

Sister Mila de Gimeno in the Philippines

12 Datus unite for peace

Today is Mission Sunday

TWELVE chiefs (Datu) of the Matigsalog tribe gathered for a 3-day caucus to settle differences in the implementation of their customary laws and foster uniformity in their implementation.

The conference was organized together with the Timema, their tribal organization composed of Datu and tribesmen, and in coordination with the Missionaries of Assumption (MA) sisters and Hijas de Jesus.

With the theme: "Pagsaboka Tu Anio Daru Patangko To Kasabokaan Woy Kinsapaan" (Uniting the Datus towards Unity and Peace), the conference was also attended by the Matigsalog tribe of Paquibato, Malabog and Malabog Districts. Delegates were housed in San Roque Parish Seminar Hall in Malabog from October 12-14.

The conference started with a "panubadtabad" (prayer), participated in by the staff of Archdiocesan Church

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Sister Milagros Gimeno of the Missionaries of Assumption assists a Datu in placing his thumbmark on a copy of the covenant forged after the 3-day conference with the other Datus of the Matigsalog tribe. (Insert) Like Jesus during meal with his disciples, Bishop George Rimando shares lunch with the 12 Datus during the IPA Sunday celebration, October 14.

KNOW YOUR SHEPHERD:
Sharing the faith is my joy

BODHI Adviser Sister Mila de Gimeno, of the Missionaries of the Assumption writes that she is still working in the upland communities in Malabog, Paquibato district, with the indigenous people of the Manobo tribe, particularly the Matigsalog. She sent these reflections on a three-day conference in which twelve chiefs of the Matigsalog tribe gathered in Malabog to settle differences in the implementation of their customary laws and foster uniformity in their implementation.

Hope Rises in the Hearts of the Lumads at Daybreak

While I was walking down the pathway going to the seminar house of San Roque Parish, the cold October winds swept my face and permeated my whole being. I paused for a while and ponder what this last day of the Datu conference brings. I realized then that because the previous days were so hectic and I wanted that everything be done according to the set plan, I forgot to notice the dewdrops that wet my feet and the glistening waters cascading from the leaves of banana trees.

I stopped for seconds thanked the waters that wet my feet... signaling to me that they have a part in the celebration. It gave me much energy to continue on my walk.

Two striking events touched me that day and my energy was replenished and my soul soared high in gratitude. First it was the ritual that the twelve (12) Datu offered to Manama at the close of the Conference on October 12-14, 2007. they prayed for unity, peace and justice in all our families and communities.

Datu Puyod who led the rituals and those who participated in the ritual formed a circle around the Tambaló (Panubaran) – a shape likened to an altar. He then went around to each one of us and held the white chicken above our heads and it seemed to drive away the bad spirits. Then he offered the chicken and we waited for some minutes to see which direction the head of the chicken would point to when it finally expired.

Suddenly greater silence was felt among us as the chicken lost its life facing the sun which gradually rises in the East. Then I saw the wrinkled faces of the Datus and their wives broke into radiant smiles with the realization that there was much hope awaiting all their efforts and discussions the previous days, as symbolized by the positive ending of the ritual.

Everyone stood in awe when the Datu in a loud voice shouted “Moupiya” (good sign!). Their faces spoke thousands of unexpressed joy. It was indeed a profound experience for me and perhaps to all of us.

There was Hope that God (Manama) will give us strength to face the difficulties before us.

As closure to the ritual, IPA Director Fr. Jun Acedo gave the blessings to the group and asked God to increase our hope and trust to Manama and with each other.

After the ritual, the Holy Eucharist followed presided by Bishop George Rimando. All the Datu, the leaders from different communities, the scholars and the children from Kibalatong attended the Mass in their full regalia. They innocently followed the Mass and listened to the homily of the bishop which was intended for them as a celebration of the Mission Sunday.

It was heartwarming and hopeful experience to see Bishop Rimando, Sr. Luz, Sr. Etta and many others shared lunch with the Datu and the Lumad leaders in one long table. To me it speaks of unity, love and care of our sisters and brothers, the Lumads who have been living in the margins of society.