

"ACT JUSTLY, LOVE TENDERLY, AND WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD!"
A Plea for and in behalf of the Women-Victims of Sexual Abuse

The phenomenon of sexual violence against women is a scandal for every society, much more for one that calls itself Christian.

Prompted by the Spirit of the truth that sets us free and guided by the Church's teachings, we, the members of the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines or DAKATEO (*Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya*), in collaboration with the team of social scientists that investigated the phenomenon, in dialogue with other theologians, with representatives of faith-based institutions that provide care to sexually violated women, and with the presence of some women victim-survivors themselves, gathered together in Tagaytay City on October 24-25, 2008 to pray and reflect on the phenomenon in the light of God's word.

We now wish to share to fellow members of the People of God and fellow Filipinos the fruits of our collective faith-reflection on the reality of sexual violence against women today.

1. The stories of women victim-survivors that we have encountered here are very unsettling and disturbing for us. Their testimonies tell us of the ugliness of sexual violence, the depth of human suffering and the extent of the crucifixion these women-victims experience. Their experiences made us think deeply about how our modes of doing theology can address their struggles to regain a sense of self-respect and dignity after being preyed upon and reduced as objects for domination and sexual gratification. The insights gathered from social science research suggest that certain socio-cultural aspects operating in our churches and in the Philippine society in general create a "climate of abuse" which in turn exposes women and children to danger and vulnerability. But these same testimonies also reveal their firm refusal to keep silent, their courage to cling to hope, their persistence to struggle in order to regain self-respect and dignity.

2. The causes and factors of sexual violence against women are so deeply rooted in our society than perhaps previously thought. Such, at least, would include the patriarchal and hierarchical features of our society, the machismo ideal of masculinity, the reduction of women into objects of domination and gratification, the climate of silence in the face of abuse, the proclivity to blame the victim and the victims' lack of awareness of their rights as human persons. These conditions are exacerbated by the failure if not the reluctance of even our most revered institutions – such as the churches, the schools, law enforcement agencies or the courts of law – to help the victim, prosecute the perpetrator or address the problem. Seeking help



and not knowing where to go, these women victim-survivors often find our churches 'closed' and its structures either hostile or unwelcoming.

3. Yet the stories also tell of the many silent but heroic efforts and programs of women, and even of some men, in institutions and Centers that have provided rescue, refuge, sanctuary or a home to the victims. Theirs are a concrete expression, "from below", of the merciful compassion and prophetic justice of Jesus, our Wounded Healer and Risen Savior, hence a gift that, if well received and appropriated, can enrich the entire People of God. In the experience of these Centers, we also realize that our own Christian religious tradition, if freed from the distorted use of Scriptures and doctrine, can serve as a potent and effective source for a genuine reconstruction of these violated identities.

During these days of listening, humble sharing and dialogue, we sensed the Spirit moving us to greater awareness of seeing in our sexually-violated sisters a glimpse of the face of God. Prompted by this same Spirit that renews the face of the earth and mindful of our ecclesial ministry as theologians and agents of pastoral care, we now wish to proclaim our own commitments and offer our humble recommendations:

1. To Ourselves

- a. We oppose and reject clericalism for fostering the climate of sexual and other forms of abuse against women and children, and for the cover up of many cases of sexual abuse in the church;
- b. In our pastoral endeavors, we prioritize, defend and promote the rights of women and children as well as explore and implement ways toward mutual support among groups working for victim-survivors;
- c. In our academic undertakings, we commit ourselves to do theology from the perspective of the still countless victims of sexual violence as we also opt for a theology that interrupts well-established social and ecclesial hierarchies that underlie sexual and other forms of violence.

2. To the Bishops of the Philippine Church, leaders of other Christian churches, and heads of religious communities

- a. That the *Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines* institutionalize the eradication of clericalism and other features of church structure and ethos that facilitate sexual and other forms of violence against women and children in the church. Along this line, we call on the CBCP to initiate a fundamental review of the CBCP Protocol entitled "Pastoral Care of Victims and Offenders" (2003) in order to strengthen some of its weak



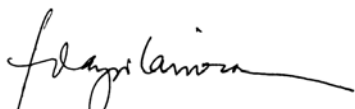
- points, e.g., the need for an independent oversight and monitoring body for its implementation, etc.
- b. That individual bishops, together with their priests and heads of religious communities and educational institutions under their pastoral care, shall institutionalize the integration of gender sensitivity and equality, human sexuality, the rights of women and children and other means of abuse-prevention in the formation programs and operative policies of their own dioceses, parishes, Basic Ecclesial Communities, seminaries and houses of formation, family life ministries, pre-cana seminars and couple-oriented movements, universities and schools;
 - c. That bishops and pastors name sexual violence against women as sin, preach against it, collaborate with and give support to institutions and centers that minister to victims of sexual violence and, considering the presence of the problem in families and villages far from urban areas, create structures, allocated with human and material resources, to help the victims and dedicated to abuse-prevention in parish and BEC levels.

3. To the public officials who have the mandate to govern

- a. That, in the spirit of preferential love for the poor, officials and instrumentalities of the judiciary, law enforcement and social service shall together prioritize the resolution of cases of sexual abuse against women and expedite the dispensation of justice;
- b. That the curriculum of our educational system shall include not only the goal of sexual abuse-prevention but above all a human sexuality education centered on responsibility and respect for the equal rights and dignity of women and men.

“This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

Signed:



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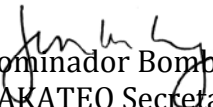


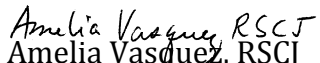
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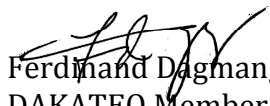


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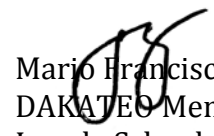

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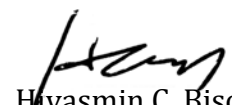

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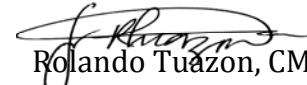

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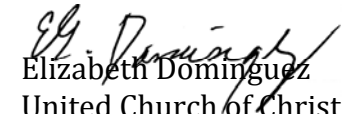

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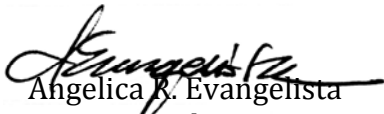

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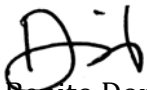

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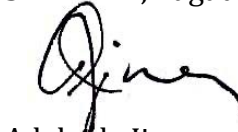
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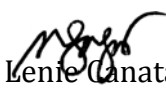
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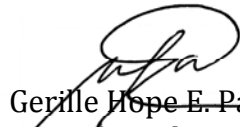
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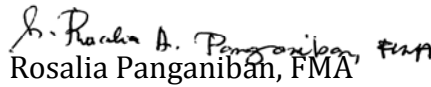
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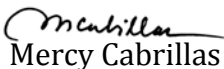
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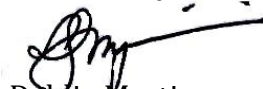
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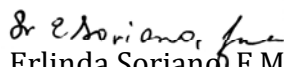
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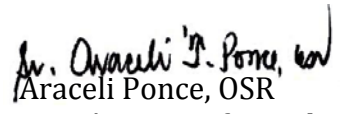
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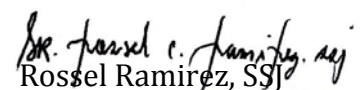
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