Holistic Interreligious Dialogue in Mindanao, Philippines: Sowing the Seeds of lasting Peace in the Mountains of Iligan

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Holistic Interreligious Dialogue in Mindanao, Philippines: Sowing the Seeds of lasting Peace in the Mountains of Iligan

An Interview with Mike Baños (Northern Mindanao independent news writer)

Fr. Adam Bago, C.S.Sp., is a member of the Tanzanian province and studied in Arusha and Nairobi. He was appointed to the Philippines where he worked for twelve years in Digkilaan-Iligan City, Mindanao. He completed both a Masters and doctoral degree in education at Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro, Philippines. He has authored The Power of Filipino Smile. Fr. Adam lectures in education at Saint Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) since September 2017. He is on the staff of Stella Maris Mtwarra University College in South Eastern Tanzania, a constituent college of SAUT.

The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the conviction that unity brought about by the spirit can harmonize every diversity. It overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis (EG, no. 230).

Many of us would find it extremely difficult to see God in the midst of a catastrophic disaster, but for many residents in the upland barangays of Iligan City, it was the deadly flash floods spawned by Tropical Storm Sendong (International Name: Washi) which sparked the confluence of uncommon events that are even now coming together to plant the seeds of a lasting and sustainable peace in the area.

Perched atop a hill around half a kilometer from Digkilaan Centro, Our Lady of Fatima Parish (OLFP) is the largest parish in terms of geographical area in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Iligan. Formally established in August 1998, the parish has been under the pastoral care of the international community of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (C.S.Sp.), better known as the Spiritans.

Mainly responsible for the barangays of Digkilaan, Mainit, and Rogongon, OLFP also services more remote upland communities in Dulag, Kalilangan, and Panorogangan. Together, the six villages make up seventy-five percent of Iligan City’s total land area of 81,337 hectares
but only six percent of its population (339,268 est. 2014). Most (eighty-five percent) of the
people in the area are Catholic/Christian, including many among the indigenous Higaonon
communities, while the rest are Muslim Maranao.

Although it is only seventeen kilometers from downtown Iligan City, the parish church in
Digkilaan and its outstations might as well be on another planet. Mountainous and sparsely
populated, the parish’s expanded pastoral area has been sorely lacking in basic public ser-
vices. The upland villages have no roads, no schools or teachers, no health centers or health
personnel, and no agriculture extension workers. Although transmission lines of the National
Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) track through the area, there is scarcely any
electricity available for the use of the residents, and potable water is primarily sourced from
springs or brooks.

A Priest’s Vision to turn around a desperate Situation

“There are 42 outstations, which makes it a challenging responsibility for a priest who pays
regular visits to all these outstations,” notes Rev. Fr. Adam Joseph Bago, C.S.Sp., a Tanzanian,
who has just completed his second tour of duty as parish priest in Digkilaan. “Out of forty
outstations, only nine (9) could be reached by motor vehicles. The rest could be ‘comfortably’
reached by many hours of rugged trekking!”

By then 45 years young, Fr. Adam originally wanted to be a journalist, but entered the
priesthood after he was profoundly affected by how missionary priests unselfishly devoted
their lives to serving people in Tanzania, especially a Spiritan priest who worked in his home
parish. His grandfather was a Muslim and his parents are devoted Catholics. Although he
was the only biological child in his family, Fr. Adam eventually joined the Spiritans also
known “Holy Ghost Fathers.”

Fr. Adam was first assigned to OLFP in 2006. Not too long after being appointed chap-
lain of the Mercy Hospital in downtown Iligan in 2008, he was re-assigned to Digkilaan to
replace the second of two parish priests who got sick on duty. His return to the parish opened
a pretty remarkable chapter in the history of the people in the area.

When he first arrived in Digkilaan, Fr. Adam was aghast to find an unprecedented level
of illiteracy among the populace, regardless of their ethnic origin or religion. When he said
mass, he was often the only one reading the Missal for its entire duration, because there was
no one else who knew how to read. He read the first reading, psalm, the second reading, the
gospel, preaching, and made some announcements at the end too.

