



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

**THE WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK (WIHW) CONFLUENCE OF INITIATIVES 2013**  
**DAVAO, PHILIPPINES**

“Religion is the heart of the culture;”<sup>1</sup> according to a professor of the Phenomenology of Religion course. Yes religion is very much part of our cultures and traditions, and it influences the way we relate dialogically to nature, others, self and God. Fascinatingly, the humanity has produced varieties of ways to live life humanly. Perhaps this might be one of the reasons why we have many different religions, without ignoring the other factors which led to the proliferations of many other faith-groups. Experience would tell us that Religions generally provide a space for people to ask and answer some of the questions in life that deals with mystery, the realities beyond our human capacities to understand. Religions help people to search for meaning to unanswered questions and ambiguities of life.

Unfortunately, as experience during the past centuries until at present, religion has become part of the problem instead of being a catalyst for finding solutions.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the tensions, conflicts and violence around the world some have been attributed to religious conflicts. There are some truths about this reality but it isn't the whole story. Religions have abundant gifts necessary to provide harmony and peace; perhaps, the people have failed to allow the gifts to become sources for unity and harmony in the midst of diversity. There have been lots of efforts for unity and harmony among religious groups and other groups that do not have any religious affiliations, but often they haven't been the highlights of the news, both locally and internationally. Does this discourage you and me, the world to continue working for harmony?

*Alhamdulillah*, H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan, was given the *baraqa* (blessings) of *Allah* to initiate and propose the celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week. During the United Nations' General Assembly in October 2010, H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed Personal Envoy and Special Advisor to H.M. King Abdullah II, presented the proposal which eventually accepted by the body. The UN on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2010, declared the first week of February of every year as the celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week. The word harmony (Confucian concept) at least in our time can capture and express the kind of “beautiful and dynamic interaction between different elements within a whole”<sup>3</sup> This initiative was also inspired by the letter of the 138 Muslim scholars entitled, “A Common Word between Us and You is love of God and love of neighbour.” This letter was sent to Pope Benedict XVI and to all other religious leaders around the globe. This was probably the highest level of initiative done by our Muslim scholars. Gradually, this life giving initiative has inspired many people of different religions, other faith-traditions, cultures and ideologies. The Silsilah Forum Davao with an active partnership and collaboration with the Harmony Links of Davao responded to the call to promote and celebrate the World Interfaith Harmony Week.

The Silsilah Forum Davao celebrated the first WIHW in 2012. In close collaboration with the Ateneo de Davao University, Theology Division and Al-Qalam Institute, we organized the launching of the WIHW and

<sup>1</sup> Edgar G. Javier, “Phenomenology of Religions” (Lectures, Divine Institute of Mission Studies, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed Personal Envoy of and Special Advisor to H.M. King Abdullah “Proposal for the celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week” presented during the United Nations' general assembly (October 20, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

a symposium on Interfaith Harmony. An Interfaith Harmony gathering was also organized successfully at the Davao City Jail.

This year the WIHW was celebrated in Davao with much wider participation. The Silsilah Forum Davao was able to inspire religious communities, government and non-government peace and cause-oriented organizations and groups to promote and participate in the celebration of the WIHW. To facilitate the ongoing preparation of the said celebration, the working team decided to call the participating groups as "Interfaith Harmony Links 2013". These are composed of the following organizations: Arabic Language and Islamic Values of the Department of Education, Archdiocesan Center for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue, Ateneo de Davao University, Ata Paquibato Kalayag Organization, Bishops-Ulama Conference, Brahma Kumaris, City Government of Davao, Davao Association of Catholic Schools, Dominican Fathers Davao, Eastern Mindanao Command, 10th Infantry (Agila) Division of the Philippine Army, Franciscan Friars of Third Order Regular, Literacy & Development Program for Indigenous People, Mindanao Pranik Healing Center, Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference-Youth Secretariate, Mindanaw Tripartite Youth Core, Naval Forces Eastern Mindanao, Philippine National Police Regional Chaplain 11, University of Mindanao and Silsilah Forum Davao. The first meeting of the Harmony Links was on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2012 and it was followed by series of meetings in January 2013. The Silsilah Forum Davao working team was given the task to act as secretariat; it wasn't an easy task to coordinate with the different groups in the Harmony Links because each one has its own style of doing things and other concerns. The task to be the over-all coordinator of the celebration demands lots of patience and harmonious attitude towards others and us. Certainly, *Allah* has been working harmoniously within us because despite the difficulties in organizing ourselves, the Harmony Links was able to finalize programs for the first week of February 2013.

On January 21, 2013 during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the Silsilah Forum Davao (SFD) Centre, the official announcement of the celebration of the WIHW happened. The whole day Anniversary celebration of the SFD centre became a venue to promote the celebration of the WIHW. There were about thirty Alumni and friends of Silsilah who were present. The celebration started with a mass followed by the harmony lunch. The afternoon activity started with *Salah' wal Asr*, the mid-afternoon prayer for our Muslim brothers and sisters. The Christians and Muslims were present during the Liturgy and the Muslim prayer. Short programs followed after the *Salah' wal Asr*, where we divided the group and shared about the call to promote interfaith harmony.

