Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Warmest greetings and abundant blessings from the FABC Office of Laity and Family and the three desks: Women, Youth and AsIPA(BEC). Greetings from Archbishop Patrick d’Rosario, Bishop Joel Baylon, Bishop Mathew Arackal, Dr Bibiana Ro, Fr Patrick Gomes and myself.

What a blessed and beautiful time we have entered – Christmas joy at the coming of our Lord, his becoming a man, and living an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. Our dear Pope Francis has blessed and provided us all by his words and example of mercy and he impels us to witness anew the mercy of Christ as we gaze upon his face, contemplate the scriptures and carry out corporal and spiritual acts of mercy.

The theme of the year of mercy "Merciful like the Father" inspires our Advent longing and our Christmas joy. This call of the Holy Father for a year of mercy to awaken our dulled consciences gives us a new impetus for our pastoral outreach and strategies. Everything starts from love and extends itself in mercy.

The Synod on the Family completed on October 28 2015 was lived and experienced under the Merciful Gaze of the Father towards all those families who are struggling, broken or poor and in need of a compassionate, healing Church. As we wait for the post-synodal exhortation we are organising a Seminar (the FABC Offices of Clergy and Laity & Family), on 'Shepherding the Family' in May 2016 which is for bishops and their teams. The emphasis is on the pastoral care of the family. Look out for the details coming soon.

Also coming up very soon, in line with the Holy Father’s call to care for our common home (Laudato Si) is a South East Asian Regional Seminar on 'Women and the Ecology' in Cambodia from March 7 to 11 2016.

In October of this year we concluded a very successful 7th AsIPA General Assembly, which focused on inter-religious dialogue. You will find the final statement in this issue.

Finally, we will have a new secretary for the Youth Desk from January 2016. Fr Simon Patrick Gomes is not renewing his term as he has too much responsibility in his archdiocese and holds multiple roles. We wish him the very best in his endeavours and welcome the new secretary. Much more about this in our next issue.

Christmas joy and blessings to all.

The Editor
Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) Fifth Plenary Assembly in Bandung, Indonesia. The Second Vatican Council redefined the Church as People of God and put communion at the heart of what it means to be Church. The foundation of communion is to be understood in the context of the Holy Trinity. Communion, however, is intrinsically linked to mission because mission shapes the way we are to be church (Ecclesia in Asia [EA] 24). The People of God, where every baptized person participates in the priestly, prophetic and kingly role of Christ (Lumen Gentium [LG], Chapter 1) naturally forms local faith communities.

4. The efforts of the FABC to understand communion from an Asian context has been greatly beneficial. Its constant thrust in forming SCCs/BECs has resulted in many local churches in Asia taking steps to promote them. At the FABC V Plenary Assembly, it was clearly mentioned that the Church in Asia will have to be a communion of communities; where laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as brothers and sisters in a common mission (FABC V 5, 8). Final Statement, VII AsIPA General Assembly 2015

5. SCCs/BECs have been viewed as the renewing instrument and direct fruit of this Church as People of God in communion and mission of the Second Vatican Council. In its reception in Asia, FABC has supported the growth of SCCs/BECs as a New Way of Being Church. The reports from different countries during the VII AsIPA General Assembly saw the SCCs/BECs enliven the Second Vatican Council vision of Church as follows:

5.1. People have experienced a deepening of the faith through the SCCs/BECs.

5.2. SCCs/BECs have become a ‘launching pad’ to nurture the laity; those who have been trained have become more confident facilitators of SCCs/BECs with a clear vision of the Church; have grown in awareness of their dignity and call as baptized and have become co-responsible for the ordained in the mission of the Church.

5.3. Thirst for Jesus and His Word has deepened with the different Bible sharing methods used in SCCs/BECs; by living the Word of God, they edify each other, even to the non-believers, not only by words but by action as well.

5.4. SCCs/BECs have broken down barriers between priests and people, as priests and even bishops now sit together with them for SCC/BEC meetings.

