

Manila, Philippines

## 2020 World Interfaith Harmony Week Celebration Highlights Dialogue Towards Harmony

As reported by Genevieve Balance-Kupang  
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Caption: Participants at the Interfaith Prayers For Love And Peace, Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple February 6, 2020

In solidarity with the global celebration of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, UniHarmony Partners Manila held a week-long series of activities in line with the theme of interreligious dialogue towards harmony. Established in 2012, UniHarmony Partners Manila was formed to implement the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 65/5 adopted on October 20, 2010, proclaiming the celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week every first week of February. Recognizing that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute critical dimensions of a culture of peace, the UN established World Interfaith Harmony Week as a way to promote harmony between all people regardless of their faith.

UniHarmony Partners Manila is composed of religious communities, faith-based organizations, interfaith groups, and peace advocates to contribute efforts towards attaining a harmonious and peaceful Philippine society through interreligious dialogue and multi-religious collective action. This year the World Interfaith Harmony Week coincides with the Year of Ecumenism, Interreligious Dialogue, and Indigenous Peoples in preparation for celebrating the 500th years of Christianity in the Philippines.

Here are just some highlights of the week-long celebration organized by the different organizations under the UPM umbrella.

**Celebrating the UN WIHW with Cardinal Tagle and the Diplomatic Corps  
February 3, 2020**



Caption: Cardinal Tagle gives an uplifting speech.

In the spirit of promoting the essence of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Archdiocese of Manila through the beloved Cardinal Tagle has been hosting the BREAKFAST/FELLOWSHIP WITH THE CARDINAL since 2013. Friends in the Archdiocese of Manila, Rev. Fr. Carlos V. Reyes, and Rev. Fr. Richard James M. Babao, minister and assistant minister respectively of the Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Affairs, invited the members of the UniHarmony Partners Manila (UPM) to celebrate the occasion with the Diplomatic Corps.

A great host, with his sense of humor and wit, Cardinal Tagle delivered his message of peace. Listeners were touched by his joy of proclaiming the Gospel, his message of peace, and the “confluence of the mystery of God’s love.”

His eminence articulated that God cannot be matched in hosting, and it is “our Christian belief that Jesus who is the Son of God is also present during the agape- the Jesus we welcome in the hungry, the prisoner, the immigrants, the sick.”

He reiterated the message of Pope Francis last January 1, 2020, that peace is a journey of hope: dialogue, reconciliation, and ecological conversion.

The Cardinal challenged the UPM leaders and the Diplomatic Corps to keep the tradition alive. On the other hand, the group wished him well as he assumes his new role as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

A new addition to the UPM family this year is the Russian Orthodox Church representative Hieromonk Alexie Lapshin of the Parish of Our Lady of Iveron in Manila.

**Interfaith Prayers For Love And Peace  
Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple  
February 6, 2020**



Caption: Ven. Miao Jing leads the Prayer to Avalokitesvara for Safety from the Wuhan Corona Virus Outbreak; the other Faith leaders give each a short message or prayer according to her/his faith tradition.

Amid suffering, ill-treatment, fear, adversity, suspension of classes for some learning institutions, and even the cancellation of an event prepared three months before supposedly for February 7, Uniharmony Partners Manila (UPM) members offered Interfaith Prayers of Safety from the Wuhan Coronavirus epidemic. The Head Abbess Venerable Miao Jing of the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple, Dharma Brother Erwin Choa, president of the Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA), Dharma Sister Luisa So, deputy secretary of Guang Ming College, Patrick Tanunliong, friends of the FGSMT and the UPM members were together in this particular afternoon. All dedicated a prayer "seeking compassion and blessings so that many will have the courage and wisdom to confront the outbreak with calmness and fortitude..."

Invited Catholics, followers of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Muslim, and Indigenous People prayed in their respective faith tradition.

Here is an excerpt of a prayer our Buddhist friends shared that day:

"Oh great, compassionate Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, as cities become sealed off, and events are suspended, we are in dire need of the spirit of your alleviating suffering. Let us care and help one another and not be struck with panic. Let us support and encourage one another to strengthen our faith. May the momentary isolation become retreats for self-introspection. May the momentary inconvenience become mindful practices of self-improvement. This is the moment when unity is most crucial; let us trust the government to resolve the crisis. Let us thank the medical professionals for treating the disease. No matter how difficult the situation, as long as there are compassion and wisdom, when we all practice the Three Acts of Goodness: Do good deeds, speak good words, and think good thoughts, if we all protect the environment and have respect for all lives, we shall be able to turn peril into safety. We pray for your blessings. Please help the survivors be delivered from suffering and recover their good health; Please help the deceased be reborn in Buddhland, and rest well in peace. May this world be free from the turmoil of outbreaks. May every one of us be safe and well. Oh great, compassionate Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, please accept my sincerest prayer!

