

## UPF Manila, Philippines: Role of Religion in Building a Heavenly Unified World

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December 9, 2020



Manila, Philippines -- The Philippines chapter of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), an initiative of UPF, in partnership with the Asian Clergy Leadership Conference, launched the Interfaith Online Fellowship program with the theme, "The Role of Religion in Building a Heavenly Unified World," on December 29, 2020. Fifty people of different faiths joined the launch on Zoom, while the broadcast of the event on Facebook and YouTube was viewed 1,000 times.

The online fellowship is taking place every Tuesday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Manila time in lead up to the Philippines Rally of Hope on February 6, 2021, organized by UPF in partnership with the Asian Clergy Leadership Conference.

The program commenced with songs, setting the atmosphere, and an invocation, which was offered by Msgr. Isagani Fabito of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente. This was followed by the singing of the Philippine national anthem and an introductory video about the IAPD and its activities around the world. Archbishop Elias T. Soria, president of the IAPD-Philippines, gave the welcoming remarks in which he spoke about the vision and mission of the IAPD and announced the launching of the Interfaith Online Fellowship by striking a gong. For the offertory song, Bishop Felomino Josol and the family band sang "Let Me Be There."



The next part of the program featured three speakers. The first speaker was Dr. Robert S. Kittel, director of education of UPF-Asia Pacific. He began his presentation by reading a quote from a message given by UPF co-founder Rev. Sun Myung Moon saying that the goal of every religion is goodness. It is not to be selfish, not to hurt. He emphasized that the role of religion is to teach all its members to live for the sake of others. Dr. Kittel continued by reiterating the common elements of religion which are eternal versus temporal, spiritual above material, ethics and morals, sacredness of life, and law-giving and marriage, which he especially underscored. Laws are the most important contribution of religion by which people

can follow and unite. Marriage is the common ground all religions agree on. It is from the family that society is built and nations are created. The role of religion is to properly educate people of the importance of marriage so that we can create a society, nation and world of peace.



The second speaker was Rev. Edgardo De Jesus, Ph.D., a Roman Catholic priest of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish, Diocese of Bulacan. He stressed that religion is not about the textbooks but is beyond the fundamentals they teach. Religion speaks of an attitude to become good, and the goodness to love and be loved by everyone. A goodness guided by faith, strengthened by unity and cultivated through charity. Let us make our religion the cradle of life and faith, acceptance and love, dialogue and forgiveness; let religion be a way to make us good.

The third speaker was Bishop Rene Ballenas, president of the Association of Christian Evangelists (ACE). He began by saying, "If you want to go quickly, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together." Religions are considered the engine of chaos in today's world. We try to advance our religion, yet we fail to practice the information and guidance we receive. Furthermore, we tend to value religion and forget human beings. We need to come together beyond tolerance using the word love and build a love relationship towards God through prayer. Let us not allow our religious orientation and beliefs divide us but allow God to work with us.

A session of sharing reflections and discussion on the messages that were given, moderated by Bishop Claro Borja, Ph.D. from the ACTION International Ministries, followed. A call of offering was led by Pastor Ernesto Ilano of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), Quezon City district, an affiliated organization. Then, a prayer for repentance and healing for the Philippines was given by Bishop Fernando Lee.

The program closed with a benediction prayer, offered by Bishop Rene Ballenas, and a unison prayer. Rev. John Rhodbert Gregorio emceed the event.

## **2nd Interfaith Online Fellowship**

The IAPD-Philippines held the 2nd Interfaith Online Fellowship on January 5, 2021. Forty-two people registered for the event, which has been viewed 850 times on social media.

Archbishop Elias Soria, who served as the emcee for the event, welcomed everyone. The program started with an invocation, offered by Bishop Leonardo D. Ramos from the Divine Filipino Catholic Church. Dr. Robert S. Kittel, director of education of UPF-Asia Pacific, gave the welcoming remarks. He sang the song "God is Good" by Don Moen and explained the meaning of the song, how good God is. He also said that sacrificing for others is good. In addition, the UPF-Philippines band offered the song, "Blessed."

