

# **Prelature of St. Mary's in Marawi Dialogue of Life and Faith**

## **I. The Prelature of St. Mary in Marawi**

The foundation of the Prelature of St. Mary was connected to Bienvenido Tuddud, then Bishop of Iligan. Amidst the Muslim-Christian conflict in the 1970's Tuddud realized that the Mindanao Church needed to take a new initiative that would reflect the changes of the Second Vatican Council. He intimated that it was no longer "enough to bury the dead, cure the wounded, give food and shelter to refugees."<sup>1</sup>

In September 1974 Tuddud went to Rome to study Islam and at the end of his study he met Pope Paul VI. The Holy Father challenged Tuddud to offer reconciliation to the Muslims in the Southern Philippines; it was a challenge "that was to ring in Tuddud's ears for the rest of his life."<sup>2</sup>

In 1975 he return to Iligan but soon realized that he could not adequately respond to the challenge of the Pope without neglecting the pastoral needs of the Christians.<sup>3</sup> In October of 1976 Tuddud proposed to the Holy Father to divide Iligan and make Marawi a separate prelature covering Lanao del Sur. In December 1976, the Prelature of St. Mary in Marawi was erected with Tuddud as the first Bishop.

Marawi is the capital city of the province, which has a population of 650,000, of which 95.3 percent are Muslims. The rest of the population are divided among Christian denominations.<sup>4</sup>

The Vision:

*"TO OFFER A RECONCILING PRESENCE AMONG MUSLIMS  
THROUGH DIALOGUE OF LIFE AND FAITH"*<sup>5</sup>

There are three pillars of this vision of dialogue of life, immersion, education and contemplation

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<sup>1</sup> Tuddud, Bienvenido, Dialogue of Life and Faith, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hartford, Desmond, "How the Prelature of Marawi was Created", *25 Years of the Prelature of St. Mary*, (08 December 2001), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> The Prelature of Iligan is widespread and eighty percent of the population are Christian, mostly Catholic. Tuddud was afraid that he might be neglecting the needs of Christians if he devoted himself totally to inter-religious dialogue.

<sup>4</sup> All data are taken from the *Silver Jubilee Souvenir Program* of the Prelature (December 2001).

<sup>5</sup> *The Prelature of St. Mary's in Marawi*, p. 4.

## 1. Immersion

This pillar consists of involvement in the lives of people, sharing in their freedoms and their chains, their celebrations and their struggles.<sup>6</sup> Dialogue of life cannot happen without plunging into the life of ordinary people. Fr. Michel de Gigord in his book *A Parable of Dialogue* opines that immersion is not fashionable at all because “rubbing shoulders with people is not always smooth.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, entering into a world other than your own is demanding and it requires patience, humility, openness and utmost sensitivity. This is a precondition of dialogue referred to by Bishop Tutud as *kenosis* or displacement, that is “putting aside some of my own thought and behaviour patterns in order to make a place for those of a brother.”<sup>8</sup> If one has to dialogue he/she cannot continue to live in splendid isolation.

## 2. Education

This pillar of dialogue means learning to imbibe the vision. It involves knowing oneself, one’s own culture and faith as well as that of the other. In the prelature, since the 1980’s there has been a concerted effort towards preparing the Christian communities for dialogue through regular retreats, seminars, radio programmes and in the schools. Bishop Fernando Capalla who once served the prelature reveals that these undertakings “are designed to give the participants the opportunity to discover prejudices and acquire what is needed to cope them and to uproot them.”<sup>9</sup> In this connection, teachers, parish workers and priests are regularly sent to study Islam and do summer courses on inter-religious dialogue.<sup>10</sup> For Tatay Bido, a dialoguer is a “learner.”<sup>11</sup>

## 3. Contemplation

This pillar highlights the spiritual grounding of dialogue. For Bishop Tutud dialogue involves sharing one’s experience of God’s call and the response she/he makes to Him.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Paul Knitter argues “in order to have a religious encounter, we must speak from religious, or at least from religious quest.”<sup>13</sup> The late Desmond Hartford, who was kidnapped in 1997 while serving as Apostolic Administrator of Marawi, suggests that the

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<sup>6</sup> Tutud, Bienvenido, *ibid*, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Gigord, Michel de, *A Parable of Dialogue*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>8</sup> Tutud, Bienvenido, *Dialogue of Life and Faith*, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Capalla, Fernando, “Dialogue of Life and Faith: Giving witness to the Muslims of Marawi”, *Columban Mission* (October 1990), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Rufus Halley himself studied Islam in Louvain, Belgium in 1984. During his sabbatical in England 1991-1993, he used to attend seminars at the Selly Oaks College Centre for Christian and Muslim Relations.

