The Dynamics of Filipino Interfaith Families in Bukidnon, Southern Philippines:Strategies Towards the Attainment of Everyday Peace

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of interfaith families and examines the factors that contribute to attaining and maintaining everyday peace among religious-divided households. Dynamics involve negotiation styles and communication strategies, made tangible through religious tolerance, compromises, avoidances, and non-implementation. Using in-depth interviews of eight (8) informants who are members of interfaith households in Bukidnon, Philippines, and guided by the concepts of interfaith (Elwood, 1983), religious tolerance (Potgieter et al., 2014; Courtis & Cayton, 2019) everyday peace (Mac Ginty, 2014), and negotiation (McGuire, 2004), the data show that interfaith marriages, because they are largely characterized by religious differences, are spaces where the routinized, everyday encounters in marriages can reflect everyday peace. Interfaith couples need not adhere to institutional and communal structures to navigate the complexities of their marriages. Rather, it is through the conscious and habitual use of negotiation styles, the efforts to show religious tolerance, and the practice of positive communication that interfaith families learn to get by and experience harmonious cohabitation. The results of the study may also reflect the dynamics of other interfaith couples in other localities in the Philippines.

Keywords: *Interfaith Families, Negotiation, Religious Tolerance, Communication*

Introduction

To refer to the Philippines as a Catholic nation does not sit well with Cornelio & Aldama (2020) who argued that there is a religious diversity in the country. Although Roman Catholic constitutes the majority (78.8%), the Philippine Statistics Authority (2015) and 2020 Census of Population and Housing list a significant number of other religious communities in the country such as Islam (6.4%), Iglesia ni Cristo (2.6%), Seventh Day Adventist (0.8%), Aglipay (0.8%), Iglesia Filipina Independiente (0.6%), Bible Baptist Church (0.5%), United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Jehovah's Witness, and Church of Christ (0.4% each), and others (8.2%). The practice of these religions makes the Philippines a religious eclectic country, shaped by these religions' historical and political foundations.

Religious diversity can lead to either a harmonious coexistence or possible tensions due to theological differences (Cornelio & Aldana, 2020; Taufiqurrachman & Fauzi, 2023). It can also pave the way for the dissolution of essentialized notions of individual, familial, and societal interactions. Previous literature would argue that religion and its diversity may contribute to social progress (Davie, 2022) and yet also foster competition, thereby decreasing vitality and utmost participation in religious activities (Krech, 2009). This continuous ambivalence brought by religious diversity can somehow be tangibly observed in familial interfaith marriages. Defined as a marriage of two people who hold different religions and beliefs, an interfaith marriage frequently entails significant challenges and is highly prone to problems (Riley 2013; Syatriadin, 2019). Bukido et al. (2021) also argue that interfaith couples highly struggle with the differences in religion, practices, and expectations in their marriage, highlighting struggles related to negotiating religious preferences, parenthood, and predispositions imposed on them by their extended family members and their immediate community that either support or weaken their familial relationships (Abcede, 2017).

It is within this premise that this paper examines the dynamics of interfaith families in the Philippines and assesses how the differences among their religious faith and beliefs can lead to either harmony or conflict. Moreover, the researchers aim to render insights into how these interfaith family dynamics can be constituted as "everyday peace" which refers to the routinized practices that individuals or groups employ to navigate their lives amidst the challenges caused by ethnic or religious divides (Mac Ginty, 2014).

