



INTERFAITH DIALOGUE PROGRAM IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF COTABATO

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Abstract

The study evaluates the Interfaith Dialogue Program in the Archdiocese of Cotabato. The decision to integrate IFD in the various programs in Mindanao came out as a reflection that while the nature of conflict in Mindanao is not necessarily religious in nature, it has a religious color just the same. If religion has become a source of conflict, it would also become a source of peace. The study made used the qualitative methods of research in this study such as: Document analysis, Focus Group Discussion, and Key Informant Interview (KII). The respondents of the study were the Christian and Muslim Inter-Religious Dialogue beneficiaries and promoters in the Archdiocese of Cotabato. They were the Muslim and Christian youth leaders, community residents, and Religious Leaders. The major findings of the study are; The socio-political events that led to the formation of IFD in the Archdiocese of Cotabato were: lack of knowledge of one's religion, land issue and non-acceptance of others, violence and deprivation, prejudice and mistrust, looting, killing, strafing, burning of houses, ambushes, military encounters, displacement, absence of basic needs, presence of armed vigilantes, religious intolerance, land problems, development aggression, graft and corruption, self-centeredness of some leaders, and poor judicial systems. The context of the IFD program in the Archdiocese of Cotabato includes history – the establishment of the Oblate Missionaries of a vibrant church with strong Basic Ecclesial Communities that started in the late 70's and the recognition of Pikit by the Archdiocese as a model community for the Inter-Faith Dialogue where the parish then facilitated the formation of the Inter-Faith council through a series of meetings and dialogues with key leaders and elders of the communities; Goal – the primary aim of the Archdiocese IFD works on: to continue and respond to the challenges of transforming people to understand, respect, and forgive one another so as dialogue, justice, unity, peace and care of nature will flourish in Mindanao; Organizational structure – In the Archdiocese of Cotabato headed by Cardinal Orlando R. Quevedo, OMI, DD and the IFD is manned by Rev.Fr. Robert Layson ,OMI supported by the IFD coordinators in Pikit, and IFD council; Stakeholders – The Immaculate Conception Parish, Internally Displace Persons, Women group, Local Government Units, Religious Leaders, Lumad, Military, Rebel groups and people in the community themselves; and projects and activities – COP-IRD orientation; Mindanao week of peace celebration; *duyog ramadan*, monthly meeting on IFD council; IRD youth camps; and youth festivals.

KEY WORDS: Interfaith Dialogue, IFD Program, Conflict, Archdiocese of Cotabato, Mindanao

INTRODUCTION

The Roman Catholic Church has been actively engaged in interreligious dialogue ever since the Second Vatican Council, especially after the promulgation of the landmark document *Nostra Aetate*, which discusses the relation of the church to non-Christian religions stated: “In the age of ours (*Nostra Aetate*), when people are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions. Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what tends to promote fellowship among them. All people form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to prepare the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God.”

This was of course a long awaited and expected gesture from the Christian Church and met with an immediate and general response from all concerned. For, in the Muslim world and no doubt also in other religious communities the same desire for dialogue and rapprochement already existed.

The historic encounter of religions is accompanied by another remarkable phenomenon – *the interfaith dialogue movement*. The great faiths of the world are now talking to one another in a fashion that is new, exciting and challenging. And Christianity has joined the conversation.

In the last four decades, Catholics and Protestants worldwide have been seriously rethinking their attitudes toward other religions. And the second Vatican Council is now seen as watershed event in this new openness toward Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Indigenous Peoples and others. Indeed, the Church has come to recognize and respect the presence of grace, truth, and holiness in other religions.

Pope John XXIII, a natural-born ecumenist, convened the Second Vatican Council out of a conviction that the Church was in need of a renewal. The theological breakthroughs of this “Ecumenical Council” led to ground-breaking documents on interfaith dialogue, religious freedom and religious pluralism.

Pope John’s successor, Pope Paul VI, dreamed of a Church in conversation with all the religions and cultures of the world. Pope Paul became the chief architect of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, a Vatican department for promoting relations with other faiths. In 1964, he published *Ecclesiam Suam*, the first encyclical in history to promote interreligious dialogue. But nothing could have prepared us for the “man from a far country.” Indeed, who could predict that this Pope would eventually emerged as one of the most influential interfaith figures of the twentieth century?

Pope John Paul II readily embraced Paul VI’s commitment to dialogue and quickly expanded the Church’s interreligious outreach. To the interfaith task, JP II brought a practical, hands-on approach and a tireless capacity for travel. He made more than 100 trips abroad, visiting 129 countries. During JP II’s pontificate, Sister Donna Geernaert S.C., Director of Ecumenism for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops here is how she described JP II’s conviction about interreligious dialogue: “The Pope is convinced that all religions need to collaborate in the cause of humanity and that they need to do this from spiritual perspective. Religious belief which teaches the value and dignity of all life urges men and women of goodwill to commit their energies to eliminate hunger, poverty, ignorance, persecution, discrimination and every form of enslavement of the human spirit. Without a spiritual framework, the Pope maintains, the world will not be able to adequately face the many problems of justice, peace, and human development that call for urgent solutions.”

