

FABC OLF BILA X on the Laity

FABC OLF BILA X on the Laity originally scheduled for February in Dhaka was held in Bangkok from March 2 – 6. We continue to pray for peace and justice to be restored in Bangladesh. Details of the meeting follow:

Asian Meeting on the Laity on the 50th Anniversary of Vatican II

The Role and Mission of the Laity in the 21st Century

Camillian Pastoral Centre, Latkrabang, Thailand

Pre-Conference preparation

- A Survey Questionnaire was sent out at the end of November for all national or diocesan teams to fill. The aim of the survey was to get a picture of the structures supporting the Laity commissions or work on lay formation and also to gauge how they perceive themselves responding to the real challenges they face. 5 responses were sent prior to the conference from national teams and 4 more from Bangladesh diocesan teams. A fuller report on this survey will be completed by May 2015. More responses are expected.
- An article by Bishop Joseph Dinh Duc Dao – auxiliary bishop of Xuan Loc, Vietnam – was sent to all participants. This article which originally appeared in EAPR, analyses the formation of the laity and mission of the laity as found in FABC documents.



Participants reflect on their concerns and expectations

Arrival Day – Monday March 2nd 2015 Welcome
The team from Bangladesh led us in an opening prayer. Exec Sec Wendy Louis introduced the resource persons and welcomed the delegates. Participants then reflected on their main concern regarding the laity and what they would like to learn and to share at this conference.



Day One – Tuesday March 3rd 2015

Vatican II and the Laity – Description of the Spirit of Vatican II with special focus on the Laity.



The Papal Nuncio Msgr Paul Tsang In-Nam based in Bangkok was Presider. He was warm, welcoming and his message was strong. In his homily he insisted on Pope Francis' call to church men to have the 'smell of the sheep' and reminded them that they need to live out the symbols they bear such as the mitre, pectoral cross and crozier. He exhorted us all to 'walk the talk'

of our faith and to practice what we preach. He called on the Laity to go to the peripheries and find Christ there. He elaborated for the Lenten season the Church's tradition of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. The Nuncio joined the session until after lunch and was attentive and observant.

Welcome Address by Archbishop Patrick D’Rosario csc

In his Welcome Address Archbishop Patrick laid out the history of the Office of Laity and Family and the background of the BILAs. Many found it helpful as the FABC and its institutes are not familiar to many. His Welcome address really contextualized for us this conference on the 50th Anniversary of Vatican II.



The Keynote Address by Fr Jacob Teckanath

Fr Jacob Teckanath delivered the keynote highlighting two aspects and using as his main references the two Vatican Documents: The Church in the Modern World and The Apostolate of the Laity. He made frequent references to the Lay Faithful of Christ – the post-synodal exhortation of Pope John Paul II. In his keynote address Fr Jacob emphasized two things – the primary

mission of the Laity to transform the world, society (GS43) and secondly – an important teaching of the Council, that there are no longer any dichotomies as all things have been integrated in Christ. For the laity it is very important to understand that there is no division between the secular and the sacred, the natural and the supernatural. That the call to holiness is lived in the daily, secular realities as much as in the ecclesial and sacramental. He reiterated that the mission of the Laity comes from Baptism. The authority to share in the mission comes from our common baptism and therefore common priesthood. He enumerated some of the key thrusts of Vatican II and some of the points that were added or enhanced in Christifidelis Laici and Evangelii Gaudium. The two grave temptations cited by Pope John Paul II in CFL were highlighted and examples of how this really has been a challenge for the post-vatican church. Does God call laypeople to leave the world to work in pastoral and ecclesial settings? Is this where ‘real’ holiness is to be found? How does one discern a call to work within the Church when the priority for laity is the transformation of the ‘temporal order’.

From the keynote we could conclude that progress has been made in the understanding of the role of the laity and their share in the mission but that real sharing in the mission in church and society has still a long way to go.



Regional Groupings

Following the keynote address, the two regions present met to discuss key insights and learnings and apply them to their particular situations.

There were only two regions present in this conference. We were unable to get any participants from East and Central Asia. This is probably due to the fact that they were not so interested in this

conference as it was originally to be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh and they may have felt that the destination with its particular perspectives and problems would not relate to their situation.

Whatever the reason, it was a huge lack and they were missed. However, the South East Asian and South Asian regions were reasonably well represented.

A phenomenon observed was that each country group wanted to discuss among themselves even if they were only two or three persons. The reluctance to discuss as a region made it difficult to produce a good report at the regional level. For



this reason it may be important to process the regions in layers so that the countries have a chance to discuss prior to joining the region. Also it may be important to hold a regional meeting in the near future to assist these countries discuss their challenges in a more cohesive and collaborative manner.

Sharing in Plenum



The Plenary Discussion got into the need for greater partnership between church hierarchy and Laity as well as the need for more targeted formation. Many stories were shared here to highlight successful collaboration and participation but there was more frustration and pain regarding the lack of trust, the lack of participation, particularly of women. This

was true in all countries and at all levels. Some countries have made real progress while others lag far behind.

Also expressed, was the need for laity not to wait for the hierarchy to tell them what to do but to find their mission in the world and look for the formation needed.

