



2016 WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK CELEBRATION

1-7 February 2016

UniHarmony Partners Manila

*Theme: Love, Mercy and Compassion as Well-
springs of Peace and Hope*



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I. INTRODUCTION

UniHarmony Partners Manila established in 2011 brings together under one umbrella a network of faith based organizations which aims, through a series of activities, to spread the message of interfaith harmony, dialogue and cooperation as key elements towards nation building.

This year, 2016, UniHarmony Partners Manila celebrated the World Interfaith Harmony Week with a daily dose of activities every day for the whole week from February 1-7. In cooperation with partners from government and non-government organizations, and the media, a series of activities brought about the spirit of harmony and peace to people in the community and society.

Rationale:

The UN General Assembly proclaimed World Interfaith Harmony Week as an annual event to be observed during the first week of February starting 2011 in resolution [A/RES/65/5](#) adopted on 20 October 2010. In the resolution, the General Assembly, points out that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace and establishes World Interfaith Harmony Week as a way to promote harmony between all people regardless of their faith.

Responding to this global call for harmony and solidarity, the **UniHarmony Partners Manila** was established in 2011 to implement programs and activities during the World Interfaith Harmony Week. The main goal of the celebration is to strengthen unity and cooperation between and among religions and faith-based organizations, and to advocate peace and harmony in society.

In April 2013, Republic Act 10525 was enacted declaring the First Week of February of every year as “World Interfaith Harmony Week” in the Philippines. Section 1 states that “All government agencies and instrumentalities, including government-owned and -controlled corporations as well as local government units, are hereby mandated to carry out the observance of activities designed to advance the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in accordance with religious traditions and practices.”

Objectives:

To organize activities in solidarity with the global celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week;
To foster friendship and advance common action between and among the interfaith communities;
To promote awareness of the challenges and aspirations of the World Interfaith Harmony Week; and,
To witness to love, mercy and compassion as wellsprings of harmony and mechanisms of dialogue.

Member Organizations:

1. Episcopal Commission on Inter-religious Dialogue, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)
2. Ministry of Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs, Archdiocese of Manila
3. University of Santo Tomas-Institute of Religion
4. Religions for Peace Philippines
5. University of the Philippines-Institute of Islamic Studies
6. Silsilah Dialogue Movement
7. Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO)
8. SM Group of Companies
9. Imam Council of the Philippines
10. Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches
11. Miriam College-Center for Peace Education
12. Peacemakers' Circle
13. Focolare Movement
14. United Religions Initiative Philippines (URI)
15. Pacific Dialogue Foundation
16. Interfaith Council of Leaders-Quiapo

17. PNP Chaplain Services
18. Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple
19. Aksiyon para sa Kapayapaan at Katarungan-
20. Center for Active Nonviolence for Phil., Inc. AKKAPKA-CANV
21. Teodora: In Defense of the Authentic Woman
22. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints-Philippines Public Affairs Department



Members of UniHarmony Partners Manila met regularly to plan, provide direction and consolidate efforts of members in preparation for the 2016 World Interfaith Harmony Week. This particular meeting sponsored by Imam Ebra Moxsir (standing), President of the Imam Council of the Philippines, and the Philippine National Police (PNP) Chaplain Service, was attended by officers of the Presidential Communications Operations Office. Father Carlos Reyes, Executive Secretary of the Episcopal Commission on Interreligious Dialogue of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) regularly presides at the meetings.



Father Carlos Reyes interviewed on TV by the media on the objectives of the World Interfaith Harmony Week and its weeklong activities.



II. Digest Summary

2016 World Interfaith Harmony Week

1-7 February 2016

Metro Manila, Philippines

Video: Day1-7 Recap: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teamVMfAoKw>

TV Feature: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RykT3YtEC4>

DAY 1



Breakfast Dialogue Meeting with Cardinal Tagle

Archdiocese of Manila

7:00-9:00 am, Day 1, Arzobispado de Manila, Intramuros

The breakfast dialogue gathering of religious leaders, key government officials and the Diplomatic Corps hosted by his Eminence, Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, the Archbishop of Metro Manila, commenced the weeklong interfaith harmony celebration. At this meeting, Cardinal Tagle delivered his keynote address on the significance of the World Interfaith Harmony Week celebration.

Tapatan sa Aristocrat Media Forum

Aksiyon para SA Kapayapaan at Katarungan (Action for Peace and Justice) Center for Active Nonviolence for Phil., Inc. (AKKAPKA-CANV)

9:00-11:30, Day 1, Aristocrate Restaurant, Roxas Boulevard

The media forum brought together various religious leaders to highlight the importance of world interfaith harmony and its relevance to national and global issues.

World Hijab Day (Symposium)

University of the Philippines

1:00-5:00 pm, Day 1, UP Hotel

People of other faiths and the general public were invited to an experience of wearing the hijab. A video featuring a social media experiment showing how the public perceives a person wearing a hijab was shown. The event was attended by members of the academe and non-government organizations.

Video: Day 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZAvhtOp3JQ>

Photos:

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1676974015904211.1073741828.1675423849392561&type=3>

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1678572595744353.1073741835.1675423849392561&type=3>

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1678571902411089.1073741834.1675423849392561&type=3>

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1678566185744994.1073741833.1675423849392561&type=3>

DAY 2

Interfaith Meal for Peace: Halal, Kosher and Vegetarian

United Religions Initiative

10:00 am-12:00 noon, Day 4, Aurora Chapel, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The politics of food can unite humanity. The activity celebrated interfaith and diversity, yet one humanity through understanding and partaking of halal, kosher and vegetarian food.

