

**THE ATENEO DE DAVAO UNIVERSITY  
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS  
FROM NOW**

**GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONIES  
OF THE  
ELLEN FRANCISCO-FAJARDO BUILDING  
(THE MAIN BUILDING OF THE UNIVERSITY)**

**12 JUNE 2000  
JACINTO CAMPUS, DAVAO CITY**

**REV. EDMUNDO M. MARTINEZ S.J.**

My dear friends of the Ateneo de Davao:

Before all else, allow me to call you all, “friends.” For friendship is based on trust and goodwill, and a commonality of ideals and aspirations. And you are here this morning because of your goodwill and trust in the Ateneo and what it stands for, and this happy occasion provides an opportunity for all of us to envision our common ideals and aspirations for the future. And so, I thank you for your friendship that has brought your presence here this morning.

This year we entered into the new millennium. Only recently, we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ateneo de Davao University. And now, we are gathered here for the ceremonies of breaking ground for what will become the main building of the Ateneo de Davao University.

What is the significance of what we are about to do?

Suspend your disbelief for a few moments, and allow me to take you with me on a bit of time travel into the not-too-distant future, to the year 2025, twenty-five years from now. Imagine Davao City as it will be then: a prosperous cosmopolitan city, at peace like the

rest of Mindanao, an island that has begun to live up to its promise as the future of the Philippines. The whole country itself, thank God, after so many fumbles, has begun to live up to its name as the Pearl of the Orient, taking its place with pride as an equal among its ASEAN neighbors and taking a lead role in the BIMP-EAGA region. The point city of the country in its regional prominence is Davao City.

In this setting, let us leave the Jacinto campus that now, in the year 2025, is the center of the University's part-time Graduate Studies, Professional Programs, Outreach Programs, and Extension Programs. Centrally located as it is in the heart of downtown Davao, the Professional Schools in the Jacinto campus have contributed greatly to the training of businessmen and professionals in Davao City and the region.

### **The Campus and Physical Facilities of the University**

Join me and let us take a drive 18 kilometers from where we are now, down towards Toril and up the foothills of the Catigan area. We drive up a cemented road four kilometers from the main highway and enter a campus of dramatic setting, the campus of the Ateneo de Davao University, a first-class university, nestled on a 65-hectare campus, forming with the rest of the surrounding housing and commercial built-up areas, an honest-to-goodness University town. From the front, the campus overlooks the whole of Davao Gulf; at the back, Mount Apo stands as a majestic sentinel; and from the higher grounds drifts a cool refreshing breeze. It is practically one of its kind in the Philippines because there hardly remains in the country a leading University within a major urban setting with such a generous campus.

The students, numbering over twenty thousand, come from all over the Philippines and from the neighboring countries of the BIMP-EAGA region. In the early stages of the University's growth as a major University, and once peace had been firmly established in Mindanao, the direction of flow of student migration had reversed:

Mindanao students no longer flocked to Manila, but rather Luzon and Visayas students, not to mention Indonesians, Malaysians, and Chinese, were strongly attracted to Davao City and, in particular, to the Ateneo de Davao University. A significant number of these students live on-campus, whose buildings and physical facilities have become a regular tourist attraction.

### **The Values of the University**

But the physical setting and the facilities are not the only unique features of this University. To the critical visitor with some knowledge of educational organizations, even more remarkable are the qualities that make a school truly great in the Jesuit tradition of excellence in education. Despite the limited number of Jesuits, the Ateneo de Davao has managed to create a vibrant culture where the core and centuries' old values of Jesuit educational tradition thrive and prosper.

#### *Focus on the Student and Relevant Research*

First among these values is the clear and almost obsessive focus on *the welfare of the students*, on their total integral formation as human persons and children of God. Despite the size of its student body, the Ateneo, by its successful use of information technologies and the intensive formation of its faculty and staff, has succeeded in giving its many students a high degree of individual attention and guidance.

Moreover, despite its early aspirations to become a University of world-class standards, the Ateneo did not take the direction of competing with First-World universities on the basis of fundamental cutting-edge research. Early on it realized that such expensive groundbreaking research was, for the most part, a function of the overall economic and cultural conditions of a nation—which were beyond the power of any university to dictate. Instead, the Ateneo focused on research that was relevant to the development of its

students and faculty, the kind of research that responded directly to the social, cultural, scientific, and religious needs of its larger community and business. At the same time, however, whenever it found support from business or government, it was happy to undertake as fundamental a research as could be supported.