5.5. SCCs/BECs are growing and more dioceses are promoting it.

5.6. The AsIPA General Assemblies become a source of revival for the SCCs/BECs. The AsIPA tools enable them to develop a deeper relationship with God through the Word and the Eucharist. The AsIPA methods and texts are very helpful and fruitful for the New Evangelization – of families, communities, and

6. However, there are still many areas for improvement as follows:

6.1. Many of the laity are traditional and not open to the new challenges for the renewal of the Church; on the other hand, those who are involved in Church activities lack appropriate formation.

6.2. Many parishes are still clergy-centered and do not involve the SCCs/BECs in the parish activities.

Continued on page 3
6.3. SCCs/BECs are not made a pastoral priority in the dioceses; transfers of priests without supportive replacement can affect the functioning of SCCs/BECs; there are also not sufficiently-motivated priests, religious and lay animators to promote and nurture SCCs/BECs.

6.4. It is not easy to get the youth involved in SCCs/BECs.

6.5. Mass Media, extra tuition, seasonal farming, employment, etc. hinder some from participation in SCC/BEC activities.

6.6. In some countries, church leaders are unable to attend SCC/BEC meetings because of political and religious restrictions.

7. However, even more than the talks, reports and discussions, we the participants in this assembly also experienced being a communion-in-mission as we deepened our relationship with Jesus and with one another through sharing the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist every day. The AsIPA texts on Spiritual Formation, Training of Leaders and Interreligious Dialogue motivated us to go forward. The Word of God also challenged us especially in living with people of different faiths. In this assembly, we took on this challenge seriously.

**SCCS/BECs IN THE MULTI-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF ASIA**

8. Asia, the birthplace of many of the world’s ancient civilizations and religions, is a continent blessed with vibrant communities with their colorful mixture of cultures, religions and philosophies, many of which are more ancient than Christianity. St. John Paul II also identified and appreciated this multi-religious nature of Asia when he said “Asia is also the cradle of the world’s major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions, with varying degrees of structured ritual and formal religious teaching” (EA 6).

9. In Asia only 4.5% of the total population is Christian and only less than 3% of Asia’s population is Catholic. In the face of our multi-religious and minority context in Asia the FABC, positively appreciating this pluralism and diversity as enriching, calls upon the SCCs/BECs to prepare themselves to engage in a dialogue with the people of different faiths.

**SCCS/BECs LIVING WITH NEIGHBOURS OF DIFFERENT FAITHS**

10. Although ignorance and intolerance of other religions continue to plague society and have produced tensions, conflicts and violence, in this assembly we have exchanged a lot of positive stories on interreligious dialogue through SCCs/BECs that have inspired us. From these stories, we learned that:

10.1 To have genuine interreligious dialogue, we must honestly recognize our differences as well as our common beliefs. Genuine interreligious dialogue begins first by entering deeply into our own faith. It also means stepping into the shoes of the people of the different religions and trying to see the world as they see it. To enter into a dialogue demands that we are poor in spirit, in order to be rich in love. Love is the method of dialogue.

10.2 SCCs/BECs engage in the “dialogue of life” with our brothers and sisters of other religious traditions, greeting them on their feast days and being with them in life’s happy and vulnerable moments such as weddings, sickness, natural calamities and death. Relationships and friendships built in these dialogues enable us to support, encourage and reach out to each other.

10.3 SCCs/BECs also engage in the “dialogue of action” acting as good Samaritans to peoples of other faiths, and working with them on issues of justice, peace and solidarity for the common good.

10.4 SCCs/BECs exercise the “dialogue of religious experience” by entering into the different spiritual traditions through celebrations and sharing. It is done through a life of listening, learning and a constant reflection on what God may be saying through these other religious traditions. In and through interreligious dialogue we mutually exchange our divine experience.

**INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

11. God “wants everyone to be saved and reach the full knowledge of the truth” (1Tim 2:4). In this line, the Church also says that it rejects nothing that is true and holy in the other religions (cf. Nostra Aetate 2).