When he went around, Fr. Adam was similarly dismayed to find that residents had little
or no knowledge of health and nutrition, hygiene and sanitation. Malnourished children,
with distended bellies and atrophied limbs, wandering around naked and barefoot was a
common sight. Residents were barely scraping a living from subsistence farming since it was
too expensive to bring produce to the markets.

Violence was common—with some twenty deaths a year in the area the norm. This was
exacerbated by mutual distrust among the parish’s various peoples and religions: Christians were taught to distrust Muslims and Lumads who also held similar notions across all age ranges. In some places, kids were taught how to kill and how to kidnap someone.

There’s an apocryphal tale making the round of the media cafés all over Mindanao about a priest asking Muslim children at school what they wanted most to be when they grew up. He was wondering why so few of them wanted to be professionals, like lawyers, doctors, or teachers. When he asked them what they wanted to be, most of them replied they wanted to be rebels, so they could kill soldiers whom their parents said were evil. Many of us always thought this was a tall tale, but Fr. Adam assures us it is true—he was in fact the priest in the tale.

“Despite more than ten years of preaching the Good News in the area, we have been witnessing a lot of unending conflicts,” Fr. Adam noted. “These conflicts exist between families, individuals, Christians against Muslims, Muslims against Lumad, Muslims against Muslims, Christians against Christians.” Claiming the area as part of the Bangsa Moro ancestral domain, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has staged sporadic attacks on civilians there. Sitio Gabonan in Rogongon, for instance, remains a ghost town till now despite the fertility of the soil in the area. “Whenever conflict erupts, Our Lady of Fatima Parish becomes the major evacuation center,” Fr. Adam said. “This situation has generated so much hopelessness among our people who survive on less than US$1 a day, with no education and future to look forward to.”

Making a Difference (MAD)

Faced with this situation, Fr. Adam decided to get MAD, the acronym for his program “Making a Difference.” Fr. Adam goes beyond looking after the spiritual life of his constituents, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. MAD also includes education, livelihood skills, feeding, peace education, health care, alternative education (Andragogy), indigenous education and culture, and practical inter-religious dialogue.

One of the lynchpins of MAD is, Sports for Peace, a program where each team is composed of an equal number of Christians, Muslims and Lumad. So far, the parish has been able to organize forty-two teams (2 football teams, 30 basketball teams, and 10 volleyball teams). Other sports, like badminton, table tennis, and other competitions, such as dance and singing contests, beauty contests, and religious contests (read the Bible, Quran, etc.) are also encouraged.

“When Manny Pacquiao fights, all the young people come to the parish: Muslims, Christians and Lumad. They all identify themselves as Filipinos, and the sport becomes a unifying power for all people in the area,” Fr. Adam noted. “They love sports so much; seeing the importance of sports in the lives of our young people that may serve as a unifying matter, we started a sports competition amongst the parishes.” He was delighted with the results and for the first time ever in the history of the area, residents would see children of all
three peoples mixing together not only during games, but also socializing with each other during fiestas or other social occasions.

“Since the start of this program in the parish, we have not heard of any major conflict,” Fr. Adam said. “We now witness Christian, Lumad, and Muslim children playing together, singing together and studying together. When they’re together in the playing field, they do not think of fighting and hatred, indeed it is sport for peace,” Fr. Adam said.

Sendong and Pablo add to the Misery

Then, the night before the Christmas season started on 16 December 2011, flash floods spawned by the torrential rains of Tropical Storm Sendong rampaged through the area and forever changed how things were in these forgotten backwoods of Iligan. “When Tropical Storm Sendong struck us in 2011, some 1,300 evacuees took shelter in the Parish. When Typhoon Pablo hit the area in 2012, the number of evacuees rose to 2,420. During typhoons, the evacuees swarm the parish church, since this remains the only safe place in this area,” Fr. Adam said. “The church will be hard put to accommodate any more evacuees should another typhoon hit the area because of its limited size.”

