



Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center

# Bendum News

September 2020



Classrooms are empty and the *basal* is silent, yet APC students continue to learn through modular approach.

## School year opens with modular learning

School year 2020-2021 officially started on 31 August for Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center. But unlike previous years, the campus in Bendum is not teeming with children and youth getting ready for their classes. Due to restrictions introduced because of the Covid crisis, classrooms are empty, yet learning continues.

The school community is undergoing several changes to ensure continued access to culture-based education for the youth of Upper Pulangi. Teachers have prepared learning modules for students in lieu of face-to-face classes. These modules contain their weekly lessons, instructions and exercises to help students master the competencies prescribed by the Department of Education within the context of their culture.

For villages with APC connecting schools, students come to collect their modules where the teachers can guide them, while following needed health standards. For villages with no APC schools, specific houses are designated for distribution at the start of the week and for the collection of completed modules at the end of the week.

Distance learning in the uplands is challenging, and some students opted to enroll to schools closer to their homes. Yet, APC sees a slightly increased enrolment this year from some students who see the value of the modules, adults who want to return to school and former students who got married. Through the modular approach, they are able to continue their studies from home.

It is very intense work for the teachers each week yet they feel affirmed in their efforts, and happy that in these times they can contribute to giving greater stability for communities and increasing the awareness for greater health caution and care. This is harvest time for many, so people are busy, but it also means families are more likely to have the food they need and the energy to engage.

While there are no Covid cases in the valley, and there are few in the neighboring cities, the awareness is important and the fresh air helps. Simply, the cultural coherence of the community around the school is very encouraging, sharing a peaceful and hope-filled context and continuing to provide broad and humble service. ◆



## An indigenous reflection on ecospirituality

words and artwork by Vincent Yan Rhu Yacapin

Ecospirituality? I do not quite understand what it means. However, when I heard the word for the first time, I know it is something good.

So I asked what does it mean? Suddenly my mind wanders and I started thinking about ecospirituality. I am overwhelmed as I listened. For me, it is so wonderful that my soul longs to live in it and aspires to live with it, especially in this kind of environment where I am now, in the uplands surrounded by forests.

Then I began to ask myself again and again, who really am I? Am I human? If I am, what makes me a human?

How can we be a human when our dignity as Indigenous Peoples is discarded and trampled by dogmatized people of the most so called "righteous religions"?

I now realize more the humility and courage of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*.

It brings justice to Indigenous Peoples who are labeled as pagan, the poor who are considered as less human, and to all other creation who are perceived as commodities and used to gain power.

*Laudato Si'* is the full reconciliation with every creation. It opens the way and gives us the chance to reclaim our dignity as humans and our contribution to humanity.

A moment of silence is one of the most beautiful things I've realized, which [Balay Laudato Si'](#) offers and encourages, to gain a deeper sense of living. It is wonderful.

How can my silence become wonderful? It is an act of humility just to listen to my inner being and to the things that surrounds me. In the silence, the mind listens and the heart speaks. It allows the unclear and unusual voices (conscience) be heard, and gives a new sense of life. Therefore, silence is a process of self-reflection and external recognition.

In the silence, I realize that being a human means to have a soul rather than to acquire possessions and being recognized, to have a spirit rather than to have a degree and achievements. The human soul is capable of understanding others, and providing love and hope. The spirit keeps us going and sustains our resilience. >>>

*continued on page 3*

## *An indigenous reflection on ecospirituality*

*continued from page 2*

We cannot make our own days to live according to our will. Only God designs our days. So why do we keep complaining about what God designs? If there is rain we complain, if there's no rain we complain, we all keep complaining without being thankful for what is given while destroying what is natural.

Peace is essential to each person and to humanity. It comes from within the person while the environment cultivates it.

Peace is ever-present in every part of creation, living and non-living, which we disrupt.

However, the world now is changing. When humans began to rule the earth, everything became complex. We want to rule our own kingdom or life, to dominate and conquer others. We are about to conquer the rest of land, the seas, the forest, the animal kingdom just to satisfy our desire.

This reality is squeezing our soul until we recognize that there is another being inside us.

Peace sometimes doesn't appear easily. Sometimes it appears in brokenness, loneliness, neglect, fears, despair, and hopelessness, until our soul realizes that we are a human, with a being inside us and living with other beings in the form of trees, wind, insect, fish, and other creation.

Vincent Yan Rhu "Yanyan" Yacapin is a member of the Higaonon community, one of several indigenous groups in northern and central Mindanao, Philippines, and who are known for their culture of peace. Yanyan works as a youth training associate with the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC), a Jesuit research and training organization in the Philippines. Yanyan is part of a youth training team who works with upland indigenous youth who are not in school and shares his passion for indigenous arts and crafts.

This article was published in [Ecojesuit Online](#).