12. In our engagement with peoples of other faiths, we are faced with the following challenges:

12.1 To give our people a sufficient understanding of their Christian identity and Church teachings to avoid confusion in interreligious dialogue.

12.2 A lack of knowledge about the other religions, fear of the unknown, suspicion, lack of self-critical assessment, superiority and inferiority complexes, disparity between those taking part in dialogue, confusion between faith and reason; culture and religion, may also hinder interreligious dialogue.

12.3 A lack of qualities needed for dialogue like attentiveness, kindness, respect, patience, forgiveness, acceptance of the other person as belonging to the same human family also affects interreligious dialogue.

12.4 A lack of enthusiasm to witness and proclaim Christ and substituting proclamation with dialogue can pose a challenge to the mission of the Church (EN 41, RM 42).

12.5 Instrumentalization of dialogue for personal, political or economic gain blocks authentic interreligious dialogue.

12.6 A lack of proper understanding of God’s Kingdom also affects interreligious dialogue. SCCs/BECs are challenged to witness and to live in solidarity with all people of the human family.
12.7 Besides strengthening the already existing SCCs/BECs, there is a need to form and encourage Basic Human Communities (BHCs) that can be a powerful means for communal peace and harmony and help us to move from religiosity to spirituality in action (FABC Papers No. 48, 1987).

12.8 Theological issues raised by interreligious dialogue such as concept of God (are we praying to the same God), concept of the People of God (are they also people of God [LG 2,16], Jesus as the only Savior [EA10], relativism, inculturation [Christianity as a foreign religion], etc. may generate negativity towards people of other faiths. Interreligious dialogue is an attitude that makes us capable of meeting God in the mysterious ways God is present in other religions. It also reminds us and our SCCs/BECs to find creative paths for articulating and living our faith in a multi-religious context (EA 18).

CONCLUSION

13. We therefore recommend:

13.1 To the SCCs/BECs:
   a. That special effort is made to involve youth and the whole family in SCCs/BECs;
   b. That SCCs/BECs seriously enter into interreligious dialogue;
   c. That we join efforts with people of other faiths to promote human rights and address especially issues of the environment, poverty, injustice and violence.

13.2 To bishops and priests:
   a. To ensure strong supportive structures for SCCs/BECs at the national and diocesan levels;
   b. As spiritual leaders to be at the forefront of interreligious dialogue promoting unity inside and outside the Church.

13.3 To the FABC - AsIPA Desk:
   a. To develop a pastoral plan, more resource materials and to organize training programs that can help promote interreligious dialogue at the SCC/BEC, parish and diocesan levels.

14. Our experience in this general assembly has strengthened us and challenged our SCCs/BECs even more to be “solid starting points for a new society based on a civilization of love” (RM 51, EA 25) especially as Pope Francis challenges us to be a church of mercy and compassion (Misericordia Vultus 15).

15. We want to thank our SCC/BEC pastoral teams and especially our SCC/BEC communities who untringly live the Christian faith and its mission. We also acknowledge with deep gratitude the generous support given to us by Missio-Aachen, Missio-Munich, Aid to the Church in Need, Propaganda Fidei, many benefactors, the local organizing team in Thailand and the AsIPA Resource Team as well as the FABC-OLF, AsIPA Desk, for overall coordination work.

16. Ending this Assembly on October 28, the very same day that the Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions was issued fifty years ago, challenges our SCCs/BECs even more to promote interreligious living. May our dear mother Mary intercede for us to live creatively and faithfully with peoples of different faiths!

The 3rd National CBCP-BEC Assembly

Report by Fr. Amado Picardal, CSsR (Executive secretary of the CBCP-BEC Committee)

On November 11 – 14, 2015, the 3rd CBCP-BEC Assembly was held in Manila. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines had declared this event as the official celebration of the 50th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II as well as one of the culminating activities of the year of the poor. The theme of the assembly: “BECs in the Philippines: In thanksgiving for 50 Years of Vatican II’s Spirit of Renewal and Responding as Community of Missionary Disciples to the call of Pope Francis to be a poor Church for the Poor.”

