

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK
The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February



2019

6th Interfaith Youth Peace Camp
Cagayan de Oro City Interfaith Luncheon
Muntinlupa City Interfaith Luncheon
Davao City Interfaith Luncheon

1-7 February 2019

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2019 WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK CELEBRATION

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

February 1-7, 2019

I. INTRODUCTION

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints established its presence in the Philippines in 1961. From only a handful of members, mostly American servicemen assigned to the country, the Church has grown exponentially. Currently, the total Church membership in the country is 785,413. It has 1,227 congregations nestled across the isles of the Philippines.

One of the hallmark teachings of the Church is respect for religious diversity. In fact, one of its basic tenets found on the *Articles of Faith* teaches, “We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship, how where, or what they may.”

As a result, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints initiates, supports and participates in interfaith initiatives in the community to increase harmony, solidarity and cooperation among different faith groups. It also hopes to teach its members to encourage and promote religious liberty and tolerance.

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.

In response to the global call for harmony and solidarity, **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** became a partner of Uniharmony Partners Manila to be broaden is efforts in interfaith dialogue. The Church also encourages its local Church leaders to build relationships with other religious groups in their local communities, taking part or initiating interfaith activities to strengthen unity and solidarity.

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.

With the republic proclamation, the Church has taken further strides in advancing interfaith efforts, involving not just Church leaders but also families and the youth for future partnerships.

Objectives:

- To Organize activities in solidarity with the global celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week;
- To foster friendship and mutually beneficial relationship that build trust and lay the groundwork for cooperation between and among interfaith communities in the local areas of the Church
- To raise awareness of the challenges and aspirations of the World Interfaith Harmony Week; and
- To open doors for interfaith dialogue and advance common interest for the benefit of the interfaith community in the local areas.

II. Digest Summary

6th Interfaith Youth Peace Camp

Saturday, 2 February 2018, 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

AM Venue: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, LDS Aurora Chapel, Quezon City

PM Venue: Camp Tipolo Adventureland, Antipolo City

A day of gathering and dialogue through fun-filled activities for young people ages 18-30 coming from various communities and organizations to foster friendship and mutual respect, and to encourage collaboration. This is the 6th year for the Church to host a peace camp.

More than a hundred youth from different religions and faith traditions gathered at the Cultural Hall of the Aurora Chapel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for the first half of the peace camp. A series of activities included getting-to-know-you games to allow participants to ask people questions as a way to get acquainted with each other. Following the getting-to-know-you, a representative from each religious group presented their beliefs in the *Presentation of Faith* segment. Afterwards, the youth were divided into 10 teams to make a poster based on the WIHW theme. Their ability to express, contribute ideas, and give in to common consent for the general good helped the teams come up with the best artistic interpretation for the theme.

In the second part of the peace camp, the participants traveled to Camp Tipolo Adventureland in Brgy. San Roque, Antipolo City for team-building activities facilitated by the game masters of Camp Tipolo. Friendships and team unity were strengthened as each team hurdled through different team building tasks. At the conclusion of the event, each team received prizes and awards. The activity aimed to foster understanding, appreciation and respect for each faith's uniqueness and shared attributes and establish rapport for peace building and future partnerships. Those who joined were members from the Roman Catholic, Aglipayan, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, the Focolare Movement, the Silsilah Dialogue Movement, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Summary video:

<https://www.facebook.com/MormonNewsroomPhilippines/videos/2286353001646999/?v=2286353001646999>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-FP2Lv5tNE>

Photos: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.2006188299479262&type=1&l=2fdfe4ecac;>
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.2006188299479262&type=1&l=2fdfe4ecac>

Cagayan de Oro Interfaith Luncheon

Saturday, 9 February 2019, 10:30 am – 1:30 pm

Venue: Limketkai Luxe Hotel, Cagayan de Oro City

The purpose is to invite religious leaders from different faith sectors to share a meal together and to share faith-promoting messages to one another in order to promote greater unity, harmony and cooperation in Northern Mindanao.

