



THE PEACEBUILDERS

"Keeping the ICF Circle informed; Connecting with Community of Interreligious Peacebuilders"



This March ICF will #ChooseToChallenge Patriarchy, Androcentrism, and Misogyny in the Sacred Texts

Virtual Thematic Workshop on Religion and Peacebuilding: Exploring Patriarchy, Androcentrism, and Misogyny in the Sacred Texts

7:00-9:00pm HKT.

March 4, 2021:

Navigating Androcentrism and Misogyny in the Scriptures: What to do with the texts of terror in the Bible?

March 11, 2021:

The Qur'an on Sex and Gender: "Are Women and Men Equal before Allah?"

March 18, 2021:

The Hindu Scriptures and the Goddesses: What do they say about Women and their Role in Society?

March 25, 2021:

If the Dhamma has No gender bias, how do Buddhist women make sense of the Garudhammas?



traditions in order to identify accounts, which are oppressive to women. Religion can only be a source for peace, if it promotes justice towards women.

We are very much looking forward to the upcoming sessions. Let's #ChooseToChallenge together. Participants can either attend the full workshop series or register for individual sessions. For more details and to register please visit our [website](#). You can still register for the remaining upcoming Thursday sessions.

*Annika Denkmann
BftW Seconded Personnel*

Inside this Issue:

- March Workshop 1
- APAY Statement on Myanmar 2
- ICF Committee Meeting 3
- Thematic Workshop on Health and Peace by ICF Alumni from Bangladesh 5
- Right to Health Seminar for the Blind and Visually Impaired People by ICF Alumni from the Philippines 7
- Workshop on Mental Health and Trauma Healing in Peacebuilding 8
- Reflections from Participants 10
- Ramblings on the Impact of Religion amidst Turmoil 14

APAY calls for a peaceful restoration of democracy in Myanmar

The whole YMCA community across the Asia-Pacific region woke up in shock and distress to the news that the military had seized control of the country. They detained the State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of the National League for Democracy. Since the military coup, we heard nothing from neither Aung San Suu Kyi or from the deposed President Win Myint.

Only recently, we celebrated with the people of Myanmar on their successful and peaceful general elections where the NLD captured over 83% of the elected seats. The whole country was waiting in eagerness for the newly elected legislators to begin their new mandate when the parliament session reopens.

In recent years, the democratically elected government of Myanmar had struggled hard to regain the trust of the people and the international community. While the global COVID19 pandemic hampered the government's hard work to rebuild the economy, they were able to improve its Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in recent years. Still, in recent months, the people of Myanmar have been struggling between maintaining their livelihood and keeping the COVID-19 pandemic under control.

The coup d'état, led by the armed forces chief Min Aung Hlaing, has installed an 11- member junta. The military has declared a yearlong state of emergency with the transfer of legislative, executive, and judicial powers to the Commander in Chief.

The coup d'état disrupted the internet connections and phone lines throughout the country. The military has arbitrarily arrested the pro-democracy activists and there are reports of increased random detentions. With deep concern, we watched the news of soldiers in armored cars visibly roaming Naypyitaw and Yangon, raising fears of lethal violence.

This military coup is a serious aberration to the democratic reforms that have been slowly taking place since 2015. The Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs joins with the international community in condemning the military coup that has disrespected the will and aspirations of the people in Myanmar as expressed in the recently concluded General Elections. We denounce the military's actions and call for the immediate, unconditional release of all those who are detained. We urge for the restoration of the communications lines and install the democratically elected authorities to power.

We offer our strong support and solidarity to the people of Myanmar and pray for the restoration of that peace and justice. We pray that the coup will not derail all earlier efforts to help the people to regain their decent livelihood under this COVID pandemic.

