

Report

The 2017 Asian Consultation of the Bishops' Commissions for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue



The 2017 *Asian Consultation of the Bishops' Commissions for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*, organized by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) was held in the Camillian Pastoral Care Center in Bangkok, Thailand from 16-20 October 2017. There were 37 people who represented 14 of the 19 FABC member conferences and one FABC associate member, from the Vatican there were two, a representative of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and a representative of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), and the two members of the FABC Bangkok Support Staff. These included 3 Archbishops, 7 bishops, 20 priests, 1 religious sister and 4 lay faithful, 3 women and one man.

Archbishop Felix Machado, Chairman of the OEIA, greeted all present and commented that he was very happy that Fr. Avelino Gonzalez from PCPCU and Msgr. Indunil

Kodithuwakku from PCID were present to indicate communion with the universal Church. There were greetings and a message from both Cardinal Kurt Koch of the PCPCU and from Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran of PCID.

All present introduced themselves where each was asked to speak for a minute or two about themselves and their work. This process left us with the impact of the depth of experience and the need to really listen to all present in the room.

There were 14 presentations on the topic of ecumenism. These included the situation of each conference, their activities, challenges, what is done for education about ecumenism, their plans, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and suggestions for the OEIA. Each presentation was followed by a discussion. Then Fr. Avelino Gonzalez gave a reflective presentation on ecumenism from the PCPCU. This was followed by a discussion. There was a presentation of the Asian Conference of Theological Students (ACTS) that the OEIA has been involved in with the CCA. The OEIA encourages all of the conferences to have something like this on the local level where the local language can be used and theological students will meet those with whom their will cooperate ecumenically in the future. There are conferences that already do this, but we can do more through this to promote ecumenism now and into the future.

This was followed by 13 presentations on the topic of interreligious dialogue. These included the situation of each conference, their activities, challenges, what is done for education about interreligious dialogue, their plans, the UN Interfaith Harmony Week Feb. 1-7, and suggestions for the OEIA. Again, each presentation was followed by a discussion. Then Msgr. Indunil gave a presentation that reminded us of the role of Pope Francis in interreligious dialogue and presented how the PCID is working for the same goals. This was followed by a discussion where one point was the *Nostra Aetate* scholarship that is offered by the PCID.

The consultation then broke into 6 groups to discuss a proposal to hold a visible gathering of religious leaders in Asia next year to demonstrate and highlight peace and harmony among religions. Also discussed was a proposal to hold meetings of the commissions on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue on a more regular basis. Finally, they were asked to offer suggestions to the OEIA on how it can better serve the bishops' conferences and their commissions.

The body agreed that we should plan for a major gathering in 2018 of Asian religious leaders. The body also proposed that a meeting like this be held every two years. The OEIA was encouraged to continue its work and send out a report to all about this meeting. The OEIA will produce an FABC Paper about this meeting so that it can be available to all of Asia and to the world.

The meeting was given a positive evaluation. It was a positive learning experience for many. The sharing, interaction and depth of the presentations were acknowledged.