



Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center

# Bendum News

March-July 2018

Mercy Pakiwag and Jason Menaling meet Pope Francis at the Vatican during the International Conference on the 3rd Anniversary of Laudato Si'.



## Bendum to Vatican: Pulangiyan stories reach Int'l Conference on Laudato Si'

Representatives from the Pulangiyan community shared stories from the uplands in the recently held international conference on the 3rd Anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, at the Vatican, 5-6 July 2018.

Pulangiyan community members Mercy Pakiwag and Jason Menaling were among the delegates who travelled to Rome, not only to meet the Pope, but to bring forward the call for social and environmental change in the context of indigenous peoples.

One of the main points emphasized in the conference was the need for global engagements in order to respond to the social and environmental challenges the world is facing today, thus, a parallel session on Youth and Indigenous Peoples gathered representatives from Asia and Pacific to share their specific contexts and aspects of their communities' relationship with nature, which live out the sense of integral ecology promoted by *Laudato Si'*. They also shared on the challenges in their communities and the hopes they have for the future.

Mercy, the Deputy School Manager of Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC) in Northern Mindanao, Philippines, shared that the APC is a source of hope in the Pulangiyan community in Bendum and in neighboring villages in the Upper Pulangi watershed. APC is an upland indigenous school formally recognized by government that uses mother tongue-based approach in education and integrates indigenous knowledge in the

curriculum, seeking to make education responsive to the realities of indigenous communities.

Jason, also a Pulangiyan community member and a community forest manager with the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC), a Jesuit research and training organization in the Philippines, shared about the role of the youth in managing their forests through a youth program that is partly supported by the Flights for Forests programme of the Jesuit Conference Asia Pacific. Not only are these youth seeking to stop illegal logging, they are also actively extending the forest cover. Extending the forest through agroforestry and assisted natural regeneration of forests along the Pantaron Range helps minimize soil erosion and rehabilitates a stretch of stream for a better water source. The youth do their part by removing the grasses and protecting seedlings and by controlling disturbances in the forest areas, germination of native tree species in regenerating forest areas is triggered.

Jason also personally gave Pope Francis a copy of *Forest Faces*, a publication by ESSC in partnership with Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that chronicles the stories and tragedies associated with the changes and loss of Philippine forest.

The cultural practices of Indigenous Peoples that contribute to managing our common home are typically dispersed and scattered, thus it is crucial that their voices are pulled together through dialogues and collaborative, inclusive action. 



APC students enjoy their free reading period at the veranda.

## New school year begins with energy

The school year for APC began at the end of May 2018 with a great deal of energy and enthusiasm as it expanded its operations to senior high school level, and welcomed many new faces in its faculty and student body. APC now serves over 400 students in all its schools, with more than 200 in the main campus in Bendum, Bukidnon.

The high school now has 150 students, of whom over a hundred live in *dalepaan* (longhouse) where they learn to build a sense of community life and connect with one other through their ancestry and cultural practices.

Unlike most student housing facilities, the *dalepaan* provide not only a place for the youth to sleep, but to live and develop relationships, support one another, understand cultural challenges, and apply traditional knowledge into a contemporary context.

The *dalepaan* are a fundamental shift in terms of understanding an integral culture-based education as they also serve as a venue for further learning and values formation, and allows for more attention to be given to students' needs, academic or otherwise.

Grade school and high school *dalepaan* house students coming from villages in the Upper Pulangi area, with a significant number from Cabanglasan, and a few from Agusan.

A greater engagement in the learning process is observed particularly among high school students, as they are taught by dynamic new teachers and increasingly exposed to books and reading materials, with the introduction of a library period where they engage in free reading. Aside from this, sports events other extra-curricular activities are sustained to keep the learning experience rich and varied.

APC is also working on the development of new and long-term facilities while present structures are being maintained. Earlier classrooms are being converted to an administration and library building for better maintenance of school records and books, while the area under the said building has been dug out to provide space for classrooms. Five more classrooms need to be built, along with a science laboratory, and an administration building.

The goal for this year is to manage these developments to ensure student engagement to successfully complete the school year.

APC aims to keep both teachers and students grounded in the culture to be able to sustain the indigenous life in the uplands, even as they pursue knowledge that will allow them to confidently relate with broader Philippine society. 



Twenty-six Grade 6 students together with some Kinder pupils sing songs to celebrate their graduation on 22 March 2018.

## Graduation message 2018

*Twenty-six Grade 6 students of Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC) graduated on 22 March 2018 in Bendum, Bukidnon. APC Executive Director Pedro Walpole addressed the students and community, a translation of which follows:*

During this school year our APC community has continued to grow in Upper Pulangi. I am very grateful to the Tribal Council who continues to be a point of welcome, of relations-building, and traditional knowledge for all the students coming from Bendum and neighbouring communities. I thank all of you in the community for sustaining the peace and the clear focus on learning in APC. In this way we continue to give real meaning to culture-based education.

I thank the Board of APC for their generosity of service and seeking decisions in the best interests of the children today. Our sponsors and One World Children's Fund, Reconciliation with Creation Network of Asia Pacific, and the global Educate Magis Network have all greatly contributed to sustaining the learning in the school and relations with the broader world of justice and reconciliation. We share in the Jesuit tradition of forming youth of culture, commitment, competence, compassion and conscience.

So many people have supported us though the year, including the Jesuit Province and the Jesuit Community in Bukidnon, we thank them from our hearts. Not least is the Department of Education in helping establish a greater understanding of the role of Indigenous Schools and Multi Lingual Education for people nationwide. Our partnership with the Jesuit Basic Education Commission continues to grow.

Most of all I thank you, the parents of these graduates, as you stand with them today and with

the school in seeking new horizons in life and in service of others.

We rejoice today in the graduation of these children and their six to eight years of learning at APC from Kinder to Grade 6, and we trust they will continue on to high school and Hulas learning. We are grateful for the support of the four connecting local schools and particularly the construction of the new classrooms in *Nabag-o*. We celebrate today also the further establishment of the high school campus and facilities for over a hundred students. These include the new classrooms, the organic farm and assisted natural regeneration of the *gaup* (ancestral domain).

Our team of teachers and staff is growing in number and competence. I am deeply grateful to the team and congratulate them in the tremendous work of service done in dealing with all the challenges. We are only able to face these challenges when we remain a community of practice committed to the children and youth of Upper Pulangi and a deeper reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and care for our Common Home.

This shared spirituality of care and of hope allows for humble opportunities of change in our own lives and in Mindanao. It demands also a compassion and sensitivity to personal growth and culture as well as being responsible in addressing the challenges in broader society. 



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<http://apupalamguwancenter.essc.org.ph>

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