

## **Harmony Through Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue: Highlights of a Decade of Commemorating the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week**

Genevieve Balance Kupang, Ph.D.  
Special Interest Groups (SIG) Chair of the  
World Council for Curriculum and Instruction (WCCI)  
ORCID ID No. 0000-0001-9288-6897  
Researcher ID: I-3915-2018  
geniebk1998@gmail.com

*Teach and learn the inclusive and creative perspectives and approaches of promoting peace, justice, interculturality, interreligious dialogue, and global citizenship.*  
-WCCI SIG on Peace Education, 2012, 2018

### **Abstract**

This article presents the significance of commemorating the United Nations *international days*, like the *World Interfaith Harmony Week*, its background, the leading movements in the Philippines I personally know that have voluntarily supported this UN resolution, and the guidelines in engaging constructively in promoting authentic dialogue. As global citizens, peace educators, and members of the local and international educational organization, we actively support *international days* as they are great educational pathways, channels for advocacy, and opportunities to offer and receive the gift of presence during a person to person encounter with believers of other faiths or belief systems. These occasions heighten the doorway to educate the public on the culture of peace, build upon spiritual wisdom, and moral solidarity, as well as benevolent hospitality. Collaborating with people of diverse religions and cultural background invigorate unity in diversity, deep friendship, the defense of truth, human rights, appreciation of the universal values and magnificent arts inspired by religions, as well as seeing reconciliation happen between aggrieved parties. The UN encourages the celebrations of these observances because they are moments to mobilize political will, human and material resources to address societal concerns, and to commend and strengthen humanity's feats towards the common good. Various stakeholders have been organizing programs and activities related to the theme of the *World Interfaith Harmony Week* to eliminate fear, discrimination and mistrust while strengthening an attitude towards building a more tolerant, peaceful, inclusive, and secure societies.

*Keywords:* interreligious dialogue, intercultural dialogue, harmony, UN world interfaith harmony week, mutual understanding, culture of peace

### **Context, the Historic, and Landmark Documents**

Ten years ago, on September 23, 2010, two prominent world leaders from a tolerant Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, made a profound and significant proposal to the UN General Assembly. His Majesty (HM) King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein and His Royal Highness (HRH) Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad proposed the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week (UN WIHW) between all religions, faiths, and beliefs to be celebrated every first week of February. The resolution affirms

that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimension of a culture of peace (Prince Ghazi, 2010). It is an opportunity to promote harmony among all people regardless of their faith, forge friendships among adherents, and heal the walls of division (D' Ambra, 2018). From experience, it can also be a chance to remember and be in solidarity with the victims of discrimination, exclusion, and hate because of religion and belief system. The proposal was unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly a month after on October 20, 2002 through resolution A/RES/65/L5.



Multi-faith prayers held during a WCCI Conference in 2016  
St. Paul College Pasig, Pasig City, Philippines

Since then, religious leaders, faith-based organizations, peace advocates, academicians, practitioners of interfaith dialogue, lawmakers, personnel of government agencies, hospital workers, and a growing number of adherents the world over had been celebrating the UN WIHW with believers of various religions.

**The Amman Message, A Common Word, and The World Interfaith Harmony Week.** HM King Abdullah II and his allies' vision of a faith-driven harmony bourgeoned and continue to flourish when he pioneered the drafting of three vital documents: a) the **Amman Message** in 2005, the unique and historical Islamic consensus among Muslims' highly esteemed scholars worldwide according to HRH Prince Ghazi of Jordan. **A Common Word** in 2007, shortcut for **A Common Word Between Us and You: An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, and other Global Denominational Christian Leaders**; and c) the notable **UN Word Interfaith Harmony Week** in 2010. **A Common Word** received numerous awards and has been the basis for many resolutions and peace initiatives and gave birth to the *UN World Interfaith Harmony Week* ([acommonword.com/fruitful/](http://acommonword.com/fruitful/)).

HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, upon the directive of HM King Abdullah II wrote the **Amman Message's** three focal points intended at fostering an intra-faith consensus among Muslims on what "Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent it and what actions do not. Its goal was to clarify to the modern world the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam" ([ammanmessage.com](http://ammanmessage.com)). It was noted that during the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo stated, "Without this clarification, the war against terrorism would be much harder to fight" ([ammanmessage.com](http://ammanmessage.com)). Accordingly, the document represents a unanimous agreement by all Muslims everywhere as signified by their acknowledged most senior religious authorities and political leaders.