Mahatma Ghandi is perhaps the best-known interfaith activist of the twentieth century. He believed that one could not even begin the interfaith conversation unless one was somehow possessed of the gift of humanity. In tune with this Gandhian wisdom, Pope John Paul recognized that there will never be reconciliation among the world’s religions without the necessary first step of confession, forgiveness and restitution.

The authenticity of his ecumenism was evidenced by a willingness to publicly admit the historical mistakes of Catholics, particularly when those mistakes involved the mistreatment of people of other faiths. And despite protestations from people at various levels of the Church, this Pope persevered in this process of reconciliation, a process which he described as “a healing of memories.”

The decision to integrate IFD in the various programs in Mindanao came out as a reflection that while the nature of conflict in Mindanao is not necessarily religious in nature, it has a religious color just the same. If religion has become a source of conflict, it would also become a source of peace.

As Rev. Fr. Roberto Layson, OMI, the coordinator of Inter-Faith Dialogue in the Archdiocese of Cotabato said, “We realized, too, that we will only have peace in the world when there is peace among religions and that we can only have peace among religions when we enter into authentic dialogue with believers” (COP-IRD Module, 2000).

As a realization of the role of IFD in peace building, the Bishop-Ulama Conference was then organized as part of the regional initiative of the local religious leaders of Mindanao. IFD brings people of different faiths in one common direction. In particular, the Muslim Ummah (Muslim Community) and the Christian Churches in the Philippines have been doing interfaith works in all levels just to address the centuries-old problem of conflict in Mindanao. Most of this conflict is rooted in the unfriendly relations between Muslims and Christians.

The government through Presidential Proclamation No. 207 dated November 5, 1999, has been very supportive to the IFD Programs thru the organization of the Bishop-Ulama

Conference. They have become partners in the implementation of the IFD programs in Mindanao. However, at present, there are few related studies on dialogue that could provide a showcase on the role of IFD in peace building and culture of peace and dialogue. It is for this reason that this research is undertaken.

METHODS

The researcher used the qualitative methods of research in this study such as: Document analysis, Focus Group Discussion, and Key Informant Interview (KII). The respondents of the study were the Christian and Muslim Inter-Religious Dialogue beneficiaries and promoters in the Archdiocese of Cotabato. They were the Muslim and Christian youth leaders, community residents, and Religious Leaders.

From the IFD in-charge, the researcher was able to secure documents and analyze systematically the content of IFD Program in the context of their goals and objectives, organizational structures, stakeholders, activities, and projects. It also included the analysis of the existing IFD documents of the Archdiocese of Cotabato and the success stories in IFD since it was launched in the Archdiocese.

The researcher conducted the FGD involving 15 participants coming from the identified respondents namely; Christian and Muslim community residents, religious leaders, and implementers. There were three (3) females, two (2) youths, four (4) religious leaders, and six (6) program implementers. Their ages ranges from twenty six (26) to fifty five (55) years old.

The researcher conducted an informal and unstructured interview with some selected key informants drawn from the respondents who were identified to be beneficiaries and implementers of the IFD.

The data gathered for the review of documents were analyzed using the historical approach, for FGD, the researcher made use of the information identified by the participants and such data were analyze using the model by the researcher in the analysis of the findings which are, the four forms of dialogue and the process of the IFD in the community, and, for the Key Informants Interview, the researcher analyzed the data recorded and conducted validations through community visits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Political Events that Led to the Formation of IFD Initiatives in the Archdiocese of Cotabato

The socio-political events that led to the formation of IFD initiatives in the Archdiocese of Cotabato have different forms: direct and indirect. In the document prepared by the IFD coordinator the following issues were raised, such as: social and political, graft and corruption, poor judicial system, and inflamed religious passion.

Social and Political

The conflict situation of Mindanao has been a product of history. Some writers term this as century-old problem based on the social and political developments in the regions.

Ustadz Ibrahim, a KII respondent said, the Philippines is considered by some writers as a very Christianized country, not only Christianized but very Christianized country although there are a number of Muslims living in the south and other parts of the country. These problems continued to exist from the early 30's until now. This is not a problem of religion but it is basically political problem. It happens though the protagonists are Muslims and Christians. Like for example, the other side of – is the government, which is primarily Christian government and the other side are the MNLF and MILF who happened to be Muslims. Therefore, this is the big challenge for the

religious leaders and peace advocates, as well as, for the faith-based organizations to sit down and discuss these socio-political issues.

According to Landau, (2001) in the shadow of September 11, 2001 disaster, interest in the IFD boomed. It has created deep tensions and hostilities among believers of different faiths especially to the Muslims and Christians who constitute nearly sixty percent of believing humanity.

In relation to this the Christian Church in Asia has been exploring this dialogue with the other faiths. The church of Asia as a result of more than 30 years of active involvement and integration in the real day-to-day lives of the people especially in the areas of justice and solidarity has come to become more intensely sensitive to the call for genuine dialogue (Rogers, 1996). Furthermore, Vatican II has exhorted all Catholics to a dialogue which will acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found in the other religions, and the values in their society and culture in order to join hand with them to work towards a world peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values (Dialogue, 2001).

