Former Chief Justice Reynato S. Puno is currently the Eminent Resident Scholar of the University of the Philippines College of Law. He finished his Bachelor of Science in Jurisprudence and Bachelor of Laws degrees at U.P. in 1962; Master of Comparative Laws at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas as full scholar in 1967; and Master of Laws at University of California, Berkeley, also as full scholar, in 1968. He has been conferred ten honorary doctorate degrees in Law, Humanities, Philosophy and Public Administration by foreign and local universities, including the University of the Philippines.

He has garnered the most prestigious legal awards in the Philippines and abroad, including the Order of Lapu-Lapu, the highest award given by the Office of the President of the Philippines; U.P.'s Most Outstanding Alumnus; Philippine Constitution Association’s ‘Ces Drilon’ Award; University of the Philippines College of Law’s Alumna del Año Award; Magdusa Outstanding Jurist; Brennos S. Aquino, Jr. Award for Nationalism; and Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Philippines. He is the only Filipino to receive the Distinguished Global Alumni Award given by the Dedman School of Law, Southern Methodist University and the Elise and Walter A. Haas International Award given by the University of California, Berkeley.

As the 22nd Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, he left as legacies to the Filipino people the writ of amparo to protect them against extra-judicial killings, the writ of habeas data to protect their right to privacy and the writ of kalikasan to protect their right to a healthy environment.

Equal Dignity & Respect

Twenty-five years after the Filipino people overwhelmingly ratified the 1987 Constitution, the Philippines society bridged crushing inequalities between the nourished and famished, the schooled and unlettered, the rich and the poor! Social justice was enshrined as the “heart of the new Constitution” to reduce inequalities and raise the quality of life for all, especially the underprivileged majority. But grim statistics bear witness to the multitudes who continue to languish at the bottom of society.

What does it mean to have a right to equal protection of the laws in a perennially unequal society under an egalitarian Constitution? Are egalitarian ends truly served by non-discrimination and equal opportunity in a country where the destitute – burdened with political, social, and economic handicaps – start out in life far behind the privileged in society? Or is the Constitution crying out for more, for an “asymmetrical” kind of equality that genuinely levels the playing field by empowering the marginalized to compete in life’s race on an equal footing with the privileged or wealthy?

Equal Dignity and Respect grapples with the timeless and timely conundrum of equality. It journeys back to the roots of the Philippine constitutional right to equal protection of the laws or Equal Protection Clause transplanted by the Americans to Philippine soil a century ago. The book meanders through the thicket of U.S. jurisprudence and debate on the meaning of the American equal protection right as essentially a protection against unreasonable classifications, an interpretation that Philippine courts have adopted. It then traces the development of the equality right in discourses of the framers of the Philippine Constitutions and annals of the Philippine Supreme Court, and makes a penultimate sojourn in Canada’s progressive law and jurisprudence on the right to equality as a right to equal dignity, concern and respect. The book’s ultimate destination is a Philippine-style adjudicative approach for a progressive Expanded Equal Protection Clause, cobbled and proposed to uphold human dignity and build a genuinely egalitarian Philippine democracy.