



United Church of Christ in the Philippines
Annual Sessions of the Conferences
June 2015 to March 2016

Report of the General Secretariat

The annual theme for Ecclesiastical Year 2015-2016, **“Toward a Spirituality for a New Creation”**, demands that we continually expand our capacity to participate in the task of protecting and caring for God’s creation. This annual session, we will be introduced to the theme for EY 2016-2017: **“Spirituality for a New Humanity”**. Humanity has been provided with life in its abundance but humanity’s greed is continuously destroying God’s wonderful and bountiful creation. Hence, renewal is not only addressed to and for creation but also for humanity itself.

Through the power, mercy and grace of Christ, we experience the transformative act of God in our lives, enabling us to be a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). As disciples of Jesus, we are to discern the present realities, learn together so that in doing Christ’s ways we may help in ushering in God’s reign here on earth. As our Biblico-Theological Reflection on the Quadrennial Sub-theme states: “The new humanity in Christ are people radically transformed and who will work to contribute to the emergence of a new world. Where conflicts arise, they come as the peacemakers and peace builders. Where prejudice, exclusion and hatred abound, they come as bridge builders and reconcilers. Where injustice and victimization take place they come as the voice and advocates of the victims calling for justice and restitution. Where mother earth is being destroyed, they come as defenders of the integrity, balance and harmony of the whole creation. This is what a new humanity touched and empowered by the spirit of Christ can do as God’s agents of transformation and reconciliation.”

This report is a reflection on the organizational health and state of our Church. It gives a view on the various organizational, institutional and program ministries of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. Like all previous reports, it is meant to open conversation on the various issues raised based on our Quadrennial Thrusts.

THRUST #1: Unity in the understanding of and commitment to the beliefs, values and principles of the Church, manifested in a profound sense of identity as UCCP.

- The **7 Quadrennial Thrusts** (QTs) have been intentionally studied and discussed in the meetings of the **7 Jurisdictional Area Cabinets** (JACs) led by the Incumbent Bishops. The intention has been to unify all the Conferences, church-recognized organizations (CROs) and church institutions (CIs) to consciously adopt these thrusts as our common framework for planning and developing programs, projects and priorities in pursuit of the UCCP Strategic Plan (Vision, Mission, Goals). So far, a number of Conferences in all Jurisdictions have started to align their programs with the Quadrennial Thrusts. All the CROs and CIs, particularly the United Church Workers Organization (UCWO), the Christian Youth Fellowship (CYF), the Christian Women’s Association (CWA), the United Church Men (UCM), the Christian Young Adults Fellowship (CYAF), the UCCP Hospitals Association (UHA) and the Church-Related Educational Action Towards Empowerment (CREATE), in the national and jurisdictional levels, have been oriented on the QTs. As a result, most of the CROs and CIs have begun to attune their endeavors with the unified thrusts of the Church.

