

Champion of Small Christian Communities - Bishop Oswald Hirmer returns to the Lord. A Tribute by Wendy Louis



Bishop Emeritus Oswald Hirmer has died at the age of 81.

On March 5th, just after

midnight he returned to the Lord at his retirement home in Marianhill, South Africa. He was busy with the translation of his latest book and full of joy to the end.

Oswald Hirmer, born on Feb 24 1930 was ordained on the 29 of June 1955 and spent the first two years of his priesthood serving in a parish deep in the Bavarian forest in his home country Germany.

He heard the call of the Pope to

give himself as a “fidei donum” priest to Africa in 1957.

In his 2010 Christmas letter to all his friends he wrote: “I wish to pay you a short visit. You should know you are not forgotten. You belong to my “extended family” which I assemble before God every morning when I begin to pray.”

Well, now Bishop Oswald can assemble us before God in a new way and we can be sure he is caring about all the people he served over the years.

In 1972 Oswald Hirmer was sent to work at the Lumko Missiological Institute which was a place to train new missionaries in the African languages, culture and customs of the local peoples.

While many of us would associate

Oswald Hirmer almost exclusively with Small Christian Communities and developing the 7 Step Gospel Sharing Method, not many would know that he and his confrere Fritz Lobinger were actually responsible for developing and encouraging local Xhosa religious music and oversaw the production of 160 tapes as well as introducing the Mirimbas instruments, something which spread to all of South Africa and were known as the ‘Lumko Mirimbas’.

Bishop Oswald was appointed to the Biblical Apostolate in 1977 which sharpened his focused on the Word of God.

In 1988 he published his book for Catechumenate communities called “Our Journey Together” which is now in several Asian languages.

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FABC Office of the Laity and Family

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Continued...Bishop Emeritus Oswald Hirmer

In 1990 Bishop Oswald was invited by the FABC Office of Laity to the Plenary Assembly of Asian Bishops in Bandung.

Many bishops were convinced of the need for renewal of the Church through Small Christian Communities and the need for an approach that was participatory and Christ Centered.

They asked the Lumko Institute to run a month long programme to train Asian facilitators and Oswald Hirmer came in 1991 for the training which took place in Hua Hin, Thailand and Oswald Hirmer and Fritz Lobinger conducted a second month long training in Taiwan with Mandarin translation. Subsequently they invited Bishop Oswald to their countries to continue the training and this brought him to Asia so often that he decided to use Singapore as his base (archbishop's house) until his appointment in 1997 to Mthatha Diocese as Bishop.



Bishop of Mthatha

Among the many things Bishop Oswald will be remembered for in his diocese is that he turned the men around, bringing many back to church; He created a 'centre'

for his priests and they knew he cared for them; he used one of the diocesan houses to create a safe haven for youth who wanted an education but had no stable home or finances.



With the help of some sisters he created a medical facility and home for those suffering from HIV aids; and he also built or re-built a number of crumbling churches. He built up a diocesan animating team where he himself was a member and trainer. He travelled all over the diocese with the team building up and visiting the Small Christian Communities and building up the faith of the ordinary people through formation sessions and emphasis on personal and community prayer and reading of the word of God.

Here in Asia, there are people who have attended workshops run by Oswald Hirmer in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Myanmar, India, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. He accompanied us in most of our AsIPA General Assemblies.

There were also large international workshops which brought participants from many more countries.

The development of the AsIPA materials, many adapted from the Lumko resources, used in the process of building SCCs were initially developed by Oswald Hirmer together with the Asian team which is today called the AsIPA Resource Team and has 9 members from different Asian countries.

The legacy of Oswald Hirmer is vast. The fruit of his prayer, his hard work and his passion for God's people will be felt for many years as we carry on his work in our different capacities and countries. The books he has written especially the last "Our Joy in Being Catholic" is making an impact in many countries and in many languages.

As a final tribute to this great missionary and Bishop we are called to take seriously all the aspects of being called to be Disciples of Christ – the prayer, the community and the marginalized brother and sister.



Messages of appreciation and condolences.



On behalf of the FABC- Office of the Laity/Family and specifically the AsiPA desk we express our deep condolences to his

loved ones, and also our appreciation for his unselfish and dedicated service for deepening Small Christian Communities in the Asian continent.