<sup>11</sup> During Bishop Tutud’s meeting with Pope Paul VI he brought up his especial concern about the necessity of learning more about the other. The deep-seated bias and prejudice cannot be eradicated or at least reduced without the component of study. He also expressed his desire to establish in the Philippines an institute for Islamic studies. Tutud, Bienvenido, *Dialogue of Life and Faith*, pp. 27, 94.

<sup>12</sup> Tutud, Bienvenido, *Dialogue of Life and Faith*, p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Knitter, Paul, *Jesus and the Other Names*, p. 143.

path to dialogue is marked by a continual search; the dialoguers spend a lot of time groping in the dark. Thus, a deep relationship with God is vital.<sup>14</sup>

### Charisms and Spirituality

The above-mentioned pillars of dialogue can be interpreted on two levels. First, as components of the vision, they are interdependent mechanisms that serve to actualise the vision of dialogue in the different parishes and communities.<sup>15</sup> They represent as charisms of the community in dialogue. For instance, the Prelature supported individuals or groups who wished to live among Muslims temporarily or permanently. On the other hand, teachers and the priests working in the school are supposed to form the 'learning' community that seeks to promote harmony and peace by continually seeking to discover the beauty, goodness and truth in the other through study. The contemplative Carmelite nuns represent the charism of a praying community.

Second, these pillars are also understood as spirituality. The spirituality of dialogue of life and faith, therefore, initiates the dialoguer, individually and as community, into a real experience of learning, of prayer and of solidarity with the poor.

## II. The "Marriage" between BEC and DLF

In one of our recent Pastoral Assembly the Prelature saw the necessity to establish clear and visible link between BEC and Dialogue and thus we coined the term "pagminyoy" (literally means marriage) to underscore not only the union but more so its significance as pastoral priority. In practice, Basic Ecclesial Communities and Dialogue of Life and Faith have become one and inseparable apostolate. Thus our BEC-DLF ministry has a two pronged objectives, that is the building and strengthening of BEC's and the promotion of dialogue; but beyond this bifocal concern, is the mission to form a community-in-the-state-of-dialogue, a community that continually extends the offering of dialogue "not only in the pleasantness of appreciation but also in, and even beyond, the pain of rejection"<sup>16</sup> as Bishop Tutud said it beautifully. Themes like prejudice, cultural and religious sensitivity, peace-building and IRD are integral to the modules we are using in the formation of BEC's in the parishes.

### MSPC and PCP II

We are talking about marriage earlier on, with regard to BEC we can safely say that the Mindanao Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) was the "midwife" that assisted the birth of BEC in Mindanao. The first four Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conferences (Davao City – 1971, Cagayan de Oro City – 1973, Ozamis City – 1976 and Pagadian - 1979) demonstrated the gradual evolution of the concept of BEC.

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<sup>14</sup> Hartford, Desmond, "Reflection on Mission," *The Far East* (April 2001), p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Tutud, Bienvenido, *Dialogue of Life and Faith*, p. 4; *Columban Mission*, (October 1990).

<sup>16</sup> *The Prelature of St. Mary's in Marawi*, p. 9.

- MSPC I: “Christian Community of Mindanao and Sulu: Teaching, Serving and Worshipping Community.”
- MSPC II: “Building Christian Communities in Mindanao-Sulu in the 70’s: The self-nourishing, self-sustaining and self-governing community”
- MSPC III: “Building Christian Community: Towards justice and love”
- MSPC IV: “The Church of Mindanao-Sulu Prayerfully Discerning Its Mission Today: Towards the development of communities witnessing to justice and love”

In the 90’s, through the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) BEC has become a priority of the Philippine Church. Paragraphs 137 – 140 and Articles 109 -112 of the PCP II Documents deal extensively on BEC and it is acknowledged as “new way of being church.”

- **Par. 137:** *“Our vision of the Church as communion, participation, and mission, about the Church as a priestly, prophetic and kingly people and as a Church of the poor – a Church that is renewed – is today finding expression in one ecclesial movement. This is the movement to foster Basic Ecclesial Communities.”*
- **Art. 109** *“Basic Ecclesial Communities under various names and forms – BCCs, small Christian communities – **must be vigorously promoted** for the full living of the Christian vocation in both urban and rural areas. Active non violence will be a guiding principle in their approach to social change.”*

Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC)

In the realm of dialogue FABC documents are continually blazing trails. FABC speaks about of the imperative - especially the Churches in Asia to be in dialogue with religion, culture and the poor.

