

The United Church Letter

A publication of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines

OCTOBER 2017

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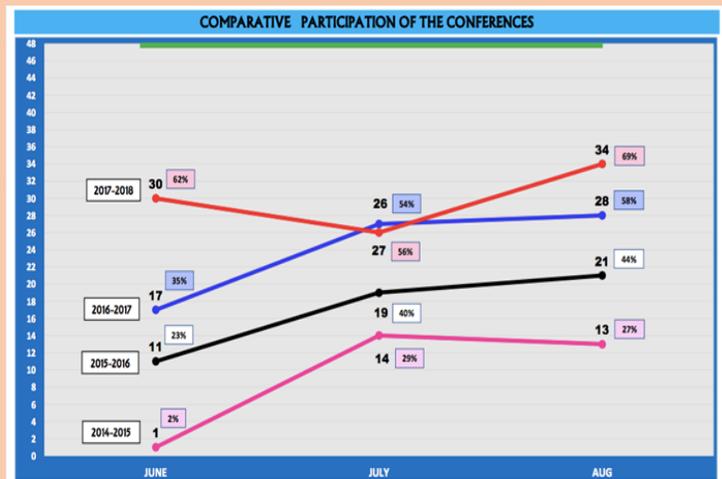
WIDER MISSION SUPPORT														
June 1, 2017 - August 31, 2017														
	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	TOTAL		JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	TOTAL		JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	TOTAL
NORTH LUZON JURISDICTION					WESTERN VISAYAS JURISDICTION									
Apayao Associate Conference	2,300.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	6,300.00	Bohol Conference	32,559.46	12,625.20	18,268.85	63,453.51					
Highland Conference	25,990.00		20,803.00	46,793.00	Cebu Conference	47,264.10	177,181.09	50,937.00	275,382.19					
North Central Luzon Conference		28,300.68	10,133.92	38,434.60	North Negros Conference	20,000.00			20,000.00					
North Central Luzon-Amurayan Conference			20,000.00	20,000.00	Negros District Conference				0.00					
Northwest Luzon Conference		30,000.00	35,000.00	65,000.00	Central Negros Associate Conference				55,000.00					
Northwest Luzon Conference				0.00	Negros Visayas Conference	49,500.00			49,500.00					
North Highland Associate Conference	35,906.50	21,684.00	70,000.00	127,590.50	sub-total	149,323.56	189,806.29	124,205.85	463,335.70					
Middle Highland Conference				0.00	EASTERN VISAYAS JURISDICTION									
New Abra Conference (ISAC)		2,000.00		2,000.00	Masbate Conference				0.00					
sub-total	64,196.50	83,984.68	157,936.92	306,118.10	Northeastern Leyte-Biliran Conference	22,318.96			22,318.96					
MIDDLE LUZON JURISDICTION					Samar Island District Conference	5,493.00	3,140.00	5,252.00	13,885.00					
United Metropolis Conference	49,431.80	49,231.85	49,434.10	148,097.75	Southern Western Leyte Conference	40,500.00	50,100.00	54,955.00	145,555.00					
Lowland Cavite - South Manila Conference	100,000.00	79,004.32	58,888.00	237,892.32	Northern Western Samar Conference				0.00					
West Central Luzon Conference	9,900.00		15,300.00	25,200.00	sub-total	68,311.96	53,240.00	60,207.00	181,758.96					
Northwest Nueva Ecija Asso. Conference	3,000.00	5,000.00		8,000.00	SOUTHEAST MINDANAO JURISDICTION									
Central Luzon Conference		3,485.00		3,485.00	Surigao-Dinagat District Conference	21,625.00	45,674.35	20,735.00	88,034.35					
Manila North Conference				0.00	Agusan District Conference	62,720.25	71,890.15	92,296.35	226,906.75					
sub-total	182,331.80	136,721.17	123,622.10	422,675.07	Cotabato Annual Conference	5,000.00		10,000.00	15,000.00					
SOUTH LUZON JURISDICTION					South Cotabato Sarangani District Conf.	10,000.00		2,000.00	12,000.00					
Upland Cavite Conference (KTKK)	161,499.39	81,463.76	110,941.10	353,904.25	Northeastern Davao District Conference	29,221.80	24,824.65	32,269.80	86,316.25					
Batangas Associate Conference	35,228.22	76,193.45	36,203.80	147,625.47	Southern Mindanao District Conference		35,000.00	35,000.00	70,000.00					
Oriental Mindoro Conference (Mindoro Conference)				0.00	sub-total	128,567.06	177,389.15	192,301.15	498,257.36					
Occidental Mindoro Associate Conference (OMAC)			1,250.00	1,250.00	NORTHWEST MINDANAO JURISDICTION									
Southern Tagalog Conference	43,165.17	16,192.75	4,294.05	63,651.97	Lanao District Conference		13,500.00	3,886.28	17,386.28					
North Bicol Conference	32,132.33		27,946.34	60,078.67	Central Mindanao Annual Conference	74,662.70	48,468.37	72,737.95	195,869.02					
South Bicol Conference			30,929.75	30,929.75	Bukidnon Area Conference	41,369.80	40,549.70	43,786.58	125,706.08					
Northwest Southern Tagalog Conference	93,033.58		96,664.93	189,698.51	District Conf. of Northern Mindanao	47,974.43	43,432.75	41,022.50	132,429.68					
Palawan Associate Conference	3,646.59	2,916.70	2,194.36	8,757.65	Western Mindanao District Conference	45,600.00	47,778.00	46,338.00	139,716.00					
sub-total	368,705.28	176,766.66	310,424.33	855,896.27	District Conf. of Southern Zamboanga		27,500.00		27,500.00					
					District Conf. of Northern Zamboanga	22,842.00		98,084.00	120,926.00					
					sub-total	232,448.93	221,228.82	305,855.31	759,533.06					
					GRAND TOTAL	1,173,885.08	1,039,136.77	1,274,552.46	3,487,574.31					

