

INTERFAITH FRIENDSHIP PILGRIMAGE 2014 With THE PEACEMAKERS' CIRCLE

We at The Peacemakers' Circle celebrated this year's World Interfaith Harmony Week in the spirit of thanksgiving for the gifts of friendship and the joys of oneness with friends in the interfaith movement. Together we shared hopes, dreams, and aspirations for peace and harmony in the world!

We launched the week's activities in North Cotabato, Mindanao where we conducted a 3-day training workshop on INTERFAITH DIALOGUE FOR MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING & COOPERATION. This was participated in by Muslims and Christians from the areas of armed conflict in the municipalities of Aleosan and Midsayap. They had earlier participated in a series of workshops on INTRA-FAITH Dialogue that inspired the creation of SALAM and SHALOM INTRA-FAITH DIALOGUE CIRCLES in their respective communities. From January 30-February 2, they met and interacted with each other for the first time in an interfaith dialogue circle. They created safe spaces for engaging moral imagination in learning how to deal with their fears, anger, hatred, and mistrust of each other and be able to engage in mutually respectful dialogue and cooperation.





In Metro Manila, The Peacemakers' Circle spearheaded and participated in various interfaith activities during the week, including activities organized by colleagues in the UNI-Harmony Partners Manila.

February 1 (Saturday)



The Peacemakers' Circle was represented by Shakuntala Vaswani in the celebrations at the **Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple** on the theme "*Love & Peace: Practicing our Faith.*" She offered a Hindu prayer and spoke at the Symposium where leaders of different religious organizations were likewise invited to share their reflections on the theme. She also talked about how The Peacemakers' Circle has been contributing to the endeavor of building a culture of peace and harmony in the world.





FEBRUARY 2 (Sunday)

The UNI harmony partners visited the Hindu Temple in Paco, Manila where Shakun Vaswani explained the rituals and symbolism in Hinduism to the interfaith group.

FEBRUARY 3 (Monday)

While I and Orlando de Guzman, Jr. were away conducting a workshop in North Cotabato (Mindanao), Shakun represented The Peacemakers' Circle at the Breakfast Forum with Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Archbishop of Manila at Villa San Miguel in Mandaluyong, Metro Manila. Cardinal Tagle gave a warm welcome to the interfaith groups and the diplomats who were present and spoke on the practice of "Love for Neighbor."



FEBRUARY 4 (Tuesday)

Upon my return from the conflict-affected communities in North Cotabato, Mindanao, I conducted a workshop on Muslim-Christian Relationship-Building for the Catholic high school students of Miriam College and the Muslim students of Rajah Mudah High School of Pikit, North Cotabato. This was upon the invitation of Dr. Loreta Castro of the Miriam Center for Peace Education (CPE).



FEBRUARY 5 (Wednesday)

On this day, we at The Peacemakers' Circle embarked on an INTERFAITH FRIENDSHIP PILGRIMAGE to different places of worship around Metro Manila. This was to renew bonds of friendship with members of the different faith groups and communities, and to introduce new people to their ways of worship.

A group of twenty-four curious and excited Muslim and Christian members of Silsilah Manila joined the pilgrimage. It was their first time to experience being in places of worship other than their own.



The first stop was the **Sheng Lian Cho Taoist Temple** in Quezon City where all were welcomed by **Rev Wong Seng Tian**, a known Chinese Astrologer and Feng Shui master. The children read with interest the astrological predictions for the year which were displayed on the walls of the Temple. Everyone was curious to know about the teachings of Taoism and about the central image of the Kuan Yin, Goddess of Mercy. They were happy to light incense sticks and eagerly offered their own quiet prayers in this strange but welcoming place of worship. Before we bade goodbye, Rev. Wong gifted everyone with packets of blessed chocolates.

The next stop was at the **Philippine Karma Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist Temple** where **Lama Damdul** welcomed our group. With Shakun acting as translator, the Lama answered the questions about the deities in the Temple and the masters of the Tibetan Buddhist faith tradition. The group offered their prayers and received blessed food from the Lama. After receiving the offering, the eager young adults went outside to the Stupa and walked round it in the traditional way.



The final stop was the Hindu Temple in Paco Manila. Shakuntala Vaswani welcomed our group and gave us an introduction to the tenets of Hinduism and introduced the various deities in the Temple. Many among us were curious to learn more about the concept of Karma and Dharma.

The friendship pilgrims of Silsilah Manila expressed appreciation and gratitude to The Peacemakers' Circle for the experience of meeting Buddhists, Taoists, and Hindus at their places of worship and to learn about their faith. The leaders of the temples were likewise pleased by their visit and looked forward to the next.

Later, at the Hindu temple, the crew from Solar TV Chanel interviewed Shakun on the contribution of The Peacemakers Circle to the endeavor of addressing conflict & violence in our society.



FEBRUARY 6 (Thursday)

The Focolare Movement organized an interfaith youth gathering in Tagaytay, but because it was a school day, the youth members of The Peacemakers' Circle were unable to attend. Nonetheless, they extended their best wishes to the Focolare group in support of their endeavors for interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding.

FEBRUARY 7 (Friday)

Our INTERFAITH FRIENDSHIP PILGRIMAGE continued. The first stop was the **Golden Mosque in Quiapo, Manila**. Going there, our group had to take a walk along the busy streets of Globo de Oro where we were greeted everywhere by friends from the Manila Muslim-Christian Peacemakers' Association who were at their *sari-sari* stalls (or makeshift convenience stores) by the roadside striving to earn a living for their families.





At the Golden Mosque our pilgrim group was received warmly by the assistant administrator of the mosque and his officers, and they expressed their interest in supporting The Peacemakers' Circle's project on INTRA-FAITH DIALOGUE FOR MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING in Mindanao. Our enthusiastic group of interfaith friendship pilgrims was later graciously escorted to the mosque to offer prayers.



It was Friday, the busiest day in Quiapo. Right across the street was the Basilica of the Black Nazarene, and it was crowded with devout Catholics attending Mass. The streets were teeming with church goers and vendors selling their wares. The friendship pilgrims waded through the human traffic in the heat of the noonday sun to the Silsilah office where a Poster Painting Competition for the youth was going on. It was interesting to witness young adults of different faiths creatively expressing their hopes, dreams and aspirations for peace and harmony!



Our final stop was the Baha'i center where we were warmly welcomed by Ador Newman and her vibrant group of Baha'is. Talk was interesting and we learned about how the Baha'is helped to address the need for values formation and spiritual strengthening among people in the grassroots regardless of their religion or faith tradition. We were enthused by their willingness to conduct study groups for the Muslim and Christian youths in the grassroots community of Tala in Calocan City. We have been serving the community for a decade and we feel that they are ready for another group to accompany them as well.

Delicious vegetarian lunch was served us by our Baha'I friends. This was a heartwarming way to end the WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK!

Later, we returned to the familiar surroundings of our homes with hearts filled with hope for the enriching journey ahead of us! We look forward to its unfolding with gladness and anticipation!



MAY PEACE & HARMONY PREVAIL in our minds and hearts, and in our ways of being in relationship with one another in the world!!

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