Interfaith Peacebuilding Workshop for Muslim and Christian Youth

Miriam College-Center for Peace Education

Whole day, Day 2, Miriam College

The workshop sought to break down barriers of historical prejudice between Muslim and Christian Youth encouraging them to be youth peacebuilders in their spheres.

IFLC Festival of Language and Cultures

Pacific Dialogue Foundation

6:00-8:00pm, Day 2, Newport Performing Arts Theater, ResortsWorld, Manila

Performers from 15 countries showcased their cultures through songs and dances with the objective of promoting understanding of differences in culture and religion to inspire peace.

Video: Day 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64gByoAAAIQv>

Photos:

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1678578755743737.1073741837.1675423849392561&type=3>

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1678574315744181.1073741836.1675423849392561&type=3>

DAY 3



A Round Table Discussion on Climate Change

UniHarmony Partners Manila

9:00-1:30 pm, Day 3, Buendia Chapel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, HV de la Costa St., Makati City

Representatives from different faiths and religious organizations discussed the consequences of climate change. Speakers reported on COP 21 and the technical aspect of climate change. A roundtable discussion followed as participating faiths and religious organizations identified ways to reduce climate change which can be implemented in their specific lay communities and barangays (villages).

People for Peace

6:00-8:00 pm, Day 3, Ugnayan Room, PhilDhrra Partnership Center, 59 C Salvador St., Loyola Heights Subdivision, Q.C.

Peacemakers' Circle

An evening of reflections and sharing on peace as people from different faiths shared inspirational experiences on building bridges of friendship with people of other faiths.

Video: Day 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3Ku2X-1IHU>

Photos:

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1679956245605988.1073741840.1675423849392561&type=3>

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1678583909076555.1073741839.1675423849392561&type=3>



DAY 4

The Gift of Womanhood

Teodora: In defense of the Authentic Woman, St. Pedro Poveda College

7:30-10:00 am, Day 4, St. Pedro Poveda College

A forum celebrating the gift of womanhood among members of different faith groups and where the promotion of unity, harmony and peaceful dialogue can help uplift and build up society.

Creating Peace & Hope Through the Three Acts of Goodness: A Digital Poster-making Contest

FGS Mabuhay Temple

2:00-4:00 pm, Day 4, FGS Mabuhay Temple, 656 Ocampo St., Malate, Manila

A digital poster-making contest with the theme: *Creating Peace & Hope through the Three Acts of Goodness* launched 6 weeks prior to the event. Participants and winners of the contest were given recognition and the audience were exhorted to apply good values in their lives.

Video: Day 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SuXWJeahsYA>

Photos:

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1679978195603793.1073741842.1675423849392561&type=3>



DAY 5

Love, Mercy and Compassion for the Law Enforcers Symposium

PNP Chaplaincy Services

1:00-5:00 pm, Day 5, PNP Headquarters

In this symposium, police personnel from the Philippine National Police conversed with multi-religious leaders on the values of love, mercy and compassion, and how it can be integrated in their daily routines of maintaining peace and order in the society.

A Symposium on Mary in the Bible, Mariam in Quran as a Woman of Love, Mercy and Compassion

8:00 am-12:00 nn, Day 5, University of Santo Tomas

Pacific Dialogue Foundation & Religions for Peace Philippines, University of Santo Tomas

Mary the Mother of Jesus is a woman both revered in Islam and in Christianity. In this symposium, the interfaith community reflected on the role of Mary and her virtues of love, mercy and compassion. This event celebrated the commonalities of different faiths.

Video: Day 5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7Yro3p0HB0>

Photos:

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1680384985563114.1073741844.1675423849392561&type=3>

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1680375795564033.1073741843.1675423849392561&type=3>

DAY 6

An Interfaith Solidarity Walk

Peacemaker's Circle

10:00 am-12:00 noon, Day 6, Globo de Oro, Quiapo

Muslims, Christians, and other faith groups marched to the places of worship in the Quiapo area to express solidarity and harmony among religions. Participants visited both the house of worships of the Catholics and Muslims.

2016 Youth Peace Camp

Parokya ng Ina ng Laging Saklolo, UniHarmony Partners and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

5:00 am-6:00 pm, Day 6, Camp Benjamin, Alfonso-Maragondon Rd., Alfonso, 4123 Cavite

Young single adult (aged 18-25 years old) Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints learned to understand, appreciate and respect each faith's uniqueness and shared attributes, and established good rapport with each other for peace-building and future partnerships

Celebration of Love, Mercy and Compassion with the Children of Bagong Silangan

Focolare Movement

2:00-5:00 pm, Day 6, Sulyap ng Pag-asa, Bagong Silangan, Quezon City

An interreligious afternoon with about 100 children in Bagong Silangan.

Video: Day 6: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CHY8Gd6xLM>

Photos:

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1677557459179200.1073741829.1675423849392561&type=3>



DAY 7

Love, Mercy & Compassion as Wellsprings of Peace and Hope: *A Festival of Harmony*

Archdiocese of Manila, CBCP-ECID

2:00 – 5:00 pm, Day 7, SM Megamall

A Festival of Harmony was the culminating activity of the weeklong celebration of the 2016 World Interfaith Harmony Week. The program highlighted the mutual cooperation between the government and the religious sector in promoting religious freedom, dialogue and peace. Leaders of faith based organizations, members of the diplomatic corps and key government gathered to highlight the harmony of all religions which was best presented through the sharing of aspirations of peace stories by 4 children from different faiths. It also brought together representatives from the foreign communities living the Philippines to foster friendship and mutual cooperation. A highlight of the evening was the presentations and musical performances by various children's groups expressing their aspirations of mercy, hope and peace.

