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Philippine Lasallian Family Convocation (PLFC) - Mindanao Cluster Reflection News Feature Article

Mindanao Cluster pooled anew; calls for a 'more inclusive' La Salle by 2030

In the pursuit to make the Lasallian mission more relevant and responsive, Lasallians from Mindanao expressed a strong call for gender and cultural inclusivity in a reflection gathering held at La Salle University (LSU), Ozamiz City, November 4 – 5, 2022.

All three (3) La Salle District Schools in the island namely, De La Salle John Bosco College (DLSJBC) – Bislig, La Salle Academy (LSA) – Iligan, and LSU together with their pool of sector representatives compose the Mindanao reflection team in preparation for the Philippine Lasallian Family Convocation 2023 (PLFC23).

“Gender identity must not be treated as a privilege but as a basic right that every human being should enjoy. As a learning institution, the issue on gender equality is something that we should address deliberately and openly. Everyone deserves to experience quality education without any reservation or hindrances.” says Zuriel Cabanag, an LSU student-representative.

Multiple Philippine News outlets including INQUIRER, PhilStar, and others, have reported recent circumstances on gender expression, particularly the gendered uniform restrictions, stating that during graduation ceremonies, members of the LGBTQIA+ community who wish to dress in accordance with their sexual orientation and gender identity were not given full support nor approval, not until a DepEd memorandum was issued.

INTERFAITH, which stresses on religious and cultural diversity was among the highlights of the discussions as most delegates mentioned deliberate inequalities towards diversity of existing ethnicities in the Mindanao Island.

The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) recognized Mindanao as the center of cultural diversity in the Philippines where 61% of the indigenous peoples reside having about 32 ethnolinguistic groups mainly the Lumad (indigenous and natives) with 18 subgroups including B'laan, T'boli, Manobo, Subanen, etc., and the Moro (indigenous Islamic) with 14 subgroups such as Maranao, Tausug, and Yakan, Melabungan, and others. All these IP groups and non-IP Mindanawans profess a variety of faith and belief systems.

“The rising number of non-catholic students and teachers in our schools could trigger long term academic implications and religious tension if not addressed promptly and accordingly,” says Tyrese Tablazon, LSA student-representative.

She added that the diversity can be an open door for religious demands and practices to potentially weaken the Catholic faith.

With everyone concurring to these urgent challenges on the LGBTQIA+ stigma and the strengthening of spirituality, such concerns have further manifested emphasis on the Lasallian Identity, which is very crucial in defining the entirety of the Lasallian mission.

“Lasallian identity today is our tradition, stories and collective experiences from all members of the Lasallian family. We live out this identity especially in this trying times.” says Mr. Jake Lumakang, DLSJBC delegate.

The septennial gathering has identified four (4) focused areas for the PLFC23 which is on Vitality, Identity, Transformation, and Association or ‘VITA’, meaning “life” in Latin, to emphasize the goal to transform lives by living with the Lasallian values and mission, and serve as a response to continue to dream.

VITA: Paving New Paths for Transformation, crafted by the Superior General and his council as a part of the Lasallian Mission Moving Forward Plan, was cascaded to the

La Salle schools all over Philippines to serve as a central theme in engaging members in the reflection, that would further address particular issues and challenge everyone to build new and difficult roads with determination and enthusiasm.

“Definitely, the conference was insightful, as I was also able to reflect on how I may contribute, as a student, to lessen the issues noted. For the whole experience, I had fun. Bonded with the people, to whom I learned a lot of from, and everyone welcomed us with hospitable faces.” shared one representative.

Meanwhile, the consolidated reflection of the Mindanao Cluster will be discussed by the different delegates elected to represent a certain sector in the PLFC23, along with other La Salle schools all over Philippines in May 2023.