The late Rt. Rev. Bishop Elenito Galido, D.D., bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Iligan, worked closely with Fr. Adam to bring relief goods to the victims in the aftermath of Sendong. “The first wave of assistance came from the Archdiocese of Manila, the National Social Action Center and the various archdioceses and dioceses of the Roman Catholic hierarchy all over the country, who immediately responded to our call for help with some (Phillipine peso’s) PhP 20-30 million (PhP 52 to 1 US Dollar) worth of relief goods,” Bishop Galido recalls. “We distributed food, medicine, kitchen utensils, blankets, mats, clothes, rice, water, and other basic necessities to the victims, including Digkilaan Parish.”

Digkilaan Parish Church—more of a chapel, really—and Fr. Adam’s house nearby became a virtual evacuation center since flood victims were unable to return, if at all, to their houses, many of which were damaged beyond repair, with surrounding areas piled high with mud and debris. After a month, however, health and hygiene concerns made it clear that relocation sites for those who lost their homes had to be established elsewhere.

Unfortunately, if government was absent before Sendong happened, it was similarly missing in its aftermath. As usual, the people in the parish had to fend for themselves, and the parish was there to lend them a hand.

“The government people said Panoroganan was too far away and dangerous for them to transport the construction materials for our houses, but that did not stop Fr. Adam from bringing them up here by himself” (this is one of the rebels’ centers), said Najiha Sumagayan (one of Fr. Adam’s ten volunteer “instruction managers”) who teaches children and adults alike in the far-off predominantly Muslim barangay before the typhoons hit. “The materials had to be first transported to Rogongon, then had to be brought on horseback to Panoroganan. Each three hours trip costs six hundred pesos per horse.” Besides helping them build over
forty houses for residents who lost their houses to Sendong, Fr. Adam helped the community rebuild their mosques and madrasah. Najiha summed up the sense of gratitude among local Muslims: “Hindi kami makapaniwala na ang isang Katoliko ang nakatulong sa amin. Para siyang hulog ng langit” (We cannot believe that the one who helped us is a Catholic. He is like heaven sent).

In total, the parish facilitated construction of over three hundred and fifty shelters in the six barangays, four mosques, two chapels, one hundred ninety toilets, four classrooms for preschool, two chapels, two alternative learning classrooms and two madrasah. Some seventy five percent of the beneficiaries are non-Catholic. Despite these efforts, some forty-five families located in the area still live in makeshift tents, almost three years after they were displaced by Sendong. Pailig Development Foundation, Inc., a nongovernment organization is also extending help to the people in hinterland of Iligan.

“Pailig is doing peace-building by facilitating traditional means of conflict transformation in cases of rido (a Maranao term for revenge, clan feud), natural resource management and sustainable agriculture, community-based cultural reinvigoration program, community development planning, and disaster preparedness capability,” Bobby Quijano, Pailig managing director, explained. “The outcome and impact are quite encouraging. However, we are still very far from the desired result.

Najiha said Pailig provides them with seeds, tilapia fish fry for some fishponds, and technical assistance in dealing with pests like rats and insects. Despite the combined assistance, food remains scarce. “Our food supply is insufficient, and if we have no harvest, we just eat camote and maize,” Najiha said. “We also do not have coconuts in our area.” There are no livestock to speak of in the barangay. To address malnutrition among children in the highlands, Fr. Adam is teaching mothers how to prepare meals with sufficient nutrients, using what is locally available. “I teach them to mix camote (sweet potato) and maize with coconut milk,” he said. “Coconut milk has fats and proteins so even if they have no meat or livestock, they would still be able to get a balanced diet with their indigenous crops.”

**Birth of a breakthrough Project**

The floods of Sendong and Pablo spurred Fr. Adam to undertake a groundbreaking project with seed funds from the Diocese of Iligan. Inspired by gains from the Sports for Peace program, Fr. Adam drew up plans for a multipurpose gymnasium, which can double as an evacuation center for residents of all tribes and creeds during times of conflict and calamities.