Graft and Corruption

The problem of corruption is rampant. This is due to greed and self-centeredness of some leaders who are always aiming for material gains. This issue happens everywhere in our country both in the regional and national government. This has a very negative effect to the local people. The example of these are; social inequities, pork barrels, and other allocations.

One of the respondents revealed that whatever happens in the national level of the government, the grass roots people are also affected. This reaction of the people clearly shows the holistic pedagogy of peace education where the issues should not only be understood locally but globally. This is trying to empower the people on how they shall think globally and act locally.

Poor Judicial System

This is in relation to injustices that are committed without appropriate sanctions. Those who win court cases are the ones who have money. It is true that there are traditional ways of settling conflict which is equivalent to the present judicial system of the government; however, some describe the present judicial system to be ineffective.

In addition, the poor have limited access to proper justice. Consequently, they are always neglected and exploited.

Inflamed Religious Passions

This is the emergence of the fundamental views on individual particularly among Muslim and Christian leaders. It is because of religious radicalism and fundamentalism that many people create divisions because some are not yet ready to engage. That is why peace advocates recommended the strengthening of the intra-religious dialogue.

This issue on religious fundamentalism both among Muslims and Christians was discussed by Mercado (2004). He said that the word fundamentalism has a different shade for Christians and Muslims. Christians normally associate fundamentalism with the born-again Christians and their literal interpretation of the Bible. Muslims view that the word fundamentalism is a fallacy because a Muslim is supposed to follow the word of God, and in doing so makes one a fundamentalist. Fundamentalism is associated with other meanings, like reformist, revivalist and radical Islam. Religious extremism is also common to some Muslim countries like Afghanistan and Iraq before under Saddam Hussein.

In a personal interview by the researcher with Professor Bajunaid, a former chancellor of Mindanao State University, he agreed to the idea that there were socio-political events that led to the establishment of IFD in the Archdiocese; He said: "This is a very strong impact because when there is war, it destroys all the institutions we had built before. This was proven during the time of all-out war declared by the former President Estrada. Several issues were observed, like discrimination and hatred and this is being observed in the different media outlets. As a professor was saying, and I heard over the radio according to the caller, presumably a Christian from Davao, he said in the vernacular, "he said at that time there were already refugees in Pikit, Kabacan and elsewhere. By that time, he was saying, *yung mga Christian dyan, tulungan natin, bigyan ng pagkain*, (we will help all the Christian there, give them food) and everything, *yung*

mga muslim pabayaang nyo lang dyan (let all the Muslims be disregarded). So that you know, even in that time of crisis”.

Historical Background of IFD in the Archdiocese of Catabato

History of Conflict in Mindanao

Understanding of the Mindanao problem has become a popular quest of many especially the peace advocates of Mindanao. While some peace advocates have arrived at a common ground of understanding the Mindanao Conflict, others are still in search for it, hence, they have created another conflict among themselves. There is no group which can claim to be in authority when it comes to legitimacy of information that would serve as a basis of understanding Mindanao issues. Most people outside Mindanao may not even have a holistic understanding of the problem in the region.

There are those who claim that there are two major roots of the problem. First, is that the Moro people were marginalized by some groups from outside of Mindanao which has resulted in a perceived lack of attention on the part of the government to the plight of the local inhabitants. The government did not express its sincere concern to this marginalized and exploited group but reinforced Republic Land Acts. This statement supports the idea of Rodil (2007) that the major cause of marginalization is the Public Land Laws, and marginalization, the labels Christian and non-Christian found their way into the land laws. In 1903, he said: “The American-dominated Philippine Commission enacted a law declaring as null and void all grants made by the traditional leaders of the non-Christian groups, such as sultans, datos, timuays and other traditional leaders of done without the consent of government.” Then, the colonial government passed the public land laws which prescribed the number of hectares, people and corporations may own and instituted the largescale movement of population from the Christian communities to non-Christian areas. Note that the bigger lot was allocated to homesteaders who were generally Christian and smaller one to the non-Christians. The law was amended in 1919 and then again in 1936.” (Autonomy and Peace Review p.9-10).

According to Fr. Bert Layson, OMI, the comprehensive resettlement program which began in 1913 in Pikit and Glan and continued until the eve of the Moro resurgence in the 60's brought about the continuous influx of Christian settlers to Mindanao. Lands were surveyed and registered. Titling of lands introduced private property as a western concept of land ownership and replace the traditional concept of communal property. Naturally the most educated Christian settlers and the educated Moro elite benefited most. Through the years, through the creation of the land laws, the ordinary Moros and Lumads were marginalized from their ancestral lands. They woke up one morning and found themselves strangers from what was once the lands they consider their own.

Second, is about identity which is the most difficult. One cannot erase the history that people are driven out of their native land who slowly adopted new culture and perhaps were acculturated and assimilated to the culture and traditions of the newcomers. The previous biases continues to develop especially those people who experienced great sufferings and survivors of human rights violation during the time of Martial Law in the 1970s.