With the theme “Celebrating Truth, Sincerity, and Forgiveness,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Cagayan de Oro City sponsored an interfaith luncheon. Members of the Interfaith Forum for Peace, Harmony, and Solidarity, a group of different religious and faith-based organizations in Cagayan de Oro City gathered at the Limketkai Luxe Hotel on 9 February 2019 to share messages of peace, unity, and harmony.

Elder Maximo Saavedra, Jr., a member of the Seventy of the Church, welcomed the guests to the interfaith gathering. In his welcome remarks, he expressed appreciation on behalf of the Area Presidency to all the interfaith leaders who accepted the invitation to the special luncheon. Archbishop Antonio Ledesma, a key figure in the promotion of Muslim-Christian relations in Mindanao gave the keynote speech that centered on God’s love and the need to help build peace, unity and harmony in the community.

Religious leaders shared messages of peace and the need for each of their organization to contribute to promoting peace in their communities. The religious leaders also agreed to meet more often and work on projects that would better the lives of the people in Mindanao. The Cagayan de Oro City Administrator attended the event to signify government’s support for peace initiatives. The media also attended the event and reported on the efforts of the religious leaders.

Photos: <https://tinyurl.com/yxe8zo5s>

Newspaper: <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1787740/Cagayan-De-Oro/Lifestyle/Interfaith-forum-tackles-peace-and-harmony?fbclid=IwAR0nQK2iijePbwZfOpPPPiNOzZAIx0LQKmPZkhGh727pZg2372-9NbPI3nA>

Muntinlupa City Interfaith Luncheon

Friday, 8 February 2019, 10:30 – 1:30 pm

Venue: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Muntinlupa Chapel

The aim is to bring together religious leaders of various faith organizations in Muntinlupa City, so they can build bridges of friendship and commonalities despite diverse faith traditions. This is the second interfaith luncheon and has increased involvement from the city government.

Religious and civic leaders converged for an intimate interfaith luncheon hosted by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Muntinlupa City.

More than 30 guests from the different religious groups graced the event, including the Aglipayan Church – Alabang, Association of Born Again Christian Inc., El Shaddai, Evangelical Methodist Church, Muslim, and the Victory in Jesus Christ Church.

Las Piñas Stake (diocese) President Raymond Vicente of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints warmly welcomed guests, expressing love, appreciation, and respect for the efforts of each leader who gave their time to be in the gathering.

In support of the interfaith efforts in the city, Muntinlupa City Mayor Jaime R. Fresnedi attended the luncheon and expressed appreciation for the efforts expended by each leader to come and participate in dialogue.

In his message, Mayor Fresnedi assured the religious leaders about the city's full support in implementing interfaith activities across religious organizations.

Following the mayor's message, religious leaders participated in a friendly introduction of their faiths. They also shared messages on unity, peace, and love as the best ingredients for a better society.

Photos: <https://tinyurl.com/y5xehood>

Davao City Interfaith Luncheon

Wednesday, 27 February 2019, 10:30 am – 1:30 pm

Venue: Saranggani Function Room, Marco Polo Hotel

Leaders from faith-based organizations as well as those from the indigenous people's groups came together to share a meal and talk about how each of them can make the lives of their members better as well as contribute to making a peaceful society in Davao City.

A diverse group of religious leaders and those from the indigenous people's communities and the academe took a break in the middle of the week to gather together and share a meal in Davao City which is located on the Southern part of Mindanao in the Philippines.

Elder Michael John U. Teh of the Philippines Area Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints greeted each leader warmly and extended a hand of friendship and collaboration for future projects.

Each participant introduced the organization they were representing and took time to get to know leaders assigned to their tables. After sharing a meal together, faith representatives spoke on how they could help Mindanao attain the somewhat elusive peace it has been searching for. They also pledged to meet often and build on their friendship.

Those who participated came from the Muslim, Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist and Roman Catholic faiths. Prayers were also given by an Ulama, Buddhist and Christian representatives.

Photos:

<https://www.facebook.com/MormonNewsroomPhilippines/photos/pcb.2044926378938787/2044924162272342/?type=3&theater>

III. Full Report

6th Interfaith Youth Peace Camp

From the eyes of onlookers, the scene may look like a group of young adults playing games, making art and just having fun. However, for the more than 100 participants aged 18 years old and above, including a team of volunteer organizers and leaders, their participation in the Interfaith Youth Peace Camp is for a bigger purpose: To foster understanding, appreciation and respect for each individual's faith, develop commonalities despite diversity, and establish rapport for peace-building and future partnerships.



