



## JUNE 2015: THE CONTEXTS OF OUR YOUTH PEACE MOVEMENT IN MINDANAO

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*This month we are expressing our gratefulness to God for calling young people into a Christian peace movement. But we need prayers as our new young peace theologians navigate the complex social, historical and theological contexts of the mostly American-influenced evangelicalism in the Philippines.*

**The Kalinaw Youth Movement.** The character of a nation's youth can never be underestimated when judging its health and efficacy. The same can be said of any movement, whether it be for peace, rights, politics, a religion, or even a sports team. This is the basis for our optimism with the Kalinaw Youth Movement based in Valencia City in the province of Bukidnon. Part of our PAR community in the area, and led by Pastors June and Clay Rojo, the *Kalinaw* (Peace) youth are building a community among students at Central Mindanao University and the surrounding churches focused on discipleship and peace building. Taking the reins of a youth movement older than some of its current members, the newly minted KYM is now engaged in developing a curriculum for the growth of its members and the group itself. In April of this year they assisted in putting on a youth camp emphasizing Evangelical missions which gave me, as an outsider, a chance to see the quality of the Kalinaw youth's faith, as well as their journey in understanding the Gospel. In fact, this camp provided a snapshot of the Evangelical youth of the entire Philippines, and thereby the denomination itself, of which the Kalinaw Youth Movement is a unique part.



In the creation of its new curriculum, KYM leaders are drawing from PBCI's four harmonies to guide the theology and direct the mission that will define the new community. Spiritual development and character transformation will be the roots from which this community grows and bears fruit in service of its greater environment. Allowing young people to discover themselves in light of God and with the help of a family of peers and mentors, KYM is admirably applying what they know of the Gospel in order to transform lives and be a presence in their region. Their passion and drive is evident, and yet they too are on a journey: rarely is the image of fruit bearing vines more applicable than in the case of the church growth mentality, as sometimes an emphasis on numbers can overshadow the impact of the Gospel, and the careful trimming of the Master Pruner becomes necessary.

This is what one may have observed during the missions camp which was put on by the Bukidnon Missions Conference on April 8-10, 2015. To be clear, KYM did not create the program or provide the material for this event, as they themselves were attendants and volunteers; they do, however, provide a telling look into the spiritual consciousness of Filipino Evangelical youth and their fervent missionary thirst, as well as a sure opportunity to witness how an injection of peace theology can transform that consciousness into something more salient for the social and religious climate of the country.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. - 1 Cor. 3:11

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**Peace theology and the Evangelical consciousness.** It would be unfair to characterize the ethos of the missions camp – dubbed “GO Camp”, after the Great Commission – as overzealous. Based on some of the material and rhetoric, though, there is justifiable cause for concern that damaging theology and missiology could be propagated. Among these are xenophobic depictions of Muslims and paternalistic attitudes towards Indigenous spirituality; the evocation of the modern state of Israel as vindication of the truth of our faith; the sharing of an un-contextualized Gospel that comes from the conviction of having a monopoly on truth; and the twin pillars of valuing Christians above others while also celebrating the strength of global Christian numbers instead of the character of our actions. These sentiments aren’t portrayed on the surface, but lie beneath, revealing themselves in outcries over the number of Christians killed in the last century instead of the number of people; in the language of domination that misunderstands the spirit of peace which defines the Kingdom of God; and in the plain fact that for all the talk of making disciples, there was far less talk of what a disciple really is.



Again, it would be unfair to characterize the GO Camp as an event that misinformed and stoked up a misguided zeal. The sight of 100 young Filipinos passionate about serving God is an unmistakable sign of His presence. However, there were some principles that Peacebuilder’s Community might see as in need of some fresher perspective. Instead of a theology of the cross and the Kingdom of God that espouses mere propagation of the Gospel and rejoices in souls won, it might be suggested that the power of radical love found in the cross and the peaceful Kingdom Jesus spoke of are better suited to real life application, especially in the Philippines. Surely, sharing the Gospel is one of the truest ways to show love for others,

but is that gauged in numbers baptized or in transformed relationships and life-giving worldviews? The easy answer is both, but the easiest practice is the former. Put another way, if the number of Christians in a nation directly translated to its well-being, why does the Philippines experience such strife? A nation’s Christian population is not unimportant, but those who are practicing the Gospel of peace, who are bearing their cross, is far more significant. That is the kind of disciple any nation could use more of, not one who knows the simple news that Jesus died, but one who sees the good news of why he died and what that means today.

It becomes clear that the Gospel needs a real world application beyond eternal destination, or else it is next to meaningless. The best way for it to be applied is to a culture by its own people. This does not discount the value of foreign missions, but it denies its status as the highest calling of a Christian. The Gospel can be applied everywhere, but it will see different expressions in different places; who better to apply the dynamism of the Good News than those who understand their own people’s deep needs? This is what the GO Camp lacked, with its imported theologies, missiologies, and even worship songs. This also is where the Kalinaw Youth Movement shines a beacon of hope, with their compassion and care for their own people in their own context; in Valencia, they have a chance to rewrite a history of colonial religion that has yet to strike the deep structures of the culture. The Gospel can enhance what is inherently beautiful to a people, gracefully condemn what is not, and energize everything else that makes them unique. Then we can celebrate not a faceless, global conglomerate, but Filipino-Christianity, Canadian-Christianity, and all the tribes, tongues, and nations who will recognize the Lamb, unique in their oneness and one in their uniqueness. The radiant Kingdom of God.