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FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES - OFFICE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

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“INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AS COMMUNICATION”

The FABC-Office of Social Communication published in September the sixth volume of its book series entitled “Interreligious Dialogue as Communication.” The 192-page book contains all inputs and the final statement of the fifth “Bishops’ Institute for Social Communication” (BISCOM V) in Bali, Indonesia Nov 22-27, 2004.

The book focuses on the communication dimension of Interreligious Dialogue, which was addressed in last year’s meeting in four steps: understanding Interreligious dialogue from Vatican and FABC perspectives, a look at Interreligious dialogue experiences

across Asia, the use of media for Interreligious dialogue, and discussion of the understanding and practice of social communication in different religious traditions in Asia. The meeting saw more than 60 Bishops, priests and religious engaged in the social communication and Interreligious dialogue ministries in Asia and beyond. A follow-up to this BISCOM was the Roundtable on “Social Communication in Religious Traditions of Asia” in Bangkok, Thailand October 2-7, 2005.

BANGLADESH: YOUNG CHRISTIANS ENCOURAGED TO DEVELOP WRITING SKILLS TO SERVE COMMUNITY

A September 27-28 workshop organized by the Young Men’s Christian Association-Bangladesh in Savar near Dhaka sought to train young students as writers. In his address to some 26 Christian college students present, Marcel Gomes, president of YMCA Bangladesh, said writing talents should focus on societal problems as well as contribute to nation-building. Speakers at the workshop included a journalist working for Radio Veritas Asia - Bengali service, and Fr Kamal Corraya, director of the Bangaldeshi bishops’ communications center. (UCAN)

PAKISTAN: 7TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF RADIO VERITAS ASIA - URDU SERVICE

The Pakistani bishops’ National Commission for Social Communication held the 7th national conference for listeners of Radio Veritas Asia (RVA) in Lahore. The theme of the conference “Culture of Forgiveness” was also chosen to be the theme of the programs for 2006. The some 48 participants present appreciated this as both well-thought-of and timely. In a panel discussion, the listeners aired their problems regarding program reception while a panel of at least six experts including RVA Program Director Monsignor Pietro Tai and NCSC Executive Secretary, Fr Nadeem John Shakir, listened and offered practical solutions. Awards were also given like the Best Listeners’ Clubs won by Abbasia club in Bahawalnagar and Chenab club in Multan. The Best Program Awards went to “Aqdar Ki Dunia” produced in Manila and “Andaz-eFikar” produced by the Lahore Center. (WAVE)

CHINA: PARISH STRENGTHENS EVANGELIZATION EFFORTS

A parish priest of Gui Lin in Guang Xi province plans to strengthen efforts at evangelization. Beautiful churches are important but “without the presence of our faithful, it would be senseless,” explains Fr Tao Shou Ying whose parish church has just completed renovation. He cited initiatives like information leaflets, meetings and catechism sessions as costly but nonetheless important. The first parish church in Gui Lin was built in 1901 by priests of the Parish Foreign Mission Society. It has six districts and a community of over 4,000 Catholics. (FIDES)

VIETNAM: YOUNG BIBLE EXPERTS NEEDED

The local Church in Vietnam should give greater attention to training young priests and seminarians so as to address a shortage of qualified Scripture instructors, a senior Vietnamese Biblical scholar said. Father Albert Tran Phuc Nan, 73, explained that of the 19 Scripture scholars who were trained in either Rome or Jerusalem before Vietnam’s reunification in 1975, only two are under 70 years of age. Seven of them have already died. Scripture professors are needed to help translate and interpret the Bible and help lay people study God’s word, the priest added. (UCAN)

CHINA: STRICTER INTERNET RULES IMPOSED

Chinese officials are cracking down on news criticizing the state’s religious policies or preaching cultist or “superstitious” beliefs on the Internet, reported AsiaNews. The State Council Information Office and the Ministry of Information Industry announced the rules recently, stating that the “state bans dissemination of content which goes against state security and the public interest.” The announcement did not give any date as to when the rules would come into effect. In addition to religious news, the new rules affect 10 other “forbidden zones,” including news that would endanger state security, state secrets, or reports that may spark ethnic violence. Mainland authorities already strictly control the media and use technology to filter and monitor Internet content considered politically sensitive or pornographic. (TNL)

KOREA: BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE ELECTS NEW HEAD, PLANS MEDIA RELATIONS OFFICE

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea (CBCK) elected a new president, Bishop Augustine Myong-jo of Pusan, during its October plenary assembly and agreed in principle to set up a media relations office. No concrete plan was set at the October 10-14 bi-annual meeting but the bishops discussed the establishment of a proposed office for media relations. The general secretariat of the conference was tasked to develop concrete plans for the establishment of said office. The approval for the opening of the office might come as early as March, during the conference’s next plenary assembly, CBCK Secretary General Fr Basil Cho Kyu-man said. (UCAN)

JAPAN: SURVEY ON RELIGION BOTHERS CATHOLICS

In an opinion poll conducted recently by the "Yomiuri" newspaper, 75 percent of the 3,000 adult-respondents from 250 locations in Japan declared "I have no faith." More than 25 percent also said they do not want a religious funeral. This has spurred scholars to react on the survey results. Theology Professor Araya Shigehiko says the findings cannot be taken in a literal sense. People might not believe some religious doctrines and thus, cannot ally themselves with any one religion. But deep down, he said, they are looking for something, and it is this that draws them to visit shrines and temples. "we make a trial of remedies proposed to us by media -- alcohol, sex, buying sprees -- only to find that the same things become the source of anguish. In that sense, people are really looking for something." Here, the Church should extend a helping hand especially in giving practical assistance to those in need, the professor said. "The present Church still has the resources for that but it is falling down on the job," Shigehiko added.