## YOUTH SPEAK

**Young people share their learnings and reflections on their experiences during the two-month Work Experience Program of Balay Laudato Si' and the Global English Language (GEL) program**

"If we really try to deepen our understanding of Laudato Si', we can realize that we are needed by our planet. Let us connect our lifestyle and our community to the environment. We should not only focus on addressing one area, but also the overall welfare of creation, like the work that we do in the Eco-agri garden. We only use locally available plants. It is one response to Laudato Si'." - **Cynde Temario**

"I am happy in this program because I feel I am encouraged to do more, share, and participate" - **Christian Berdesola**

"I learned masonry, and I am encouraged to learn new skills because I can help others and be able to work with dignity. Meanwhile GEL helps me understand and communicate people's work with visitors from other countries." - **Franklin Buno**

"I am so grateful for this experience because it gave me a lot of learnings. In construction, I improved my skills in measuring, lay outting, mixing cement, plastering, finishing, etc. I also learned how to communicate responsibly and with respect to my teammates. I learned also how to stand as a youth, so I am inspired to participate in the community." - **Angelo Menaling**

"Through the workshops, I slowly understood my feelings and who I am. If I combine my learnings in GEL, Laudato Si', and work, English will help me explain to other people what I am doing in the garden and what I learned about Laudato Si'." - **Anna Mae Lumihay**

"I learned that we need to stand with our community and save our planet. The message of Laudato Si' reminds me that all of us can cooperate to care for our environment. Like in organic farming, we learned how to make organic fertilizers and pesticides as to not damage the land." - **Leonesa Saguiwan**

# Youth, culture and Laudato Si'

When the youth in Bendum are asked what are they grateful for, they always tell you about the fresh air, water from the spring and the forest that surrounds them. These are expected answers and visitors say, yes, how wonderful it all is, and how cozy community appears.

Like any other community, the different layers of social and environmental reality call for cooperation and seek responses that are rooted locally. The context in rural communities is increasing determined by the shifts in financial arrangements with traders and so increasingly individualistic, less interdependent. So the context may be dominated more by financial transactions and sometimes politics more than the culture.

The youth needs community who stand with them and guide them, like grandparents who speak with wisdom and integrity. Datu Nestor Menaling once said to his children *"if you don't want to see your children stealing fruits from your neighbor, plant your own fruit tree now"*. Datu Nestor only attended grade school but when he walks to his farm, he can name all the plants and recognizes how each of them grows and can be used. Unfortunately, some of the youth don't even know the path to their own farm land or have no idea on how to work in a farm and have a source of food for the family.

To deepen the understanding of contemporary challenges, we designed in Balay Laudato Si' a Work Experience Program for the indigenous youth including few from migrant families that ran for 8 weeks. They had a basic orientation on work roles and responsibilities and work was scheduled with shared weekly objectives. Then there was time to share on the experience and how this helps develop their relations in the community.

The young women who were part of the Work Experience Program were assigned to work and learn the practices in the Eco-Agri Farm. They were thankful for the experience because it gave them a chance to understand better the value of farming and the importance of the land in their daily living.



In the two month period, young men learn the basic in masonry and construction work. With assistance from local skilled workers, they became part of the team building hand sinks, toilets and shower rooms for *dalēpaan* (a home away from home) for the students and staff coming from across the valley. They learned how to participate in a work environment and how to communicate with supervisors with a sense of understanding of responsibility for others.

In the process, the youth participated in a reflection workshop and realized that there are greater challenges ahead. There were many questions forming in their mind on how to move through the culture and with people in the community. How can they effectively participate and at the same time contribute in sustaining good relations for the common good. Maybe, for many youth in urban areas, they may not see the value of living with sense of community, but for the Indigenous People, it is the equivalent of who they are: their identity as a person and sense of belongingness in the ancestral domain.

Laudato Sí and Querida Amazonia are the two contemporary contextual documents, and Querida Amazonia is perhaps the only contemporary cultural reflection of great utilization. These documents are helpful for the youth to find a way to talk about the fundamentals in their way of living and to discuss legitimate concerns that need group decision and action. The messages of Laudato Si' and the four dreams of Querida Amazonia helps in deepening the local context and common aspirations of the youth for the culture. >>>

*continued on page 5*

## Building a resilient future

Over the extended summer period, new facilities were built and are being built for when the youth are back in the valley.



While classrooms are empty for the moment, APC has been preparing to welcome young people in the valley again with new facilities for the library, science and computer classrooms with better teacher offices. This is being developed as “Balay Magnanao” the central block of the school.

The bamboo shell has been constructed with giant bamboo grown over the last ten years in the area. This forms part of the integral management of local resources and a basis for training young people with a new technology that we are asking certification from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to teach. This bamboo shell of treated bamboo is made up of multiple frames that will be fitted with chicken wire, reinforced with flat bars and then plastered. So, from the outside little bamboo will be seen while inside all the present framework will be evident. It is an exciting process both in the physical construction but also socially creating much interest.

There are other activities spread out so we are able to keep everyone working without laying off any staff. During the extended summer period, our older

students wanted to work so we started forming different construction teams. The *dalēpaan* (the cultural home away from home) that was completed in the first quarter of the year gave the youth space to live, but lacked adequate facilities given its size. In the last three months, they have built toilets and showers along with a main tub for laundry. They have brought in the water supply and managed the drainage through biopore. Toilets are also being built for the bamboo Processing, Storage, and Fabrication facility that has slowly been providing the treated bamboo for “Balay Magnanao”.

There is an added elevated classroom on the old block built in 2017 which gives needed space with cool sheltered open area underneath. The construction team makes sure to follow necessary health protocols such as wearing face masks, disinfecting of hands, temperature check every morning, and limiting the number of people working in an area. The team works for four hours a day, and also takes two hours of Global English Language online based learning and two hours of Laudato Si’ formative writing and painting. So, it has been a quiet and constructive summer time. ◆

## Youth, culture and Laudato Si’

continued from page 4

The two-month program was concluded by reflecting on the understanding of the value of dreams for the culture, not simply the individual and how it can be a guide to move forward, generating solidarity and cooperation for a common vision. If you ask the youth again as to what they are grateful for they may begin to tell you about the simple life and the daily experience of peace that is coming from within themselves as they begin to reflect on their lives and how they want to take action. ◆



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



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