

The Youth of Asia A Story to Tell, A Power to Harness

1st ASIAN MISSION CONGRESS

Joy Cadelario

Ki-jo, a young professional from Korea, is a certified computer geek. He spends most of waking hours in the internet. He has accumulated many virtual friends but have grown distant from his family and peers...He is a Catholic

Joti, a Nepalese lass, is challenged in living the Christian faith in a predominantly Buddhist culture... She is a Catholic

Din, a Singaporean teenager, is an instant life of the party; her sense of fashion speaks well of her outgoing nature..She is a Catholic

Francis, a college student from Indonesia, is involved in peace work in Ambon and other conflict stricken areas of the country...He is a Catholic

Thi, a Vietnamese migrant in the Philippines, desires to retrace his roots and appreciate his culture in a foreign land...He is a Catholic...

Young people of Asia, comprising about 60% of the entire region's population, struggle with basic questions.

First, it is a question of IDENTITY. They ask the question, WHO AM I? In the multi-cultural, multi-religious environment they are in, under the structures of family and community, with all the many influences of the modern world, they desire to discover their authentic self. What does it mean to be a Catholic in these modern times?

Second, it is a question of RELATIONSHIP. They ask, TO WHOM DO I BELONG? Do I feel accepted and loved in my family? Is this the church community that can nourish me? Am I accepted by my non-Christian neighbors?

Third, it is a question of PURPOSE. They ask, WHAT AM I HERE FOR? Teenage life is exciting but when these years are over then what? After getting married and then what? What is the deeper reason for my existence? What is my mission? Was I created for a definite purpose?

Fourth, it is a question of DESTINY. 'WHERE AM I GOING?' What future lies for me? If my family cannot afford to send me to school now, how will my future be? What does faith have to do with my life direction? Is God really leading me somewhere? Or deeper yet, 'what can I look forward to?

If we are willing to listen to their questions, we will appreciate their stories. Their stories tell us of faith journeys that inspire, disturb, and challenge.

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has always expressed its concern for the young. In the first document of the assembly in 1970, the bishops were one in expressing that Asia is indeed a "Church of the young". They stated their wish

"To be, in them and for them, a Church that they shall see as worthy of their devotion and hope; which seeks to understand and trust them; which is responsive to the needs and demands of men in contemporary society; a Church not "established" in the world and which lives out in deeds, day by day, the convictions of her faith and the imperatives of her compassion. We know this is the Church they seek, and with the courage with which Christ shall support our weakness, we shall endeavor to rise to this demand" (Asian Bishops' Meeting, 1970 I, 4 & 6).

This vision has been articulated through the years by the different FABC offices, as they respond to the different realities of Asia. Clearly, whether it is interfaith and ecumenical dialogue, human development issues or social communication, young people are both prime victims and prime movers. More concretely, the FABC established the Youth Desk under the Office of the Laity which has held assemblies for the Asian youth (Asian Youth Day and Asian Youth Gathering) and Asian youth animators (Asian Youth Ministers' Meeting).

This August, the 4th Asian Youth Day will be held in Hong Kong where close to a thousand young people from 25 Asian countries are expected to participate. Here, they celebrate the gift of being young Asians, reflect on the realities that the region is facing and respond concretely in the light of faith and distinct Asian values. This year's theme is YOUTH: Hope for Asian Families following the thrust of the 8th FABC General Assembly. The 5-day event highlights the Asian Family as seen in the context of the young. Through exposure to HK families, sharing of realities and issues, youthful catecheses, awareness-raising and empowerment workshops, praying and celebrating the Sacraments, the assembly aims to enable the young to become hopegivers to their families and to their countries.

We know however that the challenge remains in that, the young's presence in the Church of Asia should be seen not only among themselves but with and in the world of their elders. A church is a community for all; a family where both the young and the old share life and respond to issues together; a bond where God's love and challenging presence is felt through and with everyone.

In the 1st Asian Mission Congress, the voice of the young will be heard not only among fellow young people but as part of the bigger family of the church. Together with their elder counterparts from the different ministries of the church, they tell their personal story of Jesus against the backdrop of a continuously changing society.

The young of Asia long for a new face of Church, where their basic questions can be answered and where an encounter of the living Jesus is made possible. As we tell of the story of Jesus in their lives to one another, may the congress bring forth a renewed vision among the young and their experience of communion with their elders so that together we may bring about God's plan of fullness for all.