

CONTINUING CALL FOR UNITY AND MISSION: UCCP at 71st

By Bishop Erme R. Camba*

Scripture Reading: Deut.6:20-21; 23; Hebrews 11: 8-12; 23-28; 12:1-2

Text: Hebrews 12:1-2a (See below.)

Ascription of Praise

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen!

Introductory Note

Thank you General Secretary Bishop Beamboy for inviting me to deliver the message on this grand celebration of the 71st Anniversary of our beloved United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

This morning, I would like to invite to you to our spiritual journey as a united and uniting Church, starting with Evangelical Union of 1901 through the Basis of Union of 1948 to our 71st year today, and at the same time to look forward to a bright future in God's own time towards our Diamond Jubilee, despite the many obstacles, difficulties, controversies and disputes along the way. That is certainly a mouthful to put together in a sermon. But I don't usually limit a keynote to a 15 minute sermon. I assure you, however, that I will not speak for two hours.

Let me start with three texts, one from the Hebrew Bible and two from the Christian Testament:

1st, From Deut. Chapter 6:20-21; 23

When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statues and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you? then you shall say to your children, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand....He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors."

2nd, From Paul's Letter to the Philippians, Chapter 3, Verses 13-14:

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ.

And 3rd, from the Letter to the Hebrews also attributed to Paul, Chapter 12, Verses 1 to 2a:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith....

Looking at these three texts I would like to invite you **to look back but at the same time to press forward towards the goal of the high calling of God looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.**

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Part I: Looking Back: 1901-2019

The Israelites have the genius of recall, the ability to pass on the faith, tradition and socio-religious heritage from one generation to the next that even when they were scattered throughout the world for centuries, their religious tradition binds them together as a people. The Hebrew Bible is replete with recollections of common religious memory:

When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?..

The Israelites has ready is answer):

We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand..He brought us out from there to give us the land that he promised to our ancestors."

This was not an easy answer. These words were written sometime in 650 BCE but the story of Moses and Israel occurred 640 years earlier. You will recall that it took them 40 years in the wilderness to become one people and one nation. It was almost an impossible task to unite all those independent complaining tribes that came out of Egypt.

Deuteronomy reminds us of the struggles of our own fore-parents to make possible the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. Just like the Israelites the movement towards a united church was not an easy one. From the organization of the Evangelical Union in the Philippine Islands in 1901, it took 47 years before UCCP was organized.

Dr. Bill Sitoy writes that the organization of the Evangelical Union was a "first [in American mission history that] before occupying a new field, the representatives of the various boards sat down to cordially plan the situation together, to pray over it and to decide how men and women could be used to the very best advantage and to the avoidance of many of the evils of denominationalism." (T. Valentino Sitoy, Jr: *Several Springs, One Stream*, Vol. 1, UCCP, 1992, p. 12.)

The Union accepted the Presbyterian proposal and decided on the following arrangements:

1. the territorial division of the country among the mission groups (to facilitate evangelism);
2. a common name for all newly organized churches: "The Evangelical Church;"
3. the new churches to organize "in the end one national Evangelical Church"; and
4. the cooperation in schools, hospitals, printing presses, etc. (Sitoy, pp. 323-324.)

But it was the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists and partly the Baptists who named their organized churches as Evangelical Church. So we have Batangas Evangelical Church, Albay Evangelical Church, Cebu Evangelical Church, to name a few. The rest used the name of their own sending American Churches: Methodist Episcopal Church, Evangelical United Brethren, Church Christ Disciples. Union Theological Seminary was founded in 1907 with the hope that the pastors of the various churches may imbibe common biblical-theological interpretations to provide leadership to an eventual one Protestant church

I suggest we look back to this history because despite our many faults, disputes and controversies, we find the guidance and blessings of God. For example, in 1912 Evangelical Union proposed forming one united Protestant Church. It took months to discuss the proposal. Finally, after three years, in 1915, the Evangelical Union Committee completed plan the for *La Iglesia Christiana Evangelica de las Islas Filipina* (The Evangelical Christian Church of the Philippine Islands). For various reasons, particularly, the issue of local church autonomy, the idea of electing

bishops and the setting up of a General Advisory Council, the plan did not go through, to the disappointment of many.