**A Common Word**, on the other hand, is a document asserting the common ground between Islam and Christianity based on the two great commandments of *'Love of God, and Love of the Neighbor.'* This is important as more than 50% of the world's population consists of Christians and Muslims. Christians (2.3 billion) or 31 % of the world's religious adherents. Muslims (1.8 billion) account for 24 % that tend to increase in terms of global percentage (Hackett, C. & McClendon, D. (2017). This 2007 document, **A Common Word** paved for global dialogue, cooperation, and co-ordination between the Muslim and Christian key leaders and scholars. As a result, conferences, ongoing dialogue, and historic meetings ensued like the first Muslim delegation meeting with the Pope at the Vatican. Regarding this open letter, Pope Benedict XVI then remarked that the **A Common Word** reverberated a theme parallel with his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love): 'the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor, and the fundamental contradiction of resorting to violence or exclusion in the name of God (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005,16, as cited in [acommonword.com](http://acommonword.com)).

**The World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW).** This was a landmark achievement of HM king Abdullah's vision of a faith-driven harmony among all people from all religions and belief systems. This initiative aimed to include all other adherents and practitioners of other faiths beyond the Muslim and Christian communities. HM King Abdullah, reiterated that

it is not a call to water down one's faith, but rather it's a call to respect our differences and personal beliefs and to unite around the basic principles that people of all beliefs agree upon and to understand that harmony can only come if we build upon a solid foundation of dialogue that has *"Love of God and love of the neighbor or, love of the Good and love of the neighbor"* as its core principle for engagement. The WIHW seeks to spread the message of harmony and tolerance among the followers of all the world's religions, faiths, and beliefs. Its message invites everyone, excludes no one, and is purely voluntary. (para. 3)



Intercultural engagement through food: Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists cooking Tang Yuan, Chinese rice balls to celebrate the WIHW, 2020, Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Buddhist Temple, Manila

Within this decade of celebrating the WIHW, there is yet another significant, landmark interfaith and intercultural document signed by Catholic Church head His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, leader of the Sunni Muslims, on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The title is **Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together**, also called the Abu Dhabi Declaration or Agreement which highlights "the adoption of a culture of dialogue is the path, cooperation is

the code of conduct, and reciprocal understanding is the method and standard."

Further, the document

invite all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings as brothers and sisters. (para. 3)

To all educators in the world, and members of the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction, there is an appeal from both Al-Azhar and the Catholic Church: that this Document "*Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*" becomes

the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities, and institutes of formation, thus helping to educate new generations to bring goodness and peace to others, and to be defenders everywhere of the rights of the oppressed and of the least of our brothers and sisters. (para 38)

Albeit, there is a wealth of resources on peace education which we in the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction had been using-UN documents, religious documents from various faith beliefs, educational sources written by scholars and educators themselves, among others, but this document is still yet another affirmation of the imperative to be courageous to be the bacon of peace and witness how to live in dialogue, and teach our students how it is to be a peacemaker in today's world enmeshed with a lot of challenges, including the pandemic and deep wounds of the world. The attainment of inner peace or dialogue with oneself, dialogue with God, dialogue with creation are very important aspects if one must exercise the courage to dialogue with others, and witness that to others. As the founder of the Silsilah Dialogue Movement, Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, PIME reminds us that the experience of "dialogue starts from God and brings people back to God."

### **The Philippine Contribution to Support the WIHW**

Long before the passage of the WIHW, it is noted that the following global networks had been advocating for harmony among religions through interreligious and intercultural dialogue on an international scale for decades, more than a century even as in the case of the "*Parliament of World Religions* established in 1893;" "*Religions for Peace* instituted in 1970," the *United Religions Initiative* (URI), a global grassroots interfaith network, birthed in 2000, among others. In the Philippines, among religious leaders is the *Bishop-Ulama Conference* formed in 1996 consisting of Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants. A grassroots exemplar is the *Silsilah Dialogue Movement* (SDM) in Mindanao that was founded in 1984. Likewise, the Philippines 15<sup>th</sup> congress on January 23, 2013, adopted the UN resolution and passed the *Philippine Senate Bill No. 3276* promoting cooperation and genuine understanding among all Filipinos to establish a country of empathy and a culture of peace (Phil. Senate, 2013).