*The Welfare of the Faculty and Staff  
and their Ignatian Formation*

A second value is the concern for the quality and welfare of its faculty and staff. Early on, the Ateneo had determined the package it would offer to anyone attracted to and gifted for the academic life. It would offer a career that was satisfying and meaningful, a standing in society of enviable repute, a financial package that offered security, a professional and personal development program that was life-long, an overall standard of living that, while modest, would answer a contemporary person's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter for himself and his family, and education up to University level for his children. To this end, the major portion of the University's annual budget had always been allocated for the salaries and benefits of its faculty and staff. The salaries-and-benefits item in its annual budget gives an example of the university's creative use of financial resources to achieve its objectives. The innocuous budgetary item funded an expensive standard faculty development program. Once the candidate for faculty had been carefully screened and recruited, the new recruit was subjected to a systematic, intensive, and life-long process of continuing professional upgrading, as well as personal and spiritual formation. The purpose of this single-minded and expensive process was to prepare the faculty to assume the role of being a lay co-worker with the Jesuits in their work of the University apostolate. It is a system that has allowed the school, despite the shortage of Jesuits, to preserve and even enhance the Jesuit character of the institution. A firm conviction underpinned this zeal: the gospels, as specified in the Ignatian ideals of education, far from undermining man's efforts and aspirations, are in fact the fulfillment of his deepest longings and potentials.

Just as the school proclaimed its objective as the total and integral development of the student, so also it mirrored back that objective vis-à-vis its faculty and pursued the total and integral human and professional development of its faculty as a corollary objective. In this way, the Ateneo as an institution of learning was effectively transformed into a learning organization.

### *The Mission of Service*

A third value is the mission of service that drives the development of the university and is a core objective in the formative process of the student, an effort that is sustained both inside and outside the classroom. The expansion of the University itself into a large university with thousands of students was a response of the Ateneo to serve the community and the region. In the beginning of the new millennium, it was clear that if the country and, particularly, southern Philippines were to develop, quality education of world-class standards was an imperative. Surveying the region at that time, it was equally clear that if any school in southern Philippines was favorably positioned to respond to such a need, the Ateneo de Davao was it. Finally, if the Ateneo were to perform such a service and have an impact on the wider community, it could not follow the route of becoming an exclusive school, whereby only the very rich, and a sprinkling of the poor but very talented could study. This key insight determined the goals and policies of the school as far as student population growth was concerned:

1. Accept whatever constraints may exist, but within those constraints, aim for excellence: in the faculty, in the curriculum, in the manner of instruction, in the textbooks, and in the facilities.
2. Determine the student profile that can hurdle such standards of excellence.
3. Accept all students who fit that profile.
4. Monitor and support these students as they go through the program.

5. Recruit and develop faculty, create responsive management structures, and institutionalize innovative processes in order to respond to the growing population.
6. Given these policies, it was anticipated that a limit in student population would eventually be reached. That point would also be the point of financial and organizational stability where the goal of world-class academic excellence—which itself is a moving target—could be maintained. And this is where the Ateneo de Davao is now, in the year 2025.

### **The Key Decisions: Historical Imperatives**

It is interesting to look back now from the perspective of 25 years and discover how so many of these fundamental and seemingly “big” decisions were in fact dictated—“compelled,” if you will—by the exigencies of the situation at that time.

#### *The Increase in Student Population (1): The Exigency of the Ateneo's Mission*

The Ateneo at that time could have remained the way it was. It had a population of 6,000 students. There was a high demand for its services. It could have maintained the status quo and sustained itself in comfort. It could have raised its tuition as needed to maintain a respectable but, admittedly, by global standards, a mediocre academic institution.

But if it had done so, it could not have remained faithful to its mission. Its Ignatian ideals were proclaimed by the slogan, “Man for others,” and the call applied as strongly to the institution as it did to the individual graduate. Its mission mandated the school to serve the needs of the nation, the Filipino people. The population figures of the country were large, and the population growth was relentless. Poverty was endemic. Quality education was the key to national development and the ticket for the individual to a better life. However, there was a severe shortage of schools that offered quality education.