If the 1915 attempt of church union failed, **in God's own time**, 9 years later in 1924, individual leaders of the churches formed a real union of only one local church called the United Church of Manila (UCM). From an original 20 members the church grew to more than 1,000 within the year. The UCM was the forerunner of our UCCP. (Sitoy, p. 348.)

Again, **in God's own time**, five years later, in 1929, following the lead of that one united local church, the Presbyterians, the Evangelical United Brethren, the Congregationalists together with the UCM formed the first national united church, the United Evangelical Church of the Philippine Islands (UEC). (Sitoy, Chap. IX.) Strong pressures of the Japanese government, however, forced a wider union called the Evangelical Church of the Philippines (ECP) in 1943. It was composed of the 1929 United Evangelical Church (UEC) together with almost all the Protestant churches. Since it was a wartime pressure, the new united church broke up after the war, returning to their own denominations. The United Evangelical Church (UEC) mainly Presbyterian and Congregationalists in South Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao went back as UEC holding their General Assembly after the war at Silliman University in 1946. The Disciples and United Brethren and other churches in Luzon continued as the Evangelical Church of the Philippines. (Sitoy, Ch. X.)

Again, **in God's own time**, five churches drafted and agreed on the original Basis of Union. Let us correct the impression that it was the five main mission churches that formed the UCCP in 1948. Actually, the five churches that drafted the Basis of Union in 1947 were the UEC, ECP, the Philippine Methodist Church (PMC) which separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1933, the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches (CPBC) and the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo (UNIDA). But only UEC, ECP and PMC sent official delegates to finally form the UCCP in 1948. CPBC and UNIDA sent representatives who said they agree with the Basis of Union but were not ready with an official vote of their General Assembly.

It is interesting to note that the first UCCP General Assembly in 1948 voted to "consider the said Convention (that is, CPBC) as a constituent member of the UCCP." But we have forgotten this action. We now have a Concordat with the UNIDA and even a Covenant with the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, but we do not have a formal written agreement with the CPBC. I suggest that current Commission for Church Unity and Union to pick up this Action of the 1948 General Assembly, and hopefully, **in God's own time**, that Action will be fulfilled.

Let us now look at and learn from some of the major controversial issues in the past 71 years.

Bishops and Presiding Bishop:

The issues related to bishops comes up in almost all our general assemblies. It was the speech of Bishop Rodriguez (Congregationalist Mindanao) that persuaded the United Evangelical Church in 1946 to accept the idea of electing bishops and paved the way to the 1948 organization of the UCCP.

The idea of Presiding Bishop as spokesperson and official representative in international ecumenical organizations was a hotly debated issue. It was finally resolved in the 1956 General Assembly by rotating the four elected bishops to be Presiding Bishops every year, removing the idea of one Presiding Bishop as "Head" of the Church. It is of interest that Bishop Sobrepena who

was elected Presiding Bishop of the Japanese inspired Evangelical Church of the Philippines and who was in the midst of the debate on the Presiding Bishop, said in the first General Assembly:

*The occasion for misunderstanding must pass away as the time of goodwill returns.
God Almighty always has a way to cause the light to break upon the shadows, and love and harmony upon suspicion and discord. I have followed as a rule of conduct in my relations to others a watchword which may well be ours as a Church:
 They draw a circle that shut me out; Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;
 But Love and I had the wit to win, We drew a circle that took them in.*

The Election of National Officers

The election of the national officers has been most controversial all through the years. The first and second General Assembly election of bishops and General Secretary was a foregone conclusion, even with the an American, Rev, Stephen Smith, as our first General Secretary. But the election of Dr. Norwood Tye as General Secretary in 1956 raised consternation mainly from the American mission executives who raised the ticklish issues of “fraternalism” and mission control.”

You see, Dr. Tye was not even a delegate when he was elected. He was just vacationing in Baguio and sat as observer in the General Assembly when his name was included among the nominees. It was the educator Mateo Occena who was then with the Presbyterian Board in New York who convinced the Boards that the election of Dr. Tye by the Filipino Church was legitimate. Dr. Tye proved to be a staunch supporter of the UCCP programs that members of Inter-board Committee used to say during his term that Dr. Tye was more Filipino than many Filipinos.

