosity are helping bring lasting hope to a once-forgotten corner of Northern Luzon.



Volunteer staff from from the hospital checking the health of the children from the community.

Faithful to the End

The Unshakable Journey of Dr. Barton & Betty McElroy

by Jeff Garrison, Director of Church and Donor Relations

My grandpa Joe was the oldest of nine children—six boys and three girls—born to Barny and Grace McElroy. Their home in Missouri Valley, Iowa, was largely absent of spiritual influence. But everything changed when Joe encountered a Church of Christ minister who led him to Christ.

After high school, Joe told his parents he planned to attend Cincinnati Bible Seminary (CBS) and become a preacher. His father, Barny, reacted sharply: “No son of mine is ever gonna be a preacher!”

When Barton Leroy “Red”, the next oldest son, finished high school, Joe urged him to follow the same path. In a burst of frustration, Barny snapped, “If you also become a preacher, don’t ever come home!” But it was at CBS that Barton came to faith and also found his calling to ministry and in time, four of the six McElroy sons would go on to fill pulpits. Eventually, Barny came to accept—and make peace with—that reality.

Thelma Elizabeth “Betty” was the second of three children born to Eva and Louis Billman of Toledo, Ohio. After her father abandoned the family, she was raised by her mother and grandparents, who instilled in her a deep and enduring Christian faith.

A gifted student, Betty graduated from high school at just sixteen. She

boarded a train in Toledo and set off for Cincinnati Bible Seminary (CBS), where she met Barton McElroy. They were married in 1939, and their first child, Barbara, was born the following year while they were living in Cincinnati, where Barton was preaching at the church in Pebbles, Ohio. In 1942, their second daughter, Jeannie, was born as the family prepared

to move to Paden City, West Virginia. Not long after, Barton entered military service as a chaplain—first with the Army and later with the Air Force—serving overseas during World War II in North Africa and primarily in the Azores.

After the war, the McElroys returned to the Cincinnati area, where Barton began preaching at White Oak Church of Christ. Early in 1951, Barton received a letter from



the venerable Carrie Wolfe of the Philippine Mission Churches of Christ, seeking workers to join her in Manila. When asked if she’d like to become a missionary to the Philippines, Betty replied “yes” and showed him a scrapbook she had been keeping for years—filled with clippings and notes about the Philippines. Within the year they had raised support and were on their way by boat, with their three children in



Betty's yearbook photo from CBS.

tow: Barbara (11), Jeannie (9) and little Jimmy (2 1/2).

For nearly two decades, the McElroys poured their hearts into the work in the Philippines. Barton served as mission treasurer, professor at Manila Bible Seminary, and director of church planting, helping to establish an average of 20 churches per year during his tenure. He also earned a Ph.D. from the University of the Philippines in 1964, one of the few Westerners to do so at the time. He saw education not as status, but as stewardship. At the same time he was still active in the Air Force reserve, ministering as a chaplain to the military personnel stationed in or near Manila. By the time he retired in 1968, he had risen to the rank of Colonel. But he would be the first to say that the stars on his shoulders meant little compared to the cross he carried in his heart.

Betty focused on raising their children and hospitality for other missionaries traveling to Manila. Later, she taught full-time at the seminary,



Barton's yearbook photo from CBS

offering courses in English, Christian Womanhood, Christian Education, organ, and accordion. She initiated ministry outreach opportunities, including the creation of the DVBS programs. She was also instrumental in organizing and expanding the

library at the seminary.

Together they were instrumental in starting the Tayabas Street Church of Christ, where she taught and played the organ. She was also heavily involved with the Dorcas Women's Ministries at Cruzada Street Church of Christ.

In 1970, due to health issues, Barton and Betty returned to the United States.

Back in the U.S., Barton continued shaping future missionaries and ministers. He taught at Ozark Christian College and later became Academic Dean at Manhattan Christian College. Those who sat under his instruction recall not only the depth of his teaching, but the warmth of his mentorship. He challenged students to think globally, live sacrificially, and serve humbly.

