



# carmelita ngo

THE CARMELITE NGO BULLETIN

2023 | Volume 16 | Number 4

English Edition

## Inter-religious dialogue in daily life

*Fr. Francis Xavier Hariawan Adji O.Carm., Ph.D.*



of mutual respect, understanding, and acceptance of the existing differences.

Gempol Margabakti, Sukun Malang, Indonesia was an area where the Indonesian Carmelites started its social ministry in 1973. At that time the Indonesian Carmelites got the property from the local

Many people think that inter-religious dialogue is a high-level dialogue, whose participants are those who have high level of religious knowledge so that they can defend or protect their religious teachings when people ask the truth of it. No, inter-religious dialogue is a simple dialogue between friends, where each participant in the dialogue presents themselves as they are, admitting the strengths and weaknesses of their respective religious knowledge, but with faith and sincerity are willing to dialogue with those from different religious backgrounds. Interreligious dialogue does not have to be carried out in official forums but in every event of daily life, for example when people are working together, eating together, doing leisure activities together and so on.

government and built simple bamboo houses to accommodate the homeless people of Malang. The Indonesian Carmelites worked together with the religious of other congregations to educate them. Some of them, not all, converted to Catholicism. Their children regardless their religious background were sent to the Catholic schools in Malang because they offered scholarship for them. The adults were trained to work so that they might have better job and better life. The Carmelites also started a Catholic elementary school and invited the sister of Charity to come and open a health centre there.

In some cultures, the topic of religion is something that is taboo to discuss as if this theme is very sensitive and can result in arguments. In other cultures, where people are open to differences in religious backgrounds, religious themes are not something vulgar and taboo to discuss. The principle that applies is that 'your religion is your religion and my religion is my religion'. Of course, this principle needs to be supported by an attitude

After 50 years, Gempol Margabakti has changed. Most of the people there live better lives though there are who still live under the normal living standard. The Indonesian Province of the Carmelite Order continues its social ministry there through the Indonesian Carmelite NGO. It develops many programs to empower the people. The Indonesian Carmelite NGO serves and involves not only the Catholics but all people with different religious background. Many times students from Islamic University in Malang come and participate in the empowering the people. The Muslim students work

together with the Catholic volunteers of the Indonesian Carmelite NGO to hold the empowerment programs. They, though practice their own belief, participate and celebrate each other's religious feasts together. Conversation on religious topics is not a matter for them. They are eager to learn from each other so that they can appreciate each other's religion better.

In Gempol Margabakti, the Indonesian Carmelite NGO runs a shelter for poor abandoned elderly people. The name of the shelter is Titus Brandsma House. As we know Titus Brandsma is a Carmelite martyr who died in Dacau, Germany during the

Nazi era. Titus Brandsma, a Dutch scholar, journalist and Catholic priest, fought for the rights of the Jews who were persecuted by the Nazi. He forcefully spoke out against Nazi's anti-Jewish laws. He was then caught and arrested by the Nazi and finally sent to Dachau concentration camp. There this loving man died after being injected with carbolic acid. Titus was known by his saying: "May God bless the Dutch; May God bless the German" He did not hate the German people who attacked and occupied the Netherlands and make the people suffered at that time. He prayed them. His name is chosen to be the name of the shelter because the shelter is not only a place where the elderly people are taken care, but also a place where people of different faith meet. Though the shelter is run by a Catholic organization, most of the elderly people living in the shelter are Moslem. The volunteers who help there are also with different religious background, though most of them are Catholics. Titus Brandsma House also become a place where the religious feast of different religions are celebrated together. During Islamic fasting month, it has breaking-the- fast program together inviting Islamic leader to preach and lead the people pray. While at the end of December, they celebrate Christmas together inviting the Catholic priest to



give a sermon and lead the prayer. To celebrate the feasts they invite the marginalized poor people from the surrounding area and share with them food and presents. Students from Catholic and Islamic schools and universities in Malang also come to participate in the feast. Isn't it beautiful and sweet if sisters and brothers share happiness regardless their different religious background?

Everyone has the right to adhere to the religion he

believes in. Differences in religious beliefs do not mean they have different humanity. All of them, regardless of their religious background, are equally human and have the same humanity. So why do religious differences lead to quarrels and hostility? Why should we break up and attack each other? Don't we all belong to the same family? Let's live together. Let's respect each other. Let's understand each other. Look at ourselves and look at each other, we are all equally human. We all want to be happy and live peacefully. Let's work on it together. Let differences not separate and destroy us.

*Fr. Francis Xavier Hariawan Adji O.Carm., Ph.D. is the Prior Provincial of the Indonesian Province of the Carmelite Order. He is a member of the Carmelite NGO and is the head of the Indonesian Carmelite NGO. Although active in many different social ministries in Indonesia, Fr. Adji is mainly interested in building inter-religious understanding among people with different background. This is the reason he always involves people with different religious background in his social ministries.*