

## Article

# Pakikipagkapwa (Fellowship): Towards an Interfaith Dialogue with the Religious Others

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**Abstract:** The present study examines the ways in which the Filipino Christian value of *pakikipagkapwa* (fellowship) can be seen and experienced in modern society. Using empirical phenomenology, this paper aims to (re)imagine the ways of cultivating ways of dialogue with religious others while understand the meaning of *pakikipagkapwa* (fellowship). This study explores the contemporary notions and practices of *pakikipagkapwa* among select Filipino Christians and how such cultural value fosters interreligious dialogue. Moreover, the study investigates the importance of dialogue between religious actors as they navigate the uncharted waters of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors contend that *pakikipagkapwa* and interreligious dialogue build communities, support social cohesion, and help religious actors find meaning in difficult circumstances.

**Keywords:** Filipino values; interreligious; religion; neighbors; fraternity; COVID-19



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## 1. Introduction

Culture is an ideal universal process through which human beings achieve progress, as well as a historical and social reality in which different lifestyles, values, customs, and institutions have developed (Doyle 2012). Osewska et al. (2022) assert that “human beings create, rely on, and re-create themselves through culture. When culture opens itself to transcendence, the truth about human beings and nations is revealed” (p. 11). Culture and religion are inextricably intertwined in a predominantly Christian country such as the Philippines. John Paul II (1981) said:

The rich geographical and human diversity, the various cultural traditions, and the people’s spirit of joy and sharing, together with the fruits of the missionary efforts, have successfully blended and have shaped through periods that were sometimes not devoid of shadows and weaknesses, a clear national identity that is unmistakably Filipino and truly Christian (para. 2).

In light of the positive role culture plays in the expression of Christian faith (International Theological Commission 1988), this article examines the Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa* (fellowship) as the embodiment of Jesus’ teaching on “loving your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37–39, New Revised Standard Version 1989). Specifically, how did select Filipino Christians practice *pakikipagkapwa* and engage in dialogue with religious others during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Approximately 92% of 110 million Filipinos are Christians (Miller 2020). Many Filipinos believe the Christian faith to be integral to their lives (del Castillo et al. 2021). However, religion in the Philippines is not a monolithic entity. Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, and autochthonous religions are present in society, and people have the freedom to practice their religious beliefs (del Castillo et al. 2020). Though the public practice dimension of religion is conceptualized as the participation of the adherent in rituals, services, and communal activities (Huber and Huber 2012), the authors contend that it can also refer to the praxis of faith in the everydayness of life. In a religiously plural society such as

the Philippines, this involves the Filipino Christian's acknowledgment and dialogue with religious others. Such dialogue may take various forms, including, but not limited to, "establishing peaceful coexistence and friendly exchanges, engaging actively in the teachings and practices of others, supporting social change, or taking part in rituals and common prayer" (Cornille 2013, p. 20).

The entire human family suffers from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those living in the Global South (Sow 2022). At the time of writing, there have been approximately 3.7 million confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Philippines and 56,165 deaths (Johns Hopkins 2022). Moreover, the pandemic has resulted in the country's reduced economic growth, increased national debt, business closures, high unemployment rates, involuntary hunger among people, and a widening wealth gap (Future Learn 2021). As the world continues to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, Christians are called to reflect upon and practice interreligious solidarity (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches 2020). Jesus commands his disciples: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, [and] you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37–39, New Revised Standard Version 1989). In Christian teaching, "neighbors" include those who practice different religious traditions or identify as nonaffiliated with any particular faith tradition. Hence, "Christians must overcome religious prejudices and cultural biases both towards those they serve and toward those with whom they serve since their mission is to alleviate suffering and bring healing and wholeness in a pluralistic society" (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Council of Churches 2020, pp. 4–5).