Then there was a presentation of interfaith activities, messages from interfaith leaders and ringing of the bell, and then the sharing of the token of appreciation. Yes, amid the challenges we are facing as global citizens, religious belief allows people to better cope with adverse life events.

**West Asian Cultural Day at the UP Film Center  
February 5, 2020**



Caption: A sampling of Turkish cuisine was part of the whole cultural event

On the 5th Day of the World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Pacific Dialogue Foundation (PDF) and UP Diliman (both active members of the Uniharmony Partners Manila) sponsored the showing of two inspirational Turkish movies, “Butterfly” and “Two Hearts as One.” A live broadcast with the scriptwriter and producer followed after. Participants got to interact with the barista/cooks and enjoyed the cultural exhibition of West Asian cuisine offered by the Muslim Turkish UPM partners. During the intermission, the Pacific Dialogue Foundation, through its president Selim Yavuz Sirinoglu gave a Token of Appreciation for the outgoing UP Chancellor Michael Tan for his ever-supportive collaboration with the Turkish community during his term as a chancellor. The presence of the promoters of Interreligious Dialogue made this event meaningful as it was a showcase of solidarity, mutual respect for cultural diversity, and the appreciation and enjoyment of reciprocity between cultures.

**“The Church and Indigenous Peoples: Partners in Reviving our Ailing Earth”  
Scheduled February 7, 2020 but was cancelled due to the Corona Virus Epidemic**



Caption: The unused banner due to the event cancellation as an effect of the ncov outbreak

The multi-faceted consequences of the coronavirus epidemic, and the occurrence of natural disasters one after another is heartbreaking.

People need “handles” to come to grips with them. The gifts of spiritual and cultural practices to cope with the stresses of tragedies are crucial among Indigenous peoples and believers of faiths. So, we planned to have a gathering of prayer leaders, flutists, chanters, ritualists, gong players, dancers, indigenous bamboo instrumentalists and other stakeholders to offer prayers, do movement meditation, chant, dance, play various indigenous musical instruments, sing, lament, and perform rituals to appease the spirit world and heal the nature-human disconnect. What we proposed, however, NCOV disposed. We call it “*sayang*” in Tagalog because the preparations we had, did not see its fruition. The event was canceled due to the Corona Virus outbreak.

This should have been a gathering of 300 students and employees, church organization, media, an educational NGO, and seven invited indigenous organizations of the Philippines. Participants were supposed to use indigenous musical instruments to produce sounds for healing the land and offer chants and prayers for peace.

**“LESSONS FROM DAMIETTA:” Towards a Spirituality of Inter-religious Dialogue and Peace”**  
**February 8, 2020**



Caption: From L-R Antonio Villasor leads the prayer with Fr. Rico Ponce, O. Carm, the Executive Director of ISA, Bro. Jess Matias, the resource speaker, and Dr. Carmen Alviar

It is said that the historic encounter between St. Francis of Assisi and the Sultan of Egypt al-Malik al -Kamil 800 years ago is an undisputed model of interreligious dialogue.

Bro. Jess Matias, OFS, lectured on the "Lessons from Damietta." This was held at the Institute of Spirituality in Asia (ISA) Multi-function Hall, New Manila, Quezon City. The objectives of which were to draw attention to the continuing need and challenge of the Church faithful to work for religious unity as a foundational requisite towards sustainable peace.

We learned from the historical analysis of the context and circumstances of the determined encounter between the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil of Egypt and Saint Francis of Assisi in 1219 during the siege of Damietta in the Fifth Crusade. The analytical discussion was the reference for the subsequent theological reflection on a praxis of transformative spirituality for engaging in inter-religious interactions and intercultural peace initiatives.

The essence we gathered from the lecture was that "Koinonia facilitates kerygma." That means it is our good conduct or witnessing that facilitates the proclamation of the Good News.

Yes, we need to walk in harmony with our Muslim brothers and sisters, and believers of other faiths. We need to uplift human conditions together. However, let us not forget that the success of interreligious dialogue is dependent on God's grace.