5th February 2021

Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs

See also the Letter to International Community from Myanmar

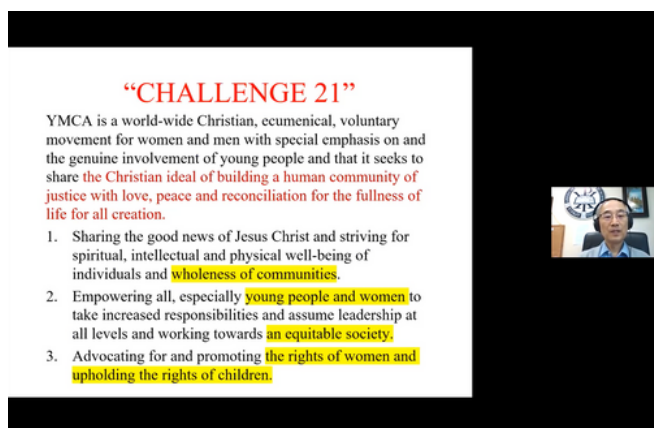


Asia Pacific YMCA organised an "INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY PRAYER MEETING FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE WITH THE PEOPLE OF MYANMAR" on February 19, 2021, from 6 PM to 6:30 PM through Zoom.

ICF Program Committee held its Annual Meeting Online

The Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) Program Committee held its annual meeting on February 9-10, 2021 via zoom. The Program Committee is a forum of ICF alumni, peace activists, and experts on interfaith issues who play a vital role in advising the ICF staff in planning the details of the ICF annual program following the project guidelines. The APAY General Secretary and Executive Secretary for Programs, ICF Program Officer also sit as members while the ICF Coordinator serves as head of the Committee.

On the first day of the meeting, Mr. Nam Boo Won, APAY General Secretary, gave his greetings and presented briefly the work of APAY.



Ms. Sunita Suna, the Executive Secretary for Programs, shared the current realities and challenges in Asia and the Pacific region. Dr. Muriel Oreillo-Montenegro, the ICF Coordinator, gave an overview of ICF and presented the Program Committee Terms of Reference. Baidido Saganding, the ICF Program Officer, reviewed the ICF activities in 2020 and shared some of the challenges in implementing the planned activities during the emergence of the pandemic.



The meeting also serves as an opportunity to welcome the newly appointed Program Committee members for the next two years. With the recommendation from the ICF Coordinator, APAY General Secretary appointed new five members namely; Hamsiya Olimpain from the Philippines, Cicilia Jambuani from Indonesia, and Mohammad Ayatullah Rahaman from Nepal Unites. Biplob Rangsa, who was present, and Sirikanya "Kwang" Chaewongkeaw who was absent, have served as Committee members for the past two years. They will continue to sit on the committee for one more year. ICF considers gender balance and representation of various faiths in selecting the members.

ICF also invited the outgoing committee members. Present were Tirmizy Abdullah from the Philippines and Ranny Rith from Cambodia. The two alternate members from the Philippines, Dory Dotusme and Dunhill Angelo Maraya also attended the meetings. Moreover, ICF invited representatives from other Asian countries, although not as regular Committee members. Nogueira Mendes, representing the Timor Leste national forum, joined the meeting.

The newly appointed Committee members who were absent were Hein Thura Htet from Myanmar and Srijana Shahi from Nepal. Hein Thura Htet could not join because of the military takeover that cut off the internet connections in his country at that time. Srijana Shahi did not send a notice why she could not attend the meeting.

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The invited outgoing members who did not attend the meeting were Rina Yanike Krebru from Indonesia and Shreeram Chaudhari from Nepal. Other invited representatives who did not send a notice for their absence were from Sri Lanka and India. Annika Denkmann, the Seconded Personnel from Bread for the World, hosted the meetings.

On the second day of the meeting, Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro presented the overview of the three years project phase from October 2020 to September 2023 and the project indicators.

Following the presentation, the Program Officer led the Committee in planning for the activities for the rest of 2021. The Committee members provided their inputs. However, due to the limited time, the Committee could not finish setting the plans. They agreed to meet sometime in March to continue with the planning.

ICF expresses its thanks to the outgoing members of the Program Committee for their contribution to the success of the project phase 2018-2020. It also hopes that the new set of committee members will play an active role in achieving the goals of ICF for the remaining years of the existing project phase.

Baidido Saganding
ICF Program Officer



Birisiri ICF Alumni Organized Thematic Workshop on Health and Peace

On the 4-5th of February 2021, the ICF alumni in Birisiri, Bangladesh organized a doable project in line with the theme of the workshop series organized by ICF on November-December 2020 on the Intersection of Religion, Gender, and Human Rights. Twenty-five (25) local youth from different religions, namely, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam attended the activity. The invited resource persons were Binita Sangma, Senior staff nurse, and Dinmahammad Shallahuddin, family planning Inspector (FPI), both from the Durgapur Upazila Health Complex. The third resource person was Majibur Rahman Nayon, Project Associate of an NGO called Hello I am, DSK.

