Peace, Joy and Hope for Christmas and the new year!

Please be assured of our continued love and service as we enter the new year 2017. We hope and pray that all your endeavours will be fruitful and that you and your communities stay close to the heart of Jesus as we strive to strengthen and accompany our Families and Communities through these challenging times.

We have an important Message which we have published from the FABC XI Plenary Assembly which ended on Dec 4. We have also provided the link to its Working Document which should be read carefully.

If there is one resolution we should all make in the new year – it is to take time to read, consult and reflect more deeply before taking any action. So, on behalf of Families, Women, Youth, Laity and Basic Ecclesial Communities everywhere I urge all of us to take time to reflect and listen and take your cues from the people on the ground who experience their realities with all its nuances in ways that we may be far from.

Let us learn from the poor, from wisdom traditions – our own and others; and let us walk humbly with God with hope in his saving power.

We thank our Bishop Members and Chairman for their loving guidance through the year and we congratulate our Chairman on his being raised to a Cardinal. A great tribute to the Church in Bangladesh and to Cardinal Patrick d’Rosario CSC.

FABC OLF, Executive Secretary
Wendy Louis

“Joy to the World, the Lord is Come.”
Warmest good wishes for Christmas and 2017”.
Message of XI PLENARY OF THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS’ CONFERENCES
Colombo, Sri Lanka
28 November – 4 December 2016

To All the Peoples of Asia,
‘The Catholic Family in Asia:
Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy.’

Introduction
We, the delegates to the XI Plenary Assembly of the Federation of the Asian Bishops’ Conferences gathered in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 28 November – 4 December, give praise to God for having given us this opportunity to come together as Church in Asia. This is indeed an expression of our communion and solidarity not only with the universal Church but also with the particular Churches in Asia. We missed the presence of our brethren from the Church in China but it is our hope that this will change soon and that a gathering such as this in the future may truly represent a greater diversity and uniqueness of Asia.

We are deeply thankful to the government and the Church in Sri Lanka for having extended a cordial welcome and hospitality during our stay. Being present in a country that has in recent times been working persistently and constructively towards reconciliation, it is our prayer that God’s peace may truly reign in this land and in the hearts of everyone.

Ongoing Dialogue on the Family
In the last couple of years, Pope Francis, recognizing the importance of the family to the Church and society, has initiated a “series of conversations” on the family in the Church namely, the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization (5 - 19 October 2014), the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Vocation and the Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World (4 - 25 October 2015), the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy (8 December 2015 – 20 November 2016) and the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia (19 March 2016). Recognizing that the impact of these conversations is varied from place to place since our “cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied” (AL, 3), the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences has chosen to continue this conversation at its XI Plenary Assembly with the theme The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy.

The Joys in Family Life
During the days that we have spent together, we once again recognised how important the family is to the Asian ethos. For centuries, the family has been the foundation on which societies and nations have been and will continue to be built. The beauty of our families is that we are not only made up of the nuclear family but we live in and care for the extended family which is the bedrock of our existence. Children, young people, and the elderly further enliven and strengthen family relations. It is from this inter-connectedness that many of us have learnt the value of faith and community living in a spirit of unity and respect for one another. The interfaith and intercultural families, though not without challenges, have also enriched the life of the Church and promoted the values of understanding and harmony in society.

We celebrate the fact that the sense of the Divine exists in many of our families. This certainly provides direction, support, and inspiration to remain faithful despite challenging times. We are glad that many Asian families give life and sustain the faith in many communities and countries where they have chosen to
begin a new life for they are indeed our missionary disciples. We listened not only to one another but also the testimonies of some families expressing the varied experiences of family life and views from other religious leaders. We are grateful to God for the gift of families to the Church in Asia for we know that the Church is indeed a communion of families modelled after the communion of the Holy Trinity.