Directories Philippines Corporation (DPC), which markets Yellow Pages online and offline products across the country, made it possible to expand the concept to include an adjacent structure with two classrooms, designed according to Department of Education (DepEd) specifications. DPC is providing PhP1 million through Children’s Hour Philippines (CHP) for the classrooms. The firm raised the funds in response to CHP’s calls for donations, following Sendong in 2011 and Pablo in 2012. Some 248 employees donated some 1,800 hours’
worth of their salaries, which were matched by DPC, resulting in the million peso donation to CHP.

DPC originally meant to invest their funds in replacing two classrooms in Digkilaan Central School (DCS) destroyed by Sendong. The company’s CHP contribution was later redirected to classroom-building in an elevated part of the barangay which was flood-free. Hence, the classrooms were included with OLFP’s multi-purpose gym project. “When you put a classroom in Digkilaan, it is for Digkilaan alone,” Fr. Adam said. “But when you put it in the parish, it belongs to all the villages. Anyone who wants to come to study here is welcome.”

The two “satellite classrooms” will cater initially to DCS feeder classes, explained Dr. Ann Timogan, DCS Elementary School Principal. Run by instructional managers (IMs)—qualified public school teachers who serve as volunteers without salaries—the classes focus on getting very young or highly marginalized children ready for elementary school.

Geenette Garcia, CHP Executive Director, expressed delight that companies like DPC are investing in child-oriented initiatives in neglected communities. She noted that, because of the global media focus on victims of Typhoon Yolanda in 2013, CHP donors have channeled an inordinately large share of the funds to communities affected by the super-typhoon. “Many disadvantaged communities elsewhere are equally in urgent need of assistance,” she noted.

Fr. Adam explained the thinking behind the multi-purpose gym project: “All people in the area will benefit. Many young lives will be transformed. Through playing together, peace and understanding will be nurtured for the entire people of Mindanao. Through sports and education, the young people and children of Rogongon, Mainit, Kalilangan, Panorogangan, and Digkilaan will be creating a ground for inter religious co-existence,” Fr. Adam said.

By increasing interaction between the three tribes and creeds in the area, activities built around the multi-purpose gym would serve as a catalyst in promoting interfaith dialogues. These would enhance relationships, among Christians, Muslims, and Lumad, making the multi-purpose gym a refuge for all during times of conflict and calamities in the area.

Through Sports for Peace and other competitions, the talents of young people would be recognized and promoted and friendships among them encouraged. Through education and livelihood trainings of the mothers by the IMs, health, nutrition and hygiene of the remotest communities would be improved, along with their quality of life. As their income and health improve, the parish work of promoting the moral, religious and human values would naturally follow.

Engineer Samuel Golez, 49, the contractor who hails from Surigao City, but who now alternates between Iligan City and Maranding, Lanao del Norte, said that he was inspired by the compassion of Fr. Adam and his IM’s: “I volunteered to build the multi-purpose building for the parish after no other contractor would accept the contract to build it with the PhP500,000 (seed money) provided by the Iligan Diocese.” Around PhP 800,000 is still being solicited from donors to roof the gym and riprap the surroundings.

DPC also wants to give the public—particularly individual and institutional donors—an
opportunity to invest in the classrooms (and the future of the upland communities’ children) through affordable donation packages. “Our Yellow Pages business is built on the concept of empowerment,” explained Arturo “Bingle” Diago, DPC Executive Vice President. “We empower consumers with information to enable them to make better choices in the marketplace. On the other end, we empower small and medium enterprises to cost-effectively reach their customers. By bringing buyers and sellers together in this manner, we are able to help boost economic development at the grassroots. In like manner, through our partnership with Children’s Hour and Our Lady of Fatima Parish, we would like to help empower disadvantaged communities over the long term. And it would be doubly gratifying to have DPC’s other stakeholders by our side in this endeavor.”