Bishop Rolando J. Tria Tirona, OCD Chairman, FABC, Office of Laity and Family

Remembering Bishop Emeritus Oswald Hirmer



He first came to Taiwan in 1988 and from that time onwards, until the 5th AsiPA General Assembly in

2009, he has accompanied us in our efforts to make the Church a "communion of communities." They have been years of deep spiritual experience rooted in the Word of God while training facilitators to build Small Christian Communities. The AsiPA methodology would not be where it is today if it were not for him accompanying, guiding and teaching us. His own life, his teachings and his facilitating skills are examples that many will keep as inspiration to continue the efforts so the Word of God can touch people's lives, making the Church truly participatory. I join in thanking God for his life and his deeds.

Cora Mateo, Executive Secretary of AsiPA Desk (1993 - 2009), Taiwan



We are all saddened to hear that Bishop Oswald Hirmer has passed away. He has contributed much to

the Church through the Lumko Institute and AsiPA has benefitted much from him. We pray that he has gone to his reward and that his contributions will continue to bring fruits to the Church. May he rest in peace.

Archbishop Nicholas Chia, Archbishop of Singapore

I did not have a chance to meet him personally, but I know him by his book "Our Journey Together". I appreciate his experiences and sharing. May the Lord give him rest in peace.

Bishop Francis X. Vira Arpondratana Chiang Mai Diocese (Thailand)

It's a great loss for the whole Church that Bp. Oswald passed away. I have no doubt that he did work with enthusiasm till the last moment of his life.

I am very sorry that we could not see him again in our gatherings of S.C.Cs although we will surely meet together again in His Kingdom.

Bishop Peter Kang President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Korea Bishop of Cheju Diocese, South Korea.

I am very sorry to hear the sad news of the demise of Bishop Emeritus Oswald Hirmer of Umtata diocese, South Africa, who was a Pioneer in the Lumko Pastoral Approach, which gave a new impetus

to all churches all over the world for a New Way of Being Church in our times. May God grant him eternal Reward!

Bishop S. Singaroyan, Salem, India.



I met him first in October 1990 and since then we met every year for a month until 1996 going around giving workshops in different parts of India.

Personally he has been a very affectionate friend and guide. He has put in very gently a huge influence on my pastoral vision and leadership. He is the one who inspired me to found the Pallottine Animation Centre. He has been a model and "Guru" for me in so many ways.

Fr. Thomas Vijay Member of AsiPA Resource Team, Nagpur, India

What a great man ... but he had already given so much of himself. It's not so long ago that I received a letter from him and he didn't mention illness. May he enjoy his new life in peace with his Creator and Lord.

Sr Judith Routier FCJ, Australia

I had met him in Port Moresby when he came to our Holy Spirit Seminary to teach our deacons in the early 1990s. He was a great visionary and catechist, and authentic missionary of the Lord.
(Fr.) Paul B. Steffen, SVD, Pontificia Univerità Urbaniana, Rome

Youth Desk

LIVING THE PENTECOST CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS FOR YOUTH IN ASIA:

In response to the need to make ministry for the young in Asia more comprehensive and collaborative, the Youth Desk initiated the move to gather organizations and movements involved in ministry for the young. This began during the feast of Pentecost in 2007 with 9 movements in attendance.

The meeting was called Living the Pentecost, an experience of the spirit uniting each one towards a common vision at the service of the church in Asia.

This gathering became an annual event since then, fostering communion and collaboration among the member movements. It has also allowed them to link up with the local youth commissions through the events organized by the Youth Desk.

Last November 2010, COYA made



a historic step by finalizing its primer and planning for the years ahead.

Among the plans of the group is to organize a COYA day for the region and the possibility of holding it in different Asian countries. Apart from the experience of communion, it is hoped that it can provide a venue to raise awareness and respond concretely on certain issues plaguing the region.

VISION

Catholic Organizations for Youth in Asia living the spirituality of ecclesial communion and becoming effective witnesses of the Word.

MISSION

We, the member organizations of COYA, in prayerful communion with each other commit to:

Encourage building of relationships and collaboration between member organizations, movements and institutions that work with young people and the local church, youth commissions and offices. Raise awareness and promote dialogue on youth evangelization and formation.

Support efforts to address societal concerns especially issues affecting the youth.

Support the development of Christ-centered youth ministries



Laity News

Hongkong has proclaimed this the Year of the Laity and Taiwan has followed suite. The theme is "Come Follow Me" (Mark 1: 17) - Vocation, Communion & Mission. The Objective is "Living the joy of the lay life, building community spirit, being part of God's mission."