I mention this election of Dr. Tye because he testified that as a teacher in church history he has found that church elections (specially national or regional) are not completely free of political ramifications and that “practical and political factors often creeps in.” So he asks rhetorically: can we deny the possibility of divine guidance in spite of human fumbling? He says “I would not.” In our experience even when elections were questioned in almost all General Assemblies, the United Church goes on and even continue to expand and proved that it carries on the mission of God. God has been faithful with us even in our fumbling.

No UCCP National Administration is free from contemporary issues in the Church in particular and in society in general. In my time, we have to answer the labeling of Communist for our strong stance against dictatorship and for our work with farmers, labor and Muslim movements. There was also opposition to the use of “a” instead of “the” in the Statement of Faith. Some Northern Mindanao churches opposed the autonomy and property provision in the New Constitution, that a few churches separated from the UCCP. The leadership that time had to move around the Conferences to explain our biblical-theological stand on socio-political issues. Every National Administration must face the issues raised and explain the various innovations and programs and apologize for shortcomings and mistakes. Looking back, I realize God’s continued guidance in the various church undertakings of the time.

I believe God has guided our fore-parents to finally form the UCCP without resolving the difficult doctrinal questions and liturgical practices. Have you realized the many compromises made by our fore-parents when they decided to organize the UCCP: they decided to have bishops although without full authority of episcopacy (a compromise with PMC and EUB); we decided to use the terms Moderators and Superintendents (a compromise with Presbyterians and PMC); now we decided to use the term Conference Ministers (following the Congregationalist practice of

UCC-USA); we accepted all the liturgical practices of the uniting churches including baptism by immersion and every Sunday Communion with elders officiating, not ordained ministers (a compromise with Disciples). We even have local churches who still elect “Ruling Elders.”

Local Autonomy

The issue of the autonomy of the local congregation, staunchly defended by the Disciples and the Congregationalists, gave us a strong congregational stance regulated only and defined in our Constitution. Until now there is still continuing debate on the local congregational autonomy.

Let me turn now to the

Root in the Faith of our Fore-parents

The writing of the UCCP history is one thing. But to know our fundamental roots is another. Bill Sitoy has brought us into further reflection to correct a misconception. In the inaugural lecture of the Centennial Lecture Series of the Divinity School, he pointed to the fact that often we, Protestants, when asked where we came from, refer to Martin Luther or Zwingli or Calvin. Certainly, we have our immediate and the reformation history, but Bill reminds us that to "reclaim our dynamic faith" we should not point to Luther or Zwingli or Calvin because those reformers were only trying to bring the Church back to the origin of the Faith. Dr. Sitoy points the testimonies of the Early Church and which was based on direct and living experience of the Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and testified to and summarized in the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed.

We must commend the members of the last Constitutional Convention for including in Section 1 of the Declaration of Principles a statement that "The UCCP is an integral part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ" and decided include the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed as an integral part of our 1993-94 Constitution. For now we have truly established our roots in the Apostolic Faith.

Are we still the same church of 1948: Yes and No!

Bishop Dia who persuaded the United Presbyterian Church to join the union foresaw the changes that will come later as a United Church when he said the first General Assembly:

*We must be satisfied with what we are able to do now; we believe it to be our best, but we know that the Church must grow. We are only launching the beginning of the Church; **God will add to its power and growth.** We plant a seed, and the first leaves are different from later leaves. We know that the United Church of Christ in the Philippines will be different five assemblies from now, but we must work and do the best we can that the Church may become more perfect.*

How true indeed! Although many beliefs and practices continue from 1948, in many aspects our United Church today has become different. For example, as a compromise in 1948, we accepted all three Statements of Faith of the uniting churches but we respected the Disciples stance against Creeds since they believe: “No Creed but Christ, no law but love.” So the uniting churches agreed only on a single uniting doctrinal declaration: **faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Lord and Saviour.** But gain, in **God’s own time**, we have discarded the three Statements of Faith, and the former Disciples did not object to have one unified UCCP Statement of Faith which we voted in the 1986 General Assembly, 38 years later.