The Faithful Giving of Wider Mission Support

An update as of August, 2017

The first quarter of 2017-2018 WMS giving is a beautiful story of faithfulness and improved appreciation of our mission work as a church. As much as the amount of WMS continue to increase and grew by 297% compared to the 2014-2015 same period giving, it is the faithfulness – or the consistent monthly giving of the conferences of 39% average for the last 3 months (19 out of 49 conferences), or as high as 69% (34 out of 49 conferences) for the month of August that really inspire us.

It is worth noting the Southeast Mindanao Jurisdiction Area (SEMJA) performed 100% for the month of August! It means, all the conferences of the jurisdiction remitted their WMS within the set deadline. Congratulations!



Small conferences, such as Palawan and Apayao Associate Conferences showed improvement on giving their WMS faithfully on a monthly basis, based on their actual collection and capacity. This we hope would also inspire other conferences – big or small. Faithfulness in giving does not lie on the amount, but on the regularity (monthly) and faithfulness in remitting what is due to the wider judicatory of the church.

Together, we continue to thank God for the blessings and for God's faithfulness to the church – the people of God.

UCCP Hosts United Evangelical Mission Asia Regional Assembly



The United Church of Christ in the Philippines hosted the United Evangelical Mission's (UEM) Asia Regional Assembly (AsRA) last September 28 to October 1, 2017 at Island Cove, Kawit Cavite, with the theme "Sharing the Good News: Faith and Grace in Action".

The United Evangelical Mission is a communion of Protestant churches in three regions: Asia, Africa, and Germany. It holds Regional Assemblies in Asia and Africa once every two years, and a General Assembly which meets every two years in between Regional Assemblies. The Asia Region is composed of 16 member churches from Indonesia, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. The past AsRA was attended by a total of 43 delegates, 1 substitute, 3 Asia Regional Board members, 1 associate member, 4 guests, 8 UEM staff and 6 stewards, with a total of 66 participants.

The delegates and participants were welcomed by the UCCP staff as they started arriving from September 25-26. Pre-Assemblies were held on September 27 by the Youth and Women delegates, respectively, in order that the delegates could get oriented about the regional assembly, to discuss about the activities that they had done and share best practices, and to collectively make plans that they would present for approval at the regional assembly.