The organizing team, along with Rinku Mankhin, SOP 2019, was composed of Psyche Mankhin, Sulogna Rema, Ruhama Meissa Sangma, Dayna Chambugong, and Renchi Chiran who, by their good participation in the thematic workshop, became certified ICF alumni. The doable project was an interfaith workshop on promoting the importance of health for peace at the training Centre of Birisiri YWCA, Bangladesh. The objective of the doable project was to identify the relationship between health, human rights, and peace, and to analyze different health issues affecting women in the country. The project seeks to equip the interfaith youths in playing a vital role in promoting a peace network among interfaith youths and lead in promoting health as a component in building peace and harmony.



Held on 4 Thursdays from November 19 and 26, December 3 and 10, 2020, ICF's Virtual Seminar-Workshop was a great opportunity for the Bangladeshi participants to increase their knowledge on those topics such as Religion, Femicide and Various Forms of Sexual Abuse; Religion and LGBT Communities; Health as Human Rights and Peace Issue; and Women's Rights are Human Rights. The attendees learned from the respected honorable resource persons, as well as from the sharing among the participants their thoughts, ideas, experiences, question, and reflections.



The participants from Bangladesh took it as their responsibility to share what they learned from the ICF virtual thematic workshop with the local youths. With the small support from ICF given to the participants to implement a doable project, the above-mentioned attendees organized a two-day workshop in Birisiri of Durgapur Upazila (sub-district of Netrakona), Bangladesh.

During the whole workshop sessions, the organizers, participants, and resource persons maintained all the preventive protocols against COVID-19. Rinku Mankhin gave the orientation on the program and introduced the work of ICF. The topics covered were Health as human rights; Women's health and Community health; Introduction of modern health care system; Making own definition of peace; and Family, Health and Peace.

All the participants actively participated in the sessions. The methods and activities included the use of small group discussions. The group shared their outputs by metacard posting, a gallery exhibit, and gallery walk, role-play, problem-solving, creative activities, individual and group presentation. Through these activities, the participants discovered that different health issues are inter-related with peace, and how equal access to health facilities and services can lead people to build peace in the community.



Binita Sangma, Senior Staff Nurse of Durgapur Complex, resource person

All the processes of working together helped the participants increase their knowledge and experience on those topics. The workshop also developed their mutual understanding and stronger relationship among them and their communities.

For more pictures and a movie click [here](#).

*Rinku Mankhin, Bangladesh
Alumni SoP 2019*



Dinmahammad Shallahuddin, Family Planning Inspector, resource person on Family planning, Women's Health, Community Health Care System and Modern Health Care System



Group picture with organizers and participants

ICF Alumni held Right to Health Seminar for the Blind and Visually Impaired People

The Right to Health Seminar for the Blind and Visually Impaired People took place on February 4, 2021 at Albay, Philippines. It was an in-person seminar attended by 21 members of VIVA or Visually Impaired Voice in Albay. The aims of the seminar were to:

1. Impart legislations that advances participants welfare, i.e. Magna Carta for Disabled Persons and Accessibility Law;
2. Explain the benefits enumerated under Universal Health Care in the Philippines;
3. Share timely and relevant health information and prevention strategies on COVID-19; and
4. Provide healthcare supplies to each participant such as masks, alcohol, and face shield.



Chris A. Ajero, Board Member of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines-Albay, discussed the topic on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In his presentation, he discussed thoroughly the salient laws encompassing seven (7) component rights and privileges. These are employment, education, health, auxiliary services, telecommunications, accessibility, and political and civil rights. He emphasized that persons with disabilities, such as the blind and visually impaired, have the same rights as other people. Further, he went the extra mile and concluded his talk by pledging free legal assistance to their organization – VIVA which overjoyed the participants.

Ms. Desiree Fatima Narvaez, Social Insurance Officer III of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), explained the second topic on Universal Healthcare.

The participants learned from her that all persons with disability (PWDs) were automatically covered under the National Health Insurance Program (NHIP) of PhilHealth. Along with this, she shared the benefits package for Konsulta (primary care services), inpatient and outpatient care and the procedure to avail of the services.

