

FABC and the Challenge of New Evangelization in Asia
On the Occasion of Fortieth Anniversary of FABC
by Cardinal John Tong, Bishop of Hong Kong
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On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), I would like to convey my sincerest congratulations to the FABC for all the achievements and contributions it has made over the past decades to the Church in Asia. I also take this opportunity to share with you, my brother-bishops and all in the Church in Asia, my humble reflection on the *New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. This is the theme of the Synod of Bishops, which also takes place in October in the Vatican. For me, the New Evangelization is a renewal of faith that deepens our relationship with Jesus Christ and inspires us to live out and to proclaim the Gospel message to non-believers. This is an important and urgent issue for the Church in Asia, where many people on this continent have not yet known Jesus Christ and, sadly, many of our believers have given up the practice of their faith.

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which encourages us to launch into the deep (Lk 5:4). We may take the Early Church community (Acts 2:42-47) as a model of evangelization today. Christians in the Early Church possessed three qualities which can be expressed in Greek as: *didache*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*. As you may know very well, *didache*, meaning doctrine, is not just a theory, but rather a personal taking on of the incarnate, crucified and risen Jesus Christ. *Koinonia* means communion on different levels: fundamentally with God, and then with all Church members, and further with the people of the world, particularly poor. *Diakonia* means service, of which Jesus instructs us not to be served, but to serve, even to the total gift of self, leading to the Cross (cf Mt 20:28). As we are called to renew our faith, let us ask ourselves if these three qualities exist in our Church communities.

Regarding *didache*, our mission to evangelize requires us to share with others both our deep desire for salvation and our faith, by communicating Christ's love and hope. From my experience in Hong Kong, we have been blessed with around 3,500 newly baptized adults at the Easter Vigil in 2012, and more or less every year. This is due to a joint effort by clergy and sisters as well as lay catechists. More than 1,000 volunteer-catechists are conscientiously taking up the task of evangelization. This is a mission shared by all members of the People of God. In Asia, more than two-thirds of the people are non-Christian. So, it is a wide open field for evangelization.

On *koinonia*, the FABC has united the Church in Asia. It is important for Church communities to have close links so that they can face challenges and support one another. There are common challenges being faced, such as poverty, environmental issues and ministry to youth. Among other things, the youth should always be a priority concern. Young people are evangelizers and the future of the Church. Their formation demands a commitment from the Church. Youth participation in the World Youth Days is vital, because young people can show support and

maintain solidarity with the Universal Church. Such participation has revitalized their faith and given them courage to respond to God's call for priestly or religious vocations. However, financial constraints may hinder young people from Asia in joining these assemblies. Youth programs in Asia that run concurrently with the World Youth Days may encourage more young people from other parts of the world to share their joy and enthusiasm for their faith, thanks to the development and availability of modern communication technology and the media.

As far as *diakonia* is concerned, benevolence and compassion is much needed in our society where family life, as well as human and international relations have broken down. The love of Jesus for the poor and the sick is manifested in his rapport and empathy with the needy. Personally, I have witnessed the heartfelt and selfless testimony of foreign missionaries to our Chinese people during the war years in 1940s. I was born in Hong Kong in 1939, a time of war between China and Japan. My family fled the devastation of the battlefield and settled down in Guangzhou, southern China. Crowded with refugees and injured soldiers from northern China and elsewhere, the church in Guangzhou was accommodating many people and providing them with food and shelter. I experienced the presence of God in the compassion of the missionaries and the seeds of my priestly vocation were sown there. Similarly, parishes in my diocese of Hong Kong started with offering material aid and spiritual support to the Chinese refugees who fled communist-rule in mainland China in the 1950s and 1960s. The testimonies of the Word in action are most effective in transmitting our Christian faith to people outside the Church.

All in all, each Catholic is invited to rekindle the flame of spreading the Good News to all. With Christ in our hearts, our zeal for faith prompts us to bring the Gospel message to our people on the Asian continent, where Christians are a little flock in this multi-cultural and multi-religious region. Traditionally, the FABC has encouraged us to dialogue with other religions and cultures. Here, we remember the late Cardinal Paul Shan of Kaohsiung, Taiwan. His dialogue with the Buddhists and other religious leaders earned him deep friendship with them. Cardinal Shan also demonstrated his steadfastness in faith and strong will to live life to its fullness amid his struggles against his physical pain and suffering. His sharing of life experiences with the youth, children and the public during his last years had a positive impact on many people's awareness of the beauty of life and the love of Jesus Christ.

Finally, I hope the FABC will continue to support the Church in China as it heads into what appears to be a highly pressurized situation, after the episcopal ordination of Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin as the auxiliary bishop of Shanghai on July 7, 2012. The Church in China needs our prayers.