Video: Day 7: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6hPDGUP_5U

Photos:

<https://web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1677935229141423.1073741831.1675423849392561&type=3>

To view photos and videos of the 2016 World Interfaith Harmony Week-Philippines, please visit:



UniHarmony Partners Manila

Breakfast Dialogue Meeting with Cardinal Tagle

Archdiocese of Manila

7:00-9:00 am, Day 1, Arzobispado de Manila, Intramuros

A breakfast dialogue meeting with Cardinal Luis Antonio G. Tagle, commenced the celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week for the year 2016. This was held at the official home of the Archbishop of Manila, The Arzobispado de Manila, on the 1st day of February 2016.

Heads of embassies and consular offices from different countries, and leaders from faith based organizations attended the event.

His Eminence, Cardinal Tagle, delivered his address on the significance of the Interfaith Harmony Week anchored on this year's theme "*Love, Mercy, and Compassion as Wellsprings of Peace and Hope.*"

After singing the Philippine national anthem, an invocation was offered by Seminarian Ramon Jamora Jr. A roll call of attendees soon followed where Prof. Bong A. Baybado from the University of Santo Tomas then recognized guests who were present at the meeting.

Rev. Fr. Carlos Reyes, the executive secretary of Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Episcopal Commission on Interreligious Dialogue, gave the opening remarks and highlighted the Philippines' rich diversity of cultures and faiths. Creating a culture of peace among people of all faiths will spread the message of peace and harmony among all cultures.

The keynote speaker, Cardinal Tagle, compared the theme "Love Mercy and Compassion as Wellsprings of Peace and Hope" with the declaration of Pope Francis that 2016 be the Year of Mercy.

"Peace is threatened when there is injustice, and injustice shows a lack of mercy," he said

"No merciful person can be unjust. If we want peace, there should be love, mercy and justice, and most importantly we should act upon these things. We can do this by developing friendship through small gestures of kindness such as a smile, a hug, a wave," he added. He then invited everyone to apply love, mercy and compassion in their own lives.

The message of peace was also expressed through music. The Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple Choir, and 5 representatives from the Pacific Dialogue Foundation, Inc. coming from South Africa, Belarus, Thailand, Kazakhstan and Turkey presented special musical numbers. The foreign artists presented their songs in their native tongue.

Members from the diplomatic corps came to the event to support this United Nations' initiative and share oneness with people of other faiths.



The host, Cardinal Tagle (4th from left seated) with leaders from different religions and faith based organizations.

Ambassadors and chargé d'affaires from different countries offered support for the event.



Musical presentations were rendered by representatives from South Africa, Turkey, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Thailand.



Cardinal Tagle (3rd from left), Rabbi Eliyahu Azaria (4th from left), US Ambassador Philip Goldberg (5th from left), Ambassador of Turkey to the Philippines Esra Cankorur (second from right) and other members of the diplomatic corps join in the celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week.



Sharing a table together were (L-R) members of the Quiapo Interfaith Leaders, Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) and United Religions Initiative (URI)

Tapatan sa Aristocrat Media Forum

Aksiyon para sa Kapayapaan at Katarungan (Action for Peace and Justice) Center for Active NonViolence for Phil., Inc. (AKKAPKA-CANV)

9:00-11:30, Day 1

Aristocrat Restaurant, Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City

The “Tapatan sa Aristocrat” is a regular media forum organized and hosted by Mr. Melo Acuna, a veteran journalist. It was held on February 1, 2016 in conjunction with World Interfaith Harmony Week. The discussion focused on the relevance and objectives of the World Interfaith Harmony Week to national and global issues.

Sitting on the panel to discuss and address questions from the media audience were Venerable Miao Xing from the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple, Professor Val Brillo and Professor Philip Fuentes from the University of Sto. Tomas Institute of Religion.

“Can we still have peace?” Melo asked. Prof. Brillo responded and said that peace is a product of man since he is given the faculties to address matters of his own given that he has been blessed with wisdom and sound judgment. He also added that peace is possible, it may be difficult but it is possible.

To the Venerable Miao Xing, Mr. Acuna asked, “What should we do to attain peace?” She suggested a concept by which a person can have peace starting within ourselves. It is to have good thoughts, words and deeds, but she added, “Doing it is something questionable.” She highlighted that some things are easier said than done. “Having good thoughts, words and deeds are where we often fall short. To establish this practice within ourselves, we should start by having a positive mind and peaceful thoughts. We may not have the power to persuade others to be good, but we can begin with ourselves. By being a good example, we will make a difference no matter how small, she added.

One difficult question addressed by Prof. Fuentes was “Is there a religion that promotes violence?” The professor began by defining peace. “Absolute peace is the condition wherein there is no conflict among men. This kind of peace is impossible because we live in an imperfect world filled with imperfect people. The pursuit of our own interests sometimes violates the rights of others; conflict naturally ensues. The second type of peace, the absence of war, is possible by choosing to resolve conflict through peaceful means,” he added.