The last topic on Covid-19 Prevention Strategies was presented by the alumni-organizers. Surprisingly, most of the participants were unaware that the cloth masks that they commonly wore offered less protection against the virus. The resolve for this is surgical masks. Before handing the healthcare kits that also include a box of surgical mask, they were guided on its proper use, storage and cleaning of masks. More so, the organizers reminded the participants to constantly wash their hands and observe social distancing.

The penultimate part of the seminar was the distribution of healthcare kits that comprises of masks, alcohol, and face shield. It concluded with a prayer and overwhelming words of thanks from the participants. Through the ICF intervention 'Right to Health Seminar', the blind and visually impaired people in the locality were empowered to take control over their own health rights and prevent violation, based on informed decision. More importantly, amidst pandemic, they were equipped not only of information against Covid-19 but with actual tools that will safeguard themselves against the virus.

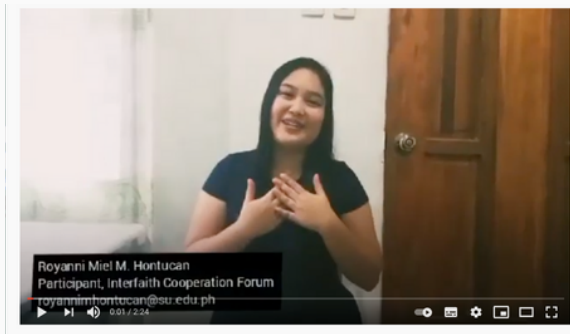
For more pictures please click [here](#).

*Almayne Joyce Mayor and
Edelene Rosin, Philippines
ICF Alumni*



Virtual Thematic Workshop on Mental Health and Trauma Healing in Peacebuilding

From February 22nd to February 26th ICF held a virtual thematic workshop on mental health and trauma healing in peacebuilding. The resource person for the weeklong workshop was Dr. Al Fuentes, who already took part in last years November-December workshop sessions. ICF was very glad to have Dr. Al Fuentes accept the invitation to conduct this particular workshop. Dr. Al Fuentes is an Associate Professor at George Mason University in Virginia United States. He specializes in psychosocial trauma healing as an important component of conflict transformation. The Workshop had 37 participants from Nepal, Philippines, Indonesia, Mongolia, United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Timor Leste. Due to the current situation in Myanmar the registered participants were unfortunately unable to join.



Royanni Miel M. Hontucan sharing her recap from the first day via video message.

The workshop focused each session on seven different subtopics. On day one, the participants were guided to make sense of their own journey in this time of pandemic. The first session also looked deeper into the manifestations of stress and trauma due to the ongoing pandemic. Dr. Al Fuentes explained the many different levels and dimensions the pandemic has on our lives and the participants were asked to explore coping mechanism. The second day focused on the religious and communities workers and compassion fatigue as a common issue especially in times like these. Again the participants had the chance to explore options in small groups, on how compassion fatigue can be overcome or prevented and what needs to be done on the side from e.g. employers to ensure workers are supported – as their humanity and health is often neglected in order to help and support others.

On day three the participants discussed about taking care of their mental health and wellbeing in the face of uncertainty and why this is so important. They were also asked to look into how to create healing spaces in this time of a pandemic and beyond. Hobart Savior from the Philippines made the important point to focus on self-care and choose the battles we fight carefully, as not all of them are worth fighting. Psyche Mankhin from Bangladesh made the point to consider that mind and body are one and both need to be healthy for us to be functioning.

The fourth day focused on the following questions: “What Sustains Us? What keeps us going?” The questions were asked so the participants could explore their resilience as individuals and within their communities. This workshop day brought about a lot of inspirational ideas and thoughts drawing for example on the concept of Kintsugi - a Japanese art of beautiful repair – that left the participants with the notion that even though some things may break or have been broken throughout the pandemic, it is not about fixing them into their original state but rather about creating something even better, so that they emerge stronger.