The AsRA started with an opening ceremony, Bishop Emergencio Padillo of the Middle Luzon Jurisdictional Area shared the good news through message. They were also welcomed by Rev. Ruth Billena, Conference Minister of the Lowland Cavite

South Manila Conference. Followed by the plenary sessions where the situation and challenges of member churches were discussed along with their response to the call of service. Devotions were also done every day.

The AsRA also elects representatives to the Asia Regional Board (ARB). The following were elected as members of the board at this past AsRA: Yodhi Anggara Primananda (Christian Church of Northern Central Java) for the youth representative, Ka Keung Chan (Chinese Rhenish Church), Yosina Adelce (Evangelical Christian Church in Tanah Papua), Asiri Priyalal Perera (Methodist Church of Sri Lanka), and Melinda Grace Aonan (United Church of Christ in the Philippines).

The Asia Regional Assembly ended with a closing service followed by a cultural night. The delegates prepared presentations that depicted their culture and were able to participate in dancing Tinikling. Appreciation was shown

to Rev. Sonia Parera-Hummel for having served UEM as Executive Secretary for Asia for 10 years, thanking her for the service and life she shared with the UEM family.

The delegates of AsRA had their Sunday Service in 7 Local Churches of the Lowland Cavite South Manila Conference (LCSMC). There were assigned preachers in each local church chosen from among the delegates of AsRA. After Sunday service they went to some areas in Cavite to see the situation of fisherfolk and urban poor.



Jesus' prayer as found in John 17:21 says, "that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me". The life and work of the United Evangelical Mission, the advocacy, development and diaconal works are geared towards unity and harmony which is the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ. The prayer of Jesus compels us to Share the Good news especially to the least of our sisters and brothers through our faith and grace in action.

Christian Education Month Celebration

September is Christian Education and Nurture (CEN) Month and is celebrated by our Conferences, local Churches, and church-related organizations (CROs) through various forms of activities. Included in the celebration is our observance of CEN Sunday, Children's Sunday, Youth Sunday and CYAF Sunday. Alongside the celebration are different activities such as Bible studies, fellowships, children's congress and other creative activities led by our CROs and Conferences.

Meanwhile, the CEN Desk conducted its planned programs for the month of September, one of which is the Sunday School Conceptualization Workshop that was held on September 10 to 15, 2017 at the UCCP Shalom Center. This said workshop was attended by writers from different Jurisdictions namely Rev. Emily Vanguardia, Rev. Marjo Belmonte, Rev. Annabelle Uriarte, Rev. Mylene Kadusale and Rev. Lilibeth Tendero. It was headed by Ms. Melinda Grace Aoanan our National Coordinator for CEN, at the same time Executive Secretary for Program Ministries. The Workshop was conducted to prepare Sunday School materials for the next Quadrennial.



GEN SEC'S CORNER



September 28 to October 1, 2017 - United Evangelical Mission, Asia Regional Assembly at Island Cove, Kawit, Cavite

September 17-23, 2017 - PROK 102nd General Assembly, South Korea

September 16, 2017 - National Union of People's Lawyers 10th Anniversary; Escalating Human Rights Violations: The Role of People's

Lawyers in the People's Struggle for a just and lasting peace.

September 15, 2017 - Signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Scholarship Program between UCCP and the Mission of Yongsan District, West Seoul Presbyterian Church of Korea

August 29-31, 2017 - Church Workers' Convocation, Dumaguete City

Migrant Ministry: Introducing Migrant Ministry Monthly Updates (MMMU)

by: Rev. Cathy Chang, Mission Co-Worker, PC-USA



Hello from Quezon City, the UCCP national offices! Since March 2016, our family moved here from the United States, to serve as international mission co-workers with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Our family includes me, Rev. Cathy Chang, my husband Juan Lopez, and our 5-year-

old daughter Aurélie. I (Cathy) accepted the call to serve as Regional Facilitator for Addressing Migration and Human Trafficking, which means working part-time throughout the Philippines, and part-time throughout Asia, with various churches and organizations as they confront the challenges of migration and combat human trafficking.

Throughout the past years, we know that the UCCP has been very active and engaged with Migrant Ministry. We look forward to reinvigorating this ministry, while focusing both on the pastoral care dimensions of families and individuals impacted by human trafficking and migration, as well as addressing the human rights issues of these victims. I also anticipate how God will guide and lead us in partnership for this Migrant Ministry.