Various stakeholders conducted collaborative planning of activities and convergence projects that were carried out during the UN WIHW and even beyond the first week of February. For several committed supporters in the Philippines, the spirit of the WIHW and the culture of peace is lived and carried out not only during the week's observance but extends beyond it. These were spearheaded by those who were already engaged in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue even before the said UN resolution.

Let me cite three organizations that I have come to know personally and have collaborated with in the past years: The Silsilah Dialogue Movement (SDM), the Uniharmony Partners Manila (UPM) where the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction (WCCI) is a partner, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) Episcopal Commission on Interreligious Dialogues, and their various networks. Thanks be to God that there were significant initiatives and action points that were carried out for the past decade and continues up to this year amidst the pandemic.

This year on February 1-7, 2021 is the dawn of the second decade of the UN WIHW and mark the inaugural day of the **UN International Day of Human Fraternity** on February 4. Due to lockdowns and general community quarantine (GCQ) status in several places, we cannot gather, travel and be with others to celebrate nor do activities together physically as we cannot compromise the safety and wellbeing of our communities due to the covid19 epidemic. We are restricted to stay at home. Even so, we, advocates still joined virtual celebrations, offered our positive thoughts and prayers for harmony and peace, supported the vision of the UN WIHW through letters of support and videos, affirmed the goodness in people, created art, green a sacred space, planted a garden, spruced up a peace garden, offered chants for global healing and wellbeing to rise above the dreadful pandemic together.

We connected spiritually with like-minded allies and fellow supporters of the WIHW to express our prayers and intentions, meditate together to strengthen our immune system, and support one another even if done virtually. On a personal note, sadly, on February 1, 2021 in the barangay where I live, we have the first case of death in our town due to covid19. In my heart, as with the rest of my townmates, we offered our prayers for the repose of a neighbor who passed away because of the virulent virus infection. Family members, barrio mates, friends near and far, sent their sympathies and to remind to let our souls continue shining and not let the darkness of this virus dampen the very strength we have inside. The strength of the faith communities is the belief in a God who console those who mourn. This is coupled with the solidarity and support of adherents and allies from various faith beliefs who sent their consolation to the grieving members of the community using the available technology.

While there are individuals and organizations in the Philippines that had been supportive of the WIHW, the following are the prime movers in the country, which I have direct contact and had been one of their core team members that collaborated with partners to advocate for interreligious dialogue (IRD) and intercultural dialogue (ICD). As an academician and advocate of IRD and ICD, I praise God for the privilege to be a member of the following groups which I will elaborate here: a) the *Silsilah Dialogue Movement*, b) the *Uniharmony Partners Manila*, and the c) *Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines Episcopal Commission on Interreligious Dialogue*.

**The Silsilah Dialogue Movement (SDM).** Fr. Sebastiano D' Ambra, PIME, SDM founder, leaders and members of the SDM felt elated when the WIHW was unanimously adopted by the UN because the WIHW's goals and objectives aligned with the movements vision-mission. Well, SDM has been the lead religious group that promoted the celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week in the Philippines. It led the establishment of the *United Nations Interfaith*

*Harmony Partners – Zamboanga* , which won in 2014 the *H.M. King Abdullah II World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize* with a *Grand Prize* and a *gold medal*. The awarding ceremony took place in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The movement has existed for than three decades and continues to promote the spirituality of life-in-dialogue with God, others, creation, and oneself. Guided by the precept “*Dialogue starts from God and brings people back to God,*” the movement has been advocating an immense meaning of dialogue and harmonious relations between Muslims, Christians, and people of other living faiths. The SDM have Forums on harmony & peace, education, holistic health care and livelihood, farmers’ training on sustainable agriculture, Silsilah media center, and a wide range of community services. The geographical scope of programs includes the cities of Zamboanga, Basilan, Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Iligan, Marawi, Jolo, Sulu, and Manila, Philippines. SDM was formed to help resolve peacefully the conflict between the Christians and the Muslims in Mindanao. It started with Christian friends and a small group of Muslims who prayed and reflected together on the mission of the dialogue.

SDM also helps poor communities by organizing and providing them with education and economic development. It has built the Silsilah Learning Center for preschool and grade school children in several areas in Zamboanga. The movement participating in a dialogue also helped organize cooperatives and credit unions. It has sponsored many other activities like peace concerts showing the oral traditions, customs, and dances of both Muslims and Christians.



