

CEAP 70: Building a Culture of Peace

More than 3,000 heads of schools converged in Davao City from September 21-23 to attend the Catholic Educational Association (CEAP) National Convention. Adopting the theme: Building a Culture of Peace: Shaping the Vision, Living the Dream, it was by far the biggest draw from the country's largest private educational association. Ateneo de Davao University (AdDU) was the 2011 Convention host and was supported by the Davao Association of Catholic Schools.

Preparation

Various publicity activities and regional assemblies were held on days leading up to the Convention, which included releases on national and local newspapers and television program guestings. Moreover, a forum on Peace was held on July 18 at St. Paul University, Quezon City. Dubbed "Partnership for Education and Peace Talk" (PEP Talk), it stressed the role of CEAP member-schools as catalysts of change in Philippine society. It challenged the students to think of creative ways of promoting peace in their respective communities.

On September 20, as delegates started to arrive, an Educators' Exhibit opened at the Apo View and The Royal Mandaya Hotels courtesy of sponsors and supporters. The exhibit was meant to showcase latest educational trends and technology available to aid classroom instruction and for more efficient school operations.

On the same day, school heads and superintendents met for the General Membership meeting at Finster Hall, AdDU. It was the first time that the meeting was held as a pre-conference activity and it was also the first time that guests were invited to a forum in the meeting. Mr. Chito Salazar (Philippine Business for Education), Ms. Malou Mangahas (Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism), and Dr. Cynthia Bautista (University of the Philippines) shared their insights and reflections on CEAP's 70 years and what they think should be CEAP's direction in the medium and long term. Their different backgrounds allowed for a rich discussion with a multi-sectoral perspective, which Fr. Antonio Moreno, SJ, CEAP Vice President summarized as follows:

1. We are invited to become schools of citizenship - schools that develop competent graduates with strong moral character.
2. We should be promoters of a vision of education that cultivates students with depth.
3. We should be at the forefront of education reform in the country - both for private and public education.

Given these, a challenge was given to the assembly to discern the next steps together.

Convention Day 1

The Convention formally opened with a Eucharistic Celebration presided by the Most Rev. Fernando Capalla, D.D., Archbishop of Davao. In his homily, Bp. Capalla appealed to everyone to actively pursue the most important stage in building a culture of peace: Shalom--where wholeness, integrity, harmony, and order pervade our communities. According to Bp. Capalla, this stage can only be possible if we live and not just celebrate the Paschal Mystery.

Fr. Joel E. Tabora, SJ, AdDU President, welcomed the delegates and noted that it was quite remarkable that the Convention opened on the day that the United Nations declared as World Day of Peace. He invited the assembly to wage not war, but peace, despite the challenges being faced today.

In his opening remarks, Fr. Gregorio L. Banaga, Jr. CM, CEAP President, recalled peace-building initiatives of CEAP, which he said has deep roots in the history of the association. He highlighted the “courageous stand of our bishops, regional trustees, superintendents, educators and students [here in Mindanao] to seek peace and pursue it relentlessly even at the risk of their lives.” He said that holding the Convention here in Mindanao, with special focus on peace, is not coincidental but “an expression of our deep solidarity with our member-schools in this area and of our appreciation of all the big and small efforts they are making to build a culture of peace.”

Known for his involvement in many peace initiatives in Mindanao, Rev. Fr. Albert E. Alejo, SJ, in his well-received Keynote Address, stressed the transformative role of Catholic schools in building a culture of peace. He specifically mentioned two prevalent forms of “unpeace” in our schools that should be taken seriously: cheating and bullying. “Blessed are the peace teachers,” he said, “for they shall be called pupils of God”.

The opening ceremonies were held at the AdDU-Matina Campus.

Convention Day 2

Ten simultaneous Eucharistic Celebrations held in different session rooms in three venues (Apo View Hotel, The Royal Mandaya Hotel, and AdDU-Jacinto Campus) opened the 2nd day. Twenty-eight concurrent sessions got the delegates busy as they attended talks built around the Convention theme. Elevators and hallways were always filled as they trooped from one hall to another during breaks. The day ended as the remaining delegates from the Cluster 3 sessions bade their speakers farewell after last-minute exchanges and some photo ops.

Convention Day 3

Three distinguished guests delivered messages in the plenary session on day 3: Most Rev. Nereo P. Odchimar, D.D., President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP); Most Rev. Socrates B. Villegas, D.D., Chairperson of the CBCP Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education; and Hon. Teresita “Ging” Q. Deles, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP).

Bp. Odchimar commended CEAP for upholding the integral development of the human person and for supporting the teaching function of the Church. As Bishop of Tandag, he can authoritatively say that peace in Mindanao is pre-requisite to national development. He reminded the audience of the historical and systematic marginalization of Moros and feels that this convention is a show of support for the on-going peace process in Mindanao. He further said that peace is a gift of God, and at the same time a task that is never completed.

For his part, Bp. Soc urged the attendees to “remember with gratitude, renew with fervor, and set forth with faith” - the adopted theme for CEAP 75. He mentioned that a pastoral letter on Catholic Education is being prepared and it is expected to be issued in time for CEAP’s 71st anniversary on 02 February 2012. He campaigned for the use of "Alive to the World Series," instructional tools on Human Sexuality. The series has been recommended for use by the Church in Latin America, Europe and the United States and has been approved for use by the CEAP National Board of Trustees. And he also endorsed “A Million Roses for the World,” a campaign wherein one million Filipinos are encouraged to commit themselves for a 200-day Rosary prayer from October 10, 2011 up to May 31, 2012. Lastly, he asked the school heads to observe “11-11-11, wherein the five Sorrowful Mysteries will be prayed by the whole school community for peace in the world on Nov. 11, 2011 at 11:00 AM.

Updates on the Peace process was the main focus of Sec. Deles’ message. She hopes that government negotiations with MILF and CPP-NPA-NDF will reach their final resolution. She stressed the importance of nurturing confidence from both sides and added that there should be no disconnect between the negotiating table and the realities on the ground. What needs to be done, she said, is to trust in the process.

Fr. Tony Moreno, CEAP Vice President, presented the Convention statement on Peace. The delegates affirmed the statement through a round of applause and a standing ovation.

A synthesis of the National Convention was given by CEAP Executive Director Rhodora Angela F. Ferrer. She thanked everyone for making the Convention a huge success.

Announcement of the newly-elected officers and trustees-at-large of the CEAP National Board was made, followed by the oath-taking of its officers and members.

Jubilarians (44 schools celebrating milestone anniversaries) were then awarded with plaques of recognition and icons of Christ the Teacher while new CEAP member-schools were given membership certificates. Included in the list of Jubilarians are University of Sto. Tomas which is celebrating its quadricentennial (400 years) and De La Salle University, St. Louis School Center, Inc. (Baguio City), St. Louis University (Baguio City) and St. Vincent School (Mt. Province) all of which are celebrating 100 years.

During the closing Eucharistic Celebration presided by Bp. Odchimar, Fr. Gregg gave his message of thanks and closing remarks before the final blessing. He announced that the next convention, to be hosted by Luzon schools, will be held at SMX, SM Mall of Asia.

CEAP75

Looking forward to its 75th Anniversary on 2016, CEAP75 was launched amid white and blue balloons holding the CEAP75 logo. It was mentioned that the roadmap for the next five years has been identified and that CEAP will do what it promised to deliver, towards a vision of Catholic education in the Philippines.

Onwards to CEAP 75!

Thank you, Davao! See you in Manila in 2012!