Many Filipinos believe that the Christian faith is crucial to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic (Patinio 2020). During the global health crisis, many Filipinos put their faith into action. Despite the difficult circumstances, there are Filipinos who demonstrated their love and concern for their neighbors through acts of generosity and kindness (del Castillo 2021; Espartinez 2021; Cacho and del Castillo 2022). Furthermore, many religious organizations performed acts of charity by sharing resources with the needy, regardless of religious affiliation (Deguma et al. 2020). Such altruism is indicative of the Filipino cultural value of *pakikipagkapwa* (fellowship). Moreover, acts of charity, sharing in the joys and sorrows of our neighbors, and working together for the integral development of people align with the teachings of the Church on interreligious dialogue (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991).

### 1.1. Objectives of the Study

This study explores the contemporary notions and practices of *pakikipagkapwa* among select Filipino Christians and how such cultural value fosters interreligious dialogue. Moreover, the study investigates the importance of dialogue between religious actors as they navigate the uncharted waters of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors contend that *pakikipagkapwa* and interreligious dialogue build communities, support social cohesion, and help religious actors find meaning in difficult circumstances. Specifically, the paper answers the following questions:

How do Filipino Christians conceptualize *pakikipagkapwa*?

How did Filipino Christians demonstrate *pakikipagkapwa* during the COVID-19 pandemic?

How did Filipino Christians experience *pakikipagkapwa* during the global health crisis?

What are the benefits of practicing *pakikipagkapwa* within the community?

How does *pakikipagkapwa* foster dialogue between Filipino Christians and religious others?

### 1.2. The Filipino Value of *Pakikipagkapwa*

Many Filipinos regard the concept of relating with one's *kapwa* (brethren) as the essence of human interaction. *Kapwa* is a relationship-based Filipino value that refers to seeing and considering the other person the same way one does oneself. In this way, a person cultivates

a humane relationship with another. It can be challenging to describe the nuances of the Filipino word *kapwa* using an English term since it has a socio-psychological component and a moral connotation. Nevertheless, the term “brethren” can be used. Being a *kapwa* is to situate oneself within the other’s situation and extend oneself to your brethren’s existential condition, especially when the situation requires it.

An individual’s concern for *kapwa* can serve as a motivation for having an altruistic relationship with others. The Filipino prefix *pakiki-* signifies a commitment to the other person according to the principles of *kapwa*, hence *pakikipagkapwa*. As such, *pakikipagkapwa* is the act of treating others as significant members of one’s existential circle.

In Filipino psychology, *kapwa* is central to the ethos of *pakikipagkapwa* (Enriquez 1977). *Kapwa* is the primary Filipino psychological dimension of *pakikipagkapwa* since the attitude reflects the object directed towards it. *Pakikipagkapwa* is made palpable when a person relates to others as fellow human beings, with a deep appreciation for a person’s immutable dignity and worth. Thus, the Filipino psyche is communal, characterized by a deep appreciation for the existence of others as extensions of their own. Moreover, in Filipino culture, another individual is not just a stranger but considered a close relation. Through *pakikipagkapwa*, Filipinos express their affinity and solidarity with others.

*Pakikipagkapwa* also refers to the Filipinos’ view, consideration, and treatment of each other in a fraternal manner that acknowledges their shared humanity. To take the other person into account means accepting and treating them as equals (Enriquez 1977). More importantly, *pakikipagkapwa* is a way of coping with a negative situation mainly experienced by the other person and existentially felt by the one who encounters the suffering *kapwa* (Aguas 2016). A moral response to the hardship of our *kapwa* involves accompanying them in the experience of detrimental suffering. Thus, *pakikipagkapwa* is accomplished by attending closely to the needs of our *kapwa*.

As a sociological movement, *pakikipagkapwa* stems from *pakikiramdam* (sensitivity) (Pe Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000). *Pakikiramdam* refers to a shared feeling or an a priori emotional experience. It describes a reluctance to react, attention to subtle cues, and non-verbal behavior in mental role-playing (e.g., “If I were in the other’s position, what would it feel like?”) (Pe Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000). A person exhibits *pakikiramdam* by being considerate to others. It is similar to empathy which is the ability to “put oneself in another’s shoes” or experience the emotions within oneself (Ioannidou and Konstantikaki 2018). As such, *pakikipagkapwa* falls short if *pakikiramdam* is not present. Hence, *pakikipagkapwa* necessitates sensitivity towards the pain and suffering of one’s brethren (Pe Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000).