Presentation from Dr. Al Fuentes (Day 4)

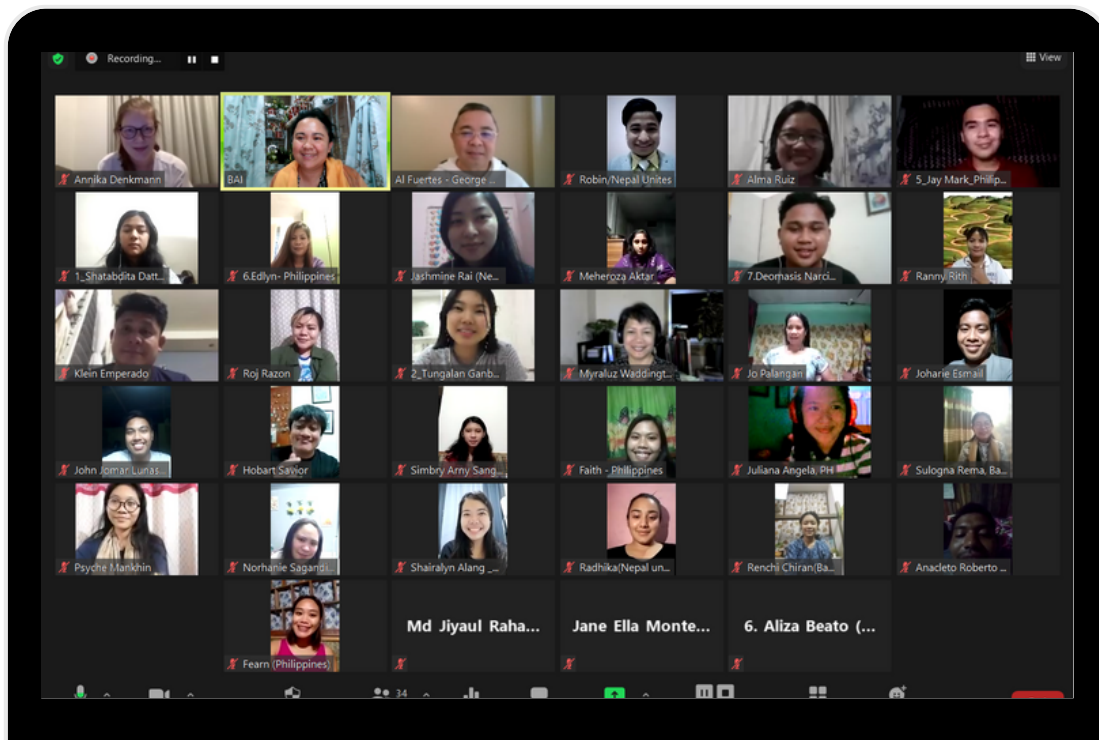
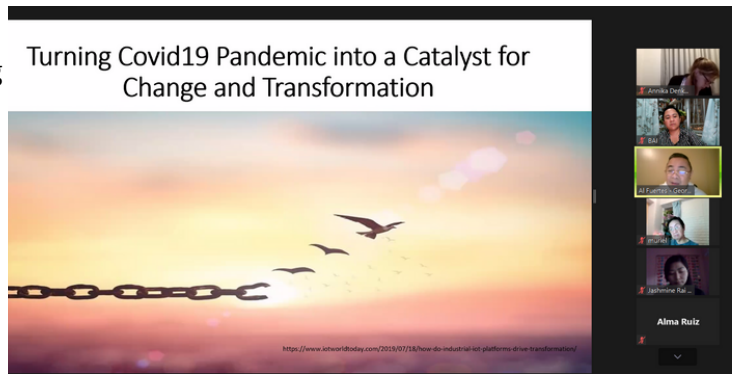
The idea of creating something new was also the main focus of the last day of the workshop. The participants were asked to think about how they can turn the pandemic into a catalyst for change. What do they want the world to look like post-pandemic and what can they do to make it happen?

Radhika Luitel from Nepal shared her powerful vision for the future.

"I would love to live in the world where no people are suffering. Happily living together. No anger, no argument. Being in need of each other. No stress, no anxiety, no poverty. So I want this kind of world where I can live happily and peacefully".
Radhika Luitel, Nepal

Throughout the entire workshop the messages of support for one another were immensely motivating and moving. The thought, that this is also an opportunity for transformation and change left everyone with the notion of hope for the future. We at ICF are very grateful for Dr. Al Fuertes in leading us throughout this weeklong workshop. We would also like to extend our gratitude towards all the participants, who trusted us with their journey.