In the meantime, let's stay connected through these many ways: read updates in this corner, follow me on Facebook (Catherine Chang), follow my blog (eveniftheskyfalls.wordpress.com), and invite me to listen, to learn and to explore partnership with your church, community, and ministries. Many of you have already been doing these things, and I invite even more to do so! Thank you and thanks be to God!



Last September 15, 2017 the Mission of Yongsan District, West Seoul Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines signed the Memorandum of Agreement on Scholarship Program.



Church Workers Deal “Liturgy, Technology and Mission” throughout its Annual Convocation



In the span of 3 days, the Church Workers from all over the country had understood their “take” as they encountered the 56th Convocation theme, “Liturgy, Technology and Mission”.

From August 29-31, 2017 - Silliman University Divinity School arranged the convocation with a keynote address with Dr. Josepapat Rweyemamu. The following series of inputs and workshops were led by Dr. Francis Borchardt from Lutheran Theological Seminary, Hong Kong, Rev. Dr. Cathy Chang, for theme exposition from Presbyterian Church, USA, Rev. Dr. Noriel Capulong, Dr. Ferdinand Anno, Rev. Dr. Wolfgang Gern, by Rev. Dr. B. Hunter Farrel and Ms. Glenda Descuatan, Bishop Melzar Labuntog for Interest groups, sermon and lectures.

Rev. Dr. Jeaneth H. Faller, Dean of SUDS in closing remark said that “the SUDS Church Workers Convocation is over but the good attendance both of our graduates and non-graduates who came to be part of this annual gathering inspired the whole SUDS Koinonia to continue doing this event. We believe that foremost in their coming is because they know that this activity is part of their continuing education program.”

Aligning with the said theme was the Banikanhong Magdudula’s presentation, “#OMG” and the traditional banquet night starred the last evening of the event, where Rev. Rodolfo A. Baslot and Rev. Francisco T. Ugsad hailed as recipients of the Diakonia Award.



CYF Celebrates Youth Week

A week -long and nationwide youth celebration of CYF for 2017 follows a theme that speaks so much of peacemaking.

“Spirituality for Mission.” This said theme of Luke 4:18-19 has enriched the youth’s understanding on Spirituality towards fulfillment of Christ’s Mission. It also challenges the youth into a reflective celebration with a purpose of deepening their commitment and moving them into action to His Mission. Guided by this verse, the mission is directed in light of the many issues that the world is facing, to proclaim good news to the poor, set liberty to the captives and oppressed, and give sight to the blind.

Through the theme, the CYF’ers have experienced the learning, spirit-filled sharing and loving in the national, jurisdictions, conferences levels through the local churches.

“The theme this year serves as an eye opener for me personally or for the CYF as a whole. Given the current situation of our country, the theme promotes a gargantuan tasks for the Church to live up to its true identity that calls for a strong sense of commitment and bravery for the faith it profess,” shared Jommel Picorro, WWJ CYF President.

Among the highlights included

the “contextualization” of the theme by the CYF National Christian Education and Nurture (CEN), headed by Ms. Ena-Kamila V. Guerrero. The CEN came out with the so called annual Youth Week Celebration Guide (YWCG) which contains the following:

- ◆ Biblico-Theological Reflection (BTR) for source of youth sermons and bible studies
- ◆ Liturgical Guide
- ◆ National Situationer
- ◆ Bible Study Guide and
- ◆ glimpse of CYF’s recent activities such as National Youth Camp 2017, Special Announcements, etc.

“Faith without action is useless...that faith which are just spoken and heard is nothing compared to a faith that is actually seen and felt, the very essence of our existence as Christians, we must let the world feel God’s unconditional love for everyone” said Ms. Eunice B. Jumalon, CYF National President.

This faith has been manifested by the CYF during its celebration through the different kinds of activities and programs on respective judicatories and even outside the Philippines, like Dubai. In the Praise jams, tree growing, run for a cause, exchange pulpit for sermon, Bible studies, community immersions and Lumad area visitations.