The Challenges to Family Life
Even though we recognise the joys of family life, we are not oblivious to the challenges faced by many of our families. Every country in Asia is not spared from the rapid changes that are affecting the family. At this crucial time of our history, we in Asia are confronted with realities that affect the heart of family life in the areas of poverty, migration, corruption, human trafficking and prostitution, new forms of colonialism, gender inequality, violence against minorities, ecological degradation, religious extremism, broken and dysfunctional families, and the numerous other situations that are equally complex and multifaceted. These pose great strain on our families as they strive to remain faithful and many families have also been left hurt and wounded. Some of these challenges are aggravated given the greater accessibility to the numerous forms of media that seem to be changing gospel values that Asian families have given great importance to through the centuries.

Recognising the countless challenges that confront us in Asia, we acknowledge that family life has been impoverished in various ways. Though in many parts of our continent, economic poverty is a widespread reality, we are also concerned with the other forms of “poverty” – emotional, spiritual, relational, cultural, intellectual, physical and social. These new forms of poverty have been brought about due to the fast-changing landscape of Asia. Though these forms of poverty can often cripple one’s outlook of life, families must not be afraid to embrace the gift of life.

Moving Forward
In these days of being together, we realised again that given the complexity of the situation before us, we do not have answers to all these challenges. However, what became clear is that we in Asia need to put our minds together, consolidate our efforts and resources, and strategize constructively together for the sake of our families. In the words of Pope Francis, “we are not living in an era of change but a change of era” (Decennial National Conference of the Italian Church, 2016). This ‘change of era’ is profoundly affecting our families - the domestic Church. We not only need to work together but also support one another in this mission. We must together seek a ‘spirituality of the family’ that is founded on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ so that we can assist and sustain each other during these changing and challenging times. Many families are already rooted in our rich tradition of family prayer and bible sharing. The Holy Eucharist is central to the family for living a prophetic way of life. We strongly encourage and support this journey.

We also call on families to nurture the gift of children in the family for “the family is the setting in which a new life is not only born but also welcomed as a gift of God” (AL, 166). Let us be mindful that ultimately “each new life allows us to appreciate the utterly gratuitous dimension of love, which never ceases to amaze us.” (AL, 166).

Though the contexts from which we come are different, the changing face of the family is a phenomenon that affects us all. A concrete fruit of the XI FABC Plenary Assembly is the document ‘The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy’ which we humbly offer to all Asian families. We invite local churches and families to study and reflect on this document. It is our hope that those engaged in ministering to the family will lead the way in celebrating the joys of family life, promoting the sacredness of life, marriage and the family, accompanying, supporting and sustaining families.

May the Holy Family of Nazareth inspire the Church in Asia and our families to be missionary disciples of mercy.

+Oswald Cardinal Gracias
President – FABC
Fr. Raymond L. O’Toole, SFM
Secretary General – FABC

Given in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 4 December 2016

The delegates comprised of Bishops representing member Episcopal Conferences and Associate Members of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences; the Holy Father’s Special Envoy, His Eminence Telesphore Placidus Cardinal Toppo; the Apostolic Nuncio, His Excellency Archbishop Pierre Nguyen Van Tot; fraternal continental delegates from Federations of Episcopal Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO), Africa (SECAM), Europe (CCEE), the United States (USCCB), and the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Orient (CCPO); Bishops and Secretaries of the FABC Offices; representatives of several funding and donor partners; and invited guests. We were a total of 137 participants (11 Cardinals, 22 Archbishops, 53 Bishops, 31 priests, 2 monks and 2 religious and 18 laity).

For the FABC document:
‘The Catholic Family in Asia: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy’ see the website:
http://www.fabc.org

DEDICATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILIES IN ASIA TO THE HOLY FAMILY OF NAZARETH

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, you lived in Asia. We praise, glorify and thank you as the sublime family, the example of a sanctuary of love and life, a living Gospel, the icon of God’s mercy and compassion.