President Erwin Brilliantes, a member of the Antipolo Stake (Diocese) Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, kicked off the activity by welcoming the participants at the Cultural Hall of the Aurora Chapel with a brief message.

“May we be sincere in the knowledge and truth, in our thoughts and desires, as we strive to make a better world for our children and for every one of us. May we be forgiving to those who have wronged us and free our hearts of anger and live happy lives.”

Following his remarks were a series of activities that centered around the 2019 WIHW theme, which is *Celebrating Truth, Sincerity and Forgiveness*.

To break the ice and to help the youth lose their inhibitions in meeting new people, they were handed Human Bingo sheets, wherein for fifteen minutes they had to go around the room to ask a unique individual questions, such as “*What is your greatest achievement, What is your favorite Song or What are the three happiest moments in your life?*”

Although there was a prize for the first 10 people to complete all 25 questions, everyone had the opportunity to get to know someone and to realize that despite differences in faith, they share some things in common, like hobbies, books and food.



QKirt Ogaya, a member of the Church and a first-time

participant, shared what he has learned from the first round of activities. “I learned that we need to be humble because when we are humble, we make friends,” he said in Tagalog.

Like QKirt, the young participants were able to meet and make new friends with those of other faiths.

Moreover, they were also able to gain knowledge and understand the basic tenets of each religion through the *Presentation of Faith* segment presented by different youth representatives. This

helped everyone learn about the basic of beliefs of Buddhists, Muslims, Latter-day Saints, Roman Catholics, Aglipayans and Hindus.

For instance, some Christians were surprised to learn that the Muslims believe in the same prophets in the Bible, such as Abraham and Isaac. The only difference was the names used in Qur'an.

Salma Arafol, a Muslim youth from the Nur

Factory, shared what she felt by attending the event. "Being here is really a great thing because I experienced lots of things, like being with other religions, interacting with them, and being with them so openly."

"Despite our differences in culture, in our traditions and in our beliefs, and despite the differences in our religion, we can still be united as one family, as human beings. We can celebrate our common values like truth, sincerity and forgiveness," added Mark Mercene, a Roman Catholic youth from the Our Lady of Fatima Parish.

In a special message by Reverend Father Carlos Reyes, Minister at the Ministry of Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs of the Archdiocese of Manila and Parish Priest of Our Lady of Fatima Parish, he encouraged the youth to remain optimistic and to be a beacon of light despite conflicts and diversity.



“While there are shadows,” Father Reyes said in reference to the recent bombing in Jolo. “There are also many lights. In fact, the lights are represented by our participation in this peace camp. So let’s not allow certain acts of violence to dampen our hope. As I’ve said, there’s peace, sincerity, forgiveness...”



The trek down to Camp Tipolo Adventureland, located in Antipolo City, did not stop the participants from giving their best for their teams during the second round of the peace camp. The team-building activities that the facilitators prepared for the youth were to encourage teamwork,

improve communication, develop trust and respect, and to bond with their team members in a fun way.

At the conclusion of the day's event, Reverend Father Richard James M. Babao, Assistant Minister at the Ministry for Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs of the Archdiocese of Manila and Parish Priest of the Ina ng Laging Saklolo Parish, encouraged everyone in the room to be kind and respectful with each other.

"I think, my dear brothers and sisters, it is important to realize that regardless of what our faith tradition is, we respect and we love each other as if we are one family," he said in his closing remarks.

He then invited the young group to cherish the experience they recently had, and the brotherhood and sisterhood they have cultivated.

To cap off the fun-filled event, groups received special awards and prizes for a job well done. The organizations that participated in the peace camp included Nur Factory (Muslim), Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple (Buddhist), Peacemakers' Circle (Hindu, etc.), Aglipay (Schismatic Catholic), *Ina ng Laging Saklolo* Parish (Roman Catholic), *Our Lady of Fatima* Parish (Roman Catholic), Focolare Movement (Interfaith), Silsilah Dialogue Movement Interfaith Council of Quiapo (Muslim/Christian), and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.