DANSALAN COLLEGE UPDATE



Dansalan College was on fire last May 23, 2017, when the government forces clashed with Maute terrorist group. This leads to the destruction of the Laubach

Hall of the College and displacement of the people in Marawi City. More than 4 months since the incident happened; there are expressions of solidarity from different Churches, partners and individuals. As a response they conduct Fund Raising Campaigns for the evacuees and exploring any possibilities for Intervention for the rescue of hostages and people who are still trapped in the City.

Trainor's Training on Trauma Awareness and Resiliency at MSU-IIT Iligan City was conducted by a team from Silliman University, in coordination with the Northwest Mindanao Jurisdiction and programs for the rehabilitation of Dansalan, as per the report of Dr. Fedelinda Tawagon, Dansalan College President.

Update on the Hostages
from **DR FEDELINDA TAWAGON**
President
Dansalan College Foundation, Inc

Seven (7) teachers were taken as hostages on May 23, the first day of the Marawi siege.

For four months, their whereabouts were unknown.

Then, on September 16, after 118 days in captivity, Lordvin Acopio along with Fr Chito Soganub (Roman Catholic priest taken at St Mary's Cathedral on the same day with many other churchgoers) were able to escape from their captors who were engaged in heavy fighting with government military troops near Masjid Bato Ali in Marawi, the command center of the Abu Sayyaf and the Maute groups. While fleeing, they were recognized and eventually rescued by troops of the AFP.

Lordvin was officially turned over to Dansalan College Iligan campus by Hon Zia Alonto Adiong, Majority Floor Leader at the Regional Legislative Assembly of the ARMM. He was received by Dr Fedelinda Tawagon, the President

of Dansalan College Foundation Inc. The faculty and staff were happy to see the safe return of their colleague.

While in captivity, Lordvin served as a medic and attended to many wounded captors. He shared concern about child soldiers who were trained and seemed more aggressive in wielding their guns than their elders.

Lordvin is now in Iloilo City with his family.

Last October 4, nine (9) hostages were rescued by government military forces, among them the five (5) women teachers from Dansalan College.

Dr Tawagon and colleagues are awaiting the turnover of the teachers to Dansalan College, and their eventual reunion with their respective families.

Still unaccounted for is one other male teacher.

Let us pray for the safety of John Rey and others still held hostage by the terrorists. As well the thousands of families displaced by the conflict, many of them without jobs, without homes and remain in congested evacuation centers.



Let us pray for the end of the Marawi conflict, and for peace in various parts of the world, peace that will transcend all earthly barriers, and peace that will last through generations to come.

Let us reach out to one another in love.



“Life of a Ministerial Student”

By: Pastor James Israel Cababan

(Intern Pastor, UCCP Sea Breeze, Lowland Cavite South Manila Conference)



There have been a lot of misconceptions on what life in the seminary is. People think that seminarians do nothing all day but read the Bible, sing hymns and pray. But here's the thing, yes, we do that in the seminary, but we do so much more than that. The Silliman University Divinity School is a community that offers a holistic ministerial formation, a formation that not only focuses in academics and enriching one's spirituality, but also has programs in building relationships with others, enriching concern for the society as well as developing social skills through fellowships, sports and other recreational activities.

The entire Divinity School Community or the “Koinonia” as we fondly call it holds its regular retreat every semester. This is an enriching activity for everyone to pause for a while from the busyness of the academic life and reflect in our own spiritual journeys; regular chapel services are also being held every week. But aside from such activities, we also have time for fun; the Divinity School is a regular participant in the University intramurals wherein our seminarians compete with other colleges in different sports such as basketball, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, swimming, track and field as well as mind games such as chess. In this way, we are taught that as future pastors, we do not exist in isolation, but rather, we build relationships in a larger community. But one of the most anticipated activities in the Divinity School is the Literary and Musical Day, an activity wherein the seminarians who are divided in different groups called “families” compete in different categories such as Bible Quiz, Quiz on Current Events, Extemporaneous Speech Contest as well as singing and dance competitions. It is a very fun day where the semi-

narians show that they are not only academically smart, but very talented as well.