World Interfaith Harmony Week Partners National Gathering at the Silsilah Harmony Village, Zamboanga, Philippines, May 2018

SDM’s main center dubbed *Harmony Village* is nestled on a hill close to the Filipino Turkish Tolerance School (owned by Muslims), and near the Pitogo Alliance Evangelical Church. Its location alone is Ecumenical and interreligious. The latest project of the movement is the

establishment last year of the Emmaus College of Theology, major in Interreligious Dialogue (ECT-MIRD). D'Ambra always say, we still can "do more" and this college major in IRD is one of a kind in the Philippines. The beginning according to the 2020 silsilah Oasis news "coincides with the Year of Interreligious Dialogue, Ecumenism, and Indigenous Peoples promoted by the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines," so, to the founder D'Ambra, it is indeed providential.

*Silsilah* is an Arabic term which means links of love and peace, and we members have been living the spirit of interconnectedness with people of various faith towards a common goal of a harmonious co-existence. The Silsilah Dialogue Movement is an example of how-to live-in peace, respect, and harmony between Muslims, Christians, indigenous peoples, and people of other faiths. This grassroot movement has started in Zamboanga, Philippines, and has been recognized not only in this country, but in other countries as well. SDM has been recognized by various awarding bodies locally and abroad.

**The Uniharmony Partners Manila.** Established in 2012, the UniHarmony Partners Manila (UPM) was formed to implement the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 65/5 adopted on 20 October 2010 proclaiming the celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week every first week of February. 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 to promote harmony between all people regardless of their faith. The UniHarmony Partners Manila is composed of religious communities, faith-based organizations, interfaith groups, and peace advocates. In particular, these are the following: Religions for Peace, Brahma Kumaris, the Institute of Spirituality in Asia, the Imam Council of the Philippines, the Archdiocese of Manila-Ministry of Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs, the former Archbishop of Manila His Excellency Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle, the Focolare Movement, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple, the University of the Philippines Diliman Institute of Islamic Studies, the Hindu Community, Manila, the Peacemakers' Circle Foundation, Inc., the Center for Peace Education, Miriam College, the Cultural Section, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran-Manila, and the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction (WCCI). In my capacity as the chair of the special interest groups of WCCI, I had been representing the organization in the programs and activities of UPM.

UPM was instrumental in the enactment of the Philippine Republic Act 10525 officially adopting the World Interfaith Harmony Week as a national celebration and mandating its observance by the different government agencies. Moreover, the King of Jordan, the author of the UNGA Resolution 65/5, awarded UPM the *second prize* for the 2016 World Interfaith Harmony Week. The primary aim of the UniHarmony Partners Manila is to contribute to attaining a harmonious and peaceful Philippine society through interreligious and intercultural dialogue and multireligious common action.

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This year 2021, we UPM members celebrated the event virtually in the context of the pandemic and the wounded world, the interfaith community gathered to share their experiences and discern common action amidst the pandemic. The objectives of which are a) to organize activities



The Uniharmony Partners Manila during a despedida gathering for one of our partners, the family of Hon. Mohammad Jafarimalak & Dr. Tandis Taghavi, Cultural Counselor, Embassy of Iran-Manila (2019) in solidarity with the global celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week; b) to foster friendship and advance common action between and among the interfaith communities; and c) to promote awareness on the challenges and aspirations of the World Interfaith Harmony Week.

To get a glimpse of last year's celebration of the Uniharmony Partners Manila WIHW Celebration, one can access the programs and activities published by Pressenza IPA Manila, Philippines dated 13.02.2020 (Kupang, G., 2020). It highlighted the theme "Dialogue Towards Harmony" which coincided with the "Year of Interreligious Dialogue, Ecumenism and Indigenous Peoples" as advocated by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. Other previous programs can be accessed in the UPM FB page.

