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FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES - OFFICE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

P.O. Box 2036, Manila 1099 Philippines

Tel: (+63 2) 732 7170, 338 7769 Fax: (+63 2) 732 7171

Email: fabc_osc@pldtdsl.net

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SPECIAL REPORT

FABC-OSC 12th annual Bishops' Meet "Eucharist as Communication"

Bangkok, Thailand November 26- December 1, 2007

"Eucharist as Communication" is the theme of the 12th annual "Bishops' Meet" organized by the FABC-Office of Social Communication at Gabrielite Provincial Center, Bangkok Nov 26-Dec 1. The meeting of 35 bishops-chairmen for social communication and their secretaries from 15 countries took an inter-disciplinary approach on the theme.

Bishop Luis Antonio Tagle of Imus, Philippines gave a theological reflection on the subject. Communication scholar Fr Sebastian Periannan of St Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore, India discussed "Eucharist in the New Media Age."

Buddhist Nun Dhammananda Kabilsingh from Thailand explained the meaning and significance of meals and celebrations in Buddhist culture, while Fr Jacob Theckanath from India discussed "Eucharist and Inculturation."

Fr Sebastian Michael, svd from India presented "Meals and Celebrations in Asian Cultures," while Fr Amelito Racelis, sdb explained the "Liturgy as a Communicative Happening."

Beside the introduction with general descriptions and insights on the concerns of the meeting, the final statement lists eleven recommendations underlining, beside others, the need

for a "Eucharistic communication spirituality," the communication dimension of the Eucharist in formation programs, and the promotion of the transforming power of the experience of the "Eucharist as communication" in ministry and apostolate.

On Nov 29 a "Festschrift" was launched in honor of Fr Franz-Josef Eilers, svd, executive secretary of the FABC-Office of Social Communication. Present were Bishops' Meet participants, guests, as well as Bangkok Archbishop Michai Cardinal Kitbunchu and Bishop George Yod Phimphisian, president of the Thai bishops' conference.

The 250-page book contains academic articles written by 15 different authors, and was edited by Dr Helmuth Rolfes of Kassel University, Germany, and Dr Angela Ann Zukowski of the University of Dayton, Ohio, USA. The Foreword was written by Cardinal John P. Foly, former president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. The book is published by Kassel University Press (ISBN 978-3-89958-310-6).

Here is the full text of the Final Statement:

Introduction

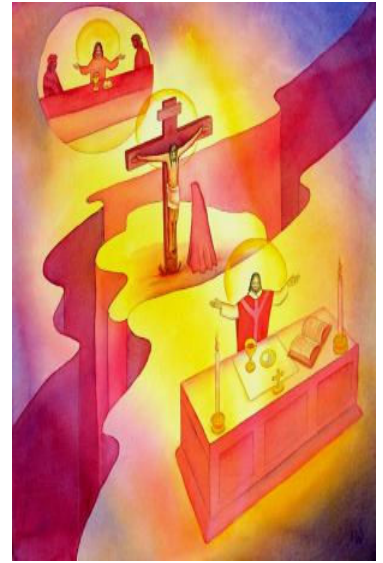
We, the 35 participants of the 12th Bishops' Meet 2007 coming from 15 countries and consisting of Bishops and secretaries of National communication offices/commissions, experts and others involved in the field of social communication gathered together in Bangkok, Thailand from November 26th to December 1st, 2007. We reflected and shared on the "Eucharist as Communication," its challenges and opportunities for the Church in Asia. Insightful presentations by those involved in communication, theology, liturgy, anthropology, pastoral ministry and other religions deepened our understanding of the communication reality of the Eucharist. The sharing of many creative initiatives and projects in social communication by the national secretaries gave us a panoramic view of the new areopagus of the communication world and the Church's involvement in different parts of Asia. At the same time, we were awakened to the challenging tasks that await us. All this was done in a spiritual atmosphere of journeying with the Eucharistic Lord, through Eucharistic celebrations and adoration. Our coming together has contributed to a renewed enthusiasm and commitment in us to deepen and live the Eucharist as "the most intimate form of communion and communication possible in this life" (Communio et Progressio, no. 11).

We hope that our considerations and experiences will further assist our member conferences for the preparation of the next FABC Plenary Assembly to be held in January 2009 on the theme "Living the Eucharist in Asia."