Responses to the Keynote Address

The **laity survey** is a work in progress as the executive secretary was too ill in the weeks leading to the conference to do much in-depth analysis or description or to chase those who had not sent it in. A few survey responses came in just days before the conference. Based on those that were available she put together a 10 minute report just to show the four countries that had sent in their forms from the national level. The report was based on Questions 1 to 3 and Question 13. Most interesting in this report was the lack of personnel in these countries for an office that should be serving a very wide and diverse population. The tendency to put one priest in charge of the office with laypeople serving as administrative or logistic support was also indicative of the low priority assigned to laity concerns. The challenges and responses listed by the four respondents seemed to indicate that the challenges are numerous and diverse but the response in terms of formation and animation remained traditional. The Small Christian Communities it would seem are more and more becoming the locus of formation for countries like India and Sri Lanka.

The **Response Speakers** integrated well with the theme.

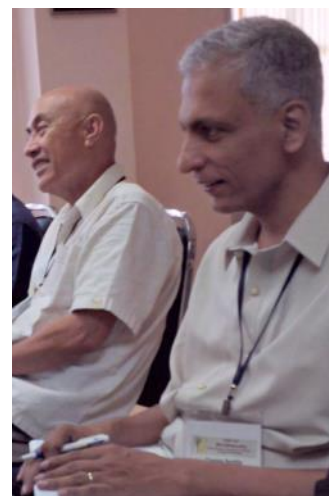
Archbishop Patrick spoke from a prepared text but his focus was on Lumen Gentium and the main images and themes from that document which inspired his work after Vatican II. He then shared the layers of programmes that are provided in his archdiocese to empower the laity including business people, women and youth.

Charles Bertille responded more spontaneously and called for a change of heart and therefore a change of priorities towards the laity. He made a plea on behalf of laity who wish to take their responsibilities in church and society and asked that they be empowered, recognized, encouraged and formed.

Fr Arthur Leger wove all the strands of the day into a story with characters coming from the speakers of the day. His main point was to show us the direction we are headed and how the characters have changed since we started out after Vatican II. His main point was that we need to learn to tell the story of Jesus in Asia and show the face of Jesus. He emphasized the need to go to the peripheries as insisted on by Pope Francis.

After some time to clarify thoughts and raise questions we ended the day.

Fr Rohan Dominic introduced the next morning's Gospel Sharing in mixed groups. The texts were of the following day and were to be found in the Liturgy booklet printed for the occasion.



Steering Committee and Drafting Committee meetings

At the end of day one, the two committees met. The feedback /suggestions from the steering committee were: that the session should be recorded as documentation and someone should be taking notes of everything. Secondly, they wanted moderators who would lead the group to certain conclusions. It was explained that the purpose of these FABC meetings and trainings could not have any such agenda to bring about some definite conclusion as those present would need to return to their home bases and consult and work with the people and leaders. This conference has no pre-determined conclusions of its own and remains open to facilitate a reflection as indicated in the theme.

Day Two – Wednesday March 4th 2015

Impact of SCC / BEC development in Asia and the Role and Mission of the Laity in society



1Fr Rohan Dominic explains the Morning Prayer Gospel Sharing

For many, the Morning Prayer: Gospel Sharing was a blessing and a moment of Grace. They expressed the wish to implement it back in their own churches and organisations. It affirms my own conviction that the main thing needed is the meeting with Christ and we can only provide the opportunities.

Workshops were the main feature of day two, as follows:

1. SCCs & Impact on laity – Dr Bibiana Ro & Fr Rohan Dominic cmf – 9 participants
2. Laity Formation & Movements – Fr Arthur Leger SJ & Mr

Charles Bertille – 14 participants

3. Laity, Family & Evangelization – Fr Jyoti Costa & Fr Jacob Teckanath – 13 participants

In general, participants found the workshops deepened their application of the post-Vatican call to lay participation in mission in the particular fields.

In the evaluation given at the end of the conference some were asking for more workshops, longer workshops and more practical application to be done in the workshops. In future BILAs we will take note of this.



2 Mr Babu Marcus Gomes of Bangladesh who is President of “Dhaka Christian Co-op & Credit Union”

In the last session of the day, we had a speaker who is lay and has experience of working with the Church and ecumenically in the context of credit unions. The **talk by Mr Babu Marcus Gomes** of Bangladesh who is President of “Dhaka Christian Co-op & Credit Union” was very well received. It was a great example of how laity, when empowered and working as trusted partners, can assist the poor, the local church and the country become more self-sufficient and self-sustaining. It was an inspiring story which sent a wave of excitement through the participants. There was a real awakening that trusting the laity is often very difficult for the ordained members of the church.

Eucharist

Bishop Silvio presided at Mass at the end of the first day and told us the

story of the church in Thailand. A fascinating analysis of the church’s foundations and showing that it is still considered a foreign import which is an obstacle to evangelization. He saw hope in the laity at the grass roots evangelizing through the family and the Small Christian Communities. He explained the 5 year plan that is being implemented as they celebrate their 350th year since Christianity came to Thailand.