- The importance of **organizational development and management strategies** through the **OGSM** (Objectives, Goals, Strategies and Metrics) and **ERRC** (Eliminate, Raise, Reduce, Create) has helped us to clarify our respective roles in the achievement of the VMG of the Church. We conducted a Stakeholders Meeting in Antipolo City, an All-Leaders Meeting in Alfonso, Cavite, and a Facilitators' Training of the CYF and CYAF to provide a framework towards an integrated planning system in the judicatories, institutions and organizations (JOIs). These tools help us to know our scope and limitations, know more about our responsibilities, identify our shortfalls, opportunities and strategies for future development that will ensure continuation of plans. The OGSM and ERRC tools provide a framework for being intentional in our programs and help create focus on the most critical things we need to do per year.
- The **Policy Statements on New Religious Movements (NRM), Let Grace Be Total (LGBT), Large-Scale Mining and Climate Change** have been religiously studied in all JACs. Eventually, they were introduced in all Conference annual sessions and have been discussed in the meetings of the CROs and some church institutions. So far, a more focused discussion on particular policy statements were done in a number of Conferences in the Middle Luzon Jurisdiction (MLJ) and the Southeast Mindanao Jurisdiction (SEMJA) on NRM, in the East Visayas Jurisdiction (EVJ) and in the North Luzon Jurisdiction (NLJ) on LGBT, and in the NLJ on mining. Appropriate study materials on these policy statements will be designed in order that the general membership can appreciate and advocate them in their own localities and context.
- It was observed that the ratification of the **Amendments to the Constitution and By-Laws (CBL)** went smoothly and speedily. This shows the kind of consensus that has already been attained by the Conferences on this fundamental statute of the Church that binds us all with common governance, principles and accountabilities. All the amendments passed and were proclaimed as duly-ratified in the last National Council held in UCCP Magugpo, Tagum City.
- The **Magna Carta for Church Workers** has been thoroughly discussed and studied among the general membership of the UCWO at all levels: Conference, Jurisdiction and National. Through this statute, a level of unity is reached and a common standard is institutionalized in dealing with the complex and protracted issues related to Church Workers from recruitment to retirement. A Bishop Emeritus is serving full-time in the Office of the Ministry in order to facilitate and coordinate the varied concerns and ongoing developments of the Church Workers.
- **Gender Justice** has been decided by the national leadership to be mainstreamed in the life and work of the UCCP. A **Gender Capacity Assessment Training** was launched recently as participated by 30 representatives from all the jurisdictional areas and CROs. **Desks on Gender Concerns** is planned to be established in the national and jurisdictional offices. A gender-just UCCP is what we aim for.
- The **Constitutional Commissions** (Faith and Order or FOC, Unity and Union or CCUU, Stewardship and Resource Development or CSRD) have held different meetings separately and jointly. Essentially, these bodies have accomplished to provide timely guidance to ensure that the Church's conduct and engagements are consistent and coherent with our faith-affirmations, polity, biblico-theological discernment and stewardship principles.

THRUST #2: A vibrant congregational life rooted in the Christian faith, strengthened by an evangelistic zeal, deepened by a commitment to serve, and made visible in a warm and caring fellowship with one another.

Engaging in both traditional and creative approaches in discerning God's vision and mission for the church brings new and innovative ways to enrich the worship life of the congregations. These approaches include:

- **A standard Sunday School Lesson series.** A three-year Sunday School lesson series based on the quadrennial theme and annual sub-themes has been started to be produced, covering the time period from 29 November 2015 to 25 November 2018. This is an important effort by the whole Church to provide necessary education to our constituents in order to consolidate their faith and theological understanding towards effective discipleship. We wish to recognize the painstaking efforts of our three theologians, Dr. Noriel Capulong, Dr. Everett Mendoza and Dr. Jeaneth Harris-Faller, together with our lay leader, Dr. Ruth de Lara, who are part of the core group of this quadrennium's Sunday School project.

The pool of writers for this year has been organized representing all jurisdictional areas. They are chosen for being advocates for peace and justice and for having the passion for writing. Dr. Noriel Capulong, together with his Divinity School students, writes the exegesis for the biblical texts for each lesson. Dr. Everett Mendoza writes the companion guide for each lesson. Dr. Jeaneth Harris-Faller prepares the liturgical guide. As of this writing, Sunday School lessons up to the Fourth Sunday in Lent can already be accessed or downloaded from our UCCP website, www.uccpchurch.com, under the menu Today's Gospel. Efforts are being made for these lessons to be translated into Ilocano, Cebuano and Tagalog, but for this year, there is no assurance that all translations can be uploaded onto our website.

Orientation on the jurisdictional level of this liturgical year's Sunday School lessons have recently concluded. We thank the leadership of all our jurisdictions for being hands-on and supportive of these activities. It is our hope that this orientation has already been cascaded down to the conference and local church levels, even as materials are already being used. Preparation of Sunday School materials for the next liturgical year starting November 2016 is already underway. Orientation on these materials should happen before we start using these.

We still need more prolific writers. We call on your Christian education writers, whether lay or ordained, who are interested to write Sunday School lessons. They must be committed to the principles of the UCCP and can produce original lessons within a limited timeframe. If you know of anyone who fits this criteria, please submit her or his name to the bishop assigned to your jurisdictional area, who in turn will recommend to the National Office.

- The work of evangelism has found new expression in the holding of **Festivals of Faith** in the various conferences and jurisdictions. These festivals foster the deepening and strengthening of fellowship among communities of faith. The festival drew in several choirs from the different conferences and showcased many musical talents and gifts. However, we still need to increase the Jurisdictions' initiative on the festival of faith to the level of conference celebrations.