Dynamics as constituted by everyday peace, in the context of interfaith marriages, involves mutual involvement in communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution practices that aim to maintain peaceful coexistence within these households despite differing religious beliefs (Mac Ginty, 2014). Hughes (2004) emphasizes the role of communication in addressing these struggles, underscoring open, respectful, and constructive dialogue as necessary factors that can maintain everyday peace (Hughes & Dickenson, 2005; Hughes, 2004). By practicing open and constant communication, members of interfaith families discover, that in spite of the contrasting beliefs, shared values like love, compassion, and empathy are common grounds for their marriage to work, hence reducing the tendency to resent, isolate or repudiate (Shoaf et al., 2022; Pramono & Priska, 2021; Reiter & Gee, 2008; Saepullah & Obsatar Sinaga, 2020). In a more particular case, Yoshizawa & Wataru (2020)

highlighted the complexities of Muslim-Christian marriages in Southern Philippines and posit that everyday peace as an essential dynamic of interfaith marriages can be achieved and reflected through regular and usual interactions with friends, neighbors, and families. This everyday peace can be achieved through the strategies of conversion and non-decision.

Research objectives

Although past researches have studied the complexities of interfaith marriages in the Philippines and the crucial role of communication in facilitating cohabitation among interfaith households, the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of the concept of dynamics as a lens in looking at these marriages need to be explored further. By focusing on Bukidnon, a province in Northern Philippines, as the locale of the study, the paper aims to show that interfaith marriages are spaces that can construct and reflect everyday peace, thereby forwarding the idea that peace is an intertwining of both institutional, formal efforts and personal, day to day interactions. In order to achieve this broad objective, we addressed these specific objectives:

1.   To analyze the negotiation styles used by members of interfaith families;

2.   To analyze how religious tolerance can constitute everyday peace among interfaith families;

3.   To identify the communication strategies and other mechanisms used by the participants and interrogate how these strategies and mechanisms maintain peace within interfaith households.

Answers to these specific questions would allow us to describe how everyday peace is lived in interfaith households, consequently enabling us to expand further the construct of peace as applicable, especially among people from diverse religious footings.

The Notions Of Everyday Peace And Positive Peace

In its most basic sense, dynamics implies movement, stimulation, and action which can eventually lead to change or development. Such perhaps are the characteristics of interfaith marriages. Interfaith marriage, traditionally called mixed marriage, is marriage between partners professing different religions (Sintang et al, 2011). Weller (2009) forwards the idea that the term "interfaith" can be used interchangeably with 'inter-religious', but inter-religious can sometimes refer to the simple state of encounter between different religions in a religiously diverse context, while 'inter-faith' tends to be used in circumstances which involve 'dialogue' between the religions and the faiths. The latter then can capture the nuances of the relationships of people of different faiths interacting on a daily basis. The maintenance of the respective religions of each spouse upon and throughout their married life mainly characterizes interfaith marriages. This can be largely attributed to tolerance which can be defined as a mental construct pointing to human qualities such as kindness, patience, courtesy, humility, self-control, courage, resilience, and respect (Potgieter et al., 2014). It is one's ability to put up with someone whose principles and beliefs are different from his or her

own. Potgieter et al., (2014), however, assert that tolerance does not imply acceptance since one can tolerate something without essentially accepting it. On a more important note, tolerance implies that a person is willing to allow some degree of deviation from the standard, norm, principle, or value that he/she has set. Specifically, religious tolerance refers to the ability to appreciate spiritual values, beliefs, and practices that are different from one's own (Courtis & Cayton, 2019) despite the involved parties' struggles with setting aside their personal biases and objectively examining ideas or situations. The inability to overcome these struggles may result in chaos and even violence among members of interfaith families, specifically that they live under the same roof.

The constant and conscious practice of religious tolerance leads to another important concept that enables us to interrogate the dynamics of interfaith families. Mac Ginty's (2014) "everyday peace" focuses on bottom-up and survival strategies that individuals and groups employ to navigate their way through life in divided situations and societies. Its main contention is that peace can be achieved and found in everyday, routinized activities that people engage in. The idea of everyday peace challenges us to take the "normal, everyday" lens as constitutive of the institutional and international levels of the attainment of peace. It compels participants to take responsibility in the peace-building process making them active, rather than passive, recipients and contributors in chartering the pathways to peace.