The assembly was hosted by the archdiocese of Manila and its suffragan dioceses in the National Capital Region (Kabookan, Novaliches, Pasig, Cubao, Paranaque, Malolos, Antipolo and Imus). Over 1,100 delegates coming from 74 dioceses attended this national event. There were also observers coming from religious congregations and institutions including the FABC OLF AsIPA (BEC) Desk. The official delegates were accommodated in

3rd CBPC BEC Assembly at prayer

Continued on page 5
AsIPA Desk

foster parishes and BECs in the dioceses in Metro-Manila. The opening Mass was held in the San Fernando de Dilao Parish Church, Paco, Manila on November 13 at 3 pm. This was presided by Archbishop Socrates Villegas, the president of the CBCP. After the Mass, Bishop George Rimando – the Chairman of the CBCP-BEC Committee welcomed the delegates and observers. The orientation was given by Fr. Amado Picardal, CSsR, executive secretary of the CBCP-BEC Committee. The delegates were then transported to their respective foster parishes for the welcome dinner and program. They were then brought to their host families/BECs.

The plenary assemblies on November 12-13 were held in the Paco Catholic School Auditorium. On November 12 at 8:30 am, Cardinal Quevedo gave the opening talk: “Basic Ecclesial Communities: In Gratitude for 50 years of Vatican II’s Spirit of Renewal.” For the next two days, representatives from the regions of Mindanao, Visayas and Luzon shared the stories of their respective BECs in creative ways. Following the reports, Mgr. Manny Gabriel presented the synthesis and Fr. Amado Picardal presented the “Trends, Concerns and Challenges” of the BECs in the Philippines. Cardinal Luis Tagle gave the final talk “The BECs in the Philippines: Responding as a Community of Missionary Disciples to the call of Pope Francis to be a poor Church for the poor.”

The culminating activity on November 14 was held at the Cuneta Astrodome from 12:00 – 5 pm which was attended by delegates and observers as well as over 10,000 members of BECs from the National Capital Region. Motorcades from various dioceses and parishes in Metro-Manila converged on DFA building along Roxas Blvd. From there the participants went in procession to the Cuneta Astrodome. The apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Giuseppe Pinto graced the occasion and read the message of Pope Francis to the assembly. At 4:00 pm, the closing Mass was celebrated, presided by Cardinal Luis Tagle.

Reference
• The website of the CBCP-BEC: http://cbcpbec.com/
• Youtube: Keyword (3rd cbcp-bec)

Women’s Desk

SOUTH EAST ASIA REGIONAL MEETING
“WOMEN and ECOLOGY”
Where: Battambang Diocese, Cambodia
When: March 7-11, 2016
Co-organised by
FABC OLF Women’s Desk and CBCT Women’s Desk
KEEP THE DATE

The scary advance of gendercide in Nepal

by Xavier Symons | 17 Oct 2015.

… Rates of sex-selective abortion in Nepal are incredibly high, even though the practice is technically prohibited. . . .

One heart-stopping statistic tells the story: for second births among the richest urban women, just 325 girls were born for every 1000 boys.

University of Oxford demographer Melanie Frost, lead author of a paper in BMJ Open about widespread sex-selective abortion in Nepal since abortion was legalised in 2002 found that as soon as abortion became readily available, the sex-ratio began to drop. Several factors were at work, but the decline in the fertility rate was particularly important. “Nepal has seen one of the most dramatic fertility declines in history, with the total fertility rate falling from 4.1 to 2.6 in just 10 years,” she observed. As family size shrinks, it becomes more important for the second child to be a boy, if the first was a girl.

According to Frost’s research, in the late 2000s (2007-2010) the sex-ratio for second-order births was drastically skewed, with just 742 girls being born per 1000 boys. Prior to legalisation of abortion (1998-2000), that ratio was 1021 to 1000. The ratio of female birth decreased most dramatically among educated and richer women, especially in urban areas. . . . “The preference for a boy child will exist unless daughters prove to be equally capable. But for that to happen, girls need to be provided with equal opportunities as boys.”