Now that the Christian Education and Nurture Program Coordinator post has been filled, we can expect a reinvigorated CEN ministry with activities like regular CEN consultations, a sustained production of Sunday School materials, publication of study guides on the Bible and other important church documents, the revision of Christian education documents like the Confirmation Manual, coordination of the campus ministry program, the lay formation program and a liturgical renewal program, continued publication of values education curricula for our schools, leadership and capability-building trainings, among others.

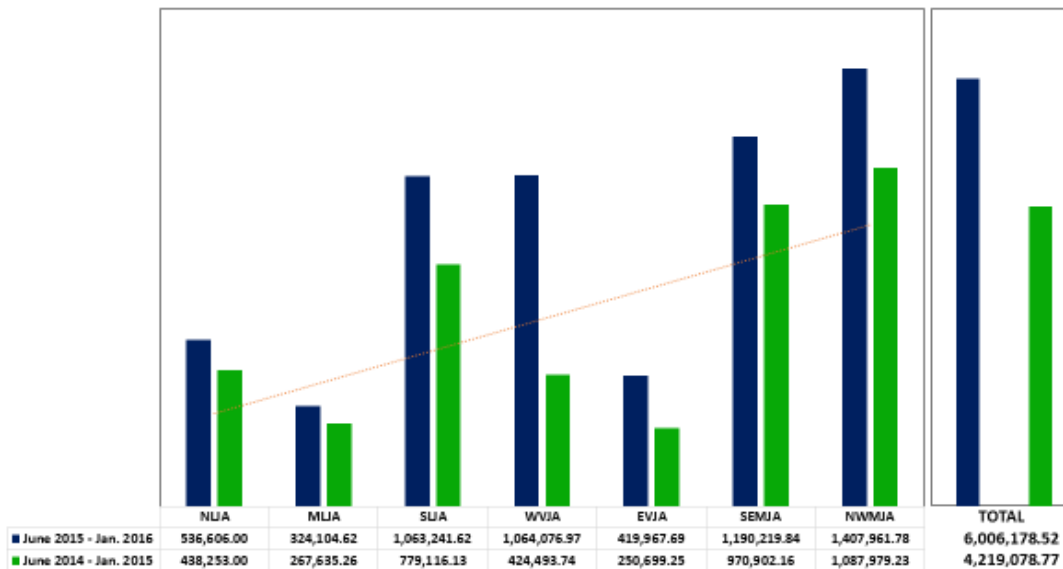
THRUST #3: Faithful and responsible stewardship of the resources of the Church to strengthen its capacity to fulfill its various ministries and eventually become self-reliant.

The fast changing economic situation dictates that we explore long term viability and that there is a need to find alternative ways of resourcing our mission work and operations.

• **Financial Stewardship**

1. Accounting software development- at least 80% completed; our financial transactions are already encoded and the reporting format and other financial requirements now need to be verified/checked;
2. Updated financial recording- regular encoding of transactions that help us in our timely submission of financial reports to our donors and partners;
3. Cash flow monitoring- regular update of bank balances; monitoring of cash inflows and outflows that help us implement projects/programs;
4. Regular Monitoring of Foreign Exchange (FX)- we gained over P1,000,000 ending January 2016;
5. Acquisition of New Vehicles- 3 vehicles have been purchased for SLJ, MLJ and the Office of the General Secretary. The vehicles were bought on loan, 3 years to pay at a low interest rate.
6. 500 Club. Have raised closed to 2M pesos on this. Report available on the website.
7. WMS Promotion- 40% increase from last year's WMS (Jan 2015 – P4.2M; Jan 2016 – P6M).