In 1979, Barton co-founded Pioneer Bible Translators, becoming its first



Captain McElroy posing in his uniform in the "Chaplain" jeep.

president. At the time, few could have imagined how far-reaching the impact would be. Today, thanks to that vision, unreached people groups across the world have access to God's Word in their own language—a gift with eternal consequences.

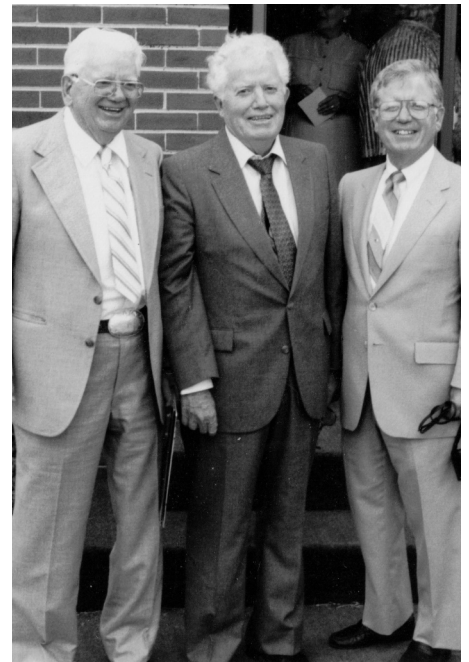
But for all his global accomplishments, Barton never lost touch with the local church. Whether at White Oak Christian Church, where he served in the 1940s and helped launch the New Burlington Church of Christ, or at Sun City Christian Church in his later years, Barton remained grounded in the rhythm of preaching, teaching, visiting, and caring. He believed the Gospel wasn't just for classrooms and conferences—it was for living rooms,

hospital beds, and Sunday morning gatherings.

On January 28, 1991, Barton LeRoy McElroy finished his earthly race. He passed peacefully in Dayton, Ohio, and was laid to rest at Dayton National Cemetery. His headstone—Plot 25 0 631—bears silent witness to a life lived with honor, sacrifice, and unshakable faith.

But Barton's legacy cannot be measured by dates or degrees. It lives in the preachers he trained, the churches he planted, the Scriptures he helped translate, and the lives he quietly transformed. It lives on in the Philippines, in soldiers' memories, and in his children and grandchildren.

Following Barton's passing, Betty's health began to decline. Then, in 1997,



Three of the four preachers: Joe, Barton and Gene
sorrow struck again when her eldest daughter, Barbara, lost her battle with cancer and joined her father in heaven.

In the years that followed, Betty first moved in with her daughter Jeannie, often traveling with her as she spoke at churches. Later, she settled with her youngest daughter, Joni Ellen, where she officially retired and began working on a book. Sadly, she was unable to complete it before her passing in 2009.

Barton and Betty's life should remind us that true greatness isn't measured by titles or recognition—but by obedience. By showing up, day after day, year after year, to love God and serve others. Their quiet, steadfast faithfulness left a lasting mark on the world—not by seeking attention, but by giving it freely. Not by clinging to power, but by surrendering wholly to Christ.

May their legacy move us to follow where God calls, to serve boldly, and to finish our race with faith and integrity.

Where He Led, We All Followed

Barton and Betty McElroy raised more than a missionary family—they raised missionaries. Their children—Barbara, Jeannie, Jimmy, and Joni Ellen—grew up in a home where faith and service were daily life.

As adults, Barbara, Jeannie, and Jimmy each committed themselves to full-time ministry. Even Joni Ellen found ways to support the family's calling. Together, they carried on a legacy of shared mission.



