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SPECIAL REPORT: **BISHOPS' MEET 06 URGES BISHOPS' CONFERENCES, DIOCESES TO MANAGE COMMUNICATIONS**

This year's 11th annual meeting of bishops' responsible for social communications in Asia (Bishops' Meet 06) was held in Taytay, Rizal, Philippines from November 20 to 25, 2006. The theme "Managing Communications for Bishops' Conferences" was reflected on by 38 participants - including 12 bishops, and 14 priests and religious - from 12 different countries. More than 10 communication professionals shared their thoughts and experiences in corporate communications and strategic communications management which the participants used in their own reflection during the workshops. On Nov 22, the participants tele-conferenced with World Bank communications director, Peter Stephens, based in Singapore and online catechism expert, Angela Zukowski, from the US on "Entrepreneurship and Building Relations." A highlight of the meeting was a panel each of Bishops and secular media professionals on what they expect from each other. The dialogue following the presentations was another important step towards the Church better understanding the role of social communication and how to develop and organize it. The "Final Statement" of Bishops' Meet 06 urges bishops' conferences and dioceses to follow the Holy See's guidelines on structuring communications in the Church, dating back to Vatican II's 'Inter Mirifica' and succeeding documents. In the same statement, the participants stress the need for a paradigm shift in communications to adjust to the new communication culture of Asia today. The recommendations also underline the need for a spokesperson for the bishops' conference and diocese, pastoral care and networking with media personnel, communication education for parents, and the cultivation of local/ indigenous forms of communication.

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11th Bishops' Meet

Bukal ng Tipan Youth and Pastoral Formation Center

Taytay, Rizal, Philippines November 20-25, 2006

FINAL STATEMENT

The 11th annual FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet on "Managing Communication for Bishops' Conferences" was held in Taytay, Rizal, Philippines from November 20 to 25, 2006. The representatives from Bishops' Conferences of 12 different Asian countries based their considerations on important Church documents. Already the Vatican II Document on Social Communication *Inter Mirifica* (1963, nos. 19-20; 21) and the following Pastoral Instructions *Communio et Progressio* (1971, nos. 170, 171-176) and *Aetatis Novae* (1992, nos. 19-23) demanded that national Communication offices for Bishops' Conferences be organized and maintained. These National Communication offices should provide beside others both personal care for communicators as well as communication training and planning to secure a well organized program for their countries. They should have a spokesperson and provide an ongoing two-way information flow within and outside their respective Conferences.

The bishops and participants further reflected and studied in more detail the roles, functions and needs of these Communication Offices. A wake up call was made to be aware of the onslaught, influence and demands of new emerging communication cultures in Asia. The participants felt a pressing need to enable the Churches in Asia to meet these challenges.

The participants committed themselves to fully implement the demands of the Church documents and to effectively avail themselves of the opportunities created by new media and the rapid communication revolution, utilizing relevant Strategic Management Principles for Communications and Corporate Communication Systems.

The bishops also reflected on and studied the inputs from media and management experts who emphasized the need for “strategic conversation and for ‘benchmarking’ outcome” rather than just output. The old paradigm of one-way, top-down communications has no relevance any more today in a world which is increasingly interactive, horizontal and flat rather than hierarchical. Communications today is also research driven and scientific, rather than intuitive. Hence, social communication instead of being message-driven, should seek to understand the needs, expectations and priorities of different “stakeholders” such as the bishops, priests, religious, laypersons and those of other faiths and civil authorities. This calls for effective networking at various Church levels, using the Internet and tools like e-mail, web-chat, webinars, SMS/texting, Podcasting and other means of social communication.

The 11th annual meeting of Asian Communication Bishops (“Bishops’ Meet 06) made the following recommendations:

1. All bishops’ conferences and dioceses should prepare a pastoral plan for communication with a proper time frame and a clear vision and mission statement relevant to their region.
2. All bishops’ conferences and dioceses must set up a communication office and appoint a full time media professional as director/ spokesperson.
3. Bishops should ensure that the personnel appointed for communication offices and activities should be professional, academically trained and with commitment to assure the continuity of the work.
4. Media workshops should be organized to sensitize and equip bishops, Church leaders, seminarians and religious on media relations, crisis communication (including ambush interviews), and other media related issues and approaches.
5. Proper Networking with media practitioners through seminars, workshops, get-togethers should be provided on a regular basis and not just in the time of need or crisis.
6. Programs for pastoral support of professionals in mainstream media should be provided.
7. Traditional media such as folk arts, performing arts, dance, music and drama should not be neglected and seen and developed as alternative means of social communication.
8. Communication education for parents, pastoral workers, religious and laity, especially children and youth should be promoted.
9. World Communication Day should be seen as an opportunity to build up awareness of media developments to sensitize people on the importance of social communications and to use media in general.
10. An effective network of Christian communicators of Asia should be promoted to share valuable information and facilitate the recounting of Jesus stories.
11. Bishops, Church leaders and communicators at national and international conferences need to communicate their inspiring experiences, insights and stories with their people and dioceses at home and beyond. * * *

‘BISCOM VI’ ON MODERN COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN MAY 2007

The FABC-Office of Social Communication will hold the sixth “Bishops’ Institute for Social Communication” (BISCOM VI) at Assumption University Bang Na campus, Bangkok from May 28 to June 2, 2007 on the theme “Converging Communications for Ministry in Asia. Modern Communication Technologies for the Church.” Recent IT (information technology) developments as well as their impact and possibilities for ministry will be discussed. The event is open to all bishops, and personnel of communication offices of bishops’ conferences and dioceses.

BISCOMs are part of the FABCs ongoing formation/animation program for bishops. In 1999, BISCOM II on “Modern Communication Technologies: Challenge for the Church in Asia” dealt with a similar theme but recent developments call for an update and further reflection to identify new challenges and opportunities.

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FABC-OSC RELEASES BOOK ON SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN ASIAN RELIGIONS

“Social Communications in Religious Traditions of Asia” is the title of a new book released by the FABC-Office of Social Communication in November. The book contains the papers given at a Roundtable organized by the same office with Assumption University Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, and the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) in Bangkok, Thailand October 2005.

Some 20 scholars met at the Roundtable and discussed the role and understanding of social communication in Buddhism,

Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Confucianism. The initiative was a follow up of an earlier “Bishops’ Institute for Social Communication” (BISCOM V) on “Interreligious Dialogue as Communication” held in Bali, Indonesia November 2004.

The papers delivered at BISCOM V are contained in volume 6 of the FABC-OSC Book series titled “Interreligious Dialogue as Communication.” The new book of 191 pages is volume 7 of FABC-OSC Books published by Logos Divine Word Publications, Manila.