Answering the question if there is a religion that promotes violence, he defined religion as an institution that’s important in promoting the dignity of man. “But, sometimes our very religions create chaos due to various cultures and beliefs which have the tendency to compete with one another for supremacy,” he added. The ongoing conflict among the Philippine Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was presented as an example. According to him, the best way to create harmony among people is to build trust and friendship through a dialogue. He concluded by saying that it is not a question of religion, it is a question of who we are. In peace nothing is lost, but in war, everything is lost.



From left to right: Mr. Melo Acuna, Professor Val Brillo, Venerable Miao Xing and Professor Philip Fuentes.



Members of the media attending the forum.

Interfaith Peacebuilding Workshop for Muslim and Christian Youth

Miriam College-Center for Peace Education

Whole day, Day 1-2

Miriam College

The two-day Interfaith Peace Building Workshop at Miriam College focused on breaking down barriers of historical prejudice between Muslim and Christian youth.

According to Ms. Mirma MaeTica, Program Coordinator of the Center for Peace Education, the workshops began in 2004.

Months prior to the 2016 workshop, students from Manila and Mindanao became acquainted through letters. At the workshop, they finally met each other in person. Muslim and Christian students were grouped into teams and did team building activities. They learned to work together for a shared goal.

Aside from the getting to know you activities and shared meals, one particular task given to the teams was to build a tall as structure as possible using only drinking straws and tape.

The task was made more challenging by some restrictions. Some of the students were blindfolded; others were restrained from talking while others could only use one hand in building a structure.

Mr. Jaime Villaforte IV, teacher facilitator of the activity, explained that the obstacles are a representation of differences found among people. The students learn through their experience that despite obstacles or differences, they could work together to accomplish their goal to build a tall and sturdy tower. Much like in life, differences with respect to cultures and beliefs should not deter a group of people working together to attain common goals. Respect for other people's beliefs can bring about unity.

One of the youth participants shared that one of the things she learned during the workshops was that team building activities showing that by utilizing each other's strengths and respecting differences they enjoy working together and can accomplish extraordinary things in peace and harmony.



Students working together to build a high tower with straws and tape. Teams need to learn to cope with limitations (some of the students are blindfolded!)



Interfaith Peacebuilding Workshop for Christian & Muslim Youth

Miriam College, Quezon City

February 1-3, 2016



Center for Peace Education
Miriam College

UniHarmony Partners
Manila



Muslim participants from Mindanao and high school Christian students from Miriam College together in a peace building forum.

World Hijab Day

UP Hotel, University of the Philippines Diliman

1:00-5:00 pm, Day 1

UP Hotel

The World Hijab Day was held at the University of the Philippines Diliman. sponsored by UP's Institute of Islamic Studies.

This year's theme was "Fostering Solidarity, Celebrating Unity in Diversity." Non-Muslims were given an opportunity to wear a hijab. Muslim women displayed their artistry in folding the scarves in a complicated assembly.

Wearing a hijab promotes modesty, proper bearing and protects a woman's identity, but is important to wear a hijab in the proper way. A woman who wears a hijab must avoid wearing revealing clothing and should wear modest ones so as not to defeat the purpose of the hijab.

In a forum organized in celebration of the World Hijab Day, participants discussed the challenges encountered by women wearing a hijab. A person wearing a hijab may feel uncomfortably warm especially in a humid country like the Philippines.

The most prevalent discomfort, however, is from discrimination by other people, mostly from those who have little knowledge of the hijab. Some women wearing hijab are thought to be in allegiance or sympathy with violent extremist groups such as the Abu Sayaff. More commonly, women experience discrimination in society by simply being ignored.

In business, there are cases where employees wearing hijab are given less attention. The Dean of the Institute of Islamic Studies, Marcina A. Morados, said "Muslim students wearing a hijab were treated as second class citizens in the campus." The purpose of the World Hijab Day is to dispel misconceptions and make people aware of discrimination.

During a question and answer period, a woman raised the question about Muslim women who choose not to wear hijab. Do they experience a form of discrimination as well? Analiza G. Flores-Malayang answered that discrimination in any form was wrong. She said "There is no compulsion in religion." One cannot force someone to obey. She added "It is between her and Allah."



Panelists from the forum together with organizers and guests from other religions.



An interested audience hears panelists respond to questions from the audience.

Muslim women assist a non-Muslim in wearing the hijab.



Non-Muslims wearing hijab.



Interfaith Meal for Peace: Halal, Kosher and Vegetarian

United Religions Initiative

10:00 am-12:00 noon, Day 2

Aurora Chapel, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Interfaith Meal for Peace brought together participants of different faiths who were served authentic halal, kosher and vegetarian food for lunch. Dr. Potre Dirampatan-Diampuan, Senior Interfaith Representative of the Philippines from United Religions Initiative, explained the differences between Halal, Kosher and Vegetarian food. She also highlighted the politics of food, and the attitudes and policies to promote understanding and respect sensitivities among religions.

Halal describes something that a Muslim is permitted to engage in i.e. eat, drink, conduct, etc. It is derived from the Arabic verb ‘Halla,’ which means to be or become ‘lawful, legal, legitimate or unforbidden’. Food is halal if it does not contain or come into contact with anything regarded as filth i.e. alcohol, pork, blood, feces and urine. It must also be prepared or processed, or manufactured using equipment untainted by anything unclean.

Kosher also includes rules on how food should be prepared or manufactured. Kosher laws determine which food are fit or proper for consumption by Jewish consumers who observe these laws. The laws are Biblical in origin. Kosher dietary laws specify which animals to eat, prohibit consumption of blood and prohibit mixing milk and meat in a meal. The only allowed animals for Kosher are traditional domestic birds (chicken, turkey, duck, and goose) and fish with fins and removable scales.