When the peace negotiation between the MNLF and the Philippine government bogged down in 1987, the people of Mindanao felt disheartened while other sectors hope for lasting peace. They believed that the peace talks would help bring about the realization of a collective aspiration for peace especially in those places where there is clamor for self-determination, popular participation, and economic development.

As a background to the conflict, political upheavals also focused attention on the profound causes of social unrest, i.e. massive poverty, social inequality and injustice, the violation of the basic human and political rights, and the loss of national sovereignty on the part of the Bangsamoro people. On the eve of the imposition of the Martial Law in 1972, one out of every two families were poor (COP-IRD Module 2000). The magnitude of the problem effected profound social change for the improvement of the lives of the people in Mindanao.

The government of President Corazon Aquino at the outset of the transition from dictatorship to democracy in the 1980's made peace overtures with the Moro separatists particularly with the MNLF. In this period of transition, it became clear that democracy cannot

be consolidated unless there is economic development that is self-reliant, equitable and sustainable.

As of the moment, conflict still viewed in different faces according to the experience of people from the different places. In the eyes of the Moro nation, for example, they view the assertion of their right to self-determination and freedom which the Philippine government does not heed and which resulted in violent confrontations between the Moros and the Philippine government as the root cause of this conflict.

The war in Mindanao resulted in the deaths and injuries of thousands of innocent people, Moro fighters, and government troopers. Millions of people were displaced from their homes and lands. The government spent billions of moneys for ammunitions that killed people of Mindanao. If this amount of money was spent for education, health, and other social services, the life of the people would certainly better than what they are experiencing now, considering that the majority of the people especially in Mindanao are living below poverty line not to mention the very high illiteracy rate. There were the results of war. In war nobody wins, for everybody is a victim, a loser. The peace process in Mindanao has already been going for three decades under a series of on-and-off negotiations and yet peace still remains elusive.

These historical animosities which started in 1970 has continued and the civil war that followed is certainly a product of long history. As Bishop Gomez has explained in his book, Moro Rebellion and the Search for Peace (2000), the Moro rebellion started as “localized wars” or even small encounters between armed Moro and Visayan (mostly Ilonggo) groups. The violent clashes started in the wide Cotabato region (now made up of provinces of North Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato and Sarangani) and then spread to the other provinces of Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur and Zamboanga del Norte and even the towns of Bukidnon bordering both North Cotabato and Lanao del Sur.

Formation of IRD in Pikit

The Immaculate Conception Parish of Pikit is one of the parishes in the Archdiocese of Cotabato. Established by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) Fathers and Brothers after World War II, it has flourished into a vibrant church with a strong Basic Ecclesial Communities that started in the late 70's. Today, it boasts of very committed and dedicated lay leaders who practically sustain the faith of the Christians especially in the barrios. Lay coordinators run all the programs of the Parish and the Parish Pastoral Council manages the finances of the parish including the modified tithing system which started in 1997.

But Pikit Parish is situated in a Muslim-dominated area. The Christians serve as a minority, comprising only 30 percent of the total population. Many of them live side-by-side with the Muslims especially in the remote barangays which serves as a strong indication of a diverse community. Incidentally too, the MILF has maintained the camp in the interior villages of the town. Since the all-out war, Pikit has always been on the headlines of the newspapers. As a matter of fact, from 1997 to 2003, the people of Pikit have experienced four major armed confrontations between government troops and MILF forces that resulted in massive evacuations of civilians, most of whom were Muslims.

In all these tragic events, the parish was always involved in providing humanitarian assistance to the helpless victims of the armed conflict. It organized the Disaster Response Team (DRT) composed mainly of 46 young Muslims and Christian volunteers. Whether under the scorching heat of the sun or the pouring rain and amidst bullet fires, these young volunteers distributed food to starving evacuees, demolishing the myth that the war in Mindanao is religious in nature. The parish realized that helping the poor, whoever they are and whatever circumstances they are in, is not a matter of choice. For the Christians, it is a duty and social responsibility. After all, when one hears the sounds of mothers and children weeping and crying inside evacuation centers, one does not anymore ask whether they are Christians and Muslims or Lumads (IRD Parish Document, 2000).

Declaration of Spaces for Peace

The Archdiocese recognized Pikit as a model community for Inter-Faith Dialogue, the parish then, facilitated the formation of Inter-Faith council through a series of meetings and dialogues of the key leaders and the elders of the communities. These continuous consultations alongside with capability building resulted in the declaration of spaces of peace which was

started in Barangays Nalapaan on February 1, 2001 and Panicupan on June 2, 2002. Since then, succeeding declarations of other five barangays followed. These seven barangays comprised the GiNaPaLaDTaKa of G-7.

This acronym literally means 'I bless you'. But it is an acronym based on the first two letters of the 7 barangays of Pikit, which declared themselves as Space for Peace communities and as children as Zones of Peace last November 29, 2004. The alliances of the seven barangays are Ginatilan, Nalapaan, Panicupan, Lagundi, Dalengaeon, Takipan, and Kalakakan, all conflict-affected communities inhabited by Muslims, Christians, and Lumads.