COMPARATIVE GIVINGS FOR THE SAME PERIOD



• **Property Stewardship**

In line with stewardship of property, we note the following:

1. In **North Luzon**, 2 church properties have been recovered (**UCCP Pata**, Claveria, Cagayan and **UCCP Baduang**, Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte)
2. In **Middle Luzon**, one Conference (LCSMC) is on simultaneous process of titling of church properties
3. In **South Luzon**, 16 properties in Cullion, Palawan are being processed for titling (8 are with counter-claimants). Three (3) new chapels were constructed in 2 Conferences (NestCon and Palawan)

4. In **West Visayas**, four (4) new church lots were acquired in Bohol (Pasanan, Canlaas, Cabayugan and Dagnawan). Thirteen (13) new church buildings were constructed in the whole jurisdiction: 10 in Bohol; 1 in Cebu, 1 in Negros and 1 in WVC. A mountain beach resort (1,000 sqm) in WVC will be donated to UCCP.
5. In **East Visayas**, seven (7) new church buildings were constructed in 3 Conferences (SIDC, NelbiCon, SWLC). Seven (7) local churches were recovered from LIFE. The Bethany Medical Arts buildings and facilities in Tacloban were renovated. At the NHI, a two-story school building is being constructed.
6. In **Southeast Mindanao**, the **Haran** premises is due for property development. For 6 months now, it is serving as a sanctuary for the 700 IP/Lumad refugees.
7. In **Northwest Mindanao**, part of the **Macasandig** property in Cagayan de Oro already belongs to the national. The Office Building of Lanao District Conference is due for construction.
8. The **National Office** has undertaken the following:
 - Continuous profiling of properties and development of the data bank system
 - Documentation of property in Culion-Palawan (for titling)
 - Preparing development plans for the Project 6 property
 - Preparing development plans for the CONDORA property
 - Development of the Bokawkan property in Baguio into a Shalom Center
 - Interior renovation of the 877 National Office; the ground floor is rented by ECLOF and the four rooms in the third floor are rented by 4 different organizations.
- **Church Workers Benefits.** We remain confronted with critical and grave concerns surrounding benefits that are supposed to be given to church workers. Hence, we need to study possible schemes to organize a Church Workers Benefits Committee to help ensure financial security for church workers assigned to local churches and institutions. Also, we need to set up an endowment fund for retired church workers.
- **Health Care Proposal.** As a way of alleviating the cost of HMOs' insurance policy fees, our National Treasurer made a comparative analysis of different HMOs to help reduce expenses and came up with proposals to develop a Church Reserve Fund to help ministers and National staff on insurance facilities for in-hospital accounts.

Challenges:

- Need to develop the service centers as a premiere service provider in their respective locations, promoting the UCCP brand grounded by UCCP basic ministries adhering to DOT standards, in order to increase occupancy rate;
- Increased contribution and effective participation of the JOIs in realizing the comprehensive stewardship program;
- Inventory of human resources and material resources from the JOIs; and
- Enlisting 200 members for the 500 Club.

THRUST #4: Comprehensive human resource development that will ensure capable, responsible and effective leadership for future generations.

There is an undisputed dearth of capable, effective leaders and managers at every level of our Church. This is more so with ministers than with laity. It is the responsibility of any credible organization to invest in the development of current and future leadership. Such development should focus mainly on calling-discernment, character-building, enhancement of leadership competencies and aligning them with the Church vision, as well as sharpening Church governance and financial management skills.

Other initiatives undertaken at present include, among others:

- Clergy and lay leaders' continuing ministerial training and development (CTE, Evangelism, CMT, the ordination process);
- A planning process with a standard framework introduced in different levels (Stakeholders, All Leaders and soon at the Conference level); training of a pool of facilitators;
- Draft governance manual developed;
- Proposal for a generational leadership and management training submitted;
- Proposal for leadership training for clergy developed;
- Human resource requirements and process review to align job descriptions, clarify roles and functions, and to intensify hiring and staff development.

THRUST #5: Committed and dedicated prophetic witness of the Church as a collective response to the need to bring wholeness of life for all of God's creation.

As reported last year there is a welcomed emerging consciousness of the Church as a vehicle for God's mission that is reflected in the program on Justice, Peace and Human Rights (JPHR) and Community Ministries. Almost all the report-narratives of these programs reflect stories of reaching out to the needy, the wretched, the marginalized and the vulnerable in the different sectors of society.

For instance, our fellow *Ata-Manobos (Lumads* in Mindanao) were given help and refuge in the UCCP HARAN Mission House in Davao City. Our Church has long been a peace sanctuary for the lost, the last and the least of our people, a place purposely created to accommodate individuals or communities that are neglected, exploited, suppressed, and deprived of their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.