### **My Personal Response to IRD Questions Asked by an Iranian Muslim Researcher**

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As I reflected on what article to write after I received the invitation from a Muslim WCCI friend from Nigeria, Dr. Yaya Aliyu, the following came to mind. I thought of developing an article on interreligious and intercultural dialogue as it relates to the WIHW celebration. Because of my active involvement in the Uniharmony Partners Manila, I met Hon. Mohammad Jafarimalak and his wife Dr. Tandis Taghavi, who requested me to share answers to questions on interreligious dialogue. It is my joy to share them here:

**1. What happens when Christians, Muslims, and followers of other religions in Manila engage in interfaith dialogue?** It stirs the participants' capacity to build bridges of interculturality and mutual understanding among followers of diverse faiths, and nationalities. It is a countercultural force against some realities in the world like religious discrimination, fanaticism, fundamentalism, and violent extremism. It is another form of community building, where a bigger family of believers from various spiritual traditions demonstrate hospitality and sharing of resources. An example is when we get to be invited during the religious festivals of other faiths and witness or experience first-hand their religious practices as well as taste their unique menu and cuisine lovingly prepared by believers of other faiths.



It has brought to the fore the joy of meeting the other in an atmosphere of mutual respect, discovery, and appreciation of diversity. As a Catholic Christian, here is a wider avenue and opportunity to live the Gospel imperative of a being a peacemaker, and to witness the love of God and neighbor regardless of religious affiliation, nationality, ethnicity, economic and educational background.

**2. How do leaders of interfaith dialogue prepare for and guide dialogue sessions?** To foster interfaith cooperation, one must be steeped first with his/her own religious conviction. As a Catholic, I read and studied the Vatican Documents written by our Church Authorities regarding Interreligious Dialogue. I took a Masters' Degree focused on religious studies. I also enrolled in a special course regarding Muslim-Christian Dialogue. For two decades, I had been joining activities of organizations who are already engaged in interfaith relations. To name a few: United Religions Initiative; the Peacemakers' Circle Foundation, Inc; the Silsilah Dialogue Movement; Integrative Center for Alternative Development (ICAD), the World Peace Prayer Society, and the Uniharmony Partners Manila. In the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction, where I am the Chairperson of Special Interest Groups, I had always organized and led multifaith prayers/interfaith prayers prior to our International Conferences and National Chapter Gatherings or Assembly since the members are followers of different religions and various Christian faith denominations.

**3. In what ways, if any, does interfaith dialogue foster perspective transformation regarding the religious other?** Interfaith dialogue is just one of the components of the "Culture of Peace." At the beginning our UPM networks were meeting specially to prepare for religious celebrations and conferences. But we have gone beyond just the celebrations; we pool resources together and help communities that are in need like those affected by both human and natural tragedies-victims of the Marawi Siege, and typhoon affected areas. Yes, we have started already with gift giving to the poor; I just hope, we can do more as an interfaith group in the alleviation of poverty and injustices suffered by those in the peripheries.

In my own research, I have stated that the capacity to build bridges of understanding among followers of diverse faiths is "a countercultural force for peace against religious violence, fundamentalism, fanaticism, and extremism" (Kupang, 2018).

**4. How do followers of other religions interpret interfaith dialogue?** This is a question which I need to find out more. It is a blessing to have read and studied the documents I mentioned earlier which were written by Muslim scholars and leaders. I have learned that we have the same aspirations of a sustainable, peaceful, inclusive, and secure societies. In the Catholic tradition, we have a wealth of documents where its members are encouraged to study and live the spirit of the council documents. The official Catholic Church documents like *Nostra Aetate*, *Ecclesiam Suam*, *Redemptoris Missio*, *Evangelii Gaudium*, and *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia* are examples articulating "a vision for dialogue with other religions and the world at large." The latest document, of course is the joint signed document by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb "A Document of Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together." It is a document where two great world religious leaders co-signed a document with the hope to find a universal peace where all can enjoy in this life.

**5. What is the transformational role of religious leaders in the interfaith dialogue?** This is what I have observed from among our committed leaders which are many to mention. Most important of all is the **courage** to build bridges instead of walls. Not to be afraid to say and believe that it is possible. Many, even good people, at that, do not believe in the vision of breaking down walls of division. Many feels at ease with where they are now, very exclusive, engaging only to their own group, and do not feel the need to reach out to the others who are different from their own group.

