

FABC-OSC 20th Annual Bishops' Meet
Catholic Bishops' Conference Centre, Yangon, Myanmar
November 16-21, 2015

**Theme: “Challenges of National Office of Social Communication –
The Role of Bishops' Meet in Strengthening OSCs
in the context of evolving media scenario”**

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC) held its 20th Annual Bishops' Meet at Catholic Bishops' Conference Centre, Yangon, Myanmar on November 16-21, 2015. The meeting was attended by 30 participants, including 10 bishops, 20 participants consisting of national secretaries of social communication and delegates from Asian countries. The participants were animated and strengthened by the presence of the Holy Spirit and by the daily celebration of the Eucharist and other moments of prayer and fellowship. The resource persons of the Meet were Msgr. Paul Tighe, Secretary, Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Vatican City, Rome, Fr George Plathottam sdb, India, and Consultant John Poon, Australia.

The participants experienced the warm welcome and generous hospitality accorded by the Church in Myanmar headed by His Eminence Charles Cardinal Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, the other Bishops and Faithful. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar Office for Social Communications (CBCM-OSC) deserves appreciation for playing host and ensuring appropriate setting for a fruitful meeting. The Bishops' Meet in Yangon also offered the participants the opportunity to have a glimpse of the rich culture and history of Myanmar, its people, and the local Church.

As the FABC-OSC Annual Bishops' Meet marks its 20th anniversary in 2015, it was considered apt to study the challenges of national offices of social communication and the role of Bishops' Meet in strengthening them in the context of evolving media scenario. The meeting set out to study and review the national structures and pastoral plans for social communication in the Episcopal Conferences in Asia.

Msgr. Paul Tighe helped the participants to understand the changes Pope Francis has initiated in the Vatican in the area of social communication. The reform process has led to the establishment of a new Secretariat for Communications, and other structural changes which are expected to lead towards greater efficiency, coordination and cost effectiveness.

Based on the emphasis given by the Church and the experience of evolving and implementing the pastoral plan in India, Fr George Plathottam highlighted the need for adequate structures and pastoral plans as effective means towards strengthening the ministry of social communication in the Episcopal Conferences in Asia. Consultant John Poon, drawing from the extensive research in clinical psychology and his own experience as a Catholic and psychologist, offered valuable insights on pastoral care of children, youth and families in media. He helped the participants to understand the harm pornography, violent video games and other excessive media habits can have on the life of the youth. He also stressed the importance of forming the clergy, religious and those in formation in healthy media habits.

The assembly noted with satisfaction the many creative efforts being made in various Episcopal Conferences in the communication ministry. These include the efforts of Radio Veritas Asia to adopt strategies suited to the times to address the needs of its audience in Asia and overseas, and efforts to mobilize resources from Episcopal Conferences within the continent; the

formation programme developed by the CBCI-OSC, and the training programmes being offered by the national communication research and training centre, (NISCORT) in India; the initiative to provide pastoral care of media persons in Philippines; the establishment of national Catholic creative artists' association in Myanmar; offering of short term formation and training programmes; giving media awards and engaging in a variety of creative media activities that respond to the needs of the respective Episcopal Conferences.

FINAL STATEMENT

Considering the fact that the mission of the Church entails effective communication praxis, the meeting affirmed the need for appropriate structures and suitable pastoral plans in each of the Episcopal Conferences in Asia. Social communication is at the heart of the Church's mandate of proclaiming the Gospel in Asia and responding to the challenge of dialogue with the cultures, religions and the poor. As *Aetatis Novae* (n. 445) recommends, "Not only should there be a pastoral plan for communications, but *communications should be an integral part of every pastoral plan*, for it has something to contribute to virtually every other apostolate, ministry, and programme."

While acknowledging the uniqueness of each local Church and the different challenges posed by each of them, the participants emphasized the need to adapt the communication plans and strategies that best suit the specific contexts and needs of each Episcopal Conference. The meeting noted the efforts of several member countries to develop pastoral plans for social communication which are underway. In order to strengthen social communication among the members of the FABC-OSC, the Bishops Meet-2015 proposed the following orientations and recommendations:

Orientations

1. We underline the indispensable role of establishing suitable structures and appointing competent personnel in the Episcopal Conferences in order to effectively render the social communication ministry.
2. We renew the exhortation of *Aetatis Novae* (n.430) urging "pastors and people of the Church to deepen their understanding of issues relating to communications and media, and to translate their understanding into practical policies and workable programmes."
3. An appropriate pastoral plan for social communication suited to the needs of the local church and capable of responding to the emerging media challenges, is essential for each Episcopal Conference.
4. The structures, plans and personnel are to be suited to serve the mission of the Church, and hence need to work in close collaboration with other structures, offices and commissions of the Conference.
5. The revolutionary changes in social communication, especially in social media, and their impact on the Church and society, call for effective research, networking and collaboration with other Churches, media professionals and experts, social scientists, psychologists and NGOs.
6. We underline the importance of serious and systematic formation in social communication of all pastoral personnel, and more particularly of those who are entrusted with the task of leading communication ministry in the Church.

Recommendations

1. We reiterate the importance of setting up in every Episcopal Conference suitable structures and drawing up of a Pastoral Plan as soon as possible.
2. Communication leaders at the Episcopal Conference level are to assist dioceses and parishes to adopt suitable communication strategies and plans and help them in implementing them.
3. Efforts should be made to strive towards greater financial sustainability and independence in carrying out the social communication ministry. The Faithful shall be urged to contribute towards this purpose, particularly by the encouragement of the pastors, through a collection made on the occasion of the World Communications Day.
4. Episcopal Communication Offices shall strive to network and collaborate effectively with Catholic Universities and College faculties of communication, Catholic publishing houses, periodicals, Signis and other media activities and organisations within the Conference and in Asia.
5. Structures and expertise within Episcopal Conferences and their resources could be shared in a spirit of service and solidarity with Conferences and dioceses that need assistance. Such collaboration can be extended particularly in the area of training, formation, publications, media festivals, awards etc.
6. The social communication structures and plans need to be periodically evaluated, and appropriate changes are to be effected in order to respond to the fast changing and evolving media scenario in the world, more particularly in Asia. Assistance and support of the FABC-OSC and other competent bodies may be availed in this task. **