Jeannie, Betty, Joni Ellen, Barton, Jimmy and Barbara

When the Dollar Drops:

How Currency Fluctuations Can Affect Global Missions



In recent years, fluctuations in the strength of the U.S. dollar have become more than just economic headlines—they've become real challenges for missionaries and ministries around the world. For those serving in other countries, a weaker dollar can create financial strain, limit ministry impact, and force difficult decisions that directly affect the work of the gospel.

Most missionaries raise support in U.S. dollars but live and minister in countries with entirely different currencies. These funds are converted to pesos, shillings, rupees, euros, or other local currencies. When the dollar depreciates—losing value compared to these currencies—each donated dollar simply doesn't go as far. Rent increases. Food prices rise. Transportation, ministry supplies, and utilities all become more expensive, while the income remains fixed. A carefully planned monthly budget can be thrown off course overnight.

For example, if the dollar drops 10% in value, that could mean a 10% pay cut in real purchasing power for a missionary family in the field. Imagine if your household income dropped that much unexpectedly. For missionaries,

the impact is not just personal—it can mean fewer outreach events, postponed building projects, reduced Bible distribution, or less time spent with the people they're called to serve. It can also mean scaling back essential community programs like feeding centers, mobile clinics, or local discipleship efforts that depend on consistent support.

The effect also reaches national partners—local pastors, teachers, evangelists, and ministry workers—who often rely on support passed through missionary organizations. A weaker dollar affects their livelihoods, too, sometimes forcing a pause in training programs, church planting, or even basic education and health outreach. When these programs falter, the long-term growth of the church in that region may suffer. What could have been an opportunity for transformation is postponed—or lost entirely—because of an unfavorable currency exchange.

In some regions, inflation in local economies further compounds the issue. When both the local cost of living rises and the dollar weakens, missionaries and local ministries are hit from both sides. They may begin

relying on personal savings to keep ministry afloat—an unsustainable path that can eventually lead to burnout or departure from the field altogether.

It's easy to overlook these challenges from afar. Giving to missions can feel distant—out of sight, out of mind. But now is a crucial time for churches and individuals to stand in the gap. Whether you support a missionary in Southeast Asia, a Bible school in Africa, or a medical outreach in Latin America, your faithful and generous support has a powerful ripple effect. And in seasons of economic uncertainty, your increased giving can make all the difference.

When the dollar drops, our resolve must rise. We encourage you to pray for the missionaries and ministries you support. Reach out to them and ask how the current economic climate is affecting their work. Let them know they're not forgotten. And if God has blessed you with the means, consider increasing your support—whether through a one-time gift or a raised monthly commitment. Every dollar counts. Every prayer matters. And every act of generosity helps sustain the mission of God across the globe.

From the Islands, For the Islands:

Empowering, Encouraging and Supporting the Indigenous Voices for Christ



When it comes to missions, we all want to use God's resources wisely. We want every dollar, prayer, and effort to make the biggest impact for the Gospel. That's why, in places like the Philippines, it often makes more sense to support local, Filipino evangelists rather than sending a missionary family from the U.S.

It's not that American missionaries don't care or can't be helpful. Through the years many have made huge sacrifices to share Jesus across cultures. But the truth is—sending a family overseas today is expensive. Between travel, housing, health care, school for the kids, and day-to-day living, the cost adds up fast. That same money could support multiple local evangelists who are already living in the culture, speak the language fluently, and understand how to share Christ in a way that connects with people.

Local believers also don't need years to adjust. They already know the customs, the struggles, and the heart language of their neighbors. That means they can get right to the work—starting churches, sharing the Gospel, and discipling new believers without the cultural learning curve.

And here's something else—when we support local leaders, we're building up the Church in the Philippines, not just bringing outside help. We're saying, "We believe that God has called and equipped you to reach your own people and we believe in YOU." That kind of trust goes a long way.

So while there's still a place for sending missionaries, especially to places where the Gospel hasn't yet been heard, in places like the Philippines—where God is already moving through faithful local leaders—supporting indigenous evangelists is often the better, wiser, and more effective choice.

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