

## **FABC turns 40 Years**

It is 40 years since the Bishops of Asia set up the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), the apex body of the Catholic Church in Asia. The event will be celebrated during the 10th plenary assembly of the leaders and delegates of the various Bishops' Conferences in the continent when they meet in Vietnam, November 19-25, 2012. About 100 participants consisting of Presidents of Bishops' Conferences, theologians and other church leaders are expected to attend the event to reflect on opportunities and pastoral challenges that society offers the Church in Asia in the 21st century. FABC is the umbrella organization of 19-member Bishops' Conferences spread across the continent stretching from Kazakhstan in Central Asia to East Timor (Timor Leste) in Southeast Asia.

The Vietnam plenary assembly, which is expected to be attended by delegates from the Vatican, has chosen for its theme: "FABC at Forty Years - Responding to the Challenges of Asia: The New Evangelization." The assembly will discuss the ways of living the spirit of renewal and the vision of evangelization in Asia. The working document for the X<sup>th</sup> plenary assembly invites the delegates to discern how the Church can spread the Gospel values in societies of Asia impacted by dynamics triggered by globalization, cultural diversity, poverty and other factors. They will also try to take account of concerns such as: migrants and refugees, indigenous peoples, population, religious freedom, threats to life, social communications, ecology, laity, women, youth, Pentecostalism and vocations.

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is the fulfillment of the dream of the Bishops of Asia when they met together for the first time in 1968 in Manila soon after the Vatican II. As the Asian bishops came to Manila again during the visit of Pope Paul VI in 1970, the proposal took more concrete steps to set up this Federation. They forged ahead with their plans for the FABC as local Churches in Asia grappled with the question of how to proclaim the Gospel in a "new world" born after the colonial period.

The statutes of the FABC were approved by the Holy See in 1972. This voluntary association of Bishops' Conferences in Asia was formed "to foster among its members solidarity and co-responsibility for the welfare of Church and society in Asia, and to promote and defend whatever is for the greater good." Taking renewal in the Church as the overarching theme of its structure, reflection and activities through the past four decades, the FABC has discerned what the Church in Asia must do to be the Light, the Salt and the Leaven for the masses of Asia so that the message of Jesus Christ who said "I came that the World may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10/10) may become relevant.

One of the main instruments of achieving its goal is the FABC plenary assembly held every four years. The assembly usually brings together about 100 bishop-delegates and a large number of theologians and experts to study particular themes, pray together and draft statements that is relevant for the church in Asia.

The first FABC plenary assembly in 1974 issued its first statement and recommendation under the title "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia". It recommended to use dialogue as the approach to evangelization in Asia where Christians comprise only two to three percent of the population in most countries. Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, who served for many years in India's troubled northeast region and currently chairs the FABC's Office of Evangelization, advocated an approach that involves "whispering the Gospel to the soul of Asia." FABC documents have detailed an approach to evangelization through dialogue at three levels: with a people's culture (inculturation), with a country's religions (interreligious dialogue), and with the poor.

Cardinal Rosales the emeritus Archbishop of Manila said: "Without the FABC, individual local Churches would find it hard to solve problems that are shared by other Churches". One of the theologians from India, Father Felix Wilfred presented in volume 1 of the book "For All the Peoples of Asia," the strategy of "implementing the grand vision of the FABC." For more information on FABC, please visit our website: [www.fabc.org](http://www.fabc.org).

### **The Functions of FABC:**

Alive to the reality of the fresh winds of renewal that was blowing in the Church, the Bishops realized the need for setting up a permanent structure by which Asian Church leaders could gather regularly to share their experiences and develop among themselves what local Churches could do to translate the vision of Vatican II into the lives of the Peoples in Asia. Hence the function of FABC was defined as follows:

- To study ways and means of promoting the apostolate, especially in the light of Vatican II and post-conciliar official documents, and according to the needs of Asia
- To work for and to intensify the dynamic presence of the Church in the total development of the peoples of Asia
- To help in the study of problems of common interest to the Church in Asia, and to investigate possibilities of solutions and coordinated action
- To promote inter-communication and cooperation among local Churches and bishops of Asia
- To render service to Episcopal Conferences of Asia in order to help them to meet better the needs of the People of God
- To foster a more ordered development of organizations and movements in the Church at the international level.
- To foster ecumenical and interreligious communication and collaboration.

Based on the logic of local Churches, the decisions of the Federation are without juridical binding force; their acceptance is an expression of collegial responsibility.

### **STRUCTURE**

FABC functions through a hierarchy of structure consisting of the Plenary Assembly, the Central Committee, the Standing Committee, and the Central Secretariat.

**The Plenary Assembly**, the supreme body of FABC, is composed of all presidents of member-conferences or their officially designated Episcopal alternates, Bishop-delegates elected by the member-conferences, associate members and members of the Standing Committee. The Plenary Assembly meets in ordinary session every four years.

**The Central Committee**, composed of the presidents of member-conferences or their officially designated Episcopal alternates, oversees the implementation of the resolutions and instructions of the Plenary Assembly.

**The Standing Committee**, composed of five Bishops elected from different parts of Asia, implements the resolutions and instructions of the Central Committee. It provides direct guidance and support to the Central Secretariat and other organs of FABC.

**The Central Secretariat** is the principal service agency and an instrument of coordination within the FABC and with outside offices and agencies. To assist the Central Secretariat are nine Offices each handling specialized ministry/area of concern:

- Office of Human Development
- Office of Social Communication
- Office of Laity
- Office of Theological Concerns
- Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy
- Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
- Office of Evangelization
- Office of Clergy
- Office of Consecrated Life

Since 2011 a desk for ecological concerns has been set up to address this important issue.

The contribution of FABC through its General Assembly and offices will be presented in the next issue.

Fr. Raymond Ambrose  
Executive Secretary, FABC-OSC

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