The two new classrooms will replace the smaller facility, currently being used both as a pre-school and livelihood training center. When the preschool children move to the new classrooms, the old structure would be used for Alternative Learning System (ALS) classes. A DepEd umbrella program catering to out-of-school youth (OSY), ALS promotes the OSY formal basic education until they have finished high school. The new classrooms will also serve a dual purpose. Every morning, the classrooms will be used for pre-school classes; in the afternoon and evening hours, they can be used by out of school youth and adults for e-learning and distance learning.

There is also a crying need for a high school in the barangay since the nearest one is a good four hours’ hike away at Bgy. Rogongon. When it rains it means the students either cannot go there or can’t come home. Beside the high school, a footbridge swept away by Sendong still has to be replaced.

Ultimately, Fr. Adam dreams of someday opening a college in Digkilaan, affiliated with Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the only American Spiritan University of higher education.

Volunteers and Partners help uplift entire Community

Rodelia D. Tahod, ALS Officer-in-charge/Division Coordinator for DepEd in Iligan City, said that Fr. Adam first sought assistance in helping his catechists get basic education so they could assist him in his parish work in 2009. “But he did not stop there,” she said. “He wanted the entire community to get better—to the point that we turned over the DepEd (Department of Education) program to him. We are now his partner.” She said the following DepEd procured programs for Digkilaan were turned over under Fr. Adam’s supervision: basic, OSY for elementary level, IP for Higaonon tribe, e-learning, technical assistance and volunteers for parish work. So far, one hundred and thirty people have been trained since 2013, and the parish expects to train another 300 by the end of 2014.

Fr. Adam has been soliciting old computers for the e-learning modules that Ms. Tahod said will be accessible online. “So even if we’re downtown, we can contact students and teachers who are in the hills like Digkilaan,” she said. “If you didn’t finish your elementary education,
you can take ALS, and if you pass the exams, you can proceed to high school (HS),” Ms. Tahod explained. “Those who did not finish HS can enroll in ALS and take the exams afterwards. If you pass, you can proceed to college. The latter ALS program is covered by a Memorandum of Agreement with the Commission on Higher Education.”

In addition to ALS, the Parish IM’s also train mothers of the pre-school children in livelihood skills like dressmaking and rubber slipper making, using donated equipment and raw materials. “This gives the mothers an added incentive to bring their children to class every day,” Fr. Adam said. Instructors from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) initially trained the IMs and some skilled mothers, who are now passing on the skills to others.

Fr. Adam’s two stalwarts for his education program are Mary Jane A. Capadiso and Juvy Siarza. Both are education graduates and Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) exam listers. Yet, as IMs in the upland schools, they have continued serving as volunteers without salaries, receiving instead token honoraria from ALS and rice and other produce from the Parish. Besides doubling as the Parish Secretary, Mary Jane is also the ALS trainer for the mothers of their pre-school students who have organized themselves into the Asosasyon sa Madasigon ug Malahutayon Kababaye-an (AMMK) Digkilaan, translated Association of enthusiastic and preserving Women, with similar groups organized in the parish’s other outposts.

“We were trained by a teacher from TESDA upon the request of Fr. Adam when he observed how children in the remote barangays often went barefoot and without clothes,” Mary Jane said. With textiles and two sewing machines donated by ABS-CBN Sagip Kapamilya, we taught the mothers of our pre-school pupils how to sew dresses. All profits are shared among the mothers with a bigger share going to the one who did the most.” The venture has also produced graduation togas, which are regularly rented by graduating students of DCS.

Some twenty women attended the training conducted by the TESDA instructor, but so far only ten have been actively involved in dressmaking. ABS-CBN Sagip Kapamilya subsequently donated an additional eight sewing machines, which Fr. Adam has dispatched to the parish’s various outposts where they are similarly being utilized to train women in dressmaking.