What then do we say when our children and children's children ask why we are a United Church? I hope that despite of our historical fumbling, we are able to speak with strong conviction in the words of our fore-parents in the Declaration of Union saying that:

...the unity of the Church is founded upon loyalty to Jesus Christ, the head and Lord of the Church, and on fidelity to the cause of [God's] Kingdom... having the same spirit and owning the same Lord, we, nonetheless, recognize the diversity of gifts and ministrations for whose exercise due freedom must always be afforded in the differences of interpretation, in forms of worship and modes of operation.

And firmly speak of the enthusiasm of pioneers of faith such as of Lola Anday of Bicol, a lay evangelist sharing the word of God even when she could not read and write. Lola Anday would bring the Bible around and say "Totoy, I do not know how to read; will you please read this to me" and many believed because Lola Anday used her deficiency, to preach the Word. Hundreds and thousands of such beautiful stories are in your local churches and Conferences. They need to be written for the sake of the generations who follow us. Let us look back and find God's faithfulness to our United Church despite all our quarrels and divisions.

In this light I suggest that all our local church write their own history now before our grandparents in the faith join our Lord. If we don't do this now, we will lose the memory of those days and our children will not have the privilege of knowing that their lolas and lolos were instrumental in changing of the religious landscape of the Philippines.

The Continuing Quest for Christian Unity

I mentioned earlier our 1948 action on the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, in relation to continuing movement for unity, the international ecumenical community admired our signing a Covenant with the IFI because the IFI is Catholic and the UCCP is Protestant Reformed. The Covenant we signed with the IFI affirms that we are both integral part of the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, have a common Scripture, and recite the same Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed. Then we added a very significant statement saying:

*We confess that we have been separated by the vicissitudes of history and the resulting differences in doctrine, structures of governance and certain practices, Now recognizing our common beliefs and in hopeful fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus "that they be one," we humbly declare our search for unity in the one body of Jesus Christ. The unity we seek is a unity in spirit and in truth, which --- **in God's own time** --- may be expressed in organic union.*

Again, "**in God's own time**" (the Covenant puts it), the two churches seek a unity where we may join together in an eventual church union. This kind of union has already happened in Churches of North and South India which includes Anglicans, Reformed and even Baptists. If Vatican II did happen in mid 1960s which started the WCC and the Vatican writing the common liturgy which we use during the Unity Octave, the Prayer for Christian Unity, every January 18-25, and the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic churches signing an agreement of common belief on justification by faith after 400 years, I believe that **in God's own time** we may yet become one church with the IFI, even if it may not happen **in our own life time**.

Let me now invite you to look at the future:

Part II: Looking at the Present and Moving Towards the Diamond Jubilee

It is beautiful to recall and learn from the past, but we cannot stay there. The Church moves on, the mission of God continues. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us to "lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely" and Paul's admonition to the Philippians "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead."

As we do this, let us look at some of our achievements as a United Church in the recent past and quickly move on to the current and future mission challenges.

The Challenge of Being a Self-Reliant Church

One of the crowning glories of the United Church is our self-reliant stance. When I moved around the international circles, I was many times asked whether our pastors are still paid by the mission boards. I am proud to answer a resounding "No" and proceed to explain that our pastors are supported by the local churches. Because of this I was asked by our German partners to write an article which was published in German on our self-reliant stance vis-à-vis partnership in mission. We should thank the missionaries who as early as 1910 encouraged us to go on self-support. It is true that the mission boards continued for many years to support our schools and hospitals and national programs. But our local churches supported themselves and their ministries.

A 1974 document said that there was no doubt that the UCCP was able to sustain its ministry and make meaningful its commitment to the Gospel because of funds from the cooperating boards. But while the funds were channeled through the US Churches, theologically, it was still God's money. We did not want to abuse the stewardship of our partners in mission in the US so we issued a Statement saying "Like them we would also like to mature fully in our stewardship of God's money." (UCCP Statements and Resolutions, 1948-1990, pp. 105-110)

So our 1974 General Assembly in Cebu declared:

That in order that we might enter fully into the world and thereby experience, as a church, the love and mercy of God, no missionaries or fraternal workers are to be requested beginning 1973 until such time as we attained the measure of the fullness of the stature of self-determination and self-development as a national church. (GA, 1974, Actions 67 and 69)

The United Church held on to these decision despite the painful process of trying to become a self-determining, self-developing and self-supporting Church. The bishops' offices, church programs and salaries had to be supported locally. Major adjustments of the national budget had to be made. Subsidies to church-related schools were dropped. The schools went on self-reliant, too.