Lastly, vegetarianism is not a particular religion. It encompasses a variety of options and choices, based on lifestyles, philosophies and religions. The three types of vegetarianism from lenient to strict are as follows. First, Pesco vegetarianism (eat fish, eggs and dairy products, but avoid poultry and meat), Lacto-ovo vegetarianism (consume all types of vegetable products, eggs and milk products but avoids all form of slaughtered flesh, meat, poultry and fish) and lastly, Vegans (do not eat anything of animal origin).

The politics of food include the production, control, regulation, inspection, distribution and consumption of food. Ethical, cultural, medical and environmental considerations are important in choosing or regulating appropriate farming, agricultural and retailing methods.

By showing accommodation for diverse views in the politics of food, we show respect for others and promote peace and harmony. According to Dr. Potre, the politics of food should also consider what is best for the planet and help to limit climate change.



Dr. Potre explaining the differences between kosher and halal and vegetarian cuisine.



Participants in the event with the food prepared for the program.



A halal potato salad was one of the most popular dishes served since participants gave feedback on how good it was.

IFLC Festival of Language and Culture
Pacific Dialogue Foundation
6:00-8:00pm, Day 2
Newport Performing Arts Theater, ResortsWorld Manila

The vision of the IFLC organization is “Uniting nations of the world with universal human values.” Their mission is to “rise on the wings of art and music and promote peace, love, and cultural encounters throughout the world.”

Nearly 2,500 students from 150 countries across the globe are taking part in the ceremonies of this year’s festival.

In conjunction with the 2016 World Interfaith Harmony Week, the 14th International Festival of Language and Culture kicked off with a spectacular show held in Manila, the capital city of the Philippines. The event was held at the Newport Performing Arts Theater with an enthusiastic audience of 2,000 attendees.

Leaders of faith based organizations, the diplomatic corps, government personnel, mostly from the Department of Justice, and families of the performers showed support by raising flaglets of the country of the performer when it was their turn to show their talent.

Peace was instilled in the hearts and minds of the audience through song and dance and short messages shared by the performers..

The festival is dedicated to the cultivation and education of youth and the creation of a platform to share cultural heritages with peers from around the world. Coming together to perform music and dance, the youth learn that loves surpasses differences and builds bridges between hearts. The youth come to realize that they are brothers and sisters under the same sky.

Today, we need these feelings of kinship and respect. IFLC are anchored on these values. It is essential for the future of the world that the youth are raised with the values of peace and fraternity where diversity is cherished and celebrated.



Entertainers moving down the center aisle in the auditorium and to the stage involving the audience in the celebration.



International and local participants join together in song and dance- a celebration of cultural unity on stage.



Almost every seat in the auditorium was filled as the celebration continues

A Round Table Discussion on Climate Change

UniHarmony Partners Manila

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

9:00-1:30 pm, Day 3

Buendia Chapel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

HV dela Costa St., Makati City

The Round Table Discussion on Climate Change brought together attendees from the academe and faith based organizations.

Fr. Carlos Reyes, Executive Secretary, CBCP-Episcopal Commission on Inter-religious Dialogue gave the opening remarks. He shared information from a Climate Change conference he attended last year in Thailand and said that increasing CO₂ emissions in the atmosphere are producing serious pervasive consequences to our climate. “We can do something for the environment... And we can begin first with an awareness that the planet is in danger.” He raised high hopes that Uniharmony partners representing their lay communities who are active in their respective villages can help by doing their part in decelerating climate change.

Dr. Lilian Sison (a former dean of the Graduate School and the Director of International Relations at the University of Sto. Tomas) showcased relevant and current information gleaned from the 2015 Conference of Parties or the COP 21 held in Paris. Over the past fifty years, greenhouse gases (CO₂) have drastically increased largely because of high per-capita consumption of resources in nations such as the United States and more recently by industrialized China.

The lifestyle of industrialized countries is depleting the earth’s resources and will result in climate change with grievous effect. Increasing temperatures will melt large ice caps at the poles, resulting in a rising sea, and increasingly more extreme weather events such as intense heat waves, drought, flood and typhoons. The economic and environmental impact will not be equal among nations nor within nations. The elderly and impoverished will suffer more from the effects of climate change. Endangered species and coral reefs are at risk. Philippines was receiving the brunt of climate change as never before seen and felt disasters barreled through the country in the past four years.

Dr. Sison concluded by saying that we should seek to educate not only our family but others in the community so that we can make cooperative efforts to slow down our current rate of climate change.

Mr. Clemente Bautista (Secretary-general of Kalikasan People’s Network for the Environment, and the Asia Coordinator of Yes to Life, No to Mining) emphasized that climate change is hastened by the production and continued consumption of fossil fuels. The most vulnerable countries, island nations such as the Philippines, have low levels of CO₂ emissions. He suggested a more pro-active approach to address climate change is though following good practices on keeping the environment safe, educating others and taking part in community actions that promote the environment.

The last presentation “Global Catholic Climate Change” by Ms. Lou Arsenio, Coordinator of Archdiocese of Manila Ministry and Ecology, began with a question “What can faith groups do?” She began by emphasizing that “Ang lahat ng bagay ay magka-ugnay (There is a connection with

everything on earth.). The issue of the environment is everyone’s concern. She proposed that the audience should “think globally and act locally” doing what it can to make a difference. Youth camps where young people are taught about plants and how to grow them will help the rising generation appreciate the importance of preserving our environment, which is part of man’s stewardship of the earth given to him by God.