In another trailblazing fashion, the Asian Bishops articulated quite explicitly the need to engage our BEC’c in the work of fostering dialogue and understanding between people of different religion and culture.

**The Third Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference (1982):**

In Section 1 on Forms of Christian Community in Asia, it says “*small ecclesial communities at all levels of Church life be more widely and intensely fostered, characterized by their openness and outreach to society through evangelization, social service, dialogue, ecumenical and **interreligious cooperation with peoples of all faiths and by their close union with their priests and bishop***” (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mendoza, M.F., *Basic Ecclesial Communities, Authentic Formation and Interreligious Dialogue: A Lonerganian Perspective*, (A Doctoral Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Missiology of the Pontificiae Universitas Gregoriana), 2001, p. 69.

- **Section IV** on The Dialogue of Communities of Faith in Asia stresses the link between BEC and DLF, the document teaches “*That **Christian communities** be conscious of communities of other faiths, be educated to recognize their belonging to the social and cultural communities of their neighbourhoods, **be initiated into a true and real “dialogue of life” with one another**, so that they, mutually enlightened and carried forward, may respond effectively through humble service, done with dedication and love, to the needs and aspirations of one and all*” (emphasis added).<sup>18</sup>

### **III. Partners in Peace-building**

At the grassroots level we have our BEC’s, neighbourhoods and local communities as protagonist in the so called dialogue of life. On the level of formal dialogue we collaborate with various institutions, NGO’s and PO’s. Aside from the RMCMDP (Ranao Muslim Christian Movement for Dialogue and Peace) where the Prelature is a founding member, our partnership with other institution like CRS, Tabang Mindanao, NDU, MSU, MARADECA is on program-to-program or project-to-project basis.

### **IV. Learning**

In the November of 2001 we celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the Prelature of St. Mary’s; after 25 years what fruits have we reaped? Well, that was the year Rufus Halley was murdered in a botched kidnapping. What an irony indeed!

Bishop Tutud once said that dialogue is a hundred years project, thus instead of focusing on the gains I would rather zero in to lessons we have learned.

1. Dialogue is never an easy option. One of the obstacles to dialogue is deep-seated prejudice. Thus, the building trust is absolutely necessary to begin the process of dialogue to move on.
2. Because dialogue involves risk and vulnerability, a dialoguer must have a “deep spirituality which enables him/her to hang on to his faith in God’s love, even when everything seems to fall apart.”<sup>19</sup>
3. Dialogue is more than an option, it is a Gospel imperative. Bishop Tutud wrote: “*Kalampusan man o kapakyasan dili mao ang pangutana. Ang importante mao nga molahutay unta kita diha sa paghuyatid aron pagkab-ot sa bituon nga ginadamgo kay kini man ang kabubut-on sa Ginoo.*”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mendoza, F.M., *ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> *The Prelature of St. Mary’s in Marawi*, p.8.

<sup>20</sup> B. Tutud, *Dialogue of Life and Faith*, Quezon City: Claretian, 1988, p. 187

4. Lack of sincerity and openness on both sides stifles dialogue.
5. In dialogue one must learn to listen first.
6. In dialogue one must be willing “to be enriched by the other and the otherness of the other.”<sup>21</sup>
7. Peace advocacy is not very widespread. The role of Ecclesial communities and churches is important. Grassroots and civil society’s initiatives for peace and reconciliation have to be supported.
8. There is still that deep-seated animosity between Muslim and Christians, thus peace education, culture of peace seminar are integral to peace building.
9. Poverty is widespread. Dialogue and peace-building efforts need to address the problems of social injustice.

I would like to end with a story, a true story. When Fr Michel de Gigord was released in June 1987, the French Government hosted a dinner; at one point the French Ambassador lamented the futility of dialogue in the presence of Bishop Tutud. Tutud simply responded: “*Kon hugot ang imong pagtuo sa imong lihok ug buhat, imo gayod kining buhaton tungod kay mituo ug kombinsido ka man niini, dili tungod sa kalampusan ug ganti... bisan pag magdala kini kanimo ngadto sa kamatayon.*”<sup>22</sup>

Fr. F. Nazareno  
Prelature of St. Mary  
Marawi

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<sup>21</sup> Halley, Rufus

<sup>22</sup> B. Tutud, p. 189.