This was a product of a long process of horizontal dialogue with all stakeholders particularly the Military and the MILF in the area. This initiative was facilitated by the local leaders and the Inter-Faith Council of Pikit.

In an interview, Mr. Bebot Recana, the IRD in-charge of the Archdiocese, explained the mechanisms are mobilizing people's support; maximizing tri-media outlets; opened for solidarity; and formation of IRD convenors group.

The GINAPALADTAKA is a grassroots initiative of peace process at the horizontal level aimed at supporting the existing Peace Talks between the GRP and MILF at the vertical level. For sometimes now, the people affected by the armed conflict in Mindanao have realized that peace is too important to be left alone in the hands of the government and MILF. The GINAPALADTAKA experience is a result of this reflection that led them to actively involve themselves in making peace a reality in their own communities with assistance provided by the parish and NGOs.

Formation of the IRD Conveners Group

Though the Archdiocese IFD activities were initially centered in Pikit, the idea of replicating IFD in the whole four provinces of the archdiocese was hatched. Mr. Recana, the IRD in-charge of the Archdiocese, started doing the Inter-Faith orientations to the other provinces. The researcher had personally witnessed some of these consultations. In the year 2003, the IRD coordinator of the Archdiocese Fr. Layson, OMI, has organized an IRD convenors group. The convenor group as composed of Muslim peace advocates namely Prof. Esmail Ibrahim, the president of Muslim Chamber of Commerce and industry, Prof. Moner Bajunaid, former MSU chancellor, Prof. Mahdi Tungao, NDU faculty, Ustdz Abdulkadir Abubakar, Southern Christian College faculty. The Christian side was composed some Notre Dame University faculty such as; Prof. Alma Zurita, Prof. Edgar Ramirez, Dr. Ester Sevilla, Fr. Layson, OMI, the IRD coordinator, Prof. Al Senturias of SCC and Tony Mokudef, the administrator of Sts. Peter and Paul school, represented the Lumad. This group served as a lead facilitator of IFD in the Archdiocese of Cotabato.

One of its major accomplishments was the Inter-Faith consultations in the three provinces of the Archdiocese of Cotabato. A series of consultations were made and plans were identified. However, when the partner NGO stopped giving additional financial support to the project, the conveners also stopped holding their meetings.

The Goals of Inter-Faith Dialogue

The primary aim of the Archdiocese IFD works is no other except to continue and respond to the challenge to transform people to understand, respect, and forgive one another so that dialogue, justice, unity, peace and care of nature could flourish in Mindanao. To attain this noble goal, the Archdiocese has outlined three strategic objectives. Firstly, to increase the participation of stakeholders, priests, imams, religious and lay people in peace and dialogue initiatives in their respective communities. Parts of these activities include seminars, symposia, forum, recollections, retreats, especially focus on peace and dialogue. Secondly, to increase capacity and commitment among peace and dialogue facilitators in school and communities; and lastly, to develop strong Inter-Faith Councils that would lead the implementation of peace building and dialogue program in schools and communities. Among these activities are Trainer's Training on Culture of Peace and Dialogue, Conflict Transformation, Human Rights Advocacy, and Non-Violent Peace Making. Thirdly, to conduct non-formal activities like the exposures and immersion in Pikit for the stakeholders to witness of the on-going peace and dialogue efforts of the Archdiocese.

Organizational Structure

The Christian Church has been an established structure unlike in Islam that has no definite hierarchy. In the Archdiocese of Cotabato, the head of the Archdiocese is the Archbishop who is in-charge of the Pastoral Program in the entire provinces of the Archdiocese of Cotabato.

There are different program components under the Archdiocese such as: BEC, Social Action, Justice and Peace, IPs, Media, Electoral reform, Educational system, and IRD. Under the IRD Program, Fr. Bert Layson, OMI, is supposed to hold the said program for the entire Archdiocese, but due to the very large scope of work in the area, he opted to start a model community for IFD in Pikit being assigned Parish Priest. The place is well-known to the name GINAPALADTAKA spaces for peace. Today, the IFD has been given spaces in the different barangays in Pikit and partly started in the Archdiocese.

In the Archdiocese, there was one program in-charge to facilitate the consultations in the different provinces. This is to ensure replication of the IFD in the entire Archdiocese of Cotabato. Many strategies have been continuously undertaken to enhance the structure like in the recently conducted Archdiocesan Pastoral Assembly (APA) which highlighted Interreligious Dialogue. According to a key Informant interview respondent, the IRD is one of the priority programs of APA in the Archdiocese.

IRD Stakeholders and Supporters

The Immaculate Conception Parish Inter-Religious Dialogue (ICP-IRD) cannot sustain its financial resources to fund its projects and activities except to link with different non-governmental organizations. In some cases, NGOs that are working in the grassroots have partnered and collaborated with one another for the implementation of IFD project. The team has the deep knowledge and experience not only technical but also established confident mechanism in the conflict affected areas especially in Pikit.

Because of its limited to fund the activities, the volunteers of the Pikit Parish link with other service providers and funders. They have been able to get support from the generous individuals and families as sponsors to some activities.