Annika Denkmann
 BftW Seconded Personnel



Reflection on the Thematic Workshop

Keeping our Sanity through Arts and Letters

I felt happy seeing Dr. Al's artwork which was his way of coping with a trauma he experienced in the past years. In my case, during the pandemic, I wrote reflections endlessly in order to let flow of my thoughts and feelings. During the pandemic, I went to back to doing art in church and that is through flower arrangements. This is what I missed about my younger years when I had so much time for these artsy matters. The weekly orders of flowers from a nearby flower farm in Canlaon City actually helped me to cope with life during the pandemic. And one time, I was not able to resist but visited the said flower farm and was amazed to be in touch with the amazing blooms grown by local flower grower. The arts and nature kept my mental health in good state even during the pandemic. It also helped me to realize my simple joys and that these basic matters added to how I coped despite the worsening situations in the community.

Life and Positivity Blooms Amidst Uncertainties

Seeing a picture of a plant and flower thriving on a rock or at a seemingly uncertain place gives me an image of resilience. I also love the image of the bamboo and its ability to bend due to the winds and storms but not to break.

When asked about what sustains me and what keeps me going as a person? While asking myself the question, I was not able to control myself from reflecting on a text from 1 Corinthians 13 which mentioning faith, hope and love and the greatest of which is, love. Yes, for me, it was faith that kept me going – faith in a higher being, faith in the self and faith in the goodness of every created being and person. Hope as an ability to see beyond fears and anxiety. And lastly, the greatest of it all, love. This love can be reworded as compassion to others as we do not want the world and its people to suffer and be desperate. This love compels us to serve others and to help in the best way we can to better their lives and situations no matter how desperate our situation will be.

Our passion to serve and spread positivity fuels our actions towards our work of striving to be relevant even in times of the pandemic and other traumatic phenomenon. And this is for me how resilience can be sustained and nurtured.

Recognizing the Beauty of our Brokenness

For me, there is beauty in brokenness. Our scars, though painful and still linger at times, shape our persona and mold us anew into better persons when we handled it positively and objectively.

I love the thought that once in a while we must acknowledge and recognize our loneliness. It is even healthier to face this and ask ourselves, "Why am I lonely?" This recognition of our internal problem begins the process of healing.

The Japanese art of fixing broken things called "Kintsugi" helps us to realize that no matter how broken we are, we can still be fixed, though not in our original state. But at least, the gold or silver fillers in between the broken pieces creates a more artistic touch and the same time, increases the value of that once broken piece of art.

Lastly, I love the thought expressed by Dr. Al when he said that we cannot fix what happened before and with this pandemic's case, we can never go back to our normal lives. But this does not mean that we cannot create a more beautiful future. As humans, we are capable of becoming more empathic to those who may need help in dire need.

Wounded Healer

Since I encountered this concept from people who went through clinical pastoral education program, I see myself as one. Since I was called into ministry, I would always ask God why have you chosen me to inspire and empower others when I myself am broken and frail. But in all these years, I would still be emotional when I hear people getting inspired and empowered by what I do for church and for the community. The simple act of leading the worships through music and hymns especially during this pandemic really meant big to me and for the people who are around me. I have always been grateful of this opportunity to serve the people through my simple means. I would always pray that God may use me to bring forth peace and justice in this world. And with tonight's reflection from the reflections, I planned to end this with a prayer.



Prayer

God, I know I am broken and bruised,
 So wounded and desperate at times,
 Yet You never looked at my faults and failures
 You called me to a creative ministry of music and song
 To inspire, encourage, teach and draw more
 To Your loving presence, full of faith and hope
 God, You know how broken and I am bruised
 Faced with trauma and anxieties abound
 Yet You called me to bring healing to your people
 With words, actions and conversations
 O God, use me in my brokenness
 Cover the broken parts of my whole being
 Mold me anew, grant me Your beauty
 To rise beyond my brokenness
 To embrace my pains and struggles
 To empower others to surpass failures
 Make me a blessing for others
 Sustain my compassion and will to serve
 Comfort me in my afflictions
 Grant me hope unending
 Grant me peace abounding
 Grant me love overflowing'
 God of the bruised and weak
 Be with me in this journey
 Towards growth and transformation
 Help me embrace the beauty of brokenness
 That I may know fully my worth, meaning and purpose
 To bear compassion and service to all the people I meet.
 Amen.