O Holy Family of Nazareth, today as we celebrate the Holy Eucharist we dedicate to you our Catholic families in Asia amidst the difficulties that they daily face. May they be families of love and prayer, in constant communion with our loving God.

May God our Father protect and give them strength in their daily striving to do His will. May the Holy Spirit inspire and guide them to reach out to other families, especially to those in need. May they experience the loving presence of Jesus in the joys and sorrows of their lives.

As their shepherds, we commit ourselves in pastoral charity to care for their total well-being, especially for the well-being of families in the peripheries. We commit ourselves to the conviction that the family is the focal point of a new evangelization.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph, be the companion of our Catholic families in Asia in their journey to become, in word and deed, domestic churches of the poor on a mission of mercy and compassion. Amen

XI FABC Plenary Assembly
Colombo, Sri Lanka
December 4, 2016

At the close of the Eleventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC, participants prayed the above dedication for Families in Asia.

Announcements

2017 East Asian Meeting on the Family
East Asian Regional Conference on Family
Family, Living A Mission of Love, as Hope for Society.
May 15 - 19 2017
St Teresa Centre,
2, Sanmin Rd, Sec 1, Taoyuan “33049”, Taiwan.
Organised by FABC OLF and Taiwan Catholic Family Commission.

2018 World Meeting on the Family will be hosted by the Archdiocese of Dublin, Ireland. For more information you can go to:
http://www.worldmeeting2018.ie/
Theme for this event is:
“The Gospel of the Family: Joy for the World”

AsIPA Workshop in Mandalay, Myanmar

This AsIPA Workshop was co-organized by the Archdiocese of Mandalay and AsIPA Desk of OLF, FABC. It was held in Chanthagone, Marian Center, 7(Mon.)-12(Sat.) November 2016. It aimed at: Acquiring an understanding of the vision of Church as ‘Communion of Communities, a participatory Church’; deepening our experience of Christ-centered communities through Gospel sharing and learning pastoral methods to move towards our vision of Church by becoming Small Christian Communities. Main local organizers were Fr. Peter Myo Aung and Fr. John Aye Kyaw.

74 lay persons, 17 religious sisters, 10 priests and 3 deacons (total 104 participants) attended it. Several AsIPA national/diocesan team members of Myanmar from Hakha, Lashio and Myitkyina supported this workshop as co-facilitators with three AsIPA Resource team members, Fr. Rohan Dominic cm, Cora Mateo and Bibiana Ro.

Bishop Lucius Hre Kung, Diocese of Hakha, chair bishop of AsIPA National Team under the Commission for Laity was present and gave a talk on the first day. He remarked “SCCs and AsIPA were introduced to Myanmar 20 years ago. However, it has been refreshed in many dioceses of Myanmar since 2013. About 8 dioceses out of 16 dioceses of Myanmar are active in promoting SCCs with diocesan coordinators for SCCs. Also, AsIPA texts have been revised in Burmese. We have planned a three-year program on SCCs at national level.” Bishop Kung emphasized that SCCs are good instruments to implement ‘a new way of being Church, a participatory Church.’

Participants showed their expectation and eagerness for knowing and experiencing the Word of God, deep spirituality and witnessing faith in daily life. They appreciated the 7 step gospel sharing method and realised that SCCs would help them grow in the Word of God with communities in neighbourhoods.
Archbishop Nicholas Mang Thang of Mandalay articulated very clearly in his keynote address that “the Archdiocese of Mandalay by all means has to prioritize as the first option, the Laity, Family and Lay Catholic Faithful as a whole to become participants essentially in building up the Archdiocese of Mandalay to become and live a new way of being - the “Local Church with the new outlook of the New Evangelization in this Third Millennium in the context of Myanmar Culture, the Majority Buddhists and other Religions.” Moreover, he proposed a tentative guideline for action planning and implementation. In addition, Archbishop Emeritus Paul Zingtung Grawng visited briefly. It was much appreciated. At the end of the program, participants made action plans at diocesan and parish levels so that they can follow up in their own situations.