I am now in my internship year, now serving as a full time resident minister in my home conference, and I would say that I am certainly missing seminary life; the pressures of academic requirements, the deadlines, the retreats and all of the recreational activities. But here's the thing, the holistic formation of the Divinity School has sufficiently prepared me as I embark in this new chapter of my learning journey. As I reflect, I now realize that being a church worker involves preparation in different areas of life, it only through understanding the wholeness of our own selves can we understand the personhood of others. And I am hopeful that this learning journey of mine will continue, as Paul says in Philippians 1:6, “the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion”. Indeed, life in the seminary is God's hand continuing to work in the lives of our ministerial students.

UPCOMING EVENTS

**OCTOBER 4-8,
2017**

**UNITED EVANGELICAL
MISSION COUNCIL MEETING
@ HOTEL
MONTICELLO, TAGAYTAY**

**OCTOBER 9-12,
2017**

**ALL LEADERS MEETING AND
TRAINING @ SUBIC
INTERNATIONAL HOTEL**

**OCTOBER 23-28,
2017**

**NATIONAL ORDINATION
REVIEW @ SILLIMAN
DIVINITY SCHOOL**

**OCTOBER 25,
2017**

**WEDNESDAY FORUM @
UCCP COSMOPOLITAN
CHURCH**



Introducing: UCCP Mission Climb (Zamboanga City)

UCCP Mission Climb is a faith-based group of outdoor-loving and climbing enthusiast individuals coming from different conferences of UCCP in the Country. It was first organized by Rev. Arturo A. Veladiez, former Conference Minister of Bukidnon Area Conference in November 29, 2002. It's prime purpose and mission is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ as mandated in the Holy Scriptures to the indigenous communities in Bukidnon mountain ranges where our brethren lumads are nestled and provided with the pristine environment by Magbabaya. This is what UCCP is all about, a group of young and able pastors, CYF, CYAF and even UCM who joined with this group and kick started a mantra of responsible mountaineering.

Programs that were conducted are the following:

- **Medical and dental missions** with our medical and para-medical partners from different groups, POs, GOs and NGOs, etc. to bring about health care services to the lumads where epidemic happened.
- **Organization and conscientization** of the lumad leaders and communities to reclaim and defend their ancestral domain of which the late Datu Jimmy Liguyon and Kap. Jimmy Arion of Dao and Kibongkog, San Fernando, Bukidnon respectively were two of the few lumads who joined the UCCP.
- **Relief, school kits, multi-media for literacy program, and distribution of farming tools and farm animals** for 3 times to two lumad schools in Sitios Ilyan and Sta. Filomena, Quezon, Bukidnon. These sitios were heavily militarized until this date and threatened them as supporters/member of the New People's Army.
- **Fact finding mission** on the alleged HRVs of the lumads in different parts of Bukidnon were conducted separately.
- **Organization and establishment** of lumad worshipping congregation supported by our partners local and abroad.



Seminary students from our Ministerial Formation Centers were also catered and facilitated every summer for their actual immersion to the life, work and struggles of the Lumads and our common stand to uphold the integrity of God's Creation.

The group was expanded with some support from North West Mindanao Jurisdiction (NWMJ). Since 2013 the group organized a national UCCP Mission Climb up to the present time where several mountains had been climbed to render basic help to the communities. We climbed Mt. Apo, Mt. Dulang Dulang, Mt. Pulag, Benguet, Mt. Malindang in Misamis Occidental and last year was in Mt. Talinis in Negros Oriental.

What is significant to the succeeding climbs was the expansion of its ministry to the retired church workers of different conferences of UCCP, through allocation of 5,000.00 to 10,000.00 cash for medications and health maintenance.

This October 29-31, 2017 the group will climb the sublime and stunning heights of Mt. Timolan Protected Landscape traversing Lake Maragang in Tigbao, Zamboanga del Sur. They

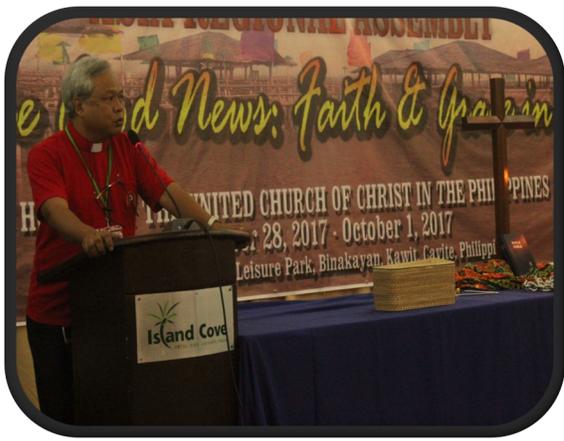
will be assisting 3 retired pastors at 5,000.00 each as their financial assistance from Bukidnon Area Conference and District Conference of Southern Zamboanga. The group grew in number with the energising and sustaining help of the Holy Spirit and the example of Jesus Christ our Lord, the first mountaineer who climbed Mt. Golgotha for the world's sins. Roughly, we have 60 or more active members coming from conferences of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

