

**Report on Interfaith Peace Blessing Ceremony**  
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Dumaguete City, Philippines

## **Unprecedented 3,000 Couples Turnout for First-time Blessing in Dumaguete City**



Last Saturday, July 21, 2012, Universal Peace Federation in cooperation with the Provincial Government of Negros Oriental and the City Government of Dumaguete, held the third large scale Blessing event for the year in the city of Dumaguete, Negros Oriental in the Visayas the middle island group in the Philippines. Some 3,000 couples joined consisting of couples from towns and cities around the province of Negros Oriental, police officers and other local government offices. The couples were also joined by around a thousand students from various colleges and universities in Dumaguete City who made the Pledge of Purity as part of the celebration. Some local dignitaries such as the governor of the province of Negros Oriental and the administrators of the cities of Dumaguete and Guihulngan and the former President of Negros Oriental also participated in the event. The Interfaith Peace Blessing Festival in Negros Oriental was also strongly supported by the Negros Oriental Provincial Police Office, Provincial Tourism Office and the Negros Oriental State University.



At eight in the morning, amidst rain, groups of couples dressed in white from all over Negros Oriental, started to arrive at the Lamberto Macias Sports Complex. Some staff who were assigned in towns two hours from the city spent the night there to guide the couples they had invited on their way to the Blessing venue. At the gymnasium, the couples were greeted and ushered by neatly uniformed tourism students coming from Negros Oriental State University (NORSU).



As a pre-program to the Blessing, several presentations were prepared to further impart the significance of the Blessing. First, a lecture presentation on pure love was delivered by Prof. Celestino Jose V. Navalta, Jr. Many among the students in the audience were from Negros Oriental State University, a major state university in the region which recognizes the W-CARP as one of the best student organizations there. As they recited the Pure Love Pledge, their sincerity could be felt in their strong voice and raised hands.



After the purity pledge, the governor of the province of Negros Oriental, Hon. Roel Degamo, greeted the thousands of people present and proclaimed that he was inspired by the efforts of UPF to build a world of peace. The provincial government was very supportive from the start of the preparations for the Blessing. He earlier had attended a UPF seminar in which he

was quoted as saying that he “trusts our people and our group and will support 150%”. He sponsored the use of the gymnasium for free.



The pre-program was capped off by Prof. Navalta’s presentation on the meaning and process of the Blessing and the Holy Juice Ceremony. The couples really looked to be digesting the presentation well because they were intently listening to the lecture. Then the Holy Juice Ceremony was held. One couple said that the Holy Juice ceremony was their most memorable part of the program.



Rev. Julius B. Malicdem, the Philippine national leader was the master of ceremonies during the main Blessing program. The atmosphere seemed to be getting more exciting as everyone was waiting to receive the Blessing. The NORSU Kabilin Choir, a prestigious choir group from the university, sang the Philippine national anthem which was followed by a doxology by Bishop Dr. Elias T. Soria, D.D., President of the Asian Clergy Leadership Conference.



One remarkable part of the program was the Water Ceremony and Interreligious Prayer which followed. Seven representatives from different religious groups took part in gathering the water that symbolized the truth in each religion and in our essential oneness. The representatives were: Imam Jamal T. Tiburon, Imam, Ekhwanol Muslimin Association, Islamic Center, Rev. Fr. Ronaldo E. Ablong, Diocese of Dumaguete City, Roman Catholic Church, Bishop Lucesio A. Alaban, Capitol Universal Evangelical Church, Bp. Dr. Elias T. Soria, D.D., President, Asian Clergy Leadership Conference, Rev. James Macahig, Dumaguete City Chaplain, Chaplain Andres Legaspi. The ceremony was wonderful sight as they come together in showing the unity of religions.



Next was the speech of the city mayor, Hon. Manuel Sagarbarria, who was also very supportive of the Blessing event. During the preparation, the mayor issued a directive to the 30 village governments (*barangay*) of the city to send 50 representative couples to the Blessing. The administrator of the city, Hon. William Ablong, delivered the speech on his behalf. He is also the brother of one of the Blessed member who is a native of the city, Rafael Ablong. His brother is also the Catholic priest that represented Catholicism at the interfaith prayer. Though his family is in Japan, he took some time off to serve in the providence in his hometown. Hon. Ablong explained that the government supported Blessing Festival because it supports peace and family. No single religion can solve the problems of humanity; instead, there needs to be interfaith cooperation the likes of which the True Parents and UPF is doing. Further, they have

come to this event not to be converted but to be transformed. His speech gathered resounding applause more so because he spoke in the local Visayan language. Such great support from the government symbolizing the Cain world did well to prepare the way for the couples to receive the Blessing with more than just basic participation.



Dr. Chung Sik Yong, the Regional President of UPF in Asia, officiated the ceremony in behalf of the True Parents and was assisted by 12 attendant couples. Throughout the Blessing ceremony, they really went through each step intently and seemed to be gathering themselves for the renewal of their marriages and desire to establish better families. During the Affirmation of Blessing Vows, for example, they shouted a passionate “Yes!”. The 11-minute Prayer of True Father in the most recent Blessing event in Korea was aired during the Benediction which was ably translated into local dialect by Police Officer Edilberto Euraoba III, one of the Blessed members in Dumaguete who like the others, have worked hard in order to make the Blessing event a success.





The newly blessed couples were then graced by the instrumental songs entitled "The Process" and "The Crucible of Life" by the NOFA/KAB.

Three resounding cheers of eog mansei echoed all over the gymnasium as the victory for God and True Parents of Heaven, Earth and Humankind was proclaimed at the end of the ceremony.

Once again, the Blessed central families, tribal messiahs, leaders and members coming to Negros Oriental who participated in the mobilization were so moved and empowered to be able to fulfill the wish of True Parents before Foundation day. They are more determined than ever to do more in order for Philippines to truly stand as filial daughter nation of God giving joy and comfort to God and True Parent.