Could such a school that proclaimed “Service of the Nation,” and “Promotion of Justice” have any choice but to try to address this fundamental problem? Who else was to address it? The government? Not really, since private initiative is the agent of change in a democracy. Other schools? But what other school had a better chance of addressing the issue successfully? Any serious analysis of the situation pointed only to one direction. The school had to grow.

If it had maintained the status quo the school would have been serving an increasingly insignificant number of students. These fortunate graduates would have been so well-educated that they would have fitted in comfortably in the culture of the First World. But their numbers would have been so insignificant and their exclusive training so sanitized from the harsh realities of a developing nation that, in the end, one could pose this question with all seriousness: “What is that school there for?” And in fact, such a question did not remain unasked.

Moreover, the demographics, and therefore Philippine society itself, was rapidly changing. Philippine society was opening up—one welcome effect of globalization. Leadership was no longer the prerogative of the landed rich. Leaders were springing up from all levels of society. In fact, at the time these decisions were made to expand the school, it almost seemed like the fad to elect movie actors and actresses to political leadership! Looking back, but this time farther back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pattern was now obvious.

The Ateneo de Manila, the premier school of the Jesuits throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was started by accident. The Jesuits, upon their return to the Philippines in 1859, had one explicit written mission: they were to evangelize Mindanao. But they were waylaid in Manila, and strings were pulled in the Royal Court, so that they ended up running a school for the children of the elite of the city. It was to their credit, however, that they opened up the school sufficiently enough to allow some native Filipino students to study. And one of them turned out to be the most illustrious graduate of Philippine Jesuit education: Dr. Jose Rizal. And so even in Rizal’s time the change was already apparent: leadership was no longer inherited. By the

end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its decision to expand, the Ateneo de Davao was merely responding to the obvious.

*The Increase in Student Population (2):  
The Financial Exigency*

Finally, the small exclusive school model would have been hoisted, so to speak, by its own petard. Significant financial resources were needed to strive for world-class excellence. For a private school in the small exclusive school model, the only reliable source of increased funding was tuition increase. But there was a limit to the annually compounding tuition and fees. One could increase that tuition, but only to that point where parents would not feel that it was just as well to send their children to a patented world-class university abroad. And so, even before the school reached the goal of world-class excellence, its students would already have gone abroad, as in fact it was already happening as segments of the population became richer. It was therefore clear that if one ambioned to become a world-class university, the small school model was a dead-end.

But could not fund-raising and donations have been the answer? It was often pointed out that world-class universities in the United States survived because of donations of benefactors.

In the Philippines, in the year 2000, this alternative did not seem all that promising; and this for three good reasons.

First, the top universities in the First World themselves had relatively large student populations; and moreover, they had had centuries during which they had been able to build up their fabled endowment funds.

Secondly, because of historical, cultural, legal, economic, and other reasons, the spirit of generous philanthropy, on a scale that supported a Stanford or a Harvard, had not yet become the norm in educational philanthropy of the Philippines. Properly motivated and in the right set of circumstances, Philippine benefactors were

generous. But there were the economic realities of the Philippine situation. So great and sustained were the needs, and so limited were the resources, that anyone with means was likely to develop “donor fatigue.” (And that is why, as I will have occasion to mention later on, the donation connected with the Ellen Francisco-Fajardo Building is so significant.) To plan for a future on the basis of projected but uncertain fund-raising campaigns would have been naïve at best. In time, perhaps, such a culture of philanthropy would become more established. And in fact, shortly after the groundbreaking of the Ellen Francisco Fajardo Building, the Ateneo embarked on its highly successful Millennial Fund Campaign; and ever since, systematic fund-raising has been a regular concern of the Ateneo administration.

But any realistic plan must entail realistic financing. The Ateneo at that time recognized that a realistic source of funding did exist: increase the tuition base by expanding student population.

A second reality concerning fund-raising was this: donors normally support ongoing successful operations, but avoid souring ones. And with good reason. As social investors, as benefactors who have had to work for their money, donors were not inclined to pour good money after bad. If an educational institution had shown itself to be non-viable in the conduct of its core business, donations could hardly keep that school viable for long.

And so, the decision to increase student population, even from financial considerations, became compelling.