The peace camp, sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is now on its 6th year and is part of the line-up of activities for the World Interfaith Harmony Week with Uniharmony Partners Manila.







Cagayan de Oro Interfaith Luncheon

With the theme “Celebrating Truth, Sincerity, and Forgiveness,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Cagayan de Oro City sponsored an interfaith luncheon. Members of the Interfaith Forum for Peace, Harmony, and Solidarity, a group of different religious and faith-based organizations in Cagayan de Oro City gathered at the Limketkai Luxe Hotel on 9 February 2019 to share messages of peace, unity, and harmony.

Elder Maximo Saavedra, Jr., a member of the Seventy of the Church, welcomed the guests to the interfaith gathering. In his welcome remarks, he expressed appreciation on behalf of the Area Presidency to all the interfaith leaders who accepted the invitation to the special luncheon.



In his message of peace, Elder Saavedra said that everything begins at home. “A peaceful home will result in a peaceful community, and a peaceful community will make a peaceful country,” he said.

Most Reverend Antonio J. Ledesma, Archbishop of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro, graced the event and gave the keynote message. Other religious leaders also shared inspiring messages that increase harmony and solidarity despite religious diversity.

Msgr. Rey Monsanto, Parish Priest of Eco Church, shared that “forgiveness is the way to attain peace and as all of us make mistakes, embrace and forgive one another.”

Rev. Goel Bagundol, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, shared that peace is attained when every day is taken as an opportunity to love others.



Muslim leaders also imparted a common message to the guests. They taught that Islam is peace and that development will only happen when there are peace and unity.

Mr. Nat Mambuay, Silsilah Forum-CDO/Interfaith-CDO, said that the Muslim greeting “As-salāmu ‘alaykum” means

"Peace be upon you" and that respect and peace comes hand in hand.

Moreover, Ms. Amina T. Mambuay, Muslim Coordinator of Silsilah Forum-CDO/Interfaith-CDO, shared her message. “Peace is not something you wish for; it’s something you make, something you do, something you are, and something you give away. Let us not just wish or dream for peace; let us work together for peace starting from ourselves, our families, and to the communities,” she said.

Apart from religious leaders imparting inspiring messages, representatives from the academe also contributed to the special gathering.

Mr. Edres Salic, a teacher of the Department of Education, expressed the importance of youth involvement. “Youth should be involved in peace initiatives because they are the future. They should be made a part in working for a peaceful and developed tomorrow,” Salic said.

Dr. Edvilla "Babes" R. Talaroc, an Anthropologist from Xavier University, also shared, “Peace is a way of life. It requires not judging others. It is attained through inclusivity and immersion as it allows all to understand each other’s differences which leads to better understanding and respect.”

Furthermore, Teosoro Sabugaa, Jr.,

Cagayan de Oro City Administrator, expressed appreciation to the interfaith group represented by religious leaders and members of the academe for their active help, which has contributed to the local government unit’s appropriate response to the needs of the internally displaced persons temporarily relocated in Cagayan de Oro due to the Marawi siege.

Sabugaa also said that the city government continues to have representatives from the interfaith group in government discussions to ensure transparency in governance.

Dr. Abdunnasser Masorong, Jr., Regional Director of the National Commission on Muslim Families Region 10, along with Ms. Alamiah S. Pangandaman and Ms. Jamela Lomondot-Barra, also shared messages of peace.



Pangandaman expressed that it was her first time to attend an interfaith gathering, and she realized that all her daily interactions are actually interfaith dialogues because she deals with people who belong to different faiths.



A total of 38 leaders attended the event. Other guests present in the interfaith luncheon included Mahar B. Samporna of ALIVE/Interfaith; Ms. Shahani Damulo of Xavier University; and Carmen Mayor, Isabel Moneva, Gemma Fortun, and Mary Sherill Cabatua of the Parish Interfaith Group in Barra, Opol. Representatives from the Xavier University - Research and Social Outreach were also present.

