CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

Forming Hearts in the Shadow and Light
A Message during the 2025 National Christian Formation Conference
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There is a hidden forge somewhere. A forge where the ore, young and raw, is painfully shaped into tender.

While the world races toward rankings, outputs, and achievement scores, the work of Christian formation walks a different path, one that listens more than it speaks, one that sits beside pain, one that dares to believe that faith, like seeds in dry ground, will one day break through. In this Jubilee Year of Hope, we are called to remember that such belief is not naïve, it is prophetic. Hope, after all, is not the absence of pain, but the stubborn conviction that God is still working in the ashes.

There are students in our schools whose stories walk barefoot.

Like Aljon, who hides in the back row of his classroom because his father is in jail and his mother is somewhere he does not know. He comes to school without lunch, but with a heart still open to God, hoping someone will notice. Or Maricar, whose bruises are not always visible, her body present in the classroom, but her soul curled tightly in fear. She does well in Christian Living class, not because she has memorized the Beatitudes, but because she clings to them like lifelines in a storm.

There is Bryan, who struggles to speak in class, not because he lacks thought, but because every word must first battle the shame of poverty and stuttering. He looks at the crucifix on the wall not with ritual, but with a hunger for someone who understands.

These children sit in our rooms. And for them, Christian formation is not a subject. It is a life raft. And for us who are tasked to form them, this Jubilee is a reminder that our labor is never in vain. We form not for the moment, but for eternity. We do not plant knowledge, but resurrection.

We in Christian formation are not simply teachers. We are gardeners of the unseen, tilling the soil of the heart, even when the seasons are dry. We are lamplighters, holding up truth in a world that grows darker by the hour. We are shepherds, seeking not the compliant, but the lost.

And yet, let us not romanticize this call.

There are days when formation feels like shouting into the wind. There are lessons that fall flat, recollections that end in restlessness, and students who stare blankly when we speak of mercy and hope. There are those who mock the faith, who resist, who wound. And sometimes, we question if any of it still matters.

But oh, it does.

Because Christian formation is not measured by applause or achievement, but by conversion. It is the quiet moment when a student stays behind after class and asks, “Sir, do you think God still listens to me?”

It is when a bully begins to weep during confession.

It is when a hardened student holds the hand of a crying classmate, not out of pity, but love.

Christian formation lives in these tiny resurrections.

It is victory when a hardened heart softens.

It is triumph when a student dares to believe she is loved.

It is glory when someone who once laughed at prayer, begins to pray.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, these are the victories we must dare to see, not in headlines, but in halos that are hidden. The Jubilee tells us: Do not measure by the world's terms. Measure by love. Measure by grace.

In a world of rapid change, Christian formation must remain the deep root. Where technology accelerates, we must slow the soul. Where the mind is formed, we must form the conscience. Where the hands are skilled, we must ask, "But for whom do you labor?"

Let us defend its place in our schools. Christian formation is not an extracurricular, it is the compass, the altar, the anchor. Without it, we may produce graduates who are smart, but lost; skilled, but empty; excellent, but cruel.

Let us form hearts that will not only resist evil but embrace goodness. Hearts that will love the poor not because it is a school program, but because it is a Gospel command. Let our retreats be spaces where students remove their masks. Let our liturgies awaken awe, not boredom. Let our outreach programs form relationships, not just requirements.

And let us not forget: we too are being formed.

In the exhaustion, in the disappointment, in the quiet moments of grace, our hearts are being carved by the same God who called us to this work.

The Jubilee reminds us: the one who called you is faithful. You are not forgotten. Your labor is remembered. Your tears are being counted. And your hope will not betray you.

So to all of you who form hearts, who walk with students not just toward success, but toward the Cross, you are not alone. You are doing holy work. You are shaping eternity in hidden ways.

And one day, we believe, perhaps in heaven or perhaps in a quiet letter year from now, a student will say:

"You taught me how to pray. You helped me believe again. Because of you, I know now that God never left."

Let that be enough. Let that be everything.

For in the end, what greater legacy can we leave than a heart that knows how to love— and a soul that still chooses hope?