

**FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES
OFFICE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION (FABC-OSC)
24th Annual Bishops' Meet 2019
Quezon City, Manila, Philippines
December 10-14, 2019**

**Pastoral Communication in Asia Today:
Challenges and Opportunities for the Digital Age
Final Statement**

The 24th Annual Bishops' Meet of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences- Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC), along with stakeholders of Radio Veritas Asia (RVA) was held, December 10-14, 2019, at Veritas Asia Institute of Social Communication (VAISCOM), Radio Veritas Asia Campus, Quezon City, Manila, Philippines. The gathering was attended by six bishops, 18 priests, and six lay persons who deliberated on the theme "Pastoral Communication in Asia Today: Challenges and Opportunities for the Digital Age."

Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki, Archbishop of Cologne, and Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila, the newly appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, presided over the inaugural Mass attended by the conference participants.

Cardinal Woelki urged Church leaders in Asia to help form people to be more competent in the area of evangelization and pastoral ministry of the Church in the digital age "and to enable them to work in a new vineyard, which is made up of social networks." Quoting examples of communication ministry in his own archdiocese, Cardinal Woelki stressed the need to adapt to changing situations and needs in the area of social communication.

Cardinal Tagle emphasized the need to develop new knowledge to navigate the "minefields of digital revolution and artificial intelligence." The Church must foster "relational and inspired intelligence," and ensure that the new technology and new media help build an atmosphere of trust and attentive listening.

During the four-day reflections and discussions, four scholarly researched papers were presented to help Church leaders in Asia, particularly those who hold leadership positions in communication, to respond to the challenges and opportunities offered by communication in the digital age.

The first paper, titled "Communication Landscape in Asia: Issues, Trends and Prospects," is the result of the work of a team of scholars under the direction of Prof. Divina Pasumbal, Dean of Communications of the Polytechnic University of Philippines with inputs from Offices of Social Communications, and was presented by Prof. Krupskaya Valila, a member of the research team. The paper provided an overview of the media situation in different Asian countries, its structures and functions and how it affects the economic, political, and cultural environment in Asia.

The second paper titled “The Church in Asia and the Challenge of Social Communication.” by Mr. Conrad A. Saldanha, an expert in communication, stressed the importance of making our communication based on authentic experience of God and witness of life than intellectual grasp of the Message or persuasive skills. However, we need to reflect and understand the changing paradigm of communication and adopt them critically in our communication ministry.

The third paper on the theme of “communication in Asia in the age of digital technology and its implication for pastoral ministry”, the fruit of the work of a team of Signis Asia, was presented by Fr. John Mi Shen, a member of the research team. The paper dealt with the various Information and Communication and how to integrate them to meet the social and pastoral challenges of the Church and society in the digital milieu.

The fourth paper discussed the evolution of the mission of Radio Veritas Asia, its migration from Short-Wave radio service to a multimedia platform, and its continuous realization as a concrete pastoral expression of the mission of the Church in Asia during the past fifty years. It recalled the process of discernment led by the FABC OSC, which is responsible for the RVA, prior to taking this major step. The results of audience surveys indicate that it has been a timely response to the opportunities offered by the digital technology.

With the vitality drawn from Jesus Christ, the Perfect Communicator and following the Magisterium of the Church, the FABC-OSC resolves to embrace the digital revolution with all its challenges to respond to the mission of the Church to proclaim the gospel in Asia. The 24th annual Bishops’ Meet of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences - Office of Social Communication reiterates its recognition of the power of technology that drives new trends in communication. Guided by the Spirit, and led by the conviction that the media are a Gift from the Lord, the Communication Offices of the Bishops in Asia affirm its commitment to continue to embrace the ICT with confidence.

Final Recommendations

1. We emphasize the need for the Bishops and the Church hierarchy to acknowledge the existence and relevance of Digital Media. Local Churches must not be hesitant to adopt new technology. Pope Francis reminds us that “Digital Media is a Gift from God” and therefore we should courageously adopt new things for the purpose of Evangelization.
2. We recognise the vital role of new and advanced technology and the challenges and opportunities offered by the ICT in proclaiming the Good News and for pastoral ministry in Asia.
3. We need to explore more vigorously innovative ways to integrate digital communication into our pastoral planning and activities so that we can bring the Gospel to individuals and entire peoples in this vast continent.
4. Witness of life, like that of Mother Teresa, is a powerful communication through which the Church in Asia can make significant impact on the people. Our communication praxis shall be rooted in the model of Christ the Good Shepherd.

5. While adopting the prevalent media culture we should strive to promote a culture of truth in the midst of falsehood, propaganda and fake news. Our communication should be genuine, authentic and transparent.
6. Given the evolving media values and practices in today's society that tend to disconnect and isolate people, we need to promote and foster a media culture that emphasizes family values, respect for one another, relationships and a more holistic individual and societal life.
7. We need to engage in using all emerging means of communication in addressing critical issues in Asia, such as addiction to gadgets, human trafficking, pornography, drug abuse, violence and other evils that impact peoples and countries negatively.
8. We should support freedom of expression and the right to information of peoples across Asia and be prophetic in opposing threats from totalitarian regimes and forces that suppress voice of freedom, that use unbridled censorship, intimidation, physical violence and cyber-harassment against media persons and institutions and champions of human rights.
9. The social communication initiatives of the Asian Church should give attention to promoting development of communication competence among Church leaders to enable them to effectively serve the Church and society. We welcome the new FABC-OSC initiative to establish an institute under the name *Veritas Asia Institute of Social Communication (VAISCOM)* to provide the necessary formation to offer necessary dispositions, aptitudes, competence and skills for effective social communication ministry.
10. In planning our communication strategies, we shall take into account the following:
 - 10.1 To identify specific audience and address their communication needs
 - 10.2 To provide Catholic teachings and value formation
 - 10.3 To prioritize the needs of young people in our pastoral communication
 - 10.4 To ensure that our message is relevant to the people
 - 10.5 To foster a culture of listening and responding to the needs of the people
 - 10.6 To engage in study and research on the changing ICT.
11. We emphasize the need for greater collaboration, networking and planning among the members of the FABC Offices of Social Communication, communication structures, organizations, activities and individuals.
12. Information Communication Technology (ICT) offers us many challenges and opportunities. Although technology may have made our life easy and efficient, there are areas that need constant introspection and discernment. To be able to respond to these challenges, a deeper and on-going study and understanding of "communication theology" are essential.