

Jesuit Notes

The Mission of the Ateneo de Davao University¹

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The Co-chairs of the Bishops-Ulama Conference—Most Reverend Fernando Capalla, Archbishop of Davao and Professor Salipada Tamano; Father Danny Montaña, RCJ, representing the Davao Association of Colleges and Schools; Mr. Paul Dominguez, Chair of the University Board of Trustees; Father Daniel McNamara, SJ, Rector of the Jesuit Community in Davao; administrators, faculty, and staff; the graduating class of 2011; their parents, families, and friends; alumni and students; ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I wish to congratulate the members of ADDU Class 2011 as they receive their Ateneo diplomas and leave academe for the challenging world outside. I hope the Ateneo de Davao University has prepared you well for the real life out there with its many challenges and opportunities, failures and disappointments. I wish to assure you of our prayers that those looking for jobs may find suitable employment in the near future and those studying or doing other things do well in their next ventures.

I also join your parents and families in their rightful pride and gratitude as you graduate: pride that you are now college graduates of the Ateneo de Davao University and gratitude that, at least for the time being, they do not have to worry about your school bills and expenses; pride and gratitude that you may soon be earning your own keep and even be able to contribute for your family expenses.

I also wish to acknowledge the dedicated work of the administrators, faculty, and staff of the University for the education and Christian formation of our youth and future leaders.

I wish to congratulate and thank our honorees today—the Bishops-Ulama Conference of the Philippines for the Archbishop Clovis Thibault Award and the Davao Association of Colleges and Schools

for the Drs. Jess and Trining de la Paz Award—for their significant contributions for peace, education, and development in Mindanao.

Yesterday, Archbishop Capalla celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. May I ask all to join me and the University in congratulating our Archbishop on the golden anniversary of his priesthood.

I thank Professor Tamano for traveling from Marawi City to join us today. The Conference's third Co-chair, Bishop Hilario Gomez of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, is unable to be with us today.

I am your Commencement Speaker because I am ending as President of Ateneo de Davao University this 31st May 2011. This gives me a chance to give a sort-of-vaedictory after twenty-five years as a university president in Mindanao: seven years at Ateneo de Davao University from 1986 until 1993; twelve years at Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro City from 1993 until 2005; and a second six and a half years at Ateneo de Davao University from December 2004 until end of May 2011.

A Commencement Speaker is usually expected to help the graduates face the uncertain future outside and beyond academe, to give them possibilities and challenges where they can make a difference in the world because of the education and training they have received, and to warn them about pitfalls and dangers out there.

It is difficult to speak about the uncertain future out there. So I will spend my time reminding you about what the Ateneo de Davao University has tried to do for you. Hopefully what you have learned and have become at the Ateneo would help you in the exciting but dangerous world out there.

To do that we have to remind you what the Ateneo de Davao University is or claims to be:

The Ateneo de Davao University is a Filipino, Catholic and Jesuit university that is inspired by the person and teaching of Jesus, rooted in the spirituality of St. Ignatius, and true to the humanistic tradition of Jesuit education. It is responsive to the challenges and needs of the country today, particularly in southern Philippines, through its work of the educational formation of the youth and professionals.

Blessed John Henry Newman described a university as a "school of knowledge of every kind, consisting of teachers and learners from every quarter." The search for and transmission of knowledge and truth is at the very core of a university.

First and foremost, the Ateneo exists to teach its students and to teach them how to study and to learn new things all their lives. The classrooms, the laboratories, the library, books, computers and class and peer discussions, the faculty, and your own self study have been the key learning tools during your stay at the Ateneo.

Indeed, we are proud that the Ateneo de Davao University has consistently received recognition as a good, if not a very good or excellent school. It has had Autonomous Status from the Commission on Higher Education since October 2001. The University is one of a literal handful of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that have been granted Institutional Accreditation by the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines. The majority of our program offerings have Level III accreditation with the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU).

Our graduates have generally performed very well at government licensure examinations. Most recently, we have a fourth placer at the 2010 Bar examinations. We know that our graduates are able to compete very well for jobs in Davao City and elsewhere.

Indeed, the Ateneo de Davao University has done well as a university. It has prepared its graduates well for jobs outside and for higher studies. Of course, it could and should do even better.

The Ateneo de Davao is Filipino: "It seeks to be a locus of research and center for propagation of authentic Filipino culture; it aims to contribute to the creation of a peace-centered multicultural society."

The Ateneo de Davao is a Catholic university: "It participates in the mission of the universal church, most immediately articulated by the local church."

The Ateneo de Davao is Jesuit: "It is a corporate apostolate of the Society of Jesus and the bearer of the Jesuit educational tradition of excellence." Since the seventies, all Jesuit institutions have been reminded that "the promotion of justice should not be for us merely one ministry among others. It should be the concern for our whole lives, an essential aspect of all our apostolic endeavors."