Klein F. Emperado, Philippines





Reflection on the Thematic Workshop

All the Good Things We Must Feel and See

Hear your mom scream in the morning, "wake up!"
Being at home, less worries even if it's late to get up.
Morning coffee with the family, a good way to start up.
These, just a few of many things we must feel and see.

Learning to cook new dishes, oh my first Dalgona coffee.
In Facebook and IG, so awesome to still see a pretty selfie.
Seeing fun TikTok clips, just lightened up the heavy.
They are the many things we must feel and see.

Glad that we all see now the value of personal space,
And to still curve a smile behind our masked face
Because we know what's coming are the better days
And all these for now are the good things to feel and see.

So resilient of us to still say 'hi!' before a screen.
Behind phones and computers, our warmth is still seen
Our bravery unfolded because of what we all have been
Aren't all these good things beyond enough to feel and see?

Quiet roads, left no smoke, restored all the fresh air.
Grayish skies turned ocean blue, once again became clear.
Less horns and engines, the silence is the best song to hear.
All these are the good things we must feel and see.

Life is hard, life is tough, life pushes us to a dead-end.
But life is short with little infinities of time we are given to spend.
Albeit countless times that we break, we still mend.
This is not the end for all the BEST things we're promised to feel and see.

I decided to begin this reflection with a poetry and prayer of gratitude for everything. But first and foremost, I would not like to romanticize this crisis that we are going through right now. I respect every single kind of emotion be it optimism or pessimism. All feelings right now are valid: grief, frustration, despair, apathy, neutrality, gratitude or whatever it is. This time, I would just like to account ALL THE GOOD THINGS I HAVE SEEN AND FELT despite the hardships that this pandemic has brought to me and my family.

At some point, I became drained and empty. I felt numb. I felt like I was just floating in the void. I seemed to untangle the chains that tied the heaviness. But I found myself getting rid of the gravity. It felt strange and unwanted.

I realized that it does not feel good to be feeling light at all. The comfort gave me a feeling of discomfort. So, I went back down and decided to let my feet feel the cold of the ground. The vibration. The rhythm. Then I became one with the ground again. I allowed myself to be human, to feel feelings and emotions. I pondered and it came up to my senses that we all need contrast. We would not be able to feel what happiness is without the contrasting effect of sadness. It is the polarity of feelings that give us the opportunity to feel and by feeling all types of emotions, we live. This time, I chose to live.

As I continue to live, I had to readjust my lens to have a clearer vision of life in the present. This is no time for convenience and coziness. Everyone nowadays is struggling and everyone is going through different troubles where no one is expert enough to fathom. We are all equal in that sense. We only differ on how we take things. In my case, I decided to SEE AND FEEL ALL THE GOOD THINGS around me and in me. Around me, I found opportunities. Inside me, I found hope. That's where I started my paradigm shift and quantum leap.

With the longest lockdowns, we get to have the chance to held tighter to our family. We gained more time to meditate and pray together. We discovered that there is bonding in a simple preparation of meals. We realized that there is a lot of new things to learn. We decluttered and found books that are worth reading. For me, I found more time to read Paolo Coelho's books. Many of us were able to go back to writing. Because of the pandemic, many poets were born. Many people started to learn driving, gardening, calligraphy, cooking, baking, painting, etc..

The lockdowns made us stay at home and find a way to stay connected. We embraced the benefits of technology, the internet, and social media. We became more involved to talks online with our friends and distant relatives. We learned and that is growth. Our imprisonment inside our houses did not mean stagnation. We became more attuned to ourselves, to our body, to our mind, and to our emotions. Our isolation from the outside world made us more connected to what is beyond the outside: relationship to God, to self, to family, and to friends who are miles away.

In the poem I wrote, it tells us that while it is fine for us to be down and feel the weight of life's problems, we keep our eyes open to behold the silver lining to every cloud of storm. Behind every dark cloud is a ray of sun that will give us light in the right time. After the downpour, there will be a rainbow. After the drought, there will be a drop of hope that will bring back a new life, new growth and new hope.

Life is hard. Life is tough. It pushes us to many dead ends but we can make a new path to lead.

Life is short but we have little infinities to celebrate. Always live the NOW.

Albeit countless times that we break, we still mend. We are healing beings. Soon or someday, we will HEAL and become WHOLE in a renewed and better version of ourselves.