Whereas Galtung's (1969) seminal work of positive peace entails the participation of institutions to address the root cause of conflict and violence, everyday peace centers on the daily practices and norms of individuals utilized to minimize conflicts especially in societies which are divided and deeply seated in conflict. The attainment of everyday peace, as Mac Ginty argues, can be a precursor for positive peace. While everyday peace captures the practices that sustain harmony, Galtung's theory highlights the values and conditions that make those practices meaningful and lasting. This includes maintaining systems that enable dignity, mutual recognition, and shared well-being which eventually would result in social justice, equity and cooperative social structures.

Embedded in the idea of everyday peace are indicators that can qualify and make tangible this notion as practiced by communities. One of these indicators is the idea of negotiation. Kim et al. (2021) define negotiation as a continuous, ongoing contestation and bargaining of meanings when individuals assert an aspect of their identity. These aspects may be ethnicity, gender, culture, and religion. This is not only about autonomy or the exercise of agency or the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices but rather being flexible to more dominant regulations and practices in the society. McGuire (2004) also describes negotiation as an important life skill that people need to acquire to help them resolve circumstances where there are opposing views or interests. She enumerates real-life situations where negotiation skills come in handy such as in the purchase of a new car or house, a couple discussing summer plans, or even parents negotiating bedtime with their children. McGuire (2004) believes that each person has a natural negotiation style influenced by his/her personality.

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in the following diagram. This diagram graphically illustrates the dynamics of interfaith families to facilitate everyday

peace.

Figure 1 shows the concentric circles illustrating the hierarchical relationship between specific practices and broader theories surrounding the unique dynamics of interfaith families. The innermost circle represents the central theme of the diagram, which refers to the specific actions transpiring within interfaith households. The second circle represents the practices and interactions that demonstrate religious tolerance and negotiations between members of identified interfaith families, serving as immediate tools or strategies navigating interfaith dynamics. These practices and interactions then would contribute to peaceful coexistence, thereby shaping their 'everyday peace' as nested within the third circle. Everyday peace serves as the micro-level practices through which interfaith members maintain peace to minimize conflict, situating family-level interactions within broader social habits. The outermost circle represents the attainment of the broadest concept, Positive Peace forwarded by Galtung (1969). The assumption is that everyday peace can eventually lead to positive peace.
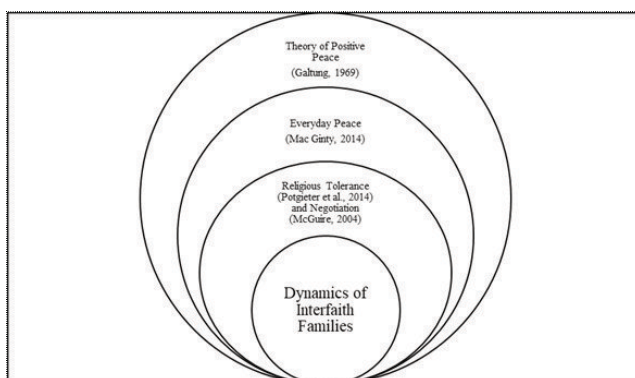

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

All in all, the concepts of interfaith, religious tolerance, everyday peace, theory of positive peace, everyday peace indicators, and negotiations are deemed beneficial in this proposed work. In the context of interfaith families, challenges caused by religious differences accentuate the need for family members to implement religious tolerance which may outline everyday peace. Thus, this work centers on exploring the dynamics within interfaith families to provide valuable insights into the practice of everyday peace within interfaith households.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design to explore the dynamics of interfaith families within the province of Bukidnon, Philippines. Bukidnon, located in the Southern part of the Philippines and one of the largest provinces in Northern Mindanao, presents a unique context due to its rich religious diversity. According to the 2020 Philippine Statistics Authority report, approximately 78.8% of the national population identifies as Roman Catholic. In Northern Mindanao, over five million residents adhere to Roman Catholicism,