Left to Right: A participant, the resource speakers-Mr. Clemente Bautista, Dr. Lilian Sison, Ms. Lou Arsenio, Father Reyes who gave the opening remarks and Ms. Arlyn Reville, emcee.



Members of UniHarmony Partners Manila together with the resource speakers.

People for Peace
Peacemakers' Circle

6:00-8:00 pm, Day 3
Ugnayan Room, PhilDhrra Partnership Center
59 C Salvador St., Loyola Heights Subdivision, Q.C.

Participants from different faith based organizations gathered in a Circle of Peace to share their personal thoughts and views on preserving peace, and how the love of God and love of neighbor can be applied in their lives to benefit their families and communities.



Dr. Teresa Guingona-Africa, a Catholic, and Dr. Shakuntala Vaswani, a Hindu, facilitated the “Sharing of Peace” (Below) Participants to the Circle of Peace



The Gift of Womanhood

St. Pedro Poveda College, Teodora: In defense of the Authentic Woman
7:30-10:00 am, Day 4, St. Pedro Poveda College

A forum entitled "The Gift of Womanhood" was sponsored by Teodora: In Defense of the Authentic Woman, Inc., a women's advocacy group in partnership with St. Pedro Poveda College.

According to Francesca Sarmiento, from Teodora, the purpose of the event was to help the high school students learn and appreciate different religious perspectives on womanhood. Seven speakers were invited to speak on the topic of womanhood from their own religious perspective.

The represented religions were:

Hinduism by Dipshika Gurung and Dr. Shakuntala Vaswani

Islam by Madri Apriatni and Dr. Porte Diampuan

Catholicism by Ria Ruiz

Sikhism by Ines Marti

Buddhism by Nambay Wangmo

One of the speakers, Ines Marti, a yoga teacher, considers herself a liberal Sikh. She is originally from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, but has been living in the Philippines for 4 years. She shared her story with the students of Poveda of how she found peace in finding herself and her worth as a woman.

Ines said: "It was very enriching to hear women from different religions not only talk about their religion but also about what it means to be a woman within their tradition and religious context. It is very important that women should get together to empower each other."

She thinks that the event was a great initiative to help the high school students see different prospective from the other religions of how wonderful it is to be a woman."

After each of the speakers talked about their own religious view regarding womanhood, there was an open forum. During the open forum, the host, Francesca Sarmiento, asked the speakers what words of wisdom they would like to leave with the audience. Though they came from different countries with different religious backgrounds, they all agreed that the most important advice they could give the students were: to get a higher education, to value the importance being a mother and raising a family, and to always remember their divine worth as a woman.

The event ended with a mantra taught by Ines Marti. The audience and the speakers all participated and sang the mantra with action. The words of the mantra encapsulated for the both the speakers and the organizers the message of the forum. "I am the light of the soul. I am beautiful. I am blessed. I am, I am."



Panelist from different religious groups share and interact with students.



Students joined in with the panelists through song and action the beauty of womanhood.

Creating Peace & Hope Through the Three Acts of Goodness: A Digital Poster-making Contest

FGS Mabuhay Temple

2:00-4:00 pm, Day 4

FGS Mabuhay Temple, 656 Ocampo St., Malate, Manila

“Do good things. Speak good words. Think good thoughts.” This was the theme of Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple’s digital poster-making contest

The winners of the contest were announced: Lorenza Nerissa Sarza, first place; Albert Rodriguez, second place and Ronald Ocampo, third place. First, second and third place winners respectively.

The activity was in coordination with UniHarmony Partners Manila as part of the World Interfaith Harmony Week. Twenty-six hopefuls from different schools and faith based organizations participated in the activity. They each tried their best to portray the three acts of goodness using digital art as a medium which is commonly used by millennials in visual expression.

The program opened with remarks from Venerable Miao Xin, Director of Life Education of Guang Ming College. A Lion Dance soon followed to the delight of the audience.

Venerable Xin said that the aim of the contest was to promote peace through the three acts of goodness.

She said “We know peace is something we all want for the world. We promoted this theme so that, hopefully, through the artists’ creativity they can help others to visualize the need to do good things, speak good words, and think good thoughts all the time. We hope this simple idea can convey to everybody that peace is not just a hope but it is something we can achieve now and in the future, and can be our gift to the future generation.”

One of the contestants, Precious Tua from Las Piñas City, also agreed that visual presentations can communicate better with people, and the posters that they made would help others become more aware of the three acts of goodness and how to apply it in their lives. She said that after participating in the activity she would also continue to promote peace in her own simple way.



The contestants and their artworks.



Members of UniHarmony Partners Manila together with the sister of one of the winners who claimed the prize that day.



Members of UniHarmony Partners Manila, Fo Guang Shan Temple leaders and students, and contestants together for a group photo.

Love, Mercy and Compassion for the Law Enforcers Symposium

PNP Chaplaincy Services

1:00-5:00 pm, Day 5

PNP Headquarters

The Philippine National Police (PNP) joined the nation in celebrating the World Interfaith Harmony Week by holding a symposium on February 5, 2016 at Camp Crame, PNP Headquarters.

Police Superintendent Onie Rosaroso, chief of the directorial staff of the Philippine Chaplain Service, said that the purpose of the half-day affair was for the police to appreciate the importance of interfaith dialogue to achieve peace by applying mercy, love and compassion.

