



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

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A NATION IN SICKBED, A PEOPLE IN DISTRESS (A Pastoral Statement)

“21 Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?” (Jeremiah 8: 21-22 NIV)

Such are words of the prophet, lamenting the miserable condition of his country. Prophet Jeremiah mournfully expressed his dirge over the situation of his people.

The sentiment of the prophet can also be said of the state of affairs of our country at this point of our history. Given the worsening poverty, the horrifying culture of impunity, violence and killings far and wide, the ever-increasing prices of basic commodities, the escalating figure of unemployment, the peril of possible return of authoritarian rule and many other symptoms of probable dark days or years ahead, our people are now in lament.

When President Rodrigo Duterte was campaigning for the office of the President, he swore that he would resolve the grinding problem of poverty; he promised that he would abolish contractualization that awfully exploits our workers; he assured us that he would end the decades-long problem of armed hostilities and bring to negotiation table the conflicting groups to give lasting peace to our people; he guaranteed that in 6-month's time after assuming office he would solve the menace of illegal drugs and bring to court all the drug syndicates. He even declared *“I am willing to go to hell as long as the people I serve live in paradise”*. Later he would publicly declare that *“he does not believe in hell”*

More than two years after his ascendancy to the presidency all such promises are yet to yield concrete result. On the contrary, our people remain in awful predicament.

Shortly after he assumed office as President the UCCP Council of Bishops had

Quadrennial Theme: **“Doing Christ's Mission in these Changing Times”**

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an audience with him in Malacanang purposely to bring to his attention a few of our urgent concerns: the situation of Lumads and other indigenous communities; the resumption of peace talks between the government and the NDFP; and to put to halt the apparent culture of impunity relative to the unrelenting killings and violence. Again he promised us that he would attend to and resolve all those problems. Nothing happened! On July 23, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte will again face the nation to account for all his actions before the Filipino people. What do we expect to hear from him this time around? Should we be persuaded again by new promises and treacheries? The bible has words of caution to us “*An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies.*”

Our own experiences as a church are enough testimonies to doubt the sincerity of the President. A number of our members in the North Luzon Area, for example, are being subjected to harassment by state forces. At least 5 church members in North Luzon are now facing trump up charges.

Will there be real change after President Duterte’s SONA on Monday? Our people are bushed of promises especially if they come from a certified deceiver. Where is the change that he promised to bring, in the first place?

On a positive note, many sectors in the country have now realized that the president cannot deliver all his promises and that he is leading the nation towards a more critical illness. The nation is now in sickbed and our people is in distress. Is there no balm in the Philippines?

Doing Christ’s mission in this context calls for the Church to engage in a ministry of healing that would bring forth peace, justice and righteousness to a people who have long been weighed down by misery and inequality. As your shepherds in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, the Council of Bishops implore our constituents to be vigilant during these changing times especially as we do the mission of Christ. We entreat you all to be in solidarity with those who work for peace and righteousness. Hand in hand let us do the mission of Christ by serving the poor, the oppressed and the desolate people! “*and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.* (Isaiah 58:10)

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July 18, 2018

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Quadrennial Theme: “**Doing Christ’s Mission in these Changing Times**”

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