

Asia's Youngest, Struggling Church at FABC Plenary

Negombo, Sri Lanka: With a little more than 1,000 baptized Catholics, six parishes and a bishop's house, the Mongolian Catholic community is trying to make its presence felt in the country.

Bishop Wens Padilla of Ulaanbaatar, head of the Catholic Church in Mongolia, explained Catholicism's origin and growth in his country, while addressing the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) at Negombo, Sri Lanka.

A widely nomadic community, cantered around their mobile tents and herding of animals, Christianity's growth was slow facing suppression and abolition at various stages.

Catholicism was first introduced in the 13th century during Mongol empire, but died out with the end of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368. Christianity was prevented by successive regimes.

With the introduction of democracy in 1991, Catholic missionaries returned and rebuilt the Church from the beginning. Currently, the country has an Apostolic Prefecture, a bishop, and diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

"With only 1,300 baptized, the Catholics could hardly make an impressive impact on society," said Bishop Padilla who pointed out that only 16 families have actually registered from the Catholics.

Couples For Christ from the Philippines visit these Catholic families and share their Catholic family experience in the hope of teaching to lead a good Christian family life, said the bishop, who was a member of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart.

"This had some positive impact on our Christian families," observed the prelate who indicated signs of improvement in terms of more stability and love in married life.

"The Catholic Mongolian family, in its meagre beginnings spearheads into the future with a great and hopeful potential in pastoral and mission works," the bishop added.

The missionary bishop mentioned on the positive use of media which can give a possibility to create a network of relationships among families to exchange experiences, opinions, and maybe to make pressure on legislators or government officials about the family.

The Mongolian Church plans to give more attention to local and international family movements such as Couples for Christ; Marriage Encounter programs, and Focolari Movement for effective Christian and human formation.

Other plans include strengthening pastoral attention and formation for the young especially those preparing for marriage, finding ways to promote economic solidarity among families especially for those experiencing financial/economic problems, and develop some sort of spirituality for families on relationships, prayer, and faith formation.

The Mongolian bishop is part of FABC's eleventh plenary assembly that addresses the theme "The Asian Catholic Family: Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy."

More than 140 bishops, FABC officials and guests are attending the November 28-December 4 meet.

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