

The 26th ASEACCU Student Conference in Hiroshima, Japan

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The 26th ASEACCU Student Conference was held at the Elisabeth University of Music in Hiroshima from August 21st to 26th, 2018. The theme of this conference was “Catholic Education and Peace Initiatives” and it involved student delegates from seven different countries ranging from East and South East Asia to Oceania. We considered the theme through lectures, a group tour to Peace Memorial Park and teamwork such as presentations.

The most memorable part of this conference for me was people’s optimistic attitudes towards life after enduring the tragedy of the atomic bomb. During the program, we had many opportunities to learn about the tragedies that occurred in Hiroshima in the year 1945. I also learned about how many people were killed and the reason why the atomic bomb was dropped. There is a big difference between just hearing about the disaster and actually visiting the location where it occurred. As such, my colleagues and I visited the Peace Memorial Park to listen to the stories of those who were affected by the bombing in World War 2. At the Peace Memorial Park, I saw many heart wrenching photos of people in terrible pain, whose skin had been burned off. What stood out the most was a clock that had stopped the exact moment when the atomic bomb exploded.

Though hundreds of thousands of people suffered from the effects of the bomb, I was so surprised when I saw in the documentary that people who had experienced the atomic bomb remained optimistic later in their lives. The documentary revealed that education still prevails even at the time of a disaster, as many teachers held classes for children under the blackened skies of Hiroshima. Parents always want the best for

children so that they can lead a better life in future. After that tragic day, while everyone suffered from the effects of the atomic bomb, hope and the need for peace drove the afflicted to strive toward a brighter future free from pain and suffering. After watching the documentary, I realized that peace is not obtained by hope alone - it is secured by those who desire a life that does not ruin the lives of others in the process.

When thinking about today's world, such positive thoughts make you want to spread your positivity to the world and thus make it a better place. At the conference, I enjoyed many lectures that focused on different perspectives of Catholic education. I also interacted with many people from different countries. During these interactions, I often thought about peace in terms of how environmental problems threaten today's world and talked about this with other students. Before I attended the conference, I had learned about how various kinds of environmental problems affect others and methods to mitigate problems such as global warming and climate change. From this conference, I have learned other, different methods that have forced me to rethink the fundamental causes of environmental problems from the perspective of Catholic education.

I attended a lecture entitled "The Mutual Affiliation Between Environmental Issues and Interior Peace", that focused on environmental issues caused by the quest for a quality lifestyle and how can we maintain our current quality in terms of Catholic education. In the final part of the lecture, the professor quoted us the words of Francis.

"There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology."

(Laudato si')

These words made me reconsider the fundamental cause of environmental issues from a Catholic perspective. These days, the comfort of our lives takes priority over the life of

other species. While there are countless potential solutions to improve the environment, it can be said that the prime cause of environmental destruction is humans looking after ourselves rather than searching for what we want inside our hearts.

From this conference, I learned new ideas and gained a deeper perspective on how I think about peace. Due to the conference being held in Hiroshima, I was able to learn about the history of atomic bombing and the importance of peace and by comparing modern day buildings built from the ashes of those destroyed I also came to understand how people work hard no matter how devastating a life-changing tragedy may be. I believe that having the right mental attitude can lead to people caring about the world around them. In addition, this conference was a great opportunity to learn about peace in the context of environmental problems. I would like to thank Nanzan University for offering me this wonderful chance. This experience has changed my educational mindset.