The Pastoral Instruction "Communio et Progressio" (1971) expresses the profound meaning of communication as "giving of self in love" (no. 11). In the Eucharist, the "culminating moment of communication", Jesus' self-giving becomes an abiding gift to us and to the whole world till the end of times. It is the most intimate and deepest form of communion. If social communication can be defined as "sharing of meaning through signs," then this sharing of meaning becomes a reality in the Eucharist as a divine gift for us. The meaning of human life can be fully communicated only in the mystery of the Eucharistic Jesus.

- The Eucharist draws us into the very mission of Jesus: the communication of the divine gift of love. “We cannot approach the Eucharist,” as Pope Benedict XVI tells us, “without being drawn into the mission, which beginning in the heart of God, is meant to reach all people” (Sacramentum Caritatis, no.84). But how can this happen without proper and extensive communication? In the course of our search and sharing, we discerned certain orientations for the communication ministry in the perspective of the Eucharist as communication.
- Liturgy is a communicative happening taking place in the very heart of the community through a variety of signs, symbols, art and architecture, music, and gestural language. The Eucharist is the communication par excellence, with the Word of God and Eucharistic sharing as the core communicative elements. This flows into a communication with one another in the community as an important and necessary part of the Eucharistic assembly. Reconciliation, sharing and peace are a precondition to such communion. To view other people as ‘strangers’, because of ethnicity, gender, caste, economic background or other factors, marks a breakdown of communication.
- The Church in Asia, to be a church truly incarnate in Asian cultures (Ecclesia in Asia, no. 24), needs mutual communication between Asian cultural and religious traditions, with the deeper communicative meaning of sharing of meals on the one hand, and the Christian communities on the other. This also facilitates a more effective discovery and living of the communicative power of the Eucharist in building up communion, peace and harmony and thus to communicate the Asian face of Jesus in the Eucharistic community (Ecclesia in Asia, no. 20). Meals, as signs of mutual bond with God and with one another, are significantly present in Asian cultures and invite us to develop this effectively for promoting communication leading to community. The inculturation of the Church in general and of the Eucharist in particular is an indispensable element of our evangelizing mission in Asia. Such inculturation will make the Asian face of Jesus in this continent more alive and present.

The rapid development of new media has a tremendous impact on people and especially the young. The Church is invited to discover new opportunities and ways for communicating the Good News, especially as a Eucharistic community. The Eucharist puts us into an intimate contact with the Good News, which needs to find a prominent place in the new media of a modern world.



Recommendations

1. The experience of the Eucharist as communication should break down the barriers of class, caste, gender, social status and lead the Christian community to a transforming power of building communion and caring fellowship. The Eucharist should lead to reconciliation and restoring broken relationships, healing of divisions as essential elements of a Communication spirituality of the Eucharist.
2. Eucharist as communication should result in community, sharing, cooperation and self-gift in service. Our world today is characterized by individualism, consumerism, competition and violence. Such a situation should be overcome in the spirit of Eucharistic unity.
3. Popular signs and symbols of Asian cultures which are compatible with the Gospel and Christian faith like local art, architecture, language and melodies should be part of the Eucharistic ambience and celebration, so that it will become evident that Jesus does not destroy but fulfill our lives.
4. Eucharistic celebrations as communicative happenings should educate us to become effective communicators of the story of Jesus, the Good News of God’s abiding love in our world. For this, our celebrations should become powerful communicative moments in the life of our communities (cf. Carlo Martini, “Communicating Christ to the World,” no. 60).
5. We need to integrate a Eucharistic communication spirituality into all pastoral plans and formation programs like biblical, catechetical, liturgical and social initiatives.
6. Formators at all levels in the church, especially those in seminaries, are to be sensitized to the communication dimension of the Eucharist, the liturgy and the sending of the Church.
7. The communication dimension of the Eucharist should be reflected in our care for migrants, linguistic or cultural minorities, as well as ethnic groups. Pastoral leaders should develop a special spirituality and have a special formation for such a communication approach.
8. From our “Eucharist as communication” experience, we should take active interest and participate in local festivals and organizing good will gatherings to contribute to peace and harmony among all peoples.
9. The experience of the breaking of the bread should also be reflected in our reaching out in compassion with the broken people around us.
10. The Eucharist as communication should in a special way reflect the expectations, situations, problems and needs of special groups like youth, children, and the elderly.
11. Modern means of communication should be used to bring the Eucharistic celebration also to home-bound people like the sick and the elderly to serve their religious and spiritual needs. (cf. Sacramentum Caritatis, no. 57)