

Consecrated Life Towards a Collaborative Role In the Mission of the Church

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Office on Consecrated Life
Symposium III
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"It is good that we are here." We, the 80 delegates of Religious Women and Men, members of Secular Institutes, Priests, Brothers and Bishops, representing 16 countries of Asia, reflected and shared our experiences of being Church in the heart of Asia. We recognize the truth that as co-workers in the Kingdom of God, we are confronting realities of abject poverty, discrimination, exclusion and devastation of our God-given resources by the few and the powerful, and loss of respect for the value of life in the post-modern era. Marginalization in the spheres of politics, economy and religion is widespread, making our task and mission difficult, yet more challenging.

Various cultures and the dialogue of life and faith have brought us here. We recognize our powerlessness as Church people and as consecrated persons. We recognize our dependency on the life and example of Jesus, the one we serve and love, who lived in poverty and who served unconditionally. It is good that we are here – to listen to each other's stories of hope despite difficulties and differences. Indeed we are one body with many gifts that we can offer to the Church and to the peoples of Asia.

Our stories showed that we are thinking as one Church. We recognize that our calling is based on the life and the mission of Jesus whose authority we share and exercise as consecrated religious, men and women from secular institutes, priests and bishops. We feel with the Church, we love the Church, and we submit to her authority, even as we recognize the unlovable human imperfections and sins of the institution. We are on the side of the Church, never to undermine her or betray her. We re-echo the words from *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, "We may admonish her and suggest a better way but always within the bonds of love."

Our sharing of thoughts leads us to work hard for communion to be realized fully in our respective missions despite the many given stories of differences. We are in an ongoing dialogue with the cultures, religions and the poor of Asia. We hold in common that this can be more fruitfully carried out by the bishops' regard for the particular charisms of religious institutes as well as the institutes' respect for the ministry of bishops in providing pastoral directives for the life of the diocese. The charisms of the religious congregations and secular institutes vis-à-vis the ministry of the bishops are two intimately linked expressions of the one ecclesial charity by which all work to build up the organic communion – charismatic and at the same time hierarchically structured – of the entire people of God.

Recommendations

To enhance the collaborative role of religious communities in the mission of the Church in Asia, particularly at the level of the particular churches, we delegates make the following recommendations:

1. Forging Relationships of Trust and a Spirituality of Communion

There is need to foster relationships that create an atmosphere conducive to communion, relationships characterized by mutuality, respect for the dignity of the person, openness and acceptance of differences, readiness to forgive, cordiality, and mutual respect. This is particularly important in Asia where people are person- and community-oriented.

1. Invite the bishop to diocesan and congregational assemblies.
2. Encourage regular visitations of the bishop to the religious communities.
3. Organize regular fora for both religious and diocesan clergy.
4. Adopt and nurture an inclusive approach, upholding a common goal. This would result in a communion of charisms and gifts.
5. There should be fraternal communication between the bishop and congregations in regard to the needs of the diocese and the charisms of congregations.
6. There is need for a deep spirituality to ground our efforts at collaboration on a solid foundation in the light of a growing secularism that is eroding Asian spiritual values.
7. Fidelity to the ongoing practice of dialogue as a preferred way to promote communion is a must. This presupposes the development of the spiritual and human dispositions and values that facilitate dialogue.
8. Create and consolidate structures of communion and for communion – e.g., assemblies, consultative bodies, life-sharing groups, etc.

2. Creation of Diocesan Structures fostering Collaboration

There is need for creating structures and arriving at written agreements to ensure long-term and sustainable relationships of collaboration. These structures and guidelines can prevent misunderstandings and conflicts that tend to undermine the evangelical mission of the local church.

1. Articulate a clear Vision-Mission Statement of the diocese as a guide and direction for the bishop, clergy, religious and lay faithful – the entire people of God in the local Church.
2. Agree on a Pastoral Plan, regularly updated, to guide the bishop, clergy, religious and lay faithful.
3. Include religious priests, brothers and sisters in the commissions and consultative bodies of the diocese.

4. Put down agreements and contracts into writing (e.g., regarding land, years of stay, involvement in the ministries, etc.) for the security of tenure of the religious on the one hand and the promise of obedience and active participation in the ministries of the diocese on the other hand.

3. Creation of Common Formation Programs among Religious Congregations

Common formation programs can help forge closer unity among religious congregations as well as with the diocesan clergy. Instead of competing, novices, junior sisters and seminarians can learn at an early stage to work together and share resources.

1. Design inter-congregational formation programs among the novices of different institutes to share some of the common themes concerning the Church and her ministries.
2. Encourage an ongoing formation program for the bishop, superiors, clergy and consecrated persons.
3. Set up common dates and programs for vocations promotion among religious orders and the diocese so that the congregations that are faced with a decline of vocations may be helped by fellow Vocation Directors/Directresses.
4. Initiate joint formation programs both at initial and ongoing levels to raise the consciousness of religious, seminarians and priests on various issues affecting their relationships in pursuing the mission of the Church.
5. Establish accountability and transparency as core values with regard to the evangelical use of goods.

Consecrated life is at the service of the Kingdom of God. It finds its embodiment in the ministries of the local church. It is good that we are here, and that we are sent – to be part of the mission of the Church in Asia.

“In the consecrated life the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world finds fresh enthusiasm and power....There is need for people able to show the fatherly face of God and the motherly face of the Church, people who spend their lives so that others can have life and hope.” (*Vita Consecrata*, 105)

It is with this life and hope that we place ourselves under the guidance and patronage of our Blessed Mother Mary, the Morning star that watches over this vast continent of Asia.

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