On January 28, 2013, a press conference on the WIHW was held at the Kapehan sa SM, Ecoland. Ms. Nor Asiah Adilao, the SFD Muslim coordinator, Sr. Cris Lagunsad, CB, the assistant Christian coordinator and Ms. Vivien Nobles were interviewed by the media people. It was an opportunity to promote the celebration. On the first day of the celebration of the WIHW, the SFD organized "The Student Leaders' Confluence for Harmony" (SLCH) with the collaboration of the Davao Association of Catholic Schools (DACS) and San Pedro College. The SLCH was a venue for the student leaders from the different universities and colleges of Davao to share their concerns and thoughts about "Interfaith Harmony." Muslims, Christians and Indigenous student leaders actively participated in the sharing and discussions. After the group sharing, the students themselves (representative from each group) formed the panel of reactors. There was a meaningful sharing of insights and ideas. Some students shared their personal experience of living and relating with other students from different faith traditions. They shared passionately about their experience of discrimination among the students. They also shared about the harmony that has been experienced in their day to day life in the school and dormitories. They have developed in their youthful ways how to live in harmony with others. They realized there are lots of things to be done in interfaith harmony. During the SLCH the song composed by Fr. Hermes Larry Sabud, SM

(Marist Fathers), and the SFD Christian coordinator, entitled “The Signs of the Horizon” was performed to help the students to reflect and deepen their understanding of the WIHW. The song expressed that

“The realities of different cultures, experiences, religions, traditions and ideologies cannot anymore be ignored but acknowledge and appreciated. All are interconnected, there is harmony and peace. These are the signs of the horizon, a place and space for everyone. Regardless of who you are, you are welcome. We are one. Come!”

The student leaders who attended the confluence for harmony were about seventy of them. It was ended with a strong commitment of the students to be agents of dialogue, harmony and peace. In the afternoon of the first day of the WIHW, the Ateneo de Davao University, Theology Division and Al-Qalam, organized a simple interfaith prayer and harmony meal. The event was attended by the participants from different religious traditions such as: the Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Indigenous. On February 4, the Brahma Kumaris organized a gathering on “Future of Power.” The invited leaders from different organizations and religious groups shared their experience of power in their respective area of responsibilities. The focus of this event is to explore the “future of power” and how power be shaped in the light and spirit of interfaith harmony. On February 5, Ms. Nor Asiah Adilao got the permission from the GMA Network to promote the WIHW. It was an opportunity for Ms. Nor Asiah and Sr. Cris to be interviewed live on GMA TV News Program. What an experience! The SFD Davao was grateful for the opportunity to appear live on TV. There was no doubt we have promoted the WIHW. On the same day the Mindanao Pranic Healing Center initiated a “Prayer for Harmony” at the Medical Arts Bldg, San Pedro Hospital. Both the “Interfaith Prayer and the Prayer for Harmony” are opportunities to get in touch with the source of harmony. The following day February 6, the SALAM, a Muslim student organization of the Ateneo de Davao University organized a Peace and Harmony Forum. During the week celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony the Davao Association of Catholic Schools sponsored the “Song and Poetry Composition”. Few students from the different schools of Davao submitted their entries. The Al-Qalam Institute initiated a “Photo Exhibit” at the People’s Park on February 7 – 11. This is an opportunity to the Muslims, Christians and Indigenous peoples to look back and to get in touch with our history and value our common heritage particularly during the American period in 1890s to 1920s.

Finally, the week-long activity of the WIHW culminated on February 7 with the “Signing of Covenant Ceremony” at the People’s Park of Davao City. The main organizer of this event was the Silsilah Forum Davao. There were about two hundred people participated during the culmination. It was a very prayerful, meaningful, colourful and moving experience to be with people of different colours, religions, cultures, traditions, etc. During the signing of the covenant the representatives from different religious traditions: Indigenous People, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Islam and Hindu gave an invocation prayer. The event highlighted the reading of the Covenant Statement that was presented in different local and foreign languages. It was followed by the signing of the Covenant of the different leaders, representatives of institutions and offices. Copies of the Covenant were also given to everyone and invited to sign them. The participants were amused by the lovely and environmental songs and beautiful cultural dances. The literary compositions and paintings of the selected students were acknowledged and performed.

Indeed, the harmony that we are trying to envision is already happening. Yes, there are many people who would want to live in harmony with creation, with others, with self and with God. We need to create the culture of harmony and we can learn from our environment, how nature lives in harmony together with other creatures. As Fr. Larry Sabud expressed in his song, “The Signs of the Horizon”:

Like the cosmos that houses the visible and non-visible beings  
Like the forest that welcomes varieties of trees, plants and animals  
Like the rivers and oceans that allow assorted species of fish to swim  
All are interconnected, there's harmony and peace.

Definitely, nature can teach us the ways to live in harmony. We have been conscious about it over the first week of February this year. In many ways we have been moved by the various initiatives in the celebration of the WIHW. **The challenge for us is how to continue and sustain our experience of harmony this year. We don't have to look for opportunities to live in harmony because harmony starts from ourselves, in fact from God. We can all do it in our own pace, but in the atmosphere of interconnectedness.**



**MS. NOR ASIAH MADALE ADILAO**  
*Muslim Coordinator, Silsilah Forum Davao*  
*Over-all Coordinator, WIHW 2013*  
Davao City, Philippines



**FR. HERMES LARRY B. SABUD, SM**  
*Christian Coordinator, Silsilah Forum Davao*  
Davao City, Philippines