Father General Pedro Arrupe re-worded all this for schools of the Society of Jesus in 1973:

Today our primary educational objective must be to form men (and women) for others; who will live not for themselves but for God and His Christ – for the God-man who lived and died for all the world; men (and women) who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors... completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for men is a farce.

Father Arrupe then gave three practical suggestions on necessary attitudes to cultivate to form men [and women] for others:

First, a firm determination to live much more simply – as individuals, as families, as social groups – and in this way to stop short, or at least slow down, the expanding spiral of luxurious living and social competition...

Second, a firm determination to draw no profit whatever from clearly unjust sources. ...Let there be men and women who will bend their energies not to strengthen positions of privilege, but to the extent possible, reduce privilege in favor of the underprivileged...

Third, and most difficult: a firm resolve to be agents of change in society; not merely resisting unjust structures and arrangements, but actively undertaking to resolve them.

Twenty-five years ago, in 1986, at my first inauguration as President of Ateneo de Davao University, I spoke about these same ideals and characteristics we would like to foster at the Ateneo de Davao University.

It was a much smaller and very different Ateneo de Davao University twenty-five years ago. For one, total student population was then less than 7,000; today, we have close to 15,000 students. There were 3,000 undergraduate collegiate students then; now we have over 8,400. Also, the College was a unitary college with various divisions, but today we have four undergraduate colleges. Physical plant changes have been truly dramatic. Imagine a Jacinto campus without the impressive Finster Hall and new Jubilee Building. Imagine a Matina campus with the Grade School and the High School buildings fronting McArthur Highway and without the whole High School complex and Martinez Sports Center at the back. Outside the Ateneo campuses

then, among many others, there was no Marco Polo Davao, Matina Town Square, and People's Park; there were no SM, Metro Gaisano, and Victoria Plaza Malls.

Though the Ateneo de Davao has grown greatly in its number of students, faculty, and staff (There were 3,000 College students in 1986; we now have close to 8,500) and its physical facilities have been greatly improved and expanded (There were no Finster and Jubilee Halls in 1986; then there were neither computers nor computer laboratories), both the smaller Ateneo de Davao of 1986 and the larger Ateneo de Davao of today have hopefully kept the same mission and vision with, of course, necessary adjustments with the changing times.

Has the Ateneo de Davao succeeded in its key mission and mandate of forming

men (and women) for others; who will live not for themselves but for God and his Christ – for the God-man who lived and died for all the world; men (and women) who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors... completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for men is a farce?

How would each one of you reply if asked whether you feel the Ateneo has taught you effectively this basic necessity of being, or at least aspiring or hoping to be, men and women for others? Does each one of you accept this aspiration as a lifelong challenge as you leave the Ateneo?

How would each one of you rate in the three hallmark attitudes suggested as key values in daily life by Father Arrupe for all products of Jesuit schools, including the Ateneo de Davao?

Has education at the Ateneo encouraged you to learn "to live much more simply?" Such is a difficult touchstone or attitude especially as the Ateneo has tried to provide you with the best teachers and the most modern classroom and laboratory facilities, which all have their costs and especially since an excellent education has its costs! How do you learn to live more simply when surrounded by excellent and expensive facilities needed for a good education? How do you live more simply in a world where to have more is the prevailing culture?

What are the opportunities for an Atenean "to live much more simply?" We admit that many of you are not rich but are most probably middle class or upper middle class. There are many who have less and

would not be able to come to the Ateneo without a scholarship or financial aid grant. You must know friends who are recipients of Daily Bread coupons for their lunch in school. The school uniform is a good example of living more simply—the same clothes for all.

But there is a prevailing consumerism culture: How often must I move up to a higher-end cell phone? How necessary for my education is my own laptop? What high end cameras and gadgets do I own or aspire to own? What do you spend on weekend or even occasional “gimmicks?” How much time do I waste playing computer games or just connecting with friends on the computer? How expensive are the clothes I wear?

Father Arrupe stresses the reason for this need for simplicity of lifestyle. We need

men and women who, instead of feeling compelled to acquire everything that their friends have will do away with many of the luxuries which in their social set have become necessities, but which the majority of mankind must do without.

For, indeed, how many of our city-mates and countrymen will never be able to get the opportunity for a college education, much more an Ateneo education? Indeed, because we see that we have much more than many others, we need to live much more simply. This is a clear but very difficult truth to accept and live by.

“No profit whatever from clearly unjust sources.” The current President of the Philippines was elected mainly in the hope that he could stem graft and corruption in our country and help give all a better life. We continue to have the almost daily spectacle of Senate hearings and other revelations about graft and corruption at high levels of the government, military and civilian, national and local. There are varying estimates of the amount or percentage of government monies for projects which are lost through greed, graft, and corruption. The University has instituted very strong measures to minimize cheating and to promote intellectual honesty as a clear sign and example to all not to draw any “profit whatever from clearly unjust sources.” Do you agree with these steps to teach honesty and transparency?