## 2. Method

Phenomenology refers to knowledge as it appears to consciousness. Describing what a person perceives can lead to the discovery of particular phenomena and, ultimately, the discovery of the Absolute (Kockelmans 1967). Accordingly, empirical phenomenology is an approach to defining the focus of phenomenology (Aspers 2009). In this regard, the participants’ perspective is of primary importance to the analysis. Therefore, phenomenology assumes that scientific explanations are grounded in the meaning structures of those being studied.

The empirical phenomenology approach also recognizes the value of theory in understanding the perspectives and articulations of participants. Creswell (1998) recommends involving five to twenty participants in phenomenological studies to unpack phenomena’s meanings. In this study, the authors employed empirical phenomenology by analyzing themes and categorizing articulations related to *pakikipagkapwa* from the perspective of select Filipino Christians. Using Filipino culture and the Judeo-Christian tradition as a frame of reference, the authors also examined the respondents’ understanding and experiences of *pakikipagkapwa* and how it fosters interreligious dialogue.

### 2.1. Demographics

Simple random sampling was used in this study. Table 1 shows that a total of 24 Filipino Christians participated in the survey, of which 13 were females and 11 were males. The majority of participants are Filipino Catholic youths. Of the respondents, 75% live in rural areas and 25% in an urban setting. A survey questionnaire was provided to the participants via Google Forms. Researchers conducted this study with the utmost confidentiality and obtained informed consent from the respondents.

**Table 1.** Demographics.

Variables	Total Number (24)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	11	45%
Female	13	55%
Age		
18 to 30	18	75%
30 to 50	6	25%
Religion		
Catholic	19	79%
Others	5	21%
Location		
Urban	18	75%
Rural	6	25%

### 2.2. Data Analysis

The researchers determined the significance of *pakikipagkapwa* in interreligious dialogue by implementing the following procedures:

First, the survey questions were formulated. The researchers aim to discover the notions and experiences of select Filipino Christians on *pakikipagkapwa*. In the online survey, respondents were asked: (1) What is *pakikipagkapwa*? (2) How did you demonstrate *pakikipagkapwa* during the COVID-19 pandemic? (3) What were your experiences of *pakikipagkapwa* during the global health crisis? (4) Why do you think it is essential to practice *pakikipagkapwa* in your community?

Second, the researchers evaluated the Filipino Christian value of *pakikipagkapwa*. Relevant literature was collected, and informal interviews were conducted.

The third step of the study involved selecting a theory. Theoretical frameworks on Christian fellowship and interreligious dialogue served as the study's frame of reference.

The fourth step consisted of gleaning the first-order constructs from the responses of the research participants.

The fifth step involved the development of second-order constructs. In this step, the central themes were derived from first-order constructs. Understanding first-order constructs requires examining patterns and connecting them to existing theories. Consequently, the researchers evaluated the first-order constructs and related them to theoretical concepts associated with interreligious dialogue.

The sixth step involved checking for unintended effects and comparing the evidence to relevant literature and other empirical studies. A scientific process enabled the authors to unravel contemporary notions and practices of *pakikipagkapwa* and its meaning structure for select Filipino Christians.

Lastly, the articulations of select Christian Filipinos on *pakikipagkapwa* were examined vis-à-vis the Church document "Dialogue and Proclamation" (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991) to explicate the salience of *pakikipagkapwa* on interreligious dialogue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Filipino Christian Concept of Pakikipagkapwa in Contemporary Times

Table 2 presents the respondents’ notions of *pakikipagkapwa*. For some Filipinos, *pakikipagkapwa* means cultivating a strong connection to one’s family, community, and neighbors. The respondents also indicated that *pakikipagkapwa* is manifested in the act of communion among members of the community. By so doing, individuals demonstrate their commitment to establishing friendships and relationships. Through *pakikipagkapwa*, people can bridge differences and become friends.

