

## Catholic volunteers foster peace in Mindanao, Philippines.

Laypeople embed themselves in Philippine Muslim communities as teachers to create 'new environment of shared learning' Catholic volunteers foster peace in Mindanao



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Catholic laypeople from across the Philippines have gone to live in Muslim communities in Mindanao for a year to foster "peace through intercultural dialogue."

The volunteers are serving as assistant teachers of subjects mandated by the education department in Islamic schools in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

The program is an initiative of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines implemented by the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Davao.

Gracielle Deanne Tubera, coordinator of the program, said the volunteers live with host families during the entire year and "engage in interreligious dialogue with Bangsamoro communities."

The "long-term immersion" program is part of the "apostolate of presence" supported by the National Association of Bangsamoro Education Inc and the Bureau of Madaris Education.

Tubera said the program aims to help improve the quality of education in the Bangsamoro region "through the creation of a new environment of shared learning."

She said "respect and cooperation between and among Islamic and Catholic schools" are necessary for peace.

The volunteers include a doctor, a master's candidate of theology, and graduates of mass communication, political science, education, international studies, and community development courses.

Alfon John Pato, a communications graduate, said he volunteered to debunk negative perceptions in the northern part of the country about Muslims and communities in Mindanao.

"There's nothing to fear. Fear is created by people, and for us to overcome this, we must explore and experience their way of life," he told [ucanews.com](http://ucanews.com).

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