**AsIPA Workshop in Yangon, Myanmar**

AsIPA Workshop for the Archdiocese of Yangon, Myanmar was held from 14 (Mon) - 18 (Fri) November, 2016 at the Archdiocesan Center of Yangon Archdiocese. The theme was ‘The Word of God is the Seedbed of SCCs.’ Main objectives were to understand a vision of the Church—a New Way of Being Church, to know about Small Christian Communities, to experience Christ and Communion of Communities through Gospel Sharing and to acquire Gospel Sharing method—7 Steps Gospel Sharing. 156 participants attended it actively. The participants from different dioceses including Yangon were 33 priests, 36 religious sisters from various congregations, 3 religious brothers and 84 lay people including the catechists. It was recommended to join it as a parish pastoral team consisting of 3 delegates from each parish—parish priest, religious sister and catechist so that they can start SCCs at the parish level as a team.

The opening ceremony of AsIPA Workshop was led by His Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo, on the 14th November. Since there was a big number of participants (156 participants), it was divided into three groups for the Workshop. Each group was facilitated by the three AsIPA Resource Team, Fr. Rohan Dominic from Sri Lanka, Miss Cora Mateo from the Philippines and Mr. Gordon Morris from India with the 12 local facilitators. Finally, by the grace of God, the five day AsIPA Workshop was completed successfully. For the closing of the Workshop, His Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo presided over the Eucharistic Celebration accompanied by the priests.

Reported by Fr. Peter Saw Htun Htun (Yangon Archdiocesan director for SCCs)

Edited by Bibiana Joohyun Ro (Executive Secretary of AsIPA Desk)
ANNOUNCING Asian Youth Day  
2-6 August 2017, in INDONESIA

The 7th Asian Youth Day (AYD) will be hosted by the Archdiocese of Semarang in Central Java, Indonesia

Co-organised by hosts from the Archdiocese of Semarang and the FABC OLF Youth Desk.

Theme:
“Joyful Asian Youth! Living the Gospel in Multicultural Asia”

Bible Verse:
“Speaking in our own languages the mighty deeds of God”
(Acts 2:1-12)

Venue:
Yogyakarta City, Central Java.

Dates for AYD:
2 – 6 August 2017.

Dates for Asian Youth Ministers’ Meeting:
6 - 9 August 2017

Venue for AYMM:
Muntilan, 25 kms from Yogyakarta.

Days in the Dioceses (DID) will be held from 30 July to 2 Aug 2017.

Announcement

South Asia Regional Meeting on Women
“Climate Change Impacts on Vulnerable Groups & Women’s Perspectives”

Date:
January 17-19, 2017

Venue:
Sarvodya St Pius Campus  
Aarey Road, Goregaon Mumbai 400 063  
India

An article in Gender and Development Vol. 10, No. 2, July 2002 called “Uncertain predictions, invisible impacts, and the need to mainstream gender in climate change adaptations”, written by the following: Valerie Nelson (Social Development Specialist), Kate Meadows (Gender and Development Specialist), Terry Cannon (Reader in Development Studies at the School of Humanities/NRI), John Morton (Reader in Development Anthropology and Associate Research Director), and Adrienne Martin (Social Anthropologist and Head of Livelihoods and Institutions Group) form part of the Livelihoods and Institutions Group, Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich, Medway Campus, have written that:

“A great deal of work is on-going in areas such as sustainable agriculture, agro-ecology, advocacy for farmers’ rights, and disaster planning, but more support for such work is required, and particularly for gender awareness to be integrated. Such measures should challenge stereotypes about gender roles, women’s unpaid time, and their centrality in coping strategies, and take account of the varied and changing relationships between people, poverty, and their environments.”

The full article is available at the following link.
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552070215911

We hope that our South Asia Seminar can help us explore these issues in depth and that more participants from the South Asia countries can join us.