The speakers were:

Hadja Lourdes Mastura, President, Religions for Peace Philippines

Rev. Fr. Richard James Babao, Assistant Minister on Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs of the Archdiocese of Manila

Elder Raul Villanueva, Area Seventy assigned to Interfaith from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Dr. Shakuntala Vaswani, Board of Director, The Peacemakers' Circle Foundation

Sheikh Nadhir Oquendo, Department Head, DepEd ALIVE Teacher, Discover Islam Baguio

Rev. Fr. Carlos Reyes, Executive Secretary, CBCP-Episcopal Commission on Interreligious Dialogue.

More than a hundred law enforcers attended the event and came home inspired to contribute to peace by applying the principles of love, mercy and compassion as they do their job to protect the country. The officers admitted during the open forum that this is not always easy to do especially when dealing with criminals.

The speakers gave inspired insights to help the Philippine National Police officers to still be able to show love, mercy and compassion while enforcing the law.

One of the speakers, Elder Raul Villanueva said, "While each of our religious views may differ, we also have many shared values and goals for humanity." He is optimistic that interfaith dialogue would contribute to peace in the Philippines.

"It's all about dialogue. It's about listening. The more you listen the more you understand each other's perspective. You'll see good things about people and emphasize the good in them and this is something we would continue to do," he added.



A symposium of Love, Mercy and Compassion for Law Enforcers included speakers from the religious community.



Members of the Philippine National Police intently listening to the speakers.



A group photo of all participants.

A Symposium on Mary in the Bible, Mariam in Quran as a Woman of Love, Mercy and Compassion

Pacific Dialogue Foundation & Religions for Peace Philippines

8:00 am-12:00 nn, Day 5

University of Santo Tomas

The Institute of Religion of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) was the venue of a symposium on the commonalities and differences of the teachings of the Quran and the Bible about Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Speakers from both Islam and the Catholic faith were asked to explore a common ground for peace between Christians and Muslims. To address this, a common figure in both the Quran and Bible who is Mary, became a topic of common ground. When two or more religions talk of commonalities, appreciation for the other is enhanced which can lead to the promotion of peace and harmony rather than violence.

During the open forum, one of the students from the Political Science Department of the Faculty of Arts and Letters asked: “Do terrorists use religion as a façade?” Father Reyes answered the question and said: “Some people have used religion for violence but this is an incorrect way of the practice of religion. When you fail to practice love of God and love of neighbor, you seek to dehumanize and demonize a person so for those who practice terrorism, the worth of an individual is diminished.” He further reiterated that no faith based organization would seek to destroy a person, rather it builds the person, his family and his community.

Assistant Professor Philip Fuentes of the UST Institute of Religion said “Organizing interreligious activities such as this symposium allows us to reach out to the students and to fight ignorance to achieve peace and harmony in the society.”

Joan Cristitrocio, Vice-President of the Interfaith Dialogue said that the top three problems that third world countries face are poverty, ignorance and disunity. “Education is the key to address all three problems,” she added.



A Symposium on Mary in the Bible and Miriam in the Quran included Father Reyes as a guest speaker from the Catholic faith.



Mr. Cihanger Arslan (third from left) from the Pacific Dialogue Foundation discussed about Mary as highlighted in the Quran.



A student poses a question to the speakers.

2016 Youth Peace Camp

Parokya ng Ina ng Laging Saklolo, UniHarmony Partners Manila and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

5:00 am-6:00 pm, Day 6

Camp Benjamin, Alfonso-Maragondon Rd., Alfonso, 4123 Cavite

Peace Camp is a day-long team-building experience for the youth of different religions sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in coordination with UniHarmony Partners Manila. It was held at Camp Benjamin, Alfonso, Cavite.

The purpose of this activity was to help the young people understand, appreciate and respect each faith's uniqueness and shared attributes, and to establish good rapport among the participants for peace-building and future partnerships.

In this year's Peace Camp, there were sixty participants representing the Muslim, Buddhist and two Christian faiths. The attendees were from the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple, Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Ina ng Laging Saklolo (Mother of Perpetual Help) Parish, Asian Conference for Religions for Peace, Islam, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

At the beginning of the activity, the facilitator asked representatives from each group to share their expectations. Some expectations mentioned were to understand each other and to build friendships that would last even after the camp. Four teams were made up of members of the different groups.

Named after colors, the violet, white, yellow and pink teams competed against each other with points given for their efforts. First, there was a group chant contest where the loudest and longest chant was awarded the most points.

For other team building activities, the group moved from a tent to an outdoor covered sports area. There were relay races. Next the teams moved from station to station completing various tasks that required teamwork, good balance and ingenuity. There was a basketball contest, a jump rope contest as well as puzzles and games.

The Violet team was hailed over-all winner receiving 3 bags of goods from Camp Benjamin's organic garden which they shared to other teams. This in itself was an act of unity and peace regardless of teams.

The activity following the team building was facilitated by Anthony Lopez, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Each organization was asked to write down their perception about other religions as well as the commonalities between them. It was a chance for each organization to correct any misconceptions others have on their beliefs. Each group picked out three items for explanation to the rest of the group.

Erwin Esmaquilan, a participant from the Catholic faith, said that to him the activity helped him understand and respect other's beliefs. "I learned that we have differences but we are one in achieving peace." Participants also shared their understanding and aspirations for peace expressing it through art works.

At the end of the day, the participants shared what they felt about the camp experience, whether their expectations were met, and what new information about other faiths they had learned. Everybody went home feeling blessed to have found new friendships with other faiths.



