The Heart and Ears to Listen
Sister Ella Naben, Soegijapranata Catholic University

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“Young people need someone who has the heart and ears to listen to them,” Sister Ella Naben finds, and she often is called upon to be that sympathetic listener in the Campus Ministry Office of Soegijapranata Catholic University in Indonesia. “Sometimes students come to me to share their struggles and conflicts, or problems with their families, in their love lives, or with their studies.” Those disputes may seem manageable, compared with political and religious tensions or with military conflicts, but they also require peacebuilders to step forward to resolve them.

Sister Ella was one of five individuals who participated in the 2015 Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI) with the support of the United Board. MPI’s summer training program brings together peacebuilders from diverse cultures and professional experiences, who want to serve as catalysts for peace and social transformation. MPI combines a local focus — drawing on the experience of the Mindanao region, an area of the Philippines shaped by religious and military conflict — and an international perspective, with the 2015 program attracting more than 100 participants from 26 countries. All of them, Sister Ella found, are “longing for peace.”

Sister Ella (right) shares her ideas on peacebuilding.

She approached the program with the simple desire to better understand the meaning of peacebuilding, and through such MPI courses as peace education and trauma healing and reconciliation in divided communities, she found new ways to examine and respond to conflict. “Conflicts can make the way we live with others better, because through conflicts we get to know each other better,” she says. “Or vice versa, when conflicts cannot be settled, they make our lives worse and can hurt us till the end of life.”

Peace education can be taught in the classroom and applied in daily life on campus. Sister Ella sees ways to share her MPI experience in both settings. “I used some of the methods in Campus Ministry with our youth and also with the residents of the Soegijapranata female dormitory,” she said. “I also will have a sharing about trauma healing and art approaches to community-based peacebuilding with students from clinical psychology.”

The United Board supports a variety of peace education efforts through its Campus-Community Partnerships program area. By sponsoring five individuals to attend MPI, it invests in peace educators who can open pathways to the ultimate goals of conflict resolution, which Sister Ella describes as “the experience of forgiveness, acceptance, peace, unity, and harmony with self, others, and nature.”

The warm spirit of Campus Ministry.