followed by Protestant denominations and Islam. Bukidnon itself is composed of roughly 77% Roman Catholics, with smaller proportions identifying as Seventh-Day Adventists (3.77%), Fundamental Baptists (3.21%), Evangelicals (3.15%), and members of Indigenous faiths (2.49%). This diversity in religion in Bukidnon posits a variety of religious traditions and practices that are crucial for fostering mutual respect and harmony within the province and its neighboring places. Also, this religious diversity calls for a more nuanced analysis of how the notion of everyday peace in interfaith marriages can be reflected.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who self-identified as members of interfaith families currently living in the same household. They were identified through online referrals and were selected based on their capacity and approval to provide rich, detailed accounts of their lived experiences. A total of eight (8) individuals from interfaith households participated in the study. These included both interfaith couples and children raised in interfaith families. The participants included:

1. Adela, female, 33 years old from San Jose, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, identifies herself as a member of the Bible Baptist church and has been married for 5 years to her Roman Catholic husband.

2. Berna, female, 23 years old from Aglayan, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, a Roman Catholic, and has been with her 24-year-old partner for six years.

3. Cathy, female, 64 years old from Sumpong, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, a member of the Church of God congregation, and married to her 66-year-old husband who is a Oneness Trinity believer.

4. Delia, female, 21 years old from Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, converted to the Universal Faith congregation, her parents are interfaith, with her mother being a Roman Catholic and her father being a Bible Baptist.

5. Edna, female, 25 years old from Don Carlos, Bukidnon, Philippines, a Seventh Day Adventist since birth, married to her husband who is a Bible Baptist.

6. Frank, Male, 36 years old from Don Carlos, Bukidnon, Philippines, a Bible Baptist for two years now after converting from being a Pentecost, married to his wife who is a Seventh Day Adventist since birth.

7. Jane, Female, 30 years old from Kadingilan, Bukidnon, Philippines, a Fundamental Baptist since birth, married to her husband for three years who identifies himself as a solid Roman Catholic.

8. Edwin, Male, 30 years old from Kadingilan Bukidnon, Philippines, is a solid Roman Catholic and has been married to her Fundamental Baptist

wife for 3 years.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted virtually via Google Meet. Each interview was scheduled individually and conducted in a secure online environment to ensure privacy. Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Ethical considerations in the interview processes were strictly adhered. The researchers explained the study's purpose, procedures, significance, and confidentiality measures. Interview sessions were also recorded, following the participants' approvals.

Interviews began with demographic questions, followed by open-ended questions focused on participants' lived experiences within their interfaith households. Key areas of inquiry included family structure and religious diversity, challenges and conflicts arising from religious differences, approaches to educating children on multiple faith traditions, and the role of language in fostering everyday peace, reflecting on specific instances where language facilitated understanding and harmony across differing religious perspectives within their homes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic coding, identifying recurring patterns, themes, and insights across cases. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the start of data collection, and all participant identities were anonymized using pseudonyms.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents the findings related to the objectives of the study. We focused mainly on the analysis of how religious tolerance can be attained through the utilization of negotiation and communication strategies. Also discussed in this section is how religious tolerance can lead to the practice of everyday peace.

Religious tolerance: The use of avoidance negotiation strategies

Marriage legally and socially binds at least two individuals who mutually assume that the union will be permanent and enduring. Marriage in itself is fraught with complexities more so when the parties involved come from different and conflicting backgrounds. Such is the case of interfaith marriages which are potent spaces for conflict and disagreements because they are grounded on religious differences. Wheat (2017) further claims that spiritually influenced relational conflicts are a growing concern impacting individual, marital, and family life.

To enter into interfaith marriages are considered constitutional rights under the Philippine Law. The Philippine Constitution clearly stipulates that the state shall protect the right of the spouses to build a family following their religious convictions. This constitutional right gives Filipino individuals opportunities and the leverage to cohabit with partners or spouses of differing, cultural backgrounds and beliefs. For our participants, however, this idea of constitutional or institutional rights does not enter into their decision-making. Rather, they consider their families and their "homes" or the nearest vicinity of their homes, to be primary referents of peace indicators. It is in their homes where religious tolerance is shaped and defined, leading to the manifestation of everyday peace.