“Fr. Adam gave us PhP 3,000.00 seed money for the slipper making livelihood project,” said Juvy. “We used it to buy materials and some cutters from Cagayan de Oro.” The slippers are sold in various outposts of the parish by the women who make them, and also during fiestas or other social events. “People are blessed by Fr. Adam’s passion for education,” Ms. Tahod noted. “I was amazed he donated four mosques for Muslims in Panoroganan and in Kalilangan, he has very strong links with his partners who are convinced he can sustain his programs. He has a passion to help people help themselves, regardless of race or religion.”

The parish has some ten IM’s and forty-five catechists; all are volunteers who have been serving the remote barangays of the parish since 2008. Five of the ten IM’s are college graduates of education courses and have served without salaries for the last three years, although the ALS instructors, like Mary Anne and Juvy, have started receiving a monthly honorarium of PhP 2,500 since 2013. Asked why they have volunteered and persevered under such trying
conditions, Mary Jane said she is inspired by the compassion of Fr. Adam who is a foreigner, yet has no qualms about going into areas where even the military and police don’t dare to venture. To Juvy, it’s simply “love of the Church and time for God.”

Not all volunteer IM’s are Catholic or Christian. In the predominantly Muslim barangay of Panorogangan, Najiha has been a volunteer teacher since 2013. She still works without a salary and makes do with the occasional sack of rice or other commodities the parish has been able to give her from time to time. An Education graduate of Iligan Medical Center College, she teaches her 30 plus students reading, writing, and arithmetic. She also teaches them reading and writing in the Arabic alphabet, reading the Quran and arithmetic using Arabic numbers under the Madrasah curriculum.

On top of that, Najiha also teaches the community’s illiterate adults reading, writing, and arithmetic using the phonetic Marungko approach under the parish’s Andragogy Alternative Education. Instead of starting with the traditional order of the alphabet, Marungko starts with m, s, a, i, so on and so forth. Thus the alphabet is “pronounced,” rather than read: i.e., the alphabet “m” would be pronounced as “mmm”.

The story of the volunteer serving the parish’s school farthest from Iligan is typical of the dedication and sacrifice of the IMs who endure extreme hardships out of compassion for the children in the mountains. Charlotte Mae S. Alinsub is a resident of Barangay Dansolihan, Cagayan de Oro’s furthest barangay about twenty-one kms. from the city proper. A B.S. Education graduate of Golden Heritage Polytechnic State College in Cagayan de Oro, she and her younger sister, Mary Claire, volunteered to teach the children of Binasan Elementary School upon the request of Veronica Suarez, a coordinator of the Binasan Tribal Council (better known among her fellow Higaonons as Bae Katiguman), who is her neighbor in Dansolihan.

An indigenous people, Higaonons, are predominant in Northern Mindanao particularly in the Province of Bukidnon, adjacent to Cagayan de Oro. They refer to themselves as Dumaan (old) or Tumandek (originally from this place), but prefer to be called Tagabukid (from the mountains), to distinguish themselves from another indigenous community called Dumagat (from the sea). The lowlanders call them nitibo. They speak their own language, called binukid, and prefer to reside in the mountains (Ruiz, 1996). The tribe’s seven thousand hectares ancestral domain in Sitio Binasan, Barangay Rogongon in Iligan City, is the farthest and highest point in Iligan City. Its population of ethnic Higaonons is listed at about two thousand, but only about two hundred live in the actual area due to its inaccessibility.

Fr. Adam had been visiting this village since 2006 when all the villagers were living below the poverty line. A mining company operated there when gold was discovered that year, but, since only two percent of the villagers were literate, they failed to benefit from the gold rush and remained poor. Ironically, Binasan is easier reached via Cagayan de Oro through jeepney ride of three hours to Bgy Tumpagon, thence a three hours ride aboard a motorcycle (called habal-habal by the locals) with a staggering fare of PhP 1,000, one-way plus one hour hiking. To reach it from Iligan City, one takes a two-hour ride to travel forty-five kms. to Sta. Cruz,
Bgy. Rogongon and then trek the remaining forty-five kms. for the next four to six hours. With no existing roads—only foot trails—leading to the area, it is no wonder that not even the barangay chairman visits Binasan. To get to the school in Rogongon, a child from Binasan would need to walk ten hours a day. Not surprisingly, only two of the hundred youths living there knew how to read and write—and only because they had relatives in Cagayan de Oro City.