Proponents and Active Partners of IRD

One of the active partners of the IFD is the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) which is involved in Peace Building and Reconciliation activities. One of the projects sponsored by the CRS was the organization of IFD Conveners Group in the Archdiocese. The participants and members of this group were peace advocates from different academic, government, and non-government agencies in the provinces where Fr. Bert Layson, OMI served as the head convener. Balay Foundation Incorporated is involved in relief, rehabilitation projects and capability building programs; OXFAM GB, is involved in health and sanitation, livestock and peace building programs; Mindanao Peoples Caucus, is involved in mediation, dialogue for conflicting parties; and Bantay Ceasefire is involved in the promotion of ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

According to the respondent of the KII, they started linking with different NGO partners. The ICP-IFD team has source out funds through the preparation of proposals submitted to NGOs. The G-7, in particular, became a People's Organization and a model of IRD community organization for Muslims and Christians in the Archdiocese.

Also, some members of the LGUs became resource persons in the seminars conducted in the spaces for peace while community organizers of the partner NGO's served as community facilitators of all development programs especially in times of crisis in the midst of armed conflict. NGOs played an important role in rebuilding the lives of the people in the area. These engagements were the results of a continuous ground working and linking of Fr. Bert and his volunteer staff in the parish.

Individuals and Communities Beneficiaries

For every project undertaken, the IFD team has been able to identify their target beneficiaries easily due to access to profile and survey results. These activities are all intended

for conflict affected areas in Mindanao. When it comes to the selection of the beneficiaries, the team had initiated a screening process to determine if the area or an individual is qualified for the assistance.

In addition, according to one of the KII respondents, the massive information dissemination and empowerment of the grassroots people has made the program successful. They ensure that the beneficiaries will be treated justly and fairly. For every community, there was one contact person to facilitate and monitor the proper distribution of the assistance and for the project to be properly implemented.

The youth volunteers also serve the parish in the implementation of the activities in the area. These scenarios had shown hoe dialogue of life takes place in the community. The implementers and the beneficiaries have partnered together to effectively deliver the services needed by the people.

Projects and Activities

According to KII respondent, most of the activities of the IRD program are sitio-based, all done in non-formal manner. These are Culture of Peace and IRD Seminar-Workshops, IRD Fora and Symposia, Mindanao Week of Peace Celebration, Duyog Ramadan, Duyog Pasko, and Duyog Lumad, Monthly Meeting of the IRD Council, IRD Youth Camp, and Sports Festivals.

The Dialogue of Life

This is the first form of dialogue; it surfaces the personal life experience by the people. The famous example of this is during war. When the massive displacement took place in 2001, a huge number of Muslim and Christian families from different places of Pikit and neighboring towns gathered in the evacuation center, some are permanently become neighbor up to this time. The dialogue of life happens every day, the interaction of the people in the public spaces such as the market, hospital, terminal and school are the manifestations of large dialogue encounter.

This supports the idea of Mercado (2004) that the dialogue of life happens at the market-place amongst the common persons on the streets. It is the dialogue where believers of different religions bear witness to the religious values and convictions in their everyday life, in their homes, workplaces and neighborhoods. In other words, this dialogue is taking place when spiritual and human values shape day-to-day interactions of peoples with their neighbors of other faiths.

Dialogue of Action

Muslims and Christians learned to conduct activities together. These activities are anchored on peace building and promotion of dialogue in Pikit. One particular example of this is the celebration of peace days through walk for peace, prayer rally, and community visits and sports activities. This supports the idea that when Muslim and Christian joined together to conduct any activities that build peace; it is a manifestation that a dialogue of action takes place.

One famous dialogue of action experience was Ustadz Adilao, when his families were victims of fire somewhere in Lanao del Norte. The families were rescued and helped by the priest assigned in the area. This signifies the essence of dialogue encounter between two believers of different religions.

Dialogue of Discourse

In many times, Muslim and Christian religious leaders sit together to talk about common teachings on religion. This happens during the celebration of the Mindanao Week of Peace and other occasions.

The dialogue of discourse often takes place on the formal level amongst trained scholars, religious leaders and theologians of different religions. Principally, it serves as the platform where experts come together to discern points of convergences and areas of divergences. They also serve to correct misinformation or distorted views of believers have about other religions.

Dialogue of Religious Experience

The dialogue of religious experience demands a high level of trust and mutual respect since many of these questions touch upon the deepest aspects of one's faith. The sharing engaged in with that no one will ridicule or belittle another for whatever has been shared around the

dialogue table. Because the dialogue is around personal experiences, this form of dialogue is most often between persons deeply involved in religious practices.

In addition, Prof. Moner said that, “All Muslims, all religions, all people, people of different religions contributed to what we have now, what we call now a civilization. Understanding this IFD contributes to peace because understanding one another, dialogue and communication builds and bridges the misunderstanding, the gaps, erases the hatred, and the misconceptions. It is important that any peace process has to be coupled and implemented with IFD.”

This supports the idea of Sin (1989) where he said, “Our dialogue will allow us, in turn, to offer the treasures of our faith the gift of the Gospel and Sacraments, and the community of the Church, as well as certain Christian meanings and values: the dignity of the human person, the dimensions of salvation as societal, human freedom and liberation.”