For the couples, attaining a certain level of peace can be achieved through negotiation. In simpler terms, it is meeting the other side halfway, which requires a relatively low level of assertiveness and quite a high level of cooperativeness. Thirty-three (33) year-old Adela, for example, who practices the Bible Baptist religion and is married to a Roman Catholic husband, attributes the longevity and sustenance of her marriage to the constant and persistent use of these negotiation strategies.

Adela admits her husband is close-minded to her religion; he is firm in his belief that Catholicism is the only religion. Shaped by a Catholic upbringing by both parents who live with them and who still serve Catholic mass every Sunday, the husband often complains of the longer hours Adele spends on Baptist services than on Catholic masses. He refuses to attend Baptist services because of their long hours and the "noise" brought by too much music. To avoid escalation of conflicts, Adele does her daily devotional, an important religious activity of the Baptist religion, in private, since her husband does not want her to engage in such activity and spend more time in her church. When asked about the compromise that she has to make, Adele acknowledges that at first, the situation made her uncomfortable and resentful, but she decided to forego some aspects of her religion to avoid conflict and to never force her husband to go to church with her. Adele readily concedes to these negotiations and compromises by adhering to one of the teachings of both churches: that the wife must always submit to the husband.

The same negotiation strategies and compromises are reflected and seen in the marriage of Berna, a 22-year-old Roman Catholic who is married to her Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) husband. Berna willingly goes to her husband's church every Saturday but her husband never engages in the practices of Roman Catholicism. Moreover, avoidance becomes much more apparent when Berna and her husband decide not to convert to either religion. Even in their everyday conversations, the discussion of religion is consciously avoided. Gender roles came into play and negotiation, however, was extended when the couple decided that Berna could bring the baby to her church since she is the mother. More importantly, they believe that for now, a "general" form of praying, a prayer which does not adhere to either of their religions, is best for the baby. Avoidance and negotiation are still reflected in the household of Delia, a 21-year-old female who converted from Roman Catholicism to the Universal Faith congregation, an evangelical religion which relatively has quite a large number of followers in the Bukidnon province. Delia's conversion caused conflict with her mother, who is a Roman Catholic. Hence, to maintain a harmonious relationship with her mother, Delia showed compromise by occasionally going to the Catholic Church but strongly identifies herself as a member of the Universal Faith congregation. To a certain extent, this maintains the everyday peace in their family and Delia asserts that this can be attributed to the respect they have shown for each other's religion in their household For example, during Holy Week, one of the most important celebrations of Christianity, Delia's mother believes that meat should not be allowed, but since Delia's father continues to eat meat during the season, the mother concedes in allowing her husband to do so as to avoid conflict in the household.

Edna and Frank are a married couple who practice different religions. Thirty-year-old Edna goes to the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church while the 36-year-old Frank is a convert from the Pentecost religion to Bible Baptist Church. Frank compromises by

occasionally going to the SDA gathering with Edna and their children. Furthermore, Edna had no opposition to Frank's conversion since for her, to be with a husband who practices a different religion is much better than a husband who does not believe in God. Their common belief "in one God" then becomes a space for Edna and Frank to reach a compromise regarding religious differences, focusing on their universal notions of "God" rather than dwelling on the specificity of their religions.

Married for three years now, Jane and George also practice different religions. Jane has been affiliated with the Fundamental Baptist Church since birth while George is a devout Roman Catholic. Both 30 years old, the couple have tried to agree on certain areas that need to be compromised in order to attain peace in the household. George for example conceded not to have images and statues of Catholic saints inside their house and sometimes accompanied his wife to attend prayer meetings in the Baptist Church. In return, Jane asks permission from George every time she intends to hold a prayer meeting, an activity which is essential for the Baptists, in their household. According to them, these negotiations prevent conflict from occurring in their discussions of religion in their households.