Friends from the media also attended the interfaith luncheon, including Mr. Sean Sulugan of Benta Birada News Daily and Mindanao Newswatch, Mr. Mark Francisco of Mindanao Daily, and Ms. Jo Ann Sablad of Sunstar Cagayan de Oro.

Local Church leaders in Cagayan de Oro graced the event as well, including Cagayan de Oro Philippines Stake (diocese) President Edwin C. Sacay, and his counselor, President Roy Cotejo. Cagayan de Oro West Philippines Stake President Feliciano Santos, Jr. and his two counselors, President Elmer Salonga and Gloriouso Buenaventura, also met and dined with the other religious leaders.



Muntinlupa City Interfaith Luncheon

To strengthen unity and harmony in the religious community in Muntinlupa, the Las Piñas Philippines Stake (Diocese) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hosted an interfaith luncheon with the different religious groups within the city.

Held at the Church meetinghouse in Muntinlupa City, the 2nd interfaith luncheon is part of the annual celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Las Piñas Stake President Raymond Vicente warmly welcomed guests, expressing love, appreciation, and respect for the efforts of each leader who gave their time to be in the small

gathering.



"May this be a beginning of a wonderful relationship between each and every one of us," he said.

Thirty guests from the different religious groups graced the

event, including the Aglipayan Church – Alabang, Association of Born Again Christian Inc., El Shaddai, Evangelical Methodist Church, Muslim, and the Victory in Jesus Christ Church.

Also present in the event were Cultural Counselor Muhammad Jafarimalak and his wife Dr. Tandis Jafarimalak of the Cultural Section of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran-Manila, Ms. Annalyn Mercado of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and Ms. Maricel Labra of the City Cooperative branches of the Muntinlupa City Government.

In support of the interfaith efforts in the city, Muntinlupa City Mayor Jaime R. Fresnedi also attended the luncheon. In his message, Mayor Fresnedi assured the religious leaders about the city's full support in implementing interfaith activities across religious organizations.

Following the mayor's message, religious leaders participated in a friendly introduction and shared messages on unity and love as the best ingredients for a better society.

Zen Payumo, El Shaddai, expressed that this is the perfect time for organizations to show good examples of unity and friendship for the younger generation. It was the first time for the El Shaddai to participate in such an interfaith luncheon and Payumo expressed gratitude for being a part of it.



As a leader of their religious organization, Pastora Josephine Gudes of Southville Christian Church expressed her desire to raise the young generation with good moral values and believes showing unity among different faiths is the right way to do it.

After the messages, Rodel Mendoza, a member of the Las Piñas Philippines Stake, presented four upcoming interfaith activities for the year and invited all of the guests to participate. He also

encouraged the group to invite everyone to attend interfaith activities organized by other organizations as well.

Respect for the diverse beliefs and unique contributions of all the world's faiths is one of the hallmark teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From the early days of the Church until the present, the Church continues to build relationships with different religious organizations, sharing mutual concerns without compromising doctrinal tenets, as a way to elevate religious freedom and tolerance.



Davao City Interfaith Luncheon

Not wanting to miss out in the celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week, faith leaders from Davao responded to the call to come and break bread together to show unity and solidarity in Mindanao. The interfaith luncheon was held on Wednesday, February 27, from 10:30 am-2:00 pm. A diverse group of religious leaders and those from the indigenous people's communities and the academe attended the event.

Elder Michael John U. Teh of the Philippines Area Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came all the way from Manila to help host the religious leaders so that they can feel the warmth and friendship. Teh grew up in Davao and has deep affinity for the place.



After sharing a meal together, faith representatives spoke on how they could help Mindanao attain the somewhat elusive peace it has been searching for. They also pledged to meet often and build on their friendship.

Davao City Councilor Pilar Braga who is an advocate for interfaith relations shared the joys of being involved with interfaith initiatives and the need for like minded individuals to work for peace. Other leaders who shared messages of peace and hope were: Mr. Lipatuan L. Unad of the

National Commission of Indigenous People Region XI; Sami Buat from the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos; Pastor Jaffet Legario , Seventh Day Adventist Church; Bro. Ben from the Buddhist community, Ulama Aleem Mahmud Adilao and several others. More than 40 leaders participated in the event.