The three aspects are explained as follows:

We hope that through the year of the Laity and the three connected realities of vocation, communion and mission, we can deepen our living out of the virtues of faith hope and love, and follow Christ in our lives more closely.

For a more detailed explanation of the three aspects you can check out their website.

Women's Desk

celebrates International Women's Day March 9 2011

March 8 2011 was the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. Give us your news of how you celebrated this great occasion. The occasion raised many reflections on Women, Feminism and the progress we have made in bringing the situation of women and gender issues to the forefront.

Defining Feminism - Can the church and the world agree on the role of women? by M. Cathleen Kaveny*

...If feminism is ultimately about affirming the dignity and well-being of women, the Roman Catholic Church as a whole is a feminist church in many crucial ways. It has done an enormous amount of good for women, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, in precarious circumstances throughout the world...
...Catholic women can sometimes find themselves caught in the middle, loving their church and their faith but dispirited by occasional statements that suggest that the Vatican views them as disordered or defiled simply because they are women. Last July the Vatican caused a public relations firestorm after its announcement of two grave crimes under canon law: sexual abuse by members of the clergy and the attempt to ordain a woman. Even women who support the church's restriction of the priesthood to males winced at the decision to group these two acts in the same document. In order to sort out the convergences and divergences between Catholicism and secular feminism, there must be nuanced historical, cultural and geographic studies. ... nuanced, rigorous, comparative analysis of the normative frameworks of Catholicism and feminism sorely needs to be undertaken. Consideration must be given to three normative polarities within the Roman Catholic framework itself, ... These three polarities are: equality and difference, nature and nurture and complementarity and collaboration. Many Catholics and many feminists see these tensions as creative and affirm the importance of holding onto both poles in each polarity. But there is also antagonism. Each party fears that the other is in danger of letting go of one pole, to the detriment of women

and, indeed, to the detriment of all of society. An examination of the fears of each group will facilitate a better mutual understanding.

Equality and Difference ... In particular, our different embodiment as either male or female is a divinely ordained aspect of the created order, which needs to be respected if humanity is to flourish.

...The Vatican fears that an insufficient appreciation of difference will denigrate women's unique power as mothers, who shape and nurture the next generation.

Feminists are worried too. The way in which some Vatican documents... try to specify these differences between men and women concerns feminists, because it can seem as if certain character traits are being defined and imposed as either male or female without any regard for empirical study or individual difference. And that definition and imposition, they believe, contributes to inequality.

Nature and Nurture - ...On the one hand, the Catholic tradition recognizes that human beings are essentially social; our understandings of our place in the world are shaped and transmitted by the languages, cultures and societies in which we live. On the other hand, that tradition also proclaims that there is some irreducible core of "human nature" that remains constant across time, place and culture.

... Nature matters. Some differences between males and females seem ingrained, not imposed, ...It is a serious anthropological mistake to think of human beings as androgynous minds encased in male or female bodies.

For their part, however, feminists worry that what some people view as the designs of nature are not natural at all but are, in fact, the deceptive mask worn by ingrained patterns of sexism.

Complementarity and Collaboration - ...The basis of a collaborative relationship is the recognition of the complementary gifts and skills of men and women. Women in particular should not aim to emulate the strengths of men but should instead nurture their own distinct gifts. Complementarity is most clearly visible in the roles that men and women play in marriage and family life but should be visible in other

contexts as well. One of the hallmarks of John Paul II-style feminism, in fact, is an effort to define the "feminine genius" in all spheres of women's existence in terms of the virtues of motherhood.

For their part, many other feminists are worried about the call to complementarity, not necessarily because they are opposed to the idea that both men and women bring some distinct and important gifts to human society but because of the way that idea tends to work out in practice. In fact, they fear it undermines collaboration, because it tends to promote separation and practical inequality.

...The concept of complementarity rightly affirms the importance—and unique demands—of motherhood on women. But how does it account for the gifts, ambitions and concerns that men and women have in common, even in parenting? For men and women to strive for excellence—together—in the many areas and interests they share ought not to be considered a destructive form of competition...