For the Church, dialogue means honoring God’s way of dealing with human beings. “Revelation that is the super natural relationship which God himself has chosen to establish with humanity.” Preparation for dialogue is needed for Muslims and Christians where each community of believers is located in a mixed society. The Church and Muslim Ummah must listen and dialogue to each other not because of the conflict but because dialogue is part of life.

Challenges of IRD

The IFD program implementers are facing the following challenges. The key informant interview respondent revealed the following like lack of financial resources; lack of support from the people; poor leadership and governance; and fundamentalism and radical views.

Lack of Financial Resources

As mentioned in the earlier discussion, financial requirements have been a problem for every activity: hence projects were stopped due to lack of funds. One of the projects that have been implemented with the support of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was the IFD conveners’ group which was created sometimes in 2006. The project had served as the advocacy campaign and consultative initiative of the IRD program in the Archdiocese.

The group and community counterparts have exerted their efforts to look for the possible means to sustain the program but due to the unstable condition of the place, the said effort did not work effectively.

Lack of Support from the People and Some Religious Leaders

Aside from the financial requirements, the IFD did not obtain its full implementation due to poor acceptance by the people. This resulted also in having inactive members of the community. The religious leaders from two Abrahamic faiths, Islam and Christianity have shared a common fear of misinterpretation from their followers.

This clearly surfaced from the great challenge posted by the Bishop-Ulama Conference of the Philippines that while the highly recognized religious elders talk in a higher and deeper level of dialogue, the grassroots followers were in objection. For example, for the Muslim, the Ulama (Muslim Learned) who sits in the conference does not represent the entire Muslim community. There were only less than twenty active Muslim leaders but do not have the support of those they lead. In addition, there is the apprehension that dialogue leads to conversion, that’s why some ulama claim that it is a sin to befriend with the Christians.

For the Christians, the religious leaders’ attitude towards dialogue is seen as an additional work. That explains why only few priest and pastors are involved in dialogue. They would rather concentrate on their assigned tasks as priests of Pastors in their respective Parishes and Churches.

Furthermore, the FGD results reveal that the program support implementers, they were always criticized and accused of having some biases with either the Muslims or the Christians. There were those who had *agam agam sa conversion* (fear of conversion); *Madalang na pagtitipon-tipon* (rare meetings); lack of support from the hierarchy (for the Christians); *walang maiwan sa bahay na mag-alaga sa bata, tatay naghahanap buhay* (nobody left at home to take care of the babies, the father is on work), *hindi maglapareho ang bawat kultura* (different cultures) were also mentioned by the respondents.

Poor Leadership and Governance

Politics nowadays is always problematic. Many of our leaders are affected by their inability to address their constituents' needs due to lack of leadership skills and political will. This supports the idea of Michele (2003), that many Muslims admit that there are some societies in crisis. The political leadership is often seen as self-serving, corrupt, and unwilling or unable to meet the basic needs of the great majority.

For most cases, the IFD council was dominated by old traditional individuals who were trained as only mediators of conflict and wedding negotiators. Some lack the skills on how to facilitate meetings and fund sourcing strategies.

Fundamentalism and Radical Views

Religious extremism became common to Muslim and Christian communities and this is seen as a great obstacle to dialogue. Mercado (2002) pointed out that no doubt, one of the sources of problematic issues in the Churches today is the encounter between Christianity and the diverse non-Christian cultures. Previous studies, however, indicated that the prospects of understanding between Christians and Muslims require a basic, radical change of attitudes. MacAmis (1973) also agreed that the prospects for such a change of attitude are much brighter on the part of the Muslim Filipino than the Christian Filipino.

Respondents' Recommendations in Addressing the Challenges

The respondents have offered recommendations to address the challenges encountered by the IFD program of the Archdiocese namely: strengthen policy implementation; capability building and empowerment, and gain support from authorities.

Strengthening Policy Implementation

One of the FGD respondents shared "*magkaroon ng isang upuan sa konseho ng barangay at munisipyo*" (provide seat in the municipal and barangay council) to strengthen policies on the implementation of IFD program under peace and order program. Noli de Castro, Vice-President of the Philippines, (2006) said the promotion of the Interreligious and intercultural dialogue and cooperation had become a cornerstone of the Philippine policy for peace and development. Among his country's efforts, he said, the 2006-2010 plan of action on interfaith dialogue and cooperation strengthened government and civil society partnership, particularly in the areas of education, media advocacy and women's empowerment, among other issues. Interfaith and intercultural dialogue had also helped to heal social wounds in conflict affected communities in the Southern Philippines. It was also essential for translating shared values and respect into action at the grassroots level.

Capability Building and Empowerment

One respondent says, continuous training is one of the effective ways of transforming individuals "*maiwasan ang biases ng bawat kultura*", (eliminate biases among cultures) and respecting each other's culture is an important value of dialoguing.