**Table 2.** Notions of select Filipino Christians on *pakikipagkapwa*.

Area of Inquiry	First-Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
What is <i>pakikipagkapwa</i> ?	Building a friendship with other people. It is an act of communion between oneself and others. It builds good relationships with other people through good words and actions. Being there when you are needed the most. Reach out your hand to those who are in need. <i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> is like a bridge between us unto others. Being a community.	<i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> is having a deep relationship with family, neighbors, and community.
	It is an act of understanding towards other people regardless of race, age, gender, economic and social status, physical appearance, religion, etc., which is maintained by shared experiences, mindset, and interaction. Being able to show kindness to others not only through words but also through actions. Helping each other in times of need regardless of circumstances. Respect and love for others. Good relationships with others through your highs and lows.	<i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> means living in an open and neighborly spirit.

#### 3.2. Experiences of Pakikipagkapwa during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Table 3 shows the experiences of *pakikipagkapwa* among select Filipinos during the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents used social media and online platforms to strengthen their relationships with others. Interestingly, *pakikipagkapwa* transcended traditional forms and demonstrated even in the digital space. Additionally, the participants experienced kindness and good deeds from their family, friends, and neighbors. They also benefitted from community pantries, group activities, and community services.

**Table 3.** Experiences of select Filipino Christians of *pakikipagkapwa* during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Area of Inquiry	First-Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
How did you experience <i>pakikipagkapwa</i> during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Using online devices such as Facebook, Twitter. Interacting with my family and friends using social media. Reaching out to others through online communication. <i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> is practiced virtually.	<i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> became virtual and made palpable even in the virtual space.
	I experience fellowship when people in my community approach me and when I can comfortably talk to them. Simple and random acts of kindness. Cooperative, especially with group work, because we are involved with each other daily. Multiple community pantries are situated in <i>barangays</i> (communities) across the country. The value of solidarity in the community is that we are very much willing to extend our hand through loving service despite our differences.	<i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> is demonstrated through good deeds performed by other people.

### 3.3. Select Filipino Christians Practicing Pakikipagkapwa during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Table 4 indicates how the select Filipino Christians showed *pakikipagkapwa* during the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents used various means of communication to deepen their relationships with others. When the government implemented a strict lockdown, they used online platforms to provide support and assistance to their loved ones and other people. Participants also performed corporal and spiritual acts of mercy. Some Filipino Christians also practiced *pakikipagkapwa* by participating in fundraising activities, giving donations, advising, and praying for those who needed their assistance.

**Table 4.** *Pakikipagkapwa* of select Filipino Christians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Area of Inquiry	First-Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
How did you demonstrate <i>pakikipagkapwa</i> during the COVID-19 pandemic?	By making people feel like they have a safe space with me using online platforms since going out to see friends is currently difficult. I practiced my " <i>pakikipagkapwa</i> " online since social distancing is strictly implemented. I show fellowship when I participate and talk to my community and provide aid if I can. By checking on the people involved in my life, <i>kamustahan</i> (reconnecting with and updating each other with recent activities), and exchanging stories. Our family often asks our neighbors about how they are coping, their feelings, and if they are well.	<i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> is characterized by being in communion with others and using various methods of communication to cultivate a sense of community.
	Taking part in fundraisers, food kitchens, relief goods packing and distribution, prayers, giving words of encouragement Being kind and practicing empathy. The pandemic struck us all in different varying forms. It would help if we treated each other with kindness and leaned more on being empathetic. Helping in any way I can I showed it by being actively involved in doing activities that would somehow help and give a piece of advice to those who are feeling down, lonely and confused—praying with them as well. Donating, joining with different social activities online, and community pantry.	

### 3.4. Salience of Pakikipagkapwa in the Community

Table 5 shows the articulations of select Filipino Christians on the importance of *pakikipagkapwa* in their communities. The respondents assert that *pakikipagkapwa* contributes to social cohesion. *Pakikipagkapwa* also allows the community members to have harmonious relationships and overcome daily challenges. Moreover, *pakikipagkapwa* serves to strengthen interpersonal relationships. It is *pakikipagkapwa* that brings peace and harmony for people to live in harmony with one another and love one another.