For the UCCP Mission Climb,

Rev. Arturo A. Veladiez

Organizer/Adviser, UCCP Mission Climb

*Associate Minister UCCP-Ecumenical Center Church
Baliwasan, Zamboanga City*



UNITED EVANGELICAL MISSION OPENING MESSAGE

Sharing the Good News: Faith and Grace in Action

Text: Matthew 11: 2-6
by Bishop Reuel Norman O. Marigza

2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples
3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"
4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:
5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.
6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

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Good morning to all of us! Selamat pagi! Guten morgen!

On behalf of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and in the name of our common Lord and Savior, we welcome you. We gather together as brothers and sisters under the banner of the Asia Region of the United Evangelical Church, under the theme: "Sharing the Good News: Faith and Grace in Action."

In our situation and condition in the Asian region, characterized as a pluralistic, multi-faith, multi-ethnic, multi-culture; a region where traditional cultures clash with digital and popular culture; also a region where serious issues of human and political rights are arising; and also a region where there is a rise of fundamentalism and extreme forms of religion, how do we share the good news? How do we show faith and grace in action?

The text given to me for our reflection this morning can shed some light on our theme. Let me share four thoughts that we can glean or pick up from this passage in the Gospel of Matthew:

The first one is the **Compelling Context**: What grabs and holds our attention? What demands our attention in such a forceful way? (v. 2)

In our passage, the compelling context was that John the Baptist was in prison. Why was he in prison? Did he steal? Did he commit graft and corruption? Was he in a sex scandal? No.

He was in jail because of his prophetic witness. He was not afraid to speak out the will of God, and denounce those that are against or contrary the will of God. He

spoke out against Herod and his greed for power. He asked tax collectors not to charge more than what is necessary and asked soldiers not to charge people falsely or to extort by threatening people. Because he went against the powerful and the armed force of the State, he was imprisoned.

For us today, what is our compelling circumstance or context? What grabs and holds our attention? What demands our attention in such a forceful way?

Here in the Philippines, it could be the big number of those who are killed without due process as those innocents who are killed. It could be the threat of Martial Law being imposed in the whole Philippines. In the whole of Asia, it could be the rise of fundamentalism and of extremism using religion as a means to spread influence and grab political power. It can be the situation of migration and human trafficking from poor countries to more well-off nations. It is a condition where the gap of the rich and the poor have gone further and further apart.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot proceed to share the good news if we do not know the bad news going on around us. We cannot fully preach about the abundant life Christ promised in John 10:10 if we do not know the economic deprivation and political exploitation of the millions upon millions of Asia.

Again the question for us are: For us today, what is our compelling circumstance or context? What grabs and holds our attention? What demands our attention in such a forceful way that we cannot ignore them?

The second thing we see in our text is the **Concerned Challenge** (v. 3)

Even in prison, the news could not escape John the Baptist. He heard about the news that went viral about Jesus and what he was doing. So, he had to find out for sure. He sent out his disciples to do a fact-finding mission so he will know for certain the truth. He had to ask the question: Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?

In Jesus times there were many who claimed they were the Promised Messiah who will liberate them from the clutches of their foreign colonizer. For the Jews, the promised Messiah will restore the kingdom of David, a kingdom where peace and justice will reign supreme.

8 But John the Baptist had reasons to be skeptical. After all,

there had been many who claimed to be the Messiah. They incite the people, play on their frustrations, angers and fears and offer them a future prospect of prosperity and freedom. So even if they were related, John the Baptist had to be certain. He had to be sure: "Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?"

This is the question of those who have gone cynical because of the so many failed attempts. This is the question of those who have been recipients of so many promises in the past but were not accomplished due to various reasons. Those who were making such promises used to say: willpower, strong power but always winding up as power failures.