### *Information Technology: The Exigencies of Student Population Growth and Limited Resources*

The Ateneo now, in this year 2025, has an established reputation of being the most wired and the most computer-literate university in the country. But again, it is interesting to note that the decision to pursue this direction, taken 25 years ago, was dictated by the combined exigencies of big numbers of students, limited financial resources, and at that time, still developing faculty. At that time, imported books were costing thousands of pesos each, the prospect

of graduate studies abroad for faculty, financed by the school, was rare. In the meantime, there were the growing thousands of students that had to be provided with a quality education that aspired to world-class standards without sacrificing the core Ignatian value of *cura personalis*, the care for the individual student. How was the school to do it?

To run faster in the same place would have gotten the school nowhere. If the school had stuck to the traditional modes of instruction and simply worked harder at them, the large numbers of students, the limited resources, and the still developing faculty, would have combined to reduce the school into a diploma mill. Instead, very early on, the school marshaled its financial resources, concentrated and channeled them towards a very specific goal: the rapid adoption of information technologies by the whole school—from the earliest levels of the preschool to its graduate and professional programs. The cost of this concerted effort in information technology was enormous, but it was worth it. For the expectations were fulfilled: the information technologies became the cornerstone of the present success of the school. Despite large numbers of students, despite still limited resources in comparison to first-world universities, the Ateneo de Davao, through the information technologies, became an active participant, in real time, to the drama of global knowledge explosion. And that was the linchpin of its claim to world-class quality education.

*Upgrading of Basic Education:  
The Exigency for Quality Students*

Finally, there is this historical fact that is not known by many. The move of the Ateneo towards world-class university status began, not in its graduate programs, as might have been expected, but in its basic education. This curious decision was also dictated by historical circumstances.

At that time, 25 years ago, the state of general basic education in the Philippines was a truly discouraging fact. High school graduates (even college graduates) could not write or speak straight English;

reading for many was an unknown habit; mathematics sowed fears, of the primal sort, in the hearts of students; and overall science education was so dismal that even among those who had gone to school, superstitious beliefs lingered, and *arbularios* ran a thriving business. Clearly, if the Ateneo was to aspire to world-class excellence, it had better do something more constructive than lament the sad state of basic education at that time. And it did.

Its earliest moves towards becoming a major university, therefore, started with its concerted efforts to upgrade its basic education. The task was inherently important, for intellectual and personal deficiencies in later life often had their roots in the early years of the child. Clearly, no serious effort to upgrade tertiary education could have been successful without upgrading basic education. This logic was clearly recognized even then, 25 years ago. The problem was: how were you going to tackle the problem?

Rather than merely bemoan the fact, Ateneo struck out on a pragmatic route. It had to secure for itself a feeder school that could reliably supply students who were well-prepared to cope with the ever upgrading quality of its university education. What more natural feeder school than its own grade school and high school? The first loans and constructions undertaken by the Ateneo were for the purpose of upgrading its whole grade school and high school facilities and operation.

The same successful pattern then was applied both in the grade school and high school, and in the college. The student populations were significantly increased, but at the same time, management structures were innovatively adapted to the changing situation, and more important, the faculty were carefully screened, systematically trained, and subjected to a life-long formation process. Visitors to the Matina campus at that time admired and marveled that such impressive buildings could be lavished on basic education in such a "provincial" city as Davao. What was missed was the significance of these developments for the long term. For the buildings were merely the outer shell for the other things that were happening and that were even more important, such as: the serious effort at upgrading its

faculty and curricula, the changes in its structures to manage an increasingly complex operation, and the systematic development of its skills to guide and counsel individual students—all intimately linked to the adoption and sophisticated development of information technologies.

### **The Achievement of the Ateneo de Davao: A Successful Apostolic Instrument**

Such, then is the Ateneo de Davao University in 2025, 25 years from now. It is a thriving university with three campuses: the Matina campus for basic education, the 65-hectare Catigan campus for the Undergraduate and full-time Graduate Programs, and the old Jacinto Campus for the part-time Graduate, Professional, Extension, and Outreach programs. Its facilities in all campuses are first-class. But its highest achievement is something less visible, but nonetheless profoundly significant. And this is the unique culture that is variously described as “Ignatian” or “Jesuit,” and whose main indicators are the following:

- its focus on the welfare of the students; its success in developing qualified faculty with the ideals of Jesuit education; the wide economic range and number of its large student populations;
- the agility of its management structures;
- the enviable sophistication in its use of information technologies that link it to the rest of the world and enable it to strive for academic excellence;
- the mission of service that it successfully instills in its graduates and lives out in its institutional priorities, decisions and directions.