This is not the end for all the BEST things we're promised to feel and see. Definitely, this is not the end. Believe.

Jay Mark F. Ferenal, Philippines



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The Interfaith Cooperation Forum is a program of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. It values the significance of interreligious understanding and unity. Thus, it offers opportunities for study and appreciation of the different perspective of religions on peace, and discern the role of religion in peacebuilding. Yet, considering that unpeace is brought about by many factors, including the onslaught of neoliberal economic globalization, more people experience poverty, internally displaced people are increasing as communities are destroyed, native wisdom and values are overrun by Western and consumerist outlooks, patriarchy and racism persists, and climate change is now felt as the destruction of the Planet Earth seems unabated.

Peace is celebrated as a gift from the Divine, yet, we, the earthlings have the responsibility to make peace a reality. Although its contribution may just be like a drop of water into the lake, ICF seeks to equip young people of different religious traditions, especially from the marginalized communities of Asia and Pacific, to make waves of peacebuilding actions.

From the Editor's Desk **Ramblings on the Impact of Religion amidst Turmoil**

One will know Asia through its cultures and plurality of religions. Today, Asia is in turmoil. The people, especially the youth, are taking to the streets. They are expressing out their discontent on the waning of democratic processes in their respective countries. Some claimed for reforms, a change towards transparent governance that serves and respects the people's rights. One saw this in Hong Kong, Nepal, the Philippines, and Thailand. In some Asian countries, where the leaders' corrupt practices are public knowledge, there seems to be a simmering volcano waiting to erupt in time. In Myanmar, the youth and the people are protesting the *coup d'état* launched by a military general who stole the leadership from the legitimately elected leaders. In these countries, the leaders and those who are in power have a common response: violence!

Unlike the secularized nations in the West, the Asian people anchored their ethos in their religiosity. However, a reality check shows that religion seems to be inutile in guiding the moral conduct of the people, especially the leaders of the nations. In 2020, like the rest of the world, Asia is going through a tumultuous period due to COVID-19. The lockdowns, instead, revealed an upsurge in cases of violence against women and children. Moreover, the pandemic has spotlighted and exposed the proclivity of leaders towards wanton corruption and self-aggrandizement. These are happening in countries populated and led by Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Muslims. The unbridled appetite to dominate led to power struggles, and the creation of unjust laws and structures imposed with the use of military and police brutalities. Greed led to ecological disasters, abject poverty, and displacements of peoples, especially the indigenous peoples.

Do people, especially the leaders, take their religion seriously? Or, do they simply go through their rituals to showcase pageantry? Religion, from the Latin word *religare*, means to bind. To the French sociologist, Émile Durkheim, religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to the sacred that binds the adherents into one "moral community." In his classic book, *The Idea of the Holy* (1923), German theologian, Rudolf Otto, said this numinous (Latin *numen*, meaning sacred, divine), or the "power beyond human sense" is *mysterium tremendum* who is, at the same time, *fascinans*. This daunting mystery is so fascinating that the creature must approach in humility with "trembling, and speechless." This experience becomes a compass for a religious adherent as, in Willard G. Oxtoby's word, a guide "to conduct and orientation to meaning and purpose in the world."

One may wonder how the adherents appropriate this notion of religion as an experience of the *mysterium tremendum fascinans* in their day-to-day lives. One may even wonder more how the leaders who claim to be adherents of certain religions employ the code of ethics that one's "moral community" teaches. Among the basic and common teachings in most religions' code of ethics are non-violence, truth, justice, simplicity, integrity, and prudence. One must not worship mammon. One should not steal, cheat, and commit corruption. The adherent must hold on to virtues and distinguish what is right from wrong. This is clear in the Buddhist's Eight Fold Paths. Ultimately, religions teach these ethical codes to attain peace at the personal and communal levels.

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Yet, in many cases, the leaders use religion and religious organizations to justify their interests to control political and economic power. Consequently, in the name of religion, they trample down democracy and human rights, freedom of conscience, and religious practice. Religion becomes an instrument to sow conflict and violence.

Asia is the cradle of living religions. However, these deplorable, abhorrent realities are happening in Asia. Where have all the religious teachings gone? Have religions failed to make an impact? Is religion a failure in truly providing a moral orientation to the leaders of nations that they may serve for the flourishing of the people and nations?