Effective personal transformation is done through accumulation of wide experiences, skills and knowledge which can be acquired through actual exposures and active participation in trainings and seminars. Educating for critical empowerment develops critical consciousness that actively seeks to transform the negative realities into positive realities.

Gain Support from Authorities

Majority of the FGD respondents mentioned that in order to sustain the program, collected effort be made like "*suporta mula sa mga namumuno*", (support from authorities), and "*magiging cultural sensitive*", (become culturally sensitive).

Some of the solutions for the implementation of IFD program are sourced through initiatives for International Dialogue, Muslim-Christian Religious Leaders' Association, Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC), Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, National and Regional Seminars, Bishop-Ulama Forum, Peace Partners of the BUF, Schools and the Development of Culture of Peace, Imama-Priests' Conference, and Lanao Muslim-Christian Movement for Dialogue and Peace.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following are the major findings of the study based on the data presented, analyzed and interpreted;

1. The socio-political events that led to the formation of IFD in the Archdiocese of Cotabato were: lack of knowledge of one's religion, land issue and non-acceptance of others, violence and deprivation, prejudice and mistrust, looting, killing, strafing, burning of houses, ambushes, military encounters, displacement, absence of basic needs, presence of armed vigilantes, religious intolerance, land problems, development aggression, graft and corruption, self-centeredness of some leaders, and poor judicial systems.

2. The context of the IFD program in the Archdiocese of Cotabato includes history – the establishment of the Oblate Missionaries of a vibrant church with strong Basic Ecclesial Communities that started in the late 70's and the recognition of Pikit by the Archdiocese as a model community for the Inter-Faith Dialogue where the parish then facilitated the formation of the Inter-Faith council through a series of meetings and dialogues with key leaders and elders of the communities; Goal – the primary aim of the Archdiocese IFD works on: to continue and respond to the challenges of transforming people to understand, respect, and forgive one another so as dialogue, justice, unity, peace and care of nature will flourish in Mindanao; Organizational structure – In the Archdiocese of Cotabato headed by Cardinal Orlando R. Quevedo, OMI, DD and the IFD is manned by Rev.Fr. Robert Layson ,OMI supported by the IFD coordinators in Pikit, and IFD council; Stakeholders – The Immaculate Conception Parish, Internally Displace Persons, Women group, Local Government Units, Religious Leaders, Lumad, Military, Rebel groups and people in the community themselves; and projects and activities – COP-IRD orientation; Mindanao week of peace celebration; *duyog ramadan*, monthly meeting on IFD council; IRD youth camps; and youth festivals.

3. The IFD model used in this study were the dialogue of life, action, discourse, and religious experience.

4. The IFD program helped promote a Culture of Dialogue for peace and development in the Archdiocese of Cotabato through the IFD structure, rebuilding the tradition of peace, dialogue, and reconciliation creating opportunities for understanding and cooperation between the believers, improved communication and dialogue and finally active community participation.

5. The best practices of the IFD that helped in the promotion of the culture of dialogue include strengthening of the IFD structures, involvement of different stakeholders in the process spaces for peace declaration, promotion of indigenous ways of conflict resolution, capability building, and linkages with other peace movements.

6. The common challenges faced by IFD program implementers were: lack of funds, poor acceptance of people, fundamentalism and radicalization, and non-existence of centralized interfaith programs for the Muslims.

7. The respondent recommendation include the following; strengthening the policy implementation through provision of seat in the municipal and barangay councils, the implementation of capacity building and continuous empowerment and support from the authorities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the IFD program in the Archdiocese of Cotabato immensely contributes to the success of the IFD in Central Mindanao.

The space for peace of the Archdiocese of Cotabato for many years has acquired recognition and respect for the entire Mindanao due to each initiative being the first inter-faith community organized. It is the only space for peace with the emphasis on IFD in the Archdiocese.

In addition, the program provides guidelines and directions on the implementation of IFD program in the Archdiocese and the members of the community to promote the values of dialogue and peace in their own level. The dialogue is not only done when there is conflict, but it is a continuous process as part of life experiences.

Finally, despite the challenges, the IFD program has brought harmonious and sustainable relationship and understanding between Muslims and Christians which may eventually have led to peace and development in the whole Archdiocese.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher is recommending the following:

1. Strengthen the IFD which should be composed of priests, ulamas, ustadzes, pastors, ministers, and other religious leaders in all conflict affected areas not only in Pikit.
2. Create an IFD among Christians and Muslims for them to talk on the importance of inter-faith dialogue for peaceful co-existence with the brother Muslims and Lumads. On the other hand, Muslims should also gather and discuss among themselves how lasting peace can be derived from interfaith dialogue with the Christians and Lumads.
3. Promote immersion and exposure of Christians in Muslim areas and Muslims in Christian areas. This will be better achieved if Christians will live for several months or became neighbors in Muslim dominated community and Muslims will also build their houses in the Christian dominated areas. Lumads should be integrated also in Christian and Muslim communities as well.
4. Enhance communications between Christians and Muslims with regards to planning organization, implementation and development of the community.
5. Promote respect for each other's rights, strength and weakness, culture, attitudes and skills, and through understanding of individual differences and uniqueness among Christians, Muslims and Lumads.

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