All these elements that now define the Ateneo de Davao University as a world-class university, at the same time define it as a

successful apostolic instrument of the Society of Jesus. From the perspective of history, *that* is a truly satisfying and fitting achievement. For the mandate given to the Jesuits in the 1800s to evangelize the island of Mindanao finds a fitting fulfillment in the achievement of the Ateneo de Davao University in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Frs. Barua and Bove were the first Jesuits to land on the island of Samal in 1868. Little could they have imagined that across the channel, on the foothills of Mt. Apo clearly visible from the island, their work would have borne fruit in a world-class university.

### **Conclusion: Realizing The Dream**

Let us now undo our suspension of disbelief, return to present realities, and ask this important question: Is this vision of the Ateneo 25 years from now an empty dream with no prospect of realization?

The vision is a dream because it is not yet a reality. But it is a dream that, in fact, is already beginning to be achieved. The visible proof of this claim is the groundbreaking ceremonies for the main building of the Jacinto campus for which we are now gathered this morning.

The Ateneo, in the past five years, has already constructed four major buildings in the Matina campus and renovated two formation buildings. And yet, for none of these constructions was a ceremony of a groundbreaking conducted. Why? Because concrete structures do not make an educational institution. It is the faculty and the students, the administrators and the staff, the curricula and the facilities, the overall culture of the people in the institution, embracing and living a common vision and mission, that makes a truly great educational institution. And we are having this groundbreaking today because these critical elements that will define the Ateneo as a great school in the future are now falling into place and are beginning to be realized. The groundbreaking for this building then is an appropriate occasion to recognize that fact, and for the Ateneo community to rally together and hasten the fulfillment of its dream.

### What has been achieved?

- Without diluting admission requirements, the student population on all levels is growing faster than projected.
- The policies, processes, and structures for faculty recruitment, orientation, and ongoing formation from the basic education levels to the doctoral levels have begun to be defined and institutionalized.
- The curricula for all courses, on all levels, are being upgraded, and the most modern textbooks being adopted. Hundreds of computers each year, for the past three years, have been purchased, and the acquisitions will grow even more before it abates when a comfortable proportion of computer-to-students has been reached.
- Already, now, the preschool classrooms boast of computers as standard tools for the children's everyday use. All the buildings of both the Jacinto and the Matina campus are wired with fiber-optic backbones. The Matina campus is linked by a wireless connection to this campus, which itself is linked to an Internet Service Provider by a similar wireless connection. All downloads from the Internet are drawn from satellites, and uploads are through a dedicated leased line direct to Manila.
- This year, five classrooms each in the grade school, the high school, and the college are being equipped with multimedia facilities so that the faculty can develop their lectures in Power Point presentations. The long-term objective is to equip all the classrooms with such effective instructional multimedia tools.
- The libraries of all units have been upgraded; Internet connections in all of them have been established.

- The University Web Page Project is well under way. The completion of the project will see all the syllabi of all the courses taught on all levels digitally published, made available to all students and faculty alike. And this objective of publishing the syllabi is only the start.
- On the formation front, the campus ministers, the guidance counselors, and the faculty formators of the First Year Christian Formation Program in the College have undergone or are undergoing professional training in formation work.
- The many formation activities on all levels are being coordinated and systematized on a university-wide basis.
- The two formation facilities—at the Shrine and in Talomo Beach—have been renovated; and negotiations are in process for the university to acquire a sufficiently large formation facility that will answer its accelerating needs for seminars, workshops, retreats, and formation activities, both for faculty and students.
- The financial structure has been so stabilized and improved that, in a very recent study made by the college faculty in preparation for the PAASCU accreditation, they were happily surprised to discover that in the last 5 years the financial package for faculty has doubled for a significant number. Moreover, not only have salaries increased across the board, so that the whole salary scale is now on a higher level; the graph also showed that the salaries of the majority of the faculty have dramatically shifted from the lower half to the higher half of the higher level salary spectrum.
- Finally, the 65-hectare Catigan campus that I invited you to visit with me in imagination, is not a dream. The Ateneo already owns that property, acquired six years ago.

The momentum has been created, the beginnings of the realization of the dream are palpable. I pray that this building and this groundbreaking will symbolize, and actualize, our common commitment to pursue to its fullest the realization of the dream.

I thank you.