



WOMEN OF FAITH
Creating a Culture of
COMPASSION & INCLUSION
An Interfaith Virtual Gathering
November 25-December 10, 2020



Concept Note

Background

We will forever remember the year 2020 as the year of the Covid 19 global pandemic. We have seen so much suffering, helplessness, and even death as the dreaded disease wrought havoc on economies, communities, and people's lives. The pandemic also exacerbated the existing inequalities and other social divide that long plague modern societies. This novel corona virus pushed governments scrambling to manage and mitigate its impact and scientists grappling with issues of treatment and care.

As if the pandemic was not enough, the recent typhoons such as the Typhoon Ulysses further added to the Filipino people's multitude of burden. The situation further highlighted the importance of climate change risk management and disaster preparedness.

Despite all these, we have also witnessed the power of hope and compassion as it propels people to overcome. People, particularly the women of faith, still rise, stand, and move forward with stories of hope and resiliency. When the situation is dire, women of faith serve as beacons of light that illuminate the minds and warm the hearts. These women's indomitable spirit is what we are celebrating at the close of 2020.

Celebration is not just a commemoration of happy milestones. Celebration is also getting together, learning from one another, and finding common grounds and collectively working towards shared aspirations. Amidst these hard realities, the women of faith will once again congregate to inspire and energize each other as we hold the 4th Women's Celebration of Life and Faith (WCLF) 2020 on November 25-December 10, 2020.

Women's Celebration of Life and Faith is a biennial gathering and a platform for conversation, convergence, and cooperation among women from different faith traditions and beliefs. Launched in 2014, it has gathered more than 1,500 women believers of the sacred to reflect and respond to the social justice issues of the times. The gatherings stimulated discourses and activism among the women in faith communities as they sought to practice and live in accordance with the universal and sacred teachings. The platform provided that safe space for women of faith to contemplate on issues that matter and to take courage in addressing dominant beliefs and paradigms that tend to promote inequality, oppression, and subordination particularly of women and girls. Since then, circles of conversations and actions among women of faith have been created to critically challenge prevailing perceptions on women's rights, gender equality, and environment. WCLF became that bridge among religious leaders and faith communities to support existing and proposed laws and policies that uphold dignity and respect, and recognize sexual and reproductive health and rights. More churches and congregations have started to mainstream gender in their programs.

Indeed, the solidarity is expanding and getting stronger as WCLF also paved the way for the formation of Interfaith for Dignity and Equality Advancement and Solidarity (IDEAS) composed of men and women in faith communities.

Theme & Purpose

The pandemic disproportionately hurt women and girls and further highlighted their vulnerabilities. The quarantine measures trapped many women and girls with their abusers.

They also live in a potentially explosive environment where anxieties over loss of income, food insecurity, and health scare could trigger violence against them.

Even before the pandemic, VAW is already an epidemic where 1 in every 4 Filipino women aged 15-49 experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their husband or partner.¹ To combat VAW, we need to understand its aspects and its links to a myriad of problems affecting the woman's security and wellbeing.

UN defines VAW as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." UN further explains that VAW prevents women from achieving equality, development, peace, and exercising their human rights.²

WCLF 2020 will participate in United Nations' International 16-day campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls (VAWG) starting on November 25 and culminating on December 10 International Human Rights Day. As a nod to UN's "Orange the World"³ theme, the color for the anti-VAWG campaign will be seen throughout the WCLF sessions.

This year's women's interfaith gathering will adapt to the new normal of social distancing by utilizing the online platform and centering on the creation of a culture of compassion and inclusion; of courage to address the situation and provide what is needed, and the commitment to do better in order to eliminate violence against women and girls. This year's theme will be **"Women of Faith Creating a Culture of Compassion and Inclusion."** We plan to gather virtually at least 100 women through direct registration during the webinars but we hope to broaden our reach by streaming the sessions in various social media platforms.

Interfaith Dialogue Program

Throughout the 16-Days of Activism Against Gender-based violence, this interfaith women's dialogue will have

- 6 main sessions or conversation circles
- 6 breakouts or community discussions

NOV 25, WED, 1-4pm

Opening Ceremonies

- Opening Blessing: Indigenous prayer of cleansing and purification
- Welcome Remarks
- Keynote: The Role of Women, particularly from faith communities, in creating a culture of compassion and inclusion

(Main Conversation Circle 1)

LIGHT ABOVE THE SHADOWS: Religious teachings affirming women's value and worth

This session interrogates two opposing paradigms: patriarchy and feminism. While the shadow of patriarchy pushes women into the darkness of subordination, oppression, and marginalization; the light of feminism brightens women's path towards freedom and equality. This panel provides the context why GBV and discrimination exist and perpetuated by social institutions and how religious universal values of equality can overturn such norms and serve as protective umbrella against GBV. Analysis will come from the perspective of

- Christian theologian
- Islamic scholar
- Indigenous spiritual leader

¹ <https://psa.gov.ph/content/one-four-women-have-ever-experienced-spousal-violence-preliminary-results-2017-national>