Ironically, Frost’s paper suggested that the mere fact that abortion is licit in the country appeared to be undermining efforts to restrict sex-selective abortion. . . . It would seem that a deep-seated societal preference for male children seems to be the driving factor behind the problem.

- See more at: http://www.bioedge.org/bioethics/the-scary-advance-of-gendercide-in-nepal/11611#sthash.1g6WNlme.dpuf
Laity Desk

On October 22, 2015 in Rome, the Holy Father Francis sent a message to the President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Cardinal Stanislaw Ryłko, on the occasion of the Day of Study organized by that Council, in collaboration with the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, on the topic: “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity, Fifty Years after the Decree ‘Apostolicam Actuositatem.’”

Here is an extract of that message:

“...Your Congress takes place in the framework of the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican II, that extraordinary event of grace that, as Blessed Paul VI affirmed, had “the character of an act of love; of a great and triple act of love: towards God, towards the Church, towards humanity: (Allocution at the Beginning of the Fourth Session, September 14, 1965)’Insegnamenti, III (1965), 475). This renewed attitude of love that inspired the Conciliar Fathers led, also, among its many fruits, to a new way of looking at the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world, which found magnificent expression first of all in the two great Conciliar Constitutions Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes. These fundamental documents of the Council consider the lay faithful in a whole vision of the People of God, to which they belong together with the members of Holy Orders and Religious, and in which they take part, in a way proper to them, in the priestly, prophetic, and royal function of Christ Himself. Hence, the Council did not see the laity as if they were members of a ‘second order,’ at the service of the hierarchy and simple executors of higher orders, but as disciples of Christ that, by virtue of their Baptism and of their natural insertion “in the world,” are called to animate every environment, every activity, every human relation according to the spirit of the Gospel (cf. LG, 31), bringing light, hope, and the charity received from Christ to those places that otherwise would remain foreign to God’s action and abandoned to the misery of the human condition (cf. GS, 37). No one better than they can carry out the essential task of “inscribing the divine law in the life of the earthly city” (Ibid., 43).

Inserted in the wide background of this Conciliar Doctrine is the Decree Apostolicam Actuositatem, which addresses more closely the nature and the realms of the apostolate of the laity. This document reminded forcefully that “by its very nature the Christian vocation is also a vocation to the apostolate” (n.2), therefore the proclamation of the Gospel is not reserved to some “professionals of the mission,” but must be the profound yearning of all the lay faithful called, in virtue of their Baptism, not only to Christian animation of temporal realities, but also to works of explicit evangelization, of proclamation and of sanctification of men (cf. Ibid.).”

Family Desk

Pontifical Council on the Family website & Resources


2. Pope Francis’ catechesis on the Family

Pope Francis dearly cares about the family; ...In his Wednesday General Audiences from 17 December 2014 to 16 September 2015, he chose to talk about it, reflecting on its mystery and beauty, the difficulties and the challenges that it faces, and giving, at the same time, wise admonitions and tender tips in the way that only a father can.

The catechesis is accessible using the link below: http://www.familiam.org/famiglia_eng/church/00011935_The_Family_According_to_Pope_Francis.html

3. Laity, Family and Life – a new Dicastery in the Vatican

On Oct 22, 2015 at the beginning of the Synod on the Family, Pope Francis made the following announcement: “I have decided to establish a new Dicastery with competency for Laity, Family and Life, that will replace the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Pontifical Council for the Family. The Pontifical Academy for Life will be joined to the new Dicastery.”

Preparation is underway to make this happen.

SHEPHERDING THE FAMILY
Seminar for Bishops
and their Family Commission/Ministry Teams
Where: Hua Hin, Thailand
When: May 16-20 2016

Co-organised by
FABC Offices of Clergy and Laity and Family.

Keep the date to reflect together on how to improve our pastoral care for the family.