Advocacy for Justice, Peace and Human Rights

- Allocated educational support for the 1st semester of this academic year to children of UCCP pastors and lay people who are victims of human rights violations;
- Held a forum on social issues with the theme: "Church People's Struggle for the Sanctity of Life, Freedom and National Sovereignty";
- Held a forum on "IP Rights to Ancestral Domain and Self-Determination" for the United Metropolis Conference and the Lowland Cavite South-Manila Conference Pastors and Lay;
- Held a para-legal training workshop in Haran, Davao City;
- Attended the hearing and held a prayer vigil on the UCCP legal suit vs. former Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo;
- Co-sponsored an ecumenical and multi-sectoral symposium on peace with the West Visayas Jurisdiction in VCMC, Cebu;
- Allocated financial support for legal processes of two UCCP pastors of the South Cotabato-Sarangani District Conference (SCSDC) who are facing trumped-up charges by state police and military;
- Allocated financial support to pay the bail bond of Ptr. Jun Bunoan who was accused of trumped-up charges by state military;
- Held an orientation on the JPHR Program for the WVJ-EVJ UCWO during their joint fellowship on Oct. 20-22 at the UCCP UEP, Catarman, N. Samar, and for the MLJ UCWO during their Annual Encounter held on Oct. 26-30, 2015 at the ETS, Baguio City;
- Attended the International People's Tribunal (IPT) trial on Human Rights Violations in the Philippines held in the USA;

- Gave solidarity support to ecumenical and multi-sectoral partners on JPHR-related advocacy and mobilization activities

Disaster Response Management. Our country is faced with environmental crisis and this is a matter of great concern which we must give priority. The following are the activities implemented within the last six months.

- Education and advocacy on critical issues on large scale mining, global warming and climate change, disaster risk reduction and Indigenous Peoples' concern;
- Institutionalized and popularized the community ministries program in Matuginao, Samar, the establishment of the agroforest training program and the procurement of land for nursery development;
- Monitored and evaluated the implementation of the rebuilding of churches in earthquake-shaken areas in the province of Bohol;
- Conducted a post-construction evaluation for UEM-supported projects;
- Conducted quick monitoring and evaluation of the PDA (PC-USA);
- Conducted an ocular inspection and monitoring of the proposed shelter project in Carigara, Leyte;
- Conducted a capability-building seminar in project development at UCCP San Juan for the Batangas Associate Conference;
- The Humanitarian and Disaster Response Agency (UHDR) that we are creating will soon be registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Proposals are being developed as we prepare to operate this agency soon.
- Conducted a Community-Based Disaster Relief and Response Management training for STC, UCC, UMC, MLJ and NLJ;
- STC and KTKK organized an emergency team to handle immediate relief operations, and responded to disaster-hit areas of the North Luzon Jurisdiction and Middle Luzon Jurisdiction

THRUST #6: Strengthened cooperation and coordination with and among church institutions and organizations as companions in the faith journey and as partners-in-mission.

Church-related institutions and organizations are partners-in-mission and companions in our faith journey. It is our aim to strengthen cooperation and coordination with them. These are the activities done so far.

- CREATE developed a database in order to facilitate sharing of its unique strengths and expertise with member institutions
- Bethany campaign: information dissemination, consultation and legal processes
- Re-orientation on the roles of Church institutions through: fellowship of CI heads, and a training/seminar for teachers
- Campus Ministry consultation held in November 2015 in Davao City. There's a need to clarify objectives and strategies and make ways to develop this as a full program

Trends and analysis:

- Start the process of consolidation of initiatives in the area of education, from Christian Education, early childhood education, to formal education to underscore the interrelatedness and complementarity of these concerns
- Raise initiatives towards establishing ownership of institutions through CBL amendments/revisions, thru the BOTs and thru legal actions

- Raise alignment of schools and hospitals' community extension programs with UCCP community ministries

THRUST #7: Stronger and meaningful interfaith, ecumenical, and international relations.

The ecumenical movement is both universal and local. The oneness of the ecumenical movement worldwide should be evident in each local church, just as the UCCP must remain firmly in touch with the reality of local communities where Christians are gathered to worship and serve. As we live out the ecumenical spirit, we continue to work with our partners, whether local and international, to facilitate and participate in various programs and advocacies.