Open discussion on pastoral challenges

In the evening after supper, at the special request of Bishop Andradi we did not cancel the Pastoral exchange which some had suggested. Those who attended shared their pastoral challenges and stories of success. This was very insightful and allowed for a closer look at reality. This was followed by night prayer prepared by the small team from Malaysia.

Day Three – Thursday March 5th 2015

Impact of faith formation and leadership training on mission among the Laity

Fr Arthur Leger SJ tried to get the participants to really listen to each other by asking them to share with someone from a different workshop and country. He then asked them to report on what their partners shared during the buzzing. He also tried to help them listen by asking the left side of the house to say what they had heard in the reports. This second part was less successful due to language limitations and the eagerness of participants to report on their own buzz group insights. It was apparent that this type of reporting needs to be better prepared from within the workshop groups already so that participants are able to articulate the insights and ideas they gleaned from the workshop.

Panel Discussion



Panelists left to right: – Dr Bibiana Ro (FABC OLF AsiPA(BEC) desk from S.Korea, Mr Hamid Henry (Theological Institute for the Laity) Pakistan, Prachuab Trinikorn (Laity Commission Chairman, Thailand) and Rosalina Basas (Council of the Laity) Philippines

Charles Bertille as moderator for the Panel Discussion, shifted the focus of the panel from formation of the laity, to mission of the laity. Panelists shared on mission and formation. The time allotted to each panelist was too short but they managed to deliver some good points. There was active discussion from the floor regarding laity and their mission. Bibiana spoke of the connection between formation and mission in the Small Communities, Hamid

Henry spoke of the need for an inductive methodology in Laity formation which is contextual. Rosalinda spoke of the need for a laity solidly founded on a spirituality that can sustain them.

For the regional planning some groups had a distinct advantage as they were almost complete teams with a bishop and therefore there was the possibility of planning with the intention to implement. These were Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Philippines. Thailand did have 4 key people with a bishop but still this was not enough to impact a national plan.

The guide questions kept in mind that these were not the decision makers so they asked for what steps could be taken to influence situations, persons etc. The regions and countries shared their plans in plenum later.

Reports on planning discussion and evaluation

This was a particularly weak part of the programme as the usual enthusiasm for sharing or 'harvesting' was missing. The process was lacking somewhat for scaffolding the discussion and sharing. People should have been encouraged to speak their minds through a more enabling process. This was felt keenly by the organisers mainly but it was not obvious how to improve it at that moment.

Conclusion

The closing Eucharist was well celebrated with the team from Sri Lanka assisting Presider Bishop Norbert Andradi. He preached on the need for awareness. To see those who are around us who are in need. Ronald Yago of the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Philippines, provided guitar accompaniment to the singing which gave a festive touch to our Lenten eucharists.

The conference concluded with a very enjoyable social evening with participants sharing cultural entertainment through music, dance and story-telling. The young participant from Pakistan was a most amiable MC for the evening.

Overall, the feeling of the participants was that of being reminded of the fundamental calling and mission of the Laity and the work still to be done. Many participants asked for a more personal and practical approach to the role of the Laity and said that we need role models and scenarios. This was supposed to take place in the small group and regional discussions and workshops but was still insufficient. Some local testimonies would also have been more inspiring.

What was missed also was a local immersion and exposure to the Laity at work or to the local culture etc. This was planned for Dhaka but was not possible to plan at short notice in Thailand.

The Final Statement

From the end of day one the Drafting committee led by Bishop Baylon (Philippines), following the format of previous statements and worked individually to develop the various sections and worked late into the night.

This being a three day conference, the drafting committee's time frame was really too tight. Members of the drafting committee were Bishop Andradi (Sri Lanka), Hamid Henry (Pakistan), Bernadette Teh (Malaysia), Ronald Yago (Philippines) and Fr Jacob Teckanath (India).

After the second reading of the statement it was approved in principle by the whole body and all agreed to allow the final text to be produced by the drafting committee after the conference with final approval from the Chairman of the FABC OLF.

Objectives of the BILA X on Laity

- A) Laity and Vatican II: to assess, in view of Vatican II, the role and mission of the Laity - how have we done, where are we and where should we be going?
- B) Laity and the World: to study the impact of the mission of the Laity in social life.
- C) Laity in the Church: to study the impact of SCCs, Family, Women's and Youth Ministry on the enabling of Laity to participate in the Mission of the Church
- D) Laity in Mission: To propose recommendations for the mission of evangelization of the Laity

There was a general feeling that the objectives were too broad for such a short conference. Less ambitious and more specific was the feedback on the objectives. However, to some degree, all the objectives were met and with the final statement completed, objective D will also be accomplished.



Archbishop Patrick in discussion with Bishop Andradi

The Camillian Pastoral Care Centre were extremely helpful and accommodating. With this in view, please note that this conference went through creditably and was a good commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of Vatican II and the Role and Mission of the Laity.

Funding partners for the programme came from Missio Munich (50%), Church of St Ignatius (20%), Singapore, Individual donors (12%), Dhaka & Singapore, FABC OLF subsidy (8%) and registration fees (10 percent).