The interviews have shown that the use of avoidance negotiation strategies can be manifested by the couples' tolerance for each other's religious beliefs. This comprises the deliberate avoidance of religion as a major reason for conflict. This is further explicated when, in the course of their marriage, spouses continuously make conscious efforts to focus on the generalities rather than the differences of their religions. Such actuations which focus on the daily activities and domestic interactions of the couples render institutional concepts of peace as almost nonexistent in the dynamics of interfaith marriages.

The use of ambiguous implementation/ implementing non-decision

The previous section focuses on how the couples utilized avoidance as part of negotiation strategies to maintain peace in their households. This section will further explicate another strategy utilized by the couples to avoid conflicts in their marriages. Whereas avoidance strategies are characterized by compromises and tolerance, ambiguous implementation is a strategy which involves the navigation of religious differences in interfaith households without causing significant conflict among the spouses (Yoshizawa & Kasuka, 2020). This strategy involves consciously acknowledging each other's religious beliefs while adopting a non-decision approach to avoid confrontation over potentially contentious issues, allowing for a more harmonious cohabitation. This strategy among spiritually divided couples often leads to vague understanding of their roles, creating ambiguity that downplays commitment, yielding potential conflicts regarding intentions and the future of the relationship (Lindsay, 2000).

In the case of our participants, issues on child rearing which arise from the dynamics of their marriages necessitates the strategy of ambiguous implementation. For the couple Jane and Edwin, one of the conflicts brought by their interfaith marriage is the issue of their child's religious identity. Edna brings their child to her Church's services and although she had informed her son that he could choose which religion to follow when he grows up, Edna fervently hopes that he would choose her religion.

Sixty-four-year-old Cathy, for example, stated that although their child was baptized in the Roman Catholic church, she is open to the idea that when her daughter comes of age, she might change to the religion of her father. If this happens, Cathy emphatically said that she would support her daughter.

Cathy is a member of the Church of God Trinity Congregation and is married to a Oneness Church believer. Both churches belong to Pentecostal religion but have different beliefs and views particularly on who and what God is. Cathy admitted that religious differences can be a main source of conflict within her family. Before their marriage, religion was not a contentious issue because they practiced the same religion. A year after their marriage, however, Cathy's husband decided to join the Oneness Church because he disagreed with the Church of God Trinity congregation's belief on salvation that one can be saved through Jesus Christ alone. Her husband disagrees with this and is more convinced that salvation can be achieved through good works to the community. Moreover, Cathy, who, at this time, had already embraced the teachings of the Church of God Trinity congregation noticed that her husband returned to his vices when he changed his religion. This ultimately convinced her not to join her husband and this is when conflict started.

Their relationship even became more strained when her husband practically forced her to join him in his new religion. Cathy however stood her ground and the aftereffects of the conflict extended to their children. Such was the strain in the family that their children decided not to practice any religion at all. Cathy rationalized that since she and her husband practice different religions, then it is not fair and neither of them has any right to impose a specific religion on their children. As a result, Cathy allowed her children to follow any religion of their choosing as long as they have a relationship with God. However, Cathy believed that there is no peace within her family because within their households, each member follows a different religion. For Cathy, peace within the family can only be attained if compromises are reached or if one decides to submit to the other's religion. Also, Cathy is convinced that her family members try to avoid the issue by following their respective religion. There is no peace because the family members do not compromise.

These instances of compromising, avoiding, and non-implementation as negotiation strategies in interfaith families in the Philippines are common in interfaith cohabitation, including marriage (Yoshizawa & Wataru, 2020). In McGuirre's (2014) concept of negotiation, participants become assertive and cooperative and are ready to meet halfway to avoid conflicts particularly when it comes to religion. As our informants have shown, acts of compromises can strengthen love, respect, and support despite the differences. These are values and conditions which foster everyday peace. By compromising, interfaith couples establish a foundation that goes beyond religious approaches and values, and which highlights the sense of oneness and belongingness in the household.

