

**HOW THE BAGSAMORO
AGREEMENT CAN BECOME AN
OCCASION FOR CATHOLIC
EDUCATION TO SHARE ITS
MISSION OF LOVE IN HARMONY,
SOLIDARITY AND PEACE**

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1) INTRODUCTION

This is a special time when the mission of forgiveness has to be emphasized more. In the letter of the CBCP in preparation for the coming of Pope Francis in January next year in the Philippines the message of “MERCY” is also emphasized. Forgiveness, mercy, love, solidarity and harmony must be for us the deeper meaning of dialogue and interfaith dialogue to promote.

There are still cultural gaps that can not be covered with an agreement and with compromises. The Christians, for their part , are more ready to accept the Bangsamoro if they are not depraved of their basic rights and of the basic freedom of religion and are not treated as second class citizens, like in some areas of Mindanao.

We need peace, we love peace and we are here to give our contribution of peace as Catholic educators. You have the urgent mission to educate the new generation of this country starting from the basic mission of love and reconciliation reaffirming the FAITH, THE HOPE AND THE CHARITY that has to guide the Catholic educators, putting these virtues in context:



FAITH


– in the context of
secularism and radicalism,
two opposite emerging
realities.

HOPE

– Catholic educators have the primary mission to promote hope in this society, even it is difficult and there are alarming signs of radicalism that test our faith and our hope in our mission in the world.

CHARITY

- the charity of the Catholics, in general of the Christians, is admired also by Muslims who see how we are in solidarity.



**2) The future Peace in
Mindanao and my
experience of Dialogue
and Peace**

We are in a critical time in the history of Mindanao. There are internal and external factors that make this time more difficult. In my experience in Mindanao, from 1977 up to now, I have been guided by the belief that something, some way, sometimes will happen in the right direction.

Sometimes I see the “revival of Islam” as a blessing for the Christians because in a very unusual way it disturbs and challenges us to revisit the centrality of God in the world and helps us to go out from our “comfort zone” .

From my experience I can say that I have been inspired by many who live their faith, but also by MNLF rebels who use violence and risk their lives.

Living in a Muslim community on my first mission, I deepened my mission and my spirituality. With them I rediscovered that, indeed, all is in the hands of God and this experience deepened my understanding of dialogue. This was my turning point, a kind of conversion to dialogue with the Muslims.

In 1984 I started in Zamboanga City the Silsilah Dialogue Movement with some Christian and Muslim friends sharing my understanding of dialogue as a style of life and a spirituality.

For this reason I choose the words “Silsilah” (chain or link) with spiritual identity taken from the sufi experience that also bring us closer to the understanding that the “chain” or genealogical tree of “Silsilah” or “Salsilah” (in the perception of Muslim groups in Mindanao) can reach all as part of the same human family, created by the same God.



**3) Bangsamoro and
Catholic Educators
in the Philippines**

How can Catholic educators answer today to the signs of the times, especially in the context of the Bangsamoro agreement that is becoming a divisive issue, even if all claim that they work for peace?

You are called to rebuild the trust and the hope for the future peace in Mindanao and in the country.

There is the temptation to live in a virtual world and education becomes selective because people try to avoid the real problems of society. There is the tendency to live in denial of the reality.

Among the many things that you as Catholic Educators can do in this situation is to start with a primer or something similar focusing on some basic questions and answers. One suggestion can be to start from “CARE” used as a name, but also an acronym (C.A.R.E.)

C – COURAGE

- Under this part on
COURAGE the primer can
emphasize:

1) Why we need courage to witness our faith, without compromise, developing a deeper and better experience of faith as a style of life, and sharing with courage love, forgiveness, harmony and solidarity in a language that the young people can understand and appreciate.

2) The courage to proclaim the Catholic identity and in the same time sharing love, friendship and solidarity to all. We are questioned as Catholics by those who follow the trend of a society affected by “secularism”, “individualism”, “egoism” etc. And we need a great courage to oppose this trend and to show the real face of Christianity.

3) The courage to rebuild the unity and sanctity of the family and to rediscover the dialogue with God, the self, others and creation as a way to educate youth to holistic form of dialogue.

A – APPRECIATION

- 1) In the spirit of inter faith dialogue the Catholic educators have to find ways to educate the youth to appreciate their own faith first and encourage them to be in dialogue with others as part of the same human family.

2) Catholic educators are encouraged to present positive stories of people or groups who can inspire the students to follow the spirit of interfaith, promoting experiences of immersion among people of different faiths through proper exposure or documentation.

3) Catholic educators have to promote activities done together with students of different faiths to develop skills in line with the pro active approach and the active-harmony paradigm in the spirit of friendship and solidarity.

R - RESPECT


- 1) Respect the identity of others in case there are points in other religions that are not in line with our own faith and moral principles that we follow.

2) Catholic educators have to prepare students to face, with kindness and determination, ideologies and groups who clearly are against their religion, especially if they advocate and justify any form of violence.

3) Respect in the spirit of sensitivity the traditions and attitudes of others in the way they act and dress inviting moderation and avoiding extreme practices that disturb others' sensitivity and privacy.

E – EXAMPLE

- 1) Be open to evangelization of the Christians and the Daw'a of the Muslims in schools and universities in the spirit of dialogue, encouraging the witness presence as a sign of faithfulness to each own faith and beliefs.



2) Propose activities that promote leadership for dialogue and peace inviting students and faculties to be creative and become models of dialogue and peace.

3) Promote forms of dialogue that are signs of dialogue and solidarity with those who are in need, sustaining the good example with the prayer and meditation.



**4) The Challenge of the
Culture of Dialogue,
path to Peace**

The Culture of Dialogue is the fruit of a process of personal and social transformation that each one is invited to experience, deepening the basic concepts of our human and spiritual aspirations that often are nurtured in the context of our own faith. Thus, different faiths are not an obstacle to the culture of dialogue, rather they are challenges to move together for the common good of society.

Thus, the Culture of Dialogue is a holistic approach that includes all aspects of dialogue, including the “Intra Religious, Inter Religious and Ecumenical Dialogue”.

The Culture of Dialogue is a way to revisit our life as an “encounter, relation, dialogue” that becomes a style of life. The expression “Dialogue starts from God and brings people back to God” best express this dynamic journey of life and the Culture of Dialogue.

UNESCO in the 90's launched the concept of the "Culture of Peace" proposing a list of priorities and issues to achieve peace in the world. The Culture of Dialogue focuses more on the spiritual aspects of life that prepares people to face the issues with more sustainable spirit. Thus, the Culture of Dialogue is a longer process to achieve a "vision of peace".

Vatican II, among the many points to renew the spirit of the Church, has indicated the way of dialogue, encouraging Christians to be in dialogue with all, with a special attention with the Muslims who share the same origin of the faith.

Catholics are still invited to be faithful to their faith, but also to see people of other faiths as part of the same human family with the same rights and dignity and to see also in other faiths some “rays” of our faith.

One of the great examples is a letter of 138 Muslim scholars of the world addressed to Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 and other Christian leaders of the world saying that Muslims and Christians are today the biggest religions of the world and together we have to work for peace based on the teaching of the love of God and the love of neighbor in Islam and Christianity.

We have to grow holistically and to overcome the concept of dialogue as a strategy and give more attention to the concept of dialogue as an expression of love in action, silence and harmony. In this way dialogue is not only a “means” but also a “goal” and a style of life that we have to experience and share.