(JCN)

INDIA: SALESIANS HOLD SEMINAR ON COMMUNICATIONS TO MARK CENTENARY IN INDIA

Some 40 Salesians of Don Bosco held a three-day research seminar on communications and challenges for the education of youth at Guwahati October 18-20. This is part of a year-long program celebrating 100 years presence of the Salesians in the country, which culminates at Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu in February 2006. Inaugurating the seminar, Salesian Provincial of Mumbai and In-charge of communications, Fr. Ivo Coelho, said social communication is central to the education and formation of today's youth, and on Bosco gave great importance to good literature and reading. The first batch of five Salesians came from Europe in India in 1906 under the leadership of Fr George Tomatis and established the first Don Bosco institution in the country in Thanjavur. (SAR NEWS)

INDIA: ARCHDIOCESE PLANS SOCIAL COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

The Archdiocese of Kolkata celebrated World Communication Day at the Archbishop's House on November 27 with a special planning session of communication activities and programs for the coming year. Participants included priests, religious superiors, lay teachers and officials of Christian schools. Personalities with special talents in journalism, music, drama, broadcasting and art were also recognized. (THE HERALD)

SINGAPORE: DISPLAY OF VATICAN ARTEFACTS COULD HELP INTERRELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING

The "Journey of Faith" exhibit of more than 140 artefacts from the Vatican Museums held at the Asian Civilizations Museum ended with a 24-hour film-screening marathon from October 8 to 9. The exhibit drew around 125,000 local and foreign visitors, which surpassed another major exhibition on ancient Egypt held at the same museum several years ago. Senior Curator of the museum and co-curator of the exhibition, Huiism Tan, said a high point about being a curator is to "learn about one's own and other people's culture and history." "I hope that the exhibition has enabled people of various faiths to understand each other more," she added. (CN)

JESUIT WORKING FOR LITERACY IN INDIA WINS OPUS PRIZE

Jesuit Father Trevor Miranda, head of Reach Education Action Program founded in Mumbai, India, is the 2005 recipient of the one million US\$ Opus Prize. Fr Miranda has spent years bringing books and teachers to the desperately poor in India. His group has opened more than 450 literacy centers throughout the country in just six years. The Opus Prize is given annually by Opus Group, a commercial real estate development company, to religious individuals or organizations that demonstrate innovative strategies to solve deeply rooted community problems while fostering responsibility and independence. (CN)

INDIA: DOCUMENTARY FILM ON GOAN HYPNOTIST-PRIEST

About 400 people attended the premier showing of "In Search of Abbe Faria: the Hypnotic Vision of a Goan Pioneer" on September 20 in Panaji, capital of Goa. The film is a documentary on the life of

Fr Jose Custodio de Faria, a 19th century Catholic priest who sought to educate Goans about hypnotherapy. Abbe Faria, as he was popularly known, practised hypnotherapy in Goa, then a Portuguese colony, and in Europe, where he also reportedly fought in the French Revolution. The 42-minute documentary aims at educating the modern generation about a known figure, who was condemned during his lifetime and

is forgotten by his countrymen. (TNL)

KOREA: CYBER-PASTORAL CENTER OPENS

Seoul archdiocese has opened a Cyber-Pastoral Center at <<http://veritas.ne.kr>> to help form and prepare catechumens for baptism. Center Director Fr John Ri Gi-jeong explains that while physical presence in Church activities and private conferences with priests are required of persons seeking conversion to Catholicism, personal learning can still be provided through the cyber-media. "Catechesis via the Internet is a new modality which could become typical in the totally computerized society of today. It can eliminate barriers of time and distance but it cannot substitute personal contacts," the priest said. (FIDES)

INDIA: BETTIAH BISHOP CALLS ON COMMUNICATORS TO PLAY PRO-ACTIVE ROLE

The three-day second general assembly of the Bijhan region of Signis-India, held at Bettiah, October 10-12, was inaugurated by Bishop Victor Henry Thakur of Bettiah. In his speech, the Bishop said the media, "God's most powerful gift in the information age, should not be used for self-aggrandisement but to reveal the divine truth to the world. Therefore, media people are the chosen people of God to communicate God's love and concern for everyone, especially the weakest of the weak. Any failure on their part to carry out this mission would spell disaster," the bishop added.

"... we engage in a spiritual encounter with people of other religions first of all by having an attitude of openness and respect for the believers of other faiths." - BISCOP V, "Interreligious Dialogue as Communication" (2004, Orientations no. 2)