On behalf of Christ, we, his followers, often go to communities and say "We have come to share the good news!" But at times, we cannot deliver what we have promised, not just once but several times. We sometimes appear as their saviors, whether we are conscious of this or not. We build up people's expectations and hope only to let them down again. With that the Church of Christ loses its credibility and integrity.

Like John, the people want to ask us: "Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?" Are you the real ones? Are you able to deliver on your promises? Are you really bringers of good news or just bringers of "fake news"? Etc. etc.

We need to seriously check ourselves and see to it that people who are raising such questions will not be lifted up only to be dropped again. "Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?" If we have lost our integrity and credibility, then let us not be surprised when they would question us: Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?"

The third thing we see in our passage in Matthew 11:4-6 is that of **Corroborative/Concrete Confirmation** (vv. 4-5)

Jesus said to those who went fact-finding: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

It is as if Jesus was saying to John's disciples: If you want to know for certain that I am the one who is to come, then hear and see what I am doing. If you want to know for real if I am the one who will save the people, have faith, and see the grace of God being poured out to the ones who are in need. This is the good news! You do not just hear about them but see with your own eyes the transformation going on. Believe and have faith. These are very concrete confirmations of what I say. By my fruits, you will know me.

That is one way of looking at this, but there is another way. Jesus knows that John the Baptist is aware of the Scriptures. You remember that after his baptism from John and his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus went back to Nazareth and on the Sabbath he went to the synagogue and he read from the scroll a passage from Isaiah 61: 1-2. As recorded in Luke 4: 18-19, Jesus said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (NRSV).

Or more clearly in Isaiah 35:2b-6b, it says:

..."They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.

3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.

4 Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy..."

The one who is to come will have these signs. He will not just be heard, he will be seen doing these things.

As Christ's Body here and now, how do we show faith and grace in action? How do we share the good news to those who need it most? Can we in UEM say: look and see at our five pillars? This is faith and grace in action. This is the concrete evidence or confirmation that we are doing the work of Christ.

Can people see and hear these concrete confirmations? Are we doing enough? In the words of Matthew: are people seeing and hearing our good works and therefore glorify God who is in heaven? If not, we must do more.

Lastly, my brothers and sisters, we can see the **Commendation of Christ** (v. 6)

Jesus said: "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (ESV). (NRSV) 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (NASB) And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

This blessing is rather a strange one, but nevertheless a blessing. It can be read as "Blessed is the one who does not stumble over me. The word 'offense' in ESV or NRSV is taken from the Greek root word for scandal.

Blessed is anyone who is not scandalized in me, can be the rendering.

But why do some people be offended or scandalized in what Jesus is doing? Why would some people take offense when Jesus is simply sharing the Good News?

Let us remember, sisters and brothers, that the Good News for some is bad news for others. For example, the Good News is often bad news for the scribes and the Pharisees for Jesus reverses and opposes their interpretation of the Scriptures. The Good News to the poor is bad news for the rich who are called to repentance and transformation. The Good News speaks of reversals, of the mighty being brought low and the poor being lifted up; of the powerful being sent away empty while the hungry are filled with good things. (See the Magnificat in Luke 2).

Some people take offense with these message. It makes some uncomfortable. It makes some people allergic to this kind of message and accuse the messenger of being leftist or radical or Communist by saying these things. They take offense. They stumble over it.

But for those who share these things and do them, for those who do not just preach them but live them out in practice, Jesus calls them "blessed."

Even as we do our work and live out our mission as UEM, ridiculous they may seem by the world's standard, may the Lord looking at what we do, call us "blessed." Amen!

- King James Version (KJV)
- And blessed is he, whoever shall not be offended in me.
- American Standard Version (ASV)
- And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me.
- Basic English Translation (BBE)
- And a blessing will be on him who has no doubts about me.
- Webster's Revision
- And blessed is he to whom I shall not be the cause of his falling into sin.
- World English Bible
- Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me."



Your stories are welcome here for our news bits. This may include your local church, district, committee or conference, institution's information, updates and even testimonies.

Kindly send them to communications_officer@uccpchurch.com

We're waiting! Thank you.

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