The program proceeded with messages from three speakers. The first speaker was Bishop Claro Borja from ACTION International Ministries. He emphasized that we must substantiate our faith for our efforts not to be useless. He encouraged everyone to be humble, move forward and declare that we are one in building a Heavenly Unified World.

The next speaker was Bishop Philip Pattaguan from the Soul of Christ Fellowship. He stressed that we should love one another despite our differences. All of us are like mathematical fractions where we each have different denominators, but we must find our common denominator: love. This is the formula for building a Heavenly Unified World.

The third speaker, Bishop Fernando Lee from the Kingdom Life Family Church-Philippines, said that



peace is essential to human life. Conflict and wars stem from people not being able to listen to one another. The origin of conflict comes from the seed of Adam and not from religion. Religious leaders are tasked to influence people in their community and members to live a peaceful life and participate in activities that advance peace.

A session of sharing reflections and discussion on the messages, moderated by Archbishop Elias Soria, and announcements of upcoming activities of UPF and IAPD, followed. Pastor Jose Jaime Enage of the Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Filipinas led the call to offering.

The program concluded with a prayer for repentance and healing for the Philippines, given by Bishop Ramil Gerner Sr. of the United Methodist Church Palawan, and a unison prayer.



### 3rd Interfaith Online Fellowship

The 3rd Interfaith Online Fellowship took place on January 12, 2021. Fifty-three people registered for the event, which has been viewed 815 times on social media.

The choir of the ACTION International Ministries opened the fellowship with a performance of "What a Beautiful Name." Emcee Archbishop Elias Soria welcomed everyone with the song "There's a Welcome Here." The program formally began with an invocation offered by Bishop Fernando Lee of the Kingdom Life Family Church-Philippines. The regional secretary general of UPF-Asia Pacific and coordinator of the IAPD-Asia Pacific, Mrs. Ursula McLackland, gave the opening remarks. She reiterated the message of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, founder of the IAPD, on forgiveness and unity towards one another. God is handicapped if there is no unity, especially among religious leaders. For the offertory song, Ms. Celine Louise Deapera sang, "I Dream the Dream."

The first speaker was Rev. Dr. Mario C. Esteban from the United Methodist Church Coastal Pacific of Middle Philippines Annual Conference and an Ambassador for Peace. He pointed out that religion is to reunite; reunion; fellowship; foster togetherness; and share a common denominator, which is love. Building a Heavenly Unified World is the heart of our ministry of reaching love. Love is the greatest weapon, and we can achieve our goal. He shared three principles in building a Heavenly Unified World. First, doing good to ourselves, our neighbors and everyone. Second, do not harm others. Do not be part of the problem but be part of the solution. Lastly, stay in love with God. Reconcile with God and people, and love one another.

The second speaker, Rev. Eliseo Mercado, OMI, Ph.D., from Notre Dame University, began by restating a message given by Pope Francis on focusing on human fellowship that bridges divisions. Help people, say no to war and establish peace and work for the common good. He also said that we have to work for justice and mercy. As religious leaders, we must cross borders and lead the fellowship of all. We are all brothers and sisters and should be responsible stewards of God's creation.

A session of sharing of reflections and discussion, moderated by Archbishop Elias Soria, followed. Next, Dr. Robert S. Kittel gave an inspirational message. He took emphasis on the importance of goodness within the individual, family and world. This is a good foundation for building a good family that can influence people in the community. Religions must work together, not compete with each other. Pastor Ernesto Ilano led the call to offering and offered a beautiful prayer to bless the monetary offering. Bishop Claro Borja offered a prayer for repentance and healing for the Philippines. The event concluded with a benediction prayer, given by Rev. Eliseo Mercado, and a unison prayer.