From Monday to Friday, Charlotte and her sister taught approximately sixty students in primary grades of the school in Binasan, while residing in a makeshift dorm provided by the council. When the weather is good, they go home to Dansolihon for the weekend, coming back on Monday along the same route. The school building was built some time ago by a mining company as part of its outreach program. Since the mining firm ceased operations, the amakan (woven bamboo) walls of the school building have deteriorated and it is badly in need of rehabilitation and repair. “Because we had no salary, we had to look for jobs as substitute teachers in Cagayan de Oro and when we had saved enough, we went back to Binasan to continue our teaching there,” Charlotte recounts. Taking up the cudgels for his ‘adopted’ parishioners, Fr. Adam wrote letters to various government agencies to open a DepEd accredited school. In response, Randolph B. Tortola, the DepEd Superintendent in Iligan dispatched District Supervisor Ernesto G. Perez to make an ocular inspection of Binasan last January. On the strength of Mr. Perez’s endorsement, the Iligan City Schools Division accredited Binasan Elementary School. Charlotte was hired as an elementary school teacher, along with two other teachers to be stationed there.

**Sustaining a Model for Peace-building**

Back at the parish center in Digkilaan, other signs of progress are taking shape. With the near-construction of the new classrooms, followed by the multi-purpose gym, the initiatives to promote peace, health, education, and livelihood over the past five years are destined to multiply. This is aligned with the call of the Catholic Bishops and Educators on Peace-building in Mindanao, issued 10 April 2014 in Davao City, to strengthen the role of the Catholic Church in the promotion of lasting peace within “a Reconciled Diversity.” Through its various institutions, the church is enjoined to use its positive influence in creating more avenues for peace-building, especially at grassroots level.

Our Lady of Fatima Parish seems to have developed a working model that other church institutions can emulate. Fr. Adam, later on assigned as parish priest to the Resurrection of the Lord Filipino-Chinese Parish at Del Carmen (near the Iligan City Water Office), effective 1 July 2014, has laid a solid foundation with which to sustain the MAD program and the multi-purpose gym project he had started. First, there is the band of stouthearted OLFP volunteers—led by Mary Jane, Juvy, Najiha and Charlotte—who work tirelessly on the strength of their faith and compassion and their commitment to their community. Then, there is the growing network of institutions, like the Diocese of Iligan, DepEd, TESDA, Digkilaan Central School, Directories Philippines Corporation, Children’s Hour and ABS-
CBN Sagip Kapamilya, which have placed long-term bets on this promising multi-faceted community peace initiative. Fr. Adam himself remained DepEd’s partner in promoting literacy in the rural areas of Iligan.

Most of all, there are the “parishioners” themselves—be they Catholic, Muslim, or Higaonon, young or old—who have begun to develop a true sense of community and empowerment. Whoever the parish priest may be, he has this vital resource to build on. To be sure, the diverse stakeholders in the OLFP initiatives have their work cut out for them. Life will never be easy in the remote barangays of Iligan City. But Fr. Adam is unfazed: “With the support of generous people who share one vision, we can move mountains.”

This is Asia, but what happened in Asia can take place in Tanzania and other places to uplift lives of the poorest of the poor through different programs including sports. This program was so successful also due to the support of the Spiritans in Taiwan who supported the evacuees during the time of Typhoon but especially the superior of the Philippine group Rev. Fr Illah Agbene, C.S.Sp., who was so supportive. Indeed, he is a loving superior, God-fearing man, and God empowered person. His leadership encourages confreres to live the Spiritan life.

*So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.”* (Luke 17:10)

**Abbreviation**