Has the University taught you “not to strengthen positions of privilege but, to the extent possible, reduce privilege in favor of the underprivileged.” Father Arrupe added:

Please do not conclude too hastily that this does not pertain to you - that you do not belong to the privileged few in your society... In this matter, our basic point of reference must be the truly poor, the truly marginalized, in our countries and in the Third World.

To truly live this, each one of you must realize and admit that compared to the many truly poor, you are among the privileged few in society: among the privileged few to have the opportunity for an Ateneo education.

To be agents of change is indeed most difficult. We can recall so-called whistleblowers of the not too distant past... on corruption in huge contracts with Chinese firms, on big amounts of the military channeled or disguised from salaries and other needs to personal pockets, on extremely generous *pasalubongs* and *pabaons* given to favored and high military officials. Many of the whistleblowers and their families live endangered lives. We have groups in Davao now questioning recent happenings and procedures at Davao Customs. We know of courageous people willing to come out and denounce irregularities for justice and a better life for all because monies due the government and needed for government projects will not be lost.

Each one of us is asked to be an agent of change in whatever unjust structure we may be involved in. We can start with small cases, small matters where there is injustice and unfairness. Are we willing to try to change things, especially so that the poor and underprivileged will be better served and will have better lives?

As President of two Jesuit universities in a quarter of a century, I must admit I do not know how successful Ateneo de Davao University and Xavier University have been in producing “men and women for others.” While we can cite many good examples of “men and women for others” among our students and graduates, can we say the same of the majority of our graduates? We will probably not know how successful our Jesuit schools are in this key endeavor of our whole educational work. All we can do is to keep on trying that each one of our graduates somehow becomes or agrees to try to be a man/woman for others.

This formulation of what an Ateneo and Jesuit education aims for remains as valid today as when given by Father Arrupe in the early seventies. These aims have been confirmed by subsequent Jesuit documents and statements.

In our rapidly changing world and expanding world population, various other concerns or values have been "added" or emphasized as our schools seek to form and produce men and women for others.

Rapid globalization—including easy access to information—has the danger of creating a culture of superficiality: There is no need for depth because we can always google anything we wish to know. In this world of the Internet, there is the danger that we really do not have time to learn for ourselves and to reflect on what we learn. It is so easy to "know" things, but how much do we "reflect on" and truly "internalize" what we know? How much time do we have to "think" and "reflect?"

In April last year Father General Adolfo Nicolas of the Society of Jesus said that

...In response to the globalization of superficiality... we need to study the emerging cultural world of our students more deeply and find creative ways of promoting depth of thought and imagination, a depth that is transformative of the person.

He added,

I urge the Jesuit universities to work towards operational networks that will address important issues touching faith, justice, and ecology that challenges us across countries and continents.

This is the challenge of the *magis* and of academic excellence which are at the core of Jesuit education.

A second concern and value which we hope the Ateneo has taught you is true love of our country. True love of country includes concern for what is happening in our country and action to move the country forward and to provide for a truly free and just Philippine society. I hope some, if not many of you, are challenged to enter public life and government service not for what it can do for you, but for what you can do for our country.

Thirdly, I hope the Ateneo has taught you to appreciate and love our Mother Earth and to be truly concerned that our present and future generations will have an Earth to give us good lives. Love of Mother Earth includes our appreciation of and action in questions of the environment, of power plants and mining, of global warming, pollution, and concern for fresh water, of overfishing and various methods of farming. It includes waste disposal and segregation, vanishing forests and glaciers. It includes concern for recent disasters in New Zealand and Japan. Closer to home, it includes use of plastic bags, campus cleanliness, improved light bulbs, and energy conservation. Indeed, concern for Mother Earth affects our daily lives. It affects everything to preserve our only home.

Historians tell us that, as Dr. Jose Rizal was being led to his execution at Bagumbayan, he saw the Ateneo de Manila buildings from inside Intramuros. Rizal was supposed to have remarked that he had spent many happy years at the Ateneo during his student years.

Similarly I hope that, when you visit the Ateneo de Davao or see the frontage of Finster Hall or the stained glass windows at the University chapel or visit your favorite spot on campus, each one of you, like Dr. Jose Rizal, could honestly say that you had spent happy and productive years at the Ateneo de Davao.

More important, like Rizal, I hope that each one of you will live courageous and meaningful lives after you leave the Ateneo de Davao, according to what you have learned at the Ateneo de Davao.

ADDU graduating Class of 2011, I have tried to review with you key lessons and values the Ateneo de Davao University has tried, or should have tried, to give you during your years at the University. We hope the University succeeded somehow to get these values into your heads, minds and hearts, into your very lives. If not, the Ateneo de Davao has failed in its mission as the Ateneo de Davao University.

I pray that all of you may have successful and meaningful lives and careers. I pray that all of you may truly be men and women for others. I hope and pray the Ateneo de Davao can be and will be truly proud of each one of you.

Do pray that the Ateneo de Davao may be successful in its educational and apostolic endeavors for the education and formation of men and women for others.