Avoidance also serves as a way for interfaith couples to cope with the challenges arising from the differences in religion. Avoiders are negotiators with low assertiveness and cooperativeness (McGuirre, 2014). The informants affirm that they resort to avoidance to lessen potential conflicts. They prefer to set aside religious discussions to maintain harmony within the household. Interfaith couples opt to focus on the common ground where shared

values do not result in heated arguments and division in the family. Avoidance also shows that these interfaith couples may seem uncertain about discussing religion that, in the first place, they are not fully aware of.

The informants' experiences on how they handle religious differences within their households reveal the following (1) the implementation of non-decision avoids potential conflicts that may arise when one parent's religion is chosen over the other. Aside from this, children can also feel supported in choosing religion without any fear or pressure from their parents; (2) non-decision fosters autonomy and freedom for the children where they can freely explore different religions; (3) non-decision can promote critical thinking where children are allowed to explore various perspectives, raise different questions, and develop their sense of faith; and (4) non-decision allows growth and acknowledges the idea that beliefs and preferences change or evolve.

Communication strategies aimed at maintaining peace within interfaith households

Interfaith marriages require communication strategies that can help navigate cultural and religious differences. Communication strategies refer to the approaches or strategies that individuals use to convey messages effectively (Addimando, 2024) (Dabizha & Pyskun, 2024). While these communication strategies are clear, not everyone can fully implement them effectively. Interfaith families often face distinct communication dynamics that can either simplify or complicate discussions about their differing religious beliefs and practices.

> Adela, a 33-year-old woman married to a man of a different faith, emphasizes the importance of open but careful communication
>
> *"Open communication helps us understand each other better, but we also have to be wise about the words we use."*

Frame 1. Adela and the power of word choice

Thirty-three-year-old Adela asserts that open communication is the key to a lasting relationship especially if the spouses have different religious beliefs. In order to dispel doubts and mistrust, Adela tries her best to have conversations with her husband about their religions. She also exercises prudence in using words and terms which she deems offensive to her husband. An example of this is the term "unbeliever". She and her husband try to avoid at all costs in using this term particularly when there is conflict.

> Berna and Cathy, both in long-term interfaith marriages, describe communication in their homes as a space for sincerity and emotional honesty. They agree that peace is maintained not by avoiding difficult conversations but by ensuring those discussions are genuine and never weaponized by blaming religion.
>
> *"When one of us is wrong, we address the mistake — not the religion."*

Frame 2. Berna & Cathy: sincerity as a safeguard

Similarly, Berna and Cathy believe that it is only through open communication, specifically conversations that are intimate and sincere, that they can maintain the peace within their household. They also believe that using offensive words and blaming religion to address wrong behaviors are major reasons that potentially intensify conflicts within the household.

Most of the informants agree that addressing problems head-on through communication is an indispensable strategy in solving conflicts.

> Delia, 21, and her husband believe in solving conflicts as soon as possible. This commitment to immediacy helps prevent the build-up of resentment.
>
> *"We don't want to carry the conflict into the next day. That's our way of keeping peace in the house."*

Frame 3. Delia and head-on approach

Twenty-one-year-old Delia and her husband ensure that communication lines between them are always open to solve conflicts. They talk about the problem head-on instead of letting the days pass without dealing with the issue at hand. They prefer to deal with the problem head-on and talk about it before the day ends. This strategy shows the importance of time and immediacy in resolving conflicts, underscoring the need for these couples to directly and promptly straighten out the issue. By addressing the problem head-on, couples can navigate problems more effectively thus preventing further escalation.

> Not all couples deal with conflict immediately. Edna, in contrast, prefers a cooling-off period.
>
> *"I wait for the right moment."*

Frame 4. Edna and the cooling-off period

Edna, on the other hand, prefers to let things cool down first before engaging in a conversation with her spouse. As for Edna, timing is key. She believes that silence is not avoidance of conflict, but rather a preparation for negotiation, eventually solving the problem at hand.