Toward a Better Conversation - How to begin bridging the tensions between Catholicism and feminism? In my view, more attention must be paid to the concrete circumstances in which women live their lives. Pope John Paul II observed that many working women carry out their jobs with a maternal spirit. Turning that observation around, I suggest that many mothers around the world must deploy a broad range of skills in working to raise their children. The church offers an important iconic ideal of motherhood: the Virgin Mary peacefully cradling a newborn baby. But mothers in war-torn lands, for example, do not have that opportunity; they must tirelessly labor to feed and protect their children. Even in peaceful countries...; dealing with a teenager in crisis because of drugs or alcohol requires steely resolve more than maternal sweetness.

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<http://blogs.nd.edu/contendingmodernities>
<http://www.americamagazine.org>



In January 2011, the two secretaries Bibiana Ro and Wendy Louis attended a number of International meetings.

Jan.13, 2011 Preparatory Meeting with local team for Annual Seminar for Thai Priests at Baan Phu Waan, Sampran, Thailand. This workshop will follow the content of the BILA I on SCCs at the request of the Thai Bishops who attended the programme last October and will be facilitated by the AsIPA Resource Team and the local Pastoral team. The workshop will take place later this year.

Jan. 17-18, 2011 Preparatory Meeting for 6th AsIPA General Assembly at Claretian Seminary House, Kattawa, Negombo, Sri Lanka. This meeting was for the purpose of finalizing the venue and budget of the 6th General Assembly of AsIPA in October 2012. The local team was very strong and systematic together with two Bishops who gave the lead.

Jan. 23-24, 2011 Preparatory Meeting with the local team and bishop for AsIPA Two International Workshop at Batam Island of Pangkalpinang Diocese, Indonesia. Here too, the bishop and local team of priests were well organized and committed. It was most heartening.

Jan. 25-29, 2011 Building up Network for AsIPA and OLF: meeting with contact persons in Lahore, Pakistan. Bibiana Ro went on her own.

AsIPA Desk Plans for 2011-2012

1. Annual Seminar for Thai priests

- Dates: July 11 th (Mon.) to 15 th (Fri.) 2011
- Duration: 9 days including 2 days exposure and arrival and departure days
- Venue: Baan Phu Waan, Sampran, Thailand
- Topic: Introducing SCCs as a Participatory Church of Communion in Thailand
- Contents: Our vision of a participatory church; Understanding Small Christian Communities; Enabling leadership in SCCs; Pastoral Tools for sharing the vision with our people: Gospel Sharing and Awareness Programmes

2. AsIPA Two International Workshop

- Dates: October 13th (Thur.) to 21th (Fri.) 2011
- Duration: 9 days including 2 days exposure and arrival and departure days
- Venue: Batam Island of Pangkalpinang Diocese, Indonesia (Pacific Palace Hotel)
- Content: Exposure programme, Additional Gospel Sharing method/s, Making own Awareness Programmes, Strengthening of the pastoral tools and skills
- Criteria of Participants: Priority is on Participants of AsIPA One and Those who complete equivalent workshops (as a team)

3. Theology Course on SCCs

- Dates: November 1th (Tue.) to 30th (Wed.) 2011
- Duration: 30 days
- Venue: Ruamrudee International School, Minburi, Bangkok, Thailand (a residential programme and full-time attendance is mandatory)
- Theme: RENEWING CHURCH IN THE NEW WAY THROUGH SMALL

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (SCCs) : A Theological, Pastoral, Spiritual Study of SCCs and Its Integrative Power to Transform Parishes into Active Communities

- Content: Basic Understanding of what the Asian bishops meant when they called for Renewing the Church in Asia in a 'New Way'; Theological Insight into what SCCs are.; Church Teachings on SCCs; Method for formation of SCCs; New Way of Being Church and Theological Issues; Insight into process of Integration; Exposure to and involvement in SCCs; Critical Reflection and Integration on the learning which happens during the course.

- Total Number of Participants: 30 (Thailand and South East Asia)
- Criteria of Participants: It is a certificate course, requiring a short integrative paper to be written. Fluency in English is required.
- Course fees: US\$ 2,000 / ₱ 60,000. Scholarship is not available from the organizer.
- Host: Programme coordinated by Pallottine Animation Centre, Nagpur, India: The course will be animated by Fr. Thomas Vijay and his team from India. - CBCThailand

4. 6th AsIPA General Assembly 2012

- Dates: October 18th (Thur.) to 24th (Wed.) 2012
- Duration: 7 days including 1 day exposure and arrival and departure days
- Venue: Chintana Center, Nainamadama, Sri Lanka
- Theme: : "Go you are sent forth" - following Jesus in mission - Small Christian Communities serving and ministering

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