**Table 5.** Articulations of select Filipino Christians on the importance of *pakikipagkapwa* in the community.

Area of Inquiry	First-Order Constructs	Second-Order Constructs
Why is it important to practice <i>pakikipagkapwa</i> in the community?	It is essential to lead us to better relations with our families, schoolmates, or fellow people around us. It leads to concern for our community, country, and environment, both social and natural. It encourages the community to strive. A community's fellowship is its strength through the tough times. It helps in strengthening the bonds of everyone in the same community. It is crucial because, in these times of pandemic, we need to build strong bonds with our neighbors and overcome the challenges. After all, there is power and unity when we are together.	<i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> is essential to building and sustaining a community.
	To have friends and to practice our communication skills. <i>Pakikipagkapwa</i> is important since we humans need to communicate and interact with others. It maintains a sense of peace and harmony among members living/working in the community. It brings togetherness and a sense of belonging. It is essential because it keeps the community going, making the world less cruel and hardships bearable.	

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Contemporary Notions and Experiences of *Pakikipagkapwa* among Select Filipino Christians

According to select Filipino Christians, *pakikipagkapwa* refers to a deep relationship with family, neighbors, and community, and it is also a spirit of neighborliness and openness. Some Filipino Christians attest that *pakikipagkapwa* was practiced and felt even in the virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, some Filipino Christians have demonstrated *pakikipagkapwa* by communing with one another while using various means of communication, primarily since mobility restrictions and social distancing rules were implemented during the global health crisis. The select Filipino Christians also confirm their experiences of *pakikipagkapwa* in charitable acts, good deeds, and corporal works of mercy. In Filipino culture, *pakikipagkapwa* is vital in building and sustaining communities since it fosters dialogue toward a better world.

### 4.2. *Pakikipagkapwa vis-à-vis the Teachings of the Catholic Church*

Pope Francis' (2020) encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* mentions that humanity can be united in fraternity, friendship, and solidarity by establishing genuine and lasting social relationships based on fraternal solidarity. Fraternal solidarity occurs when individuals treat others as their friends rather than strangers. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37, [New Revised Standard Version 1989](#)) epitomizes fraternal solidarity. The good Samaritan transcended the limitations of lingering social stratifications that make people seem indifferent to one another. As such, the Christian community must follow the example of the good Samaritan by acting responsibly towards one's neighbors and overcoming prejudices, individual interests, and cultural and historical barriers. Everyone has a part to play in creating a society that includes, integrates, and listens to the voices of those on the margins ([del Castillo 2022](#)). Through the dynamism of charity, people can move beyond themselves and open up to others. It is love for the other that drives all charitable acts.

*Kapwa* corresponds to the "neighbor" mentioned in Matthew 22:39 ([New Revised Standard Version 1989](#)), whom we must love just as we love ourselves. Indeed, every individual is a *kapwa-tao* (fellowman) to be respected and valued. Therefore, a person looking at the other as *kapwa* demonstrates loving concern regardless of social status. Christian fraternal solidarity, defined as being united in love and charity with one's neighbors, also corresponds to the Filipino concept of *pakikipagkapwa*. Hence, to be existentially available to one's *kapwa* necessitates charity.

The Church teaches that human beings are called to embody God by loving others since God created humankind in His likeness and image (Genesis 1:27, [New Revised Standard Version 1989](#)) ([Benedict XVI 2005a](#)). This theological narrative expresses the core of the Christian faith, which is the Christian image of God and the resulting image of humankind. By postulating that man's nature is love, the Church has continually affirmed the truth that men and women are created in the image and likeness of God, who is love Himself. Therefore, it is natural for humans to express love for others. To love means to serve those who have been marginalized, the poor, the last, and the least in the community. Conversely, all uncharitable acts are unnatural and violate the purpose and reason for the existence of humankind ([Benedict XVI 2005b](#), para. 2).