We have received and hosted representatives from partners like the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), the United Church of Christ, USA (UCC-USA), the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), Bread for the World, and institutions like the San Francisco Theological Seminary, for programs and activities like internship, exposure visits, project visits, and a travel seminar.

Placements are continuously being explored. It is desired that an Inventory of Placements will be clearly established within the next two years. So far, Church Institutions, particularly certain schools, seminaries and hospitals in the Visayas and Mindanao, and Community Ministries' projects/programs run by some Local Churches (like Tondo on Children and Cubao on Trafficked Women and Children) have been suitable placements especially for interns, volunteers and mission co-workers from international partners. Post-Haiyan and Post-Earthquake Rehabilitation Projects and Programs in East Visayas and Bohol are explored as potential placements for incoming interns and future Persons-in-Mission (PIM) with interest particularly on community development and climate change issues.

We have sent a youth volunteer from Baguio, Ms. Kris Aquino, to serve for one year in Sumatra, Indonesia, under the UEM South-South Volunteer Program, and a mission co-worker, Mrs. Raquel Lipata, to serve for six months in Jawa, Indonesia, as English Teacher under the UEM Short-Term Service Program.

UCCP was represented by Mr. Nelson John Salvador to the International People's Tribunal held in Washington, DC, USA. He testified before the tribunal on the brutal torture and murder by the Philippine Army of his wife, the late Engr. Fidela "Delle" Salvador. His trip was part of a "Campaign Tour for Peace and Human Rights" particularly among the partner-churches in the USA and Canada.

The UCCP General Secretary was a guest at the General Synod of the United Church of Christ in Canada (UCC-Canada) where he conveyed a solidarity message giving emphasis on our partnership in addressing the extra-judicial killings and human rights abuses in the Philippines. He was likewise invited by the German Ecumenical Network on the Philippines to a Human Rights Conference in Berlin, Germany. Our General Secretary also attended the International Ecumenical Peace Forum in South Korea, hosted by the National Council of Churches in Korea.

During the Lumad Manilakbayan, a national campaign to stop lumad killings, the UCCP (from the funding grant of UEM) contributed Php100,000 for food and medical supplies needed by the Lumad contingent while camping in Metro Manila.

There is an ongoing review by the Commission on Church Union and Unity (CCUU). The PER Coordinator is providing technical support through documentation and research. We have also been able to submit timely

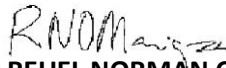
reports to our partners. Through prompt and credible reports and timely submission of well-prepared project applications, the trust and confidence of the partners have been significantly generated or restored.

Some Reminders:

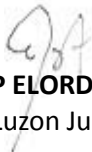
1. We wish to remind the Conferences to ratify the proposed Election Code, which were sent to you as early as last year, but whose ratification we asked to be postponed due to the numerous CBL provisions that were due for ratification.
2. As many Conferences are having elections this year, may we remind the Conferences that insofar as the term of the Conference Representative to the National Council is concerned, our National Commission on Conflict Resolution has ruled that they are only allowed three consecutive terms [NCCR Opinion No. 98-003, Oct. 20, 1998].

We wish to acknowledge and extend our sincere gratitude for the input made by various team members in the Local Churches, Conferences, Jurisdictions and the National Secretariat of the UCCP in the compilation of this report. Without such dedicated assistance, intellectual acumen, moral and prayerful support it would have been impossible to give an informed account to this Conference in session.

Mabuhay ang UCCP! With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, together we can achieve more.




BISHOP REUEL NORMAN O. MARIGZA
General Secretary



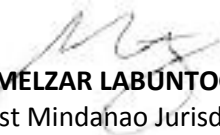
BISHOP ELORDE SAMBAT
North Luzon Jurisdictional Area



BISHOP JAIME MORILES
East Visayas Jurisdictional Area



BISHOP JOEL TENDERO
South Luzon Jurisdictional Area



BISHOP MELZAR LABUNTOG
Northwest Mindanao Jurisdictional Area



BISHOP ERMEGENCIO PADILLO
Middle Luzon Jurisdictional Area



BISHOP HAMUEL TEQUIS
Southeast Mindanao Jurisdictional Area



BISHOP JEZER BERTOLDO
West Visayas Jurisdictional Area