A blindfolded participant is listening to directions from teammates on the sidelines. He must step to the other side of the square without stepping on a ball.



Faith Presentation by a representative from the Buddhist faith.



Celebration of Love, Mercy and Compassion with the Children of Bagong Silangan

Focolare Movement

2:00-5:00 pm, Day 6

Sulyap ng Pag-asa, Bagong Silangan, Quezon City

The Focolare Movement has been supporting the community of Sulyap ng Pag-asa, Bagong Silangan, Quezon City, in their housing projects. So it was but fitting that the organization decided to spend an afternoon in Bagong Silangan to introduce interreligious dialogue to around 100 children in the community.

The objective of the event was to inspire the children to build fraternity despite the differences in culture and religion. The importance of people from various religions entering into dialogue was highlighted.

The children had an afternoon of fun and games while learning the values of working together and respect,

Asela Arago reiterated the call of Pope John Paul II when he said, “When we are open to one another in a dialogue of kindness, of mutual esteem, respect, and mercy – we are also opening ourselves to God.”



“We let God be present in our midst,” Arago added.

The children of Bagong Silangan.



A fun-filled afternoon with games, outdoor fun, cheers and learning.



A Festival of Harmony

(Culminating Activity)

Archdiocese of Manila, CBCP-ECID

3:00 – 5:00 pm, Day 7

SM Mega Fashion Hall, Mandaluyong City

A Festival of Harmony was the concluding event of the weeklong World Interfaith Harmony Week celebration held at the SM Mega Fashion Hall in SM Megamall, Madaluyong City.

This event had children in mind for the future belongs to them. Major parts of the program were handled by children starting from the emcees to the main speakers. The Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCCO), headed by Secretary Sonny Coloma, under the Office of the President of the Philippines, offered full support by coordinating with all religious groups on the final details of the program.

After a silent prayer, Ms. Annie S. Garcia, President, of the SM Group of Companies gave the welcome remarks. She expressed her support for the event and described her initial concern that the venue decorated for the Chinese New Year Celebration would not be appropriate. UniHarmony Partners and Cardinal Tagle happily agreed that the décor added to the celebration of unity and diversity.

Msgr. Esteaban U. Lo, Episopal Vicar, Foreign Communities Concern, and chaplain of the Chapel of the Eucharistic Lord, followed with his opening remarks, expressing his support for interfaith harmony, and gratitude to UniHarmony Partners Manila and to the PCOO for their efforts in organizing the celebration. After the Opening Remarks, Secretary Sonny Coloma of the Presidential Communications Operations Office, presented a congratulatory message through his assistant secretary.

A 7 minute video recap showcasing the activities of the weeklong event captured the spirit and essence of the local celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week

The highlight of the culmination was the stories of peace shared by four children from different faiths. They were:

Fatima Krizzia Lapesora, Muslim, who saw unfold before her eyes the conflict in Mindanao. War was introduced early to this young lass whose family had to transfer to Manila in order to have a life of normalcy. She hopes for the day when she and her family can return to Mindanao to lead better, peaceful lives.

Mayumi Bulan, Roman Catholic, enumerated how pride and greed has built walls of conflict among peoples. She also emphasized the need to take care of the environment and address climate

change so that children all over the world can live in a healthy environment where they are safe and free from any kind of threat.

Bryan Erving Choa, Buddhist from the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple, stressed the need to apply the three acts of goodness: Do good things. Speak good words. Think good thoughts. He encouraged everyone to live by these principles.

Alexander Kyle Villanueva, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, encouraged everyone to be peacemakers, and to love and serve others as taught by Jesus. He pointed out that even if people don't believe in the same things or even if people do things differently from each other, we are all children of God and are all part of God's family. Peace is in unity. Peace is in doing what is right.

His Eminence, Luis Antonio B. Cardinal Tagle, Archbishop of Manila, delivered the keynote address. After expressing gratitude to the children he said, "Maybe we should listen more to the children because we sense in all the children the innocence we elders are all looking for."

The four children who shared their stories of peace then presented tokens of peace to religious leaders who were called on stage. The turnover of the tokens was a symbol of their aspiration for peace, and the need for all religions to help and heed the call for peace.

Special musical numbers were rendered by the Las Pinas Stake Primary Choir of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a choir from the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple and a trio from the Pacific Dialogue Foundation. A lyrical dance depicting the theme was also performed by three members of the Focolare Movement.

The event concluded with a talk from Rev. Fr. Carlos V. Reyes, Executive Secretary, CBCP-Episcopal Commission on Interreligious Dialogue. He affirmed his commitment to work for peace for all the days of his life and urged the audience to do the same. He then thanked the many partners who assisted with the coordination of the event.



UniHarmony Partners Manila



Krizzia shares her story of peace and artwork depicting peace.



The four children turn over tokens of peace to religious leaders.



The Las Pinas Stake Primary Choir render a musical number entitled “Children All Over the World” and “Glorious.”.



Cardinal Tagle together with the Sy family of SM Group of Companies and members of the diplomatic corps seated far right.



Cardinal Tagle giving the keynote speech at the Festival of Harmony, the concluding event of the week.



The Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple Choir with the four children who shared their stories of peace.



Father Reyes, who gave the concluding message, suggested ways on how the World Interfaith Harmony Week experiences can add to our lives, and thanked the many participants for the efforts they made to bring it about.

END OF REPORT



Note: Please click on the links included in the report for videos and photos. Videos contained herein will also be uploaded separately on the site.