### 4.3. *Pakikipagkapwa as a Way to Dialogue with the Religious Others*

The Catholic Church is a pilgrim church that strives towards holiness in friendship with "fellow pilgrims" of different religions. Our peaceful coexistence with other religious groups is possible since we are all brothers and sisters ([Benedict XVI 2005a](#)). However, our dialogue with religious others should promote a sense of fraternity, leading to a "dialogue of action" ([Mitchell 2016](#)). In the Philippine context, *pakikipagkapwa* represents the essence of fraternal solidarity, and it is through *pakikipagkapwa* that difficult circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic can be overcome.

The Second Vatican Council document *Nostra Aetate* calls upon the Church to be a visible and tangible vessel of God's unity to all men and invites all to communion in the

spirit of unity, love, and fellowship (Paul IV 1965). God is omnipresent, and God is in everything good, beautiful, and true (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991). Furthermore, God can be found among people of goodwill, especially the poor, outcasts, and marginalized. Moreover, God's presence is also felt in the political, social, and religious spheres where people learn and become a brother or a sister (Paul IV 1965). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Filipino Christians demonstrated *pakikipagkapwa* by caring for the less fortunate, regardless of religious affiliation.

When we recognize God's presence in all creation, other people cease to be mere strangers. Still, they become companions and friends regardless of social or personal differences (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991). Thus, dialogue can lead to communion and personal conversion. The presence of an individual and the quality of one's relationship with another person becomes an instrument of the latter's remarkable ascent towards the good and the recognition of God's loving presence (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991). As such, one's conversion brought by another person's evangelizing relationship and presence becomes salvific both in nature and character. Through God's grace, God actively works in individuals and induces a meaningful change in their lives. Subsequently, the person abandons the old sinful self into a renewed version centered on what is ethically sound. This assumption would only be meaningful and possible if one is conscious of the kind of dialogue one engages with another person. In this regard, the Church prescribes different but interrelated forms of dialogue, namely, (1) the dialogue of life, (2) the dialogue of action, (3) the dialogue of theological exchange, and (4) the dialogue of religious experience (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991).

The dialogue of life refers to people working towards living in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and concerns (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991). Various Filipino Christians participate in the dialogue of life through *pakikipagkapwa*, and they seek to cultivate meaningful relationships with their family, community, and neighbors. Furthermore, they demonstrate an open and neighborly character by being accepting of others regardless of their race, age, religion, or social status. Moreover, some Filipino Christians also shared the sorrows of their fellowmen and demonstrated acts of charity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the dialogue of action, each community member works toward the integral development and liberation of the community (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991). Although the COVID-19 pandemic imposed mobility restrictions and limited social gatherings, some Filipino Christians were able to maintain relationships via the Internet. There are also religious groups that provide relief goods and spiritual support to poor communities. Another experience of *pakikipagkapwa* during the global health crisis is the *Alay Kapwa*. It is an action and evangelization program of the Catholic Church that assists the poor and bridges the gap between prayer and fraternal charity. In *Alay Kapwa*, public donations help communities in need. Another example of dialogue of action during the COVID-19 pandemic was the community pantries established to feed the hungry (del Castillo 2021). The numerous community pantries in the country ensured that the poor could access necessities and medicine. Most importantly, the community pantries are open to all, whether Christians, Muslims, or unaffiliated.

The purpose of the dialogue of theological exchange is to learn more about other traditions and appreciate other religions' spiritual values (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Church modeled the dialogue of theological exchange through the "Day of Prayer for Humanity" attended by Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Jains, Buddhists, atheists, and agnostics (Vatican News 2020). In the Philippines, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) invited people of all religions to join the "Walk for Life" (Gomes 2020). The CBCP's goal is to show fraternal solidarity by upholding the dignity of life, especially during a pandemic. Additionally, *pakikipagkapwa* fosters harmonious relationships among Church members and other religious groups for some Filipino Christians. As such, *pakikipagkapwa* is crucial in enabling peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths.