The United Church leadership also had to learn painfully the importance of sound management. A failure of judgment in making investments demoralized the members and greatly affected the campaign for the first Self-Reliance Fund. But the Church did not give up. The challenge for survival sustained us. Now we can take pride in the fact that we have become a self-determining, self-propagating and self-reliant Church. Thank God.

Starting with the suggestion of the Presbyterian Mission in the Visayas with 10% local church, a yearly increased was decided until we attained 100% local pastors support. The wider judicatories also needs support so our self-reliance included the local church share to wider judicatories. But this is not enough to support the national budget which includes church workers

health insurance, hospitalization, retirement, standardization of church workers salaries, scholarships, etc. etc. For many years we tried find solution to these problems.

It is in this light that I recommended to the 1994 General Assembly in Cebu an Omnibus Second Self-Reliant Program. I asked Alice Ylizarde our National Treasurer then to study how our partner churches raise funds for mission and ministry. We found that United Methodist Church has a multi-storeys building for rent in the center of downtown Chicago, with the Church on top; the Methodist Women has a big building right in front of the United Nations in New York; the United Church USA has a twin tower in Hawaii; the partners Japanese Kyodan and the Korean churches have their urban buildings for rent.

When I went around the country I found that 80 % of our church lots were not titled. That is why we started giving the Conferences titling budgets. I also found out that we have many idle urban land. With the issues raised against developing so-called mission properties, I recommended to build a multi storey building with hotel rooms and conference halls and offices for rent. I am happy the Finance Committee headed by Mr. Maynardo Jeminez who was that time President of GMA radio-tv stations and the Executive Committee strongly supported our endeavor. Now UCCP Shalom has become the flagship of our urban development which supports our national budget.

I have done my part, so I suggested in many keynote addresses to our Church and the subsequent national leadership to launch into a Third Self-Reliant Program to expand support to Conferences and Local churches with my fervent prayer and hope and looking forward to a Vibrant Diamond Jubilee four years from now.

The continuing challenge of Evangelism.

I have said many times that a Church that stops doing its mission and evangelism begins to die. Evangelism is still the basic and most fundamental missionary task of the Church in our time. The 1982 WCC document "Mission and Evangelism - An Ecumenical Affirmation," says in part:

The proclamation of the Gospel includes the invitation to recognize and accept in a personal decision the saving lordship of Christ. It is the announcement of a personal encounter, mediated by the Holy Spirit, with the living Christ, receiving his forgiveness and making a personal acceptance of the call to discipleship and a life of serve.

I invite you to re-study our 1965, 1971 and 1992 basic Statements on Mission and Evangelism and implement our Manuals on Evangelism. I am not speaking about the church growth movement. I am not talking about multiplying the number of members with the objective of enlarging further the United Church of Christ as the largest Protestant Church in the Philippines to the detriment of the other Churches. I am talking about the fervor of Christian witness in all aspect of life, confronting individuals with the Gospel message and bringing persons to an encounter with God in Jesus Christ which is a heritage from our forebears.

I am happy that the call to mission "2,000 by 2,000" by the 1982 General Assembly was described as "discipling the nation." For a nation that is nominally Christian, what is needed is to confront people with the Christian Gospel so that they are "discipled" in the way of Jesus Christ. We may as well heed the Gospel mandate to become leaven and salt in Philippine society. Our mission is not to make Protestants out of members of the Roman Catholic and Iglesia Filipina Independiente churches or steal the sheep of other Protestant folds but to disciple our nation for Christ. I invite all our churches to my paper "**Proclaiming The Gospel For Discipleship**" passed by the 2010 General Assembly as a general introduction to and practice of mission and evangelism.

Corollary to the challenge for mission and evangelism is

The Challenge of Providing Relevant Biblical-Theological Education for Lay Ministry

The Sunday Church School movement was very relevant for a long time since it was founded. But our poorly attended adult Sunday Church School today seems to have deteriorated into talking about generalities using Biblical words and theological jargon which do not have direct bearing on the actual situation of the church and community. Many times I asked pastors and church leaders whether they have theological education for various professions in our churches such as teachers, lawyers, business persons, bankers or farmers to talk about their mission in their particular sphere of work: in business, in education, in politics, in the factories and offices.