> Frank, a member of the Bible Baptist Church, makes it a point to initiate conversations after an argument.
>
> *"Even if I'm not wrong, I'll be the one to talk first. Because it's not about who's right — it's about being okay again."*

Frame 5. Frank: the initiator

Frank, who belongs to the Bible Baptist Church admits that he is often the first one to initiate conversations whenever conflicts arise. Jane and Edwin agree that initiating conversations, especially those proactive with each other, are essential means of solving problems. The participants also believe that open communication can lead to a balanced, healthy, and inclusive environment where the feelings of exclusion and estrangement are eradicated.

The communication strategies used by the participants to avoid or solve conflicts within their respective households concur with the concept of pedagogy of positiveness (Gomes de Matos, 2009), which is the use of positive, empathetic, non-violent, and constructive languages as strategies to avoid conflicts within the communication process. This is crucial in interfaith households where religious differences, especially when it comes to labels and terminologies, are deemed to be the causes of conflicts within the family. Thus, for the participants, it is imperative to have open and respectful communication with their spouses. This entails the use of clear and empathetic language in addressing conflicts peacefully and constructively on the premise that this kind of communication cannot only dispel gaps, mistrust, and doubts but more importantly can foster mutual learning between the spouses and their children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper showed three aspects of the dynamics within Filipino interfaith families. Certain negotiation styles like compromise and avoidance were used by the participants to avoid conflict, settle differences with their respective partners and thus attain everyday peace. The use of ambiguous implementation or implementing non-decision was also observed among the couples, specifically among those with young children. With the use of non-decision, interfaith parents can avoid potential conflicts particularly when one parent's religion is chosen over the other. Parents further preserve their children's autonomy to freely build their own religious identity when they grow up.

Religious tolerance is shown through the flexibility of the participants to go to church together with their spouses despite their differences in religion. Their willingness to allow a degree of deviation from the values they have set paves the way for the acknowledgment and respect for their spouses' religious decisions and practices, thereby helping them shape the everyday peace within their spiritually divided households.

The utilization of communication strategies such as proactive conversations, avoidance of offensive language, and the immediacy of which conflicts are discussed were deemed by the participants to be effective in solving conflicts caused by religious differences. These results highlight the essential role that communication plays in the promotion of peace even among spiritually-divided families.

The dynamics of interfaith marriages can lead to the attainment of everyday peace and the use of the above-mentioned strategies show that interfaith couples need not adhere to institutional and communal policies and regulations to navigate the complexities of their marriages. Rather, it is through the conscious and habitual use of negotiation styles, the

efforts to show religious tolerance, and the practice of positive communication that interfaith families learn to get by and experience harmonious cohabitation. In this sense, it is the everyday, routinized, even mundane lived experiences that can ultimately reflect what everyday peace is. Extending this notion of peace to the society at large can loosen our dependence on institutions and governments in the attainment of positive peace and social justice.

While this study presents initial insights on interfaith marriage, future research could expand on the findings of this study by exploring the dynamics of interfaith families in diverse cultural contexts beyond Bukidnon, Philippines. Investigating how negotiation styles and communication strategies vary across different regions or cultural settings can provide a broader understanding of everyday peace in interfaith households. Additionally, comparative studies could examine the experiences of interfaith families in urban versus rural settings, or among different religious pairings unique from each locale, to identify eccentric challenges and strategies employed in maintaining harmony within the interfaith marriage. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could be beneficial in assessing how these dynamics evolve, particularly as children, the fruits of these interfaith unions, are introduced into interfaith households and as societal attitudes toward religions, beliefs, and interfaith relationships continue to shift. This research could contribute valuable insights into the resilience and adaptability of interfaith families, ultimately enriching the discourse on everyday peace, religious tolerance, and coexistence in increasingly pluralistic societies.

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