The dialogue of religious experiences emphasizes the rootedness of individuals in their religious traditions and the sharing of their corporal and spiritual riches in seeking God (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991). During the global health crisis, religious institutions in the Philippines provided spiritual support to people through prayers and online worship services. Filipino Christians have practiced the dialogue of religious experience by performing corporal and spiritual acts of mercy. In addition, they consoled the downtrodden and prayed for their brethren within the Church and other religions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the *pakikipagkapwa* played a crucial role in uplifting the plight of the poor and contributed to interreligious dialogue. *Pakikipagkapwa* moved Filipinos to practice fraternal solidarity, enabling social cohesion and promoting peaceful coexistence.

The actions of a select number of Filipino Christians during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate *pakikipagkapwa* as a positive way to relate to people professing other faiths. This kind of fellowship is based on fraternal solidarity and loving care for those in need. Through *pakikipagkapwa*, Filipino Christians and other religious people can see one another as friends and share in each other's suffering. As such, *pakikipagkapwa* is crucial in times of crisis.

#### 4.4. Limitations of the Study

This study highlights the perspectives and experiences of *pakikipagkapwa* of a limited number of participants and some examples of the dialogue of life, action, religious experiences, and theological exchange that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. Thus, the authors acknowledge that this article cannot provide an exhaustive examination of *pakikipagkapwa* or a comprehensive list of dialogue(s) occurring today.

Nevertheless, this article demonstrates that human experience can serve as the basis for theological reflection that listens to the voices of the people (del Castillo 2022). As such, it is a conscious attempt to theologize "from below", which "takes into account the context of one's life—both as individuals and as members of a community, and its linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, and religious elements" (Tran 2018, p. 210). This study contributes to the body of knowledge on how modern Filipino Christians live out their faith in a multireligious society during a difficult time.

Furthermore, the author acknowledges that Roman Catholic viewpoints are biased. In a country that is the largest concentration of Roman Catholics in Asia, there is a strong emphasis on church teachings. As an active force in shaping Filipino communities, the Roman Catholic Church continues to be an important religious institution in the Philippines.

Nevertheless, this study proved that *pakikipagkapwa* is a value universal to all religions. This value has been expressed by vast majority of people as they interact with others (Jahanbegloo 1991). Thus, this study is relevant to both Catholics and believers from other religions.

#### 5. Conclusions and Outlook

The Filipino theologian José M. De Mesa asserts that "culture binds society together and gives it a sense of identity, security, and continuity" (De Mesa 1987 as cited in De Mesa and Cacho 2011, p. 21). During the COVID-19 pandemic, select Filipino Christians engaged in *pakikipagkapwa*, revealing their "relational identity." Such identity is rooted in Filipino culture, wherein "a person is relational; [thus the Filipino] is always related to other persons, to the community or society, to the world and the Divine" (Aguas 2016). In addition, the cultural value of *pakikipagkapwa*, demonstrated by the interlocutors, provided some sense of security and continuity of life in the community despite a virulent disease. In these regards, *pakikipagkapwa*, conceptualized by select Filipino Christians as having a profound connection with family, neighbors, and community and living with an open and neighborly spirit, endures as an essential Filipino value in the present day.

In a predominantly Christian but religiously pluralistic society such as the Philippines, *pakikipagkapwa* is integral to interreligious dialogue. For the select group of Filipino Chris-

tians, dialogue with religious others or *kapwa* includes, but is not limited to, caring for the poor and suffering, performing acts of charity or corporal works of mercy in the physical or virtual realm, and promoting peace. In the years to come, the COVID-19 pandemic will likely have deleterious effects on public health, the economy, and society in the country, making it vital to promote and practice *pakikipagkapwa*.

Researchers can benefit from the insights presented in this paper and contribute to the discussion by investigating other Filipino values consistent with the Gospel message and inquiring about the salience of such values during difficult situations. In addition, researchers can also study how Filipino Christians are using technology to fulfill the “love commandments” of Jesus Christ. Lastly, researchers can utilize the framework outlined in this article in exploring the intimate relationship between culture, religion, and social cohesion.

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