² www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm

³ https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/what%20we%20do/evaw/unite%20campaign_2020_concept%20note_final.pdf?la=en&vs=2808

NOV 26, THURS, 1-4pm

(Main Conversation Circle 2)

SIYA ANG AKING KAPWA: MY SISTER IS MY NEIGHBOR

This session explores the shared religious values and teachings of love, mercy, and compassion to others, especially those in need. Theologians and religious scholars will discuss this ethical modus vivendi or a way of life among the believers as they reflect on the woman as their neighbor. This conversation hopes to foster understanding and affirmation of the dignity and worth of every person as a child of God in a loving, inclusive and collaborative manner. By acknowledging that our sister is our neighbor strengthens solidarity and ensures compassionate and caring accompaniment as we journey together with fellow women.

- Christian perspective
- Islamic perspective
- Indigenous Spirituality's perspective

The religious perspectives will be supplemented by sharing of the lived realities of Filipino women and girls as they try to navigate the barriers and challenges for their own survival and development. There will be discussions on national crises like the increasing cases of teenage pregnancy, maternal mortality, HIV infection, GBV and other negative outcomes brought about by systemic neglect and socio-cultural devaluing of women's roles.

DEC 2, WED, 1-4pm

(Main Conversation Circle 3), 1-2pm

BREAKING FREE!

This session will highlight women's ability to decide and take action to break glass ceilings and stereotypes with tenacity and grit, motivated by love, compassion and inclusiveness. The conversation will also look into the internalization of culture of violence and misogyny as well as learned helplessness.

(Breakout/Community Discussions), 2-4pm

Three community discussions will touch on issues of

- Divorce
- Dignity & gender equality
- Women's health and wellbeing including mental health

DEC 3, THURS, 1-4pm

(Main Conversation Circle 4), 1-2pm

RIISING UP AND MOVING FORWARD: Stories of Resilience & Solidarity

This session encourages soul searching as we listen to the cries of the earth and of the poor as we contemplate on the ecological economics, spirituality, community, and lifestyle. Peace is not just the absence of armed conflict but also the lack of enabling environment that allows women to have dignified and fulfilling lives.

- Women and Environment in Times of Pandemic: A Holistic View
- Women and Peace

(Breakout/Community Discussions), 2-4pm

Three community discussions will touch on issues of

- Women and the Digital Media Challenge
- Women and the Economy of Survival
- Indigenous Wisdom: The Role of Spiritual Leaders and Tribal Midwives in Protecting and Caring for Nature and Culture

DEC 9, WED, 1-4pm

(Main Conversation Circle 5)

PURSUIING DIGNITY & EQUALITY

The road to freedom and equality is fraught with hard challenges that are deeply embedded in culture and perpetuated by social and religious institutions. But there is hope in as we build institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and girls taking into consideration the intersectionality of issues and the education of men and boys to be respectful and peace-loving partners for the shared responsibility of development and progress of all of humanity—without leaving and discriminating anyone.

DEC 10, THURS, 1-4pm

(Main Conversation Circle 6)

SHAPING A WORLD OF LOVE, COMPASSION, & INCLUSION

In celebration of the International Human Rights Day, this session will explore women's difficult journey for respect and recognition of their fundamental human rights. Women of faith and young people will also reflect on their role in making this dream a reality.

- Are We There Yet? A Look Back and Forward for Women's Advancement and Gender equality: From Mexico to Beijing++
- *Hora et Labora*: Integrating human rights in the practice of faith
- YouthSpeak: Yes, the *Hijas* Creating the Future Now!

Closing Ceremonies

Coming to a full circle, the Women's Celebration of Life and Faith (WCLF) 2020 will close the circle but not the conversation on women's rights and wellbeing. As we continue with our journey, we will participate in a creative prayer that reclaims the sacred feminine in every woman. We will extol women's roles as healers and protectors of humanity and God's creation. From the representatives of organized religions and churches to the indigenous spirituality, we will bless each other as we strive to create a compassionate and inclusive society.

Steering Committee and Secretariat

WCLF 2020 Steering Committee is composed of the following representatives from different faith traditions and spirituality:

- Prof. Macrina Adjerol-Morados, Dean, UP Institute of Islamic Studies
- Ms. Merian Aldea, Training Coordinator, AMRSP-OWGC
- Ms. Easterluna Luz Canoy, Executive Director, Kitanglad Integrated NGOs for indigenous people's welfare
- Ms. Luz Francess Chua, C4RH Executive Director and Convener, Women's Celebration Conference Secretariat
- Rev. Eravilla Maga-Cabillas, Parish Priest, Holy Cross Parish (IFI), Loyola Heights, QC
- Engr. Trelly Marigza, Coordinator, Co-Convener, Climate Consciousness & Action Group

Catholics for Reproductive Health (C4RH), serves as the WCLF secretariat and convener. For additional information or concerns, C4RH can be reached through

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