**6. What are the practices of inter-religious dialogue of UniHarmony Partner Manila?** These are the annual celebration of the World Interfaith Harmony Week based on love of God and love of one's neighbor or on love of the good and love of one's neighbor. This is practiced based on each faith's religious traditions or convictions. To name a few are the following: -Conferences and forums on Interreligious Dialogue, and Care for our Common Home (Laudato Si); Celebration of the United Nations International Day of Peace; Peace camp for the youth; Celebrations of various religious, spiritual traditions like 1) the Annual Breakfast with the Cardinal of the Catholic Church to open the World Interfaith Harmony Week at the Arzobispado de Manila, Intramuros, Manila; 2) Annual Friendship and IFTAR Dinner organized by our Turkish Friends Dr. Cihangir "Hans" Arslan, former President and Selim Serinoglu, current president of the ICAD Foundation; 3) Celebration of Eid'l Adha through Beef Sharing by the Integrative Center for Alternative Development (ICAD) Foundation, a yearly initiative by our Turkish Muslim Friends; 4) Chinese New Year at the Fo Guang Shan Mabuhay Temple initiated by the Buddhist nuns (Mahayana Buddhists); 5) UP Islamic Studies Institute hosting conferences and Hijab Day; 6) IFTAR SOLIDARITY Dinner with our Muslim Brothers and Sisters. Distribution of 100 gift food packs to 100 indigent families in the area, porridge feeding to children, and solidarity dinner with 00 men and women leaders; 7) Christmas Temple Lighting organized by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, at the Temple Drive corner White Plains, Greenmeadows, Quezon City; 8) Christmas gathering of UPM friends to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ; 9) Nowruz, the Iranian New Year celebration at the at the Cultural Section, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran; 9) My classes for example taking up Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems were brought to the Synagogue, Buddhist Temple, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Complex, experienced their hospitality, and had interactions with religious leaders and members other than their own faith tradition, among others.

**7. What are the religious leaders' interpretations of the impact of the inter-religious dialogue on themselves and on their social surroundings?** It is a countercultural force to show the world that it is possible to co-exist harmoniously without fear. The culture of peace and love is evident in the way people treat each other. There is openness, respect, and mutual understanding among members of UPM. There is also greater appreciation of each tradition.

**8. What are the religious followers' interpretations of the impact of the inter-religious dialogue on themselves and on their social surroundings?** In this globalizing world, many ordinary observers are amazed of the level of friendship being developed among members. There is reciprocity. Although, one of the setbacks in Southern Philippines, is that, often interreligious

dialogue is always initiated by the Catholic group as expressed by D' Ambra (2019) in his book on interreligious. But this is changing as there are also many initiatives done by Non-Christian partners.

### **Dialogue Decalogue: Guidelines in Engaging Constructively in Promoting Authentic Dialogue**

The following are guidelines to interreligious and intercultural dialogue and to rise above the seeming challenges in engaging with others (Kroeger, J. H. 2019, as cited in D'Ambra, 2019, pp-ix-x):

(1) The purpose of dialogue is to learn, to change and grow in our perception of people and reality to build solid relationships. (2) Interreligious dialogue must be a two-pronged project, within and between religious communities. (3) Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. In brief, if no trust exists, then no dialogue occurs. (4) In interreligious dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather our ideals with our partner's ideals, our practice with our partner's practice. (5) All participants must define themselves. Only the Muslim, for example, can define from the inside what it means to be a Muslim. Conversely, those interpreted must be able to recognize themselves in the interpretation. (6) Each partner should listen to the other partner with openness, while maintaining one's own tradition; dialogue does not require a "compromise" in one's faith. (7) Dialogue takes place only between equals; both partners come to learn from each other. (8) Dialogue grows only based on mutual trust. It should begin with those issues most likely to provide some common ground, helping to thereby establish human trust. (9) Persons entering interreligious dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical both of themselves and their own religious tradition; one sees the strengths/weaknesses of one's own tradition. (10) Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religious framework "from within" or "as a believer" of that faith; this means "passing over" into another's religious experience and then returning enlightened, broadened, and deepened.

As peace advocates, educators, and global citizens, we muster our courage to rise above the challenges of our times by cultivating the harmony within ourselves first and then demonstrating that harmony with others. We continue to witness our love for God and love of neighbor as expression of our spirituality in these extraordinary challenging times of a global pandemic and a wounded world. I would like to end by borrowing a line from our former WCCI international president Dr. Jessica Kimmel in her Alice Miel Lecture during the Budapest 17th International Conference in Education "We thrive on inventing solutions to unsolved problems (like violence, mistrust, and lack of understanding); that is our job!"

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