When I was a young pastor the United Church had a strong lay training program. We even published small books for the lay people. I am still using one for my Church Administration class. We need to re-create a strong program of education of the laity for they are the leaven, the light and the salt of the earth. Our challenge is to set up an educational program which provides excellent biblical-theological and ethical guidance for the laity to enable them to do their mission in their own sphere of influence in the contemporary socio-cultural, economic and political situation.

The Church must be able to train both lay and ordained theologians for this difficult task. I understand Edna Orteza is developing various educational programs for our local churches. But, of course, it is up for the Conferences to lead the local churches in this endeavor.

In relation to giving priority to Lay education for ministry is

The Continuing Challenge to Provide Strong Seminary Formation for our Church Workers

As our fore-parents set up UTS and SUDS to provide the Church with well-trained theological and pastoral leadership, today more than ever we need to train a new breed of pastoral theologians to help our local churches face the contemporary socio-cultural-political situation. I will speak about this in detail in another occasion. Suffice it to say now that we need to train men and women for the professional ministry, men and women whose personal life and integrity exemplify the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We need to support our theological schools and seminaries with faculty whose right attitude, teaching style and determination will encourage students to strive for excellence and dedication in the professional ministry of the church. We need to send to the seminaries high caliber students to be equipped as disciples of Christ, enablers, and teachers in the churches to help lay people in their ministries in their various field of endeavors.

Lastly, let me bring to your attention

The Continuing Challenge for Justice, Peace, Human Rights and the Integrity of Creation

The United Church has been known the world over for its strong advocacy for justice, peace and human rights. Added to this is our advocacy for the integrity of creation which is in our Constitution Art. II, Sec. 12. Our major statement in social concern issued in the 1960 General Assembly and updated and re-issued in the 1970 General Assembly speak about the Church concern for all aspects of socio-cultural and political-economic life of the people.

Referring to the fundamental belief that the human person is created in the image of God, and using Luke 4:18-19 as a frame of reference in its mission in Church and Society, the UCCP reduced these general ideas into action words and concepts calling for active involvement in social transformation. The 1993-94 Constitution details this in Declaration of Principles Art II, Secs 8 and 11 which was strongly promoted by our venerable Senator Jovito Salonga. Our call in the next four years is to put in place in actual program of action which are in our documents.

Martial law has put us on the balance and we were not found wanting. We were the first church that issued in a strong statement against one man rule. The statements we made and supported by our partner churches were actualized in our member's participation in the parliaments of the streets with other churches and sectors of Philippines society and contributed our own heroes and martyrs to the cause of bringing back democracy in our land. I am happy to hear that the Wednesday Forum has been revived at Cosmopolitan and even expanded to Baguio, because the original Wednesday Forum was the only Protestant democratic free expression of faith and practice during martial law years.

In the area of peacemaking our leaders are strong supporters of the negotiations for peace in this country. We participate in helping bring together the dialogues and peace talks between the GRP-NDF and others in the domestic armed conflict. Let us continue support and participate in this Christian task.

Human rights to us includes our concern and advocacy for family, women, youth and children and even trans-gender issues. Our 1987 "Mission Statement on Healing Ministry" speak of health as basic human right. We are not lacking in statements. What is needed is to encourage our local churches to do actual mission and ministry in the local area where God has placed them. Let us be reminded again and again of Luke 4:18-19 which is enshrined our Statement of Faith:

God is at work, to make each person a new being in Christ, and the whole world, God's Kingdom --- in which love, justice and peace prevail. The Kingdom of God is present where faith in Jesus Christ is shared, where healing is given to the sick, where food is given to the hungry, where light is given to the blind, and where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed.

Concluding Words

As we move forward, let us acknowledge what God has done through us these past 71 years. As God has guided our fore-parents, the pioneers of Protestant Christianity in this Islands, I have a strong faith that God will guide us to face the continuing challenges in our 72nd year towards our Diamond Jubile.

So be it! Amen, Amen.