

# FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES

## OFFICE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION (FABC-OSC)

### Statement of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Bishops' Meet 2017

November 13-18, 2017

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Bishops' meet of FABC-OSC was held on November 13-18, 2017 at Personnel Development Centre, St Gabriel's Foundation Building, Bangkok, Thailand. 24 participants including 5 bishops, 17 priests and 2 lay people deliberated on the theme, "Challenge to Social Communication in the Digital Church.

Fr Joshy Xavier S J (Xavier University, Bhubaneswar, India), Mr Michael Unland (Executive Secretary, Catholic Media Council, Germany) and Mr Joseph Ubalde (Social Media Specialist, Manila) animated the sessions on the theme.

In the keynote address, Fr Joshy dealt on the importance of the Internet and Communication Technology which has deeply penetrated the life of many people across the world. Internet, which in the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis, is a gift from God that should be used for the integral social development and proclamation of the Gospel (*cf. Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter - Message of Pope Francis For The 48th World Communications Day*) With the enormous potential and positive impact in all aspects of our life and activities, internet also poses many challenges. We recognize the enormous use of internet in the activities of the Church, at the same time, it also challenges us in the areas of Morality, Pastoral Practice, Liturgy, Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology and Eschatology. Our engagement in the cyberspace should be one characterized by knowledge, discernment and charity aiming at the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Mr Michael Unland, recognized the digitalized world as the new vineyard, where using the internet technology we can have a renewed involvement and leadership in the Church. He cited many practical and specific examples where the Internet and Social Media were used for Proclamation of the Gospel and effective spiritual and pastoral administration of the Church.

Mr Joseph Ubalde, stressed on the importance of Social Media as a tool, which if properly used, can reap great fruits in the field of evangelization and proclamation. He urged the Church leaders to venture into Social Media to make a felt presence among the faithful and the world, especially among the youth, to motivate, guide and accompany them in their life journey.

Having learnt the importance of the internet and social media and sensing the urgency of the situation of the world and the Church, we, the Church leaders, should shed our fears and inhibitions regarding internet and Social media and embrace this great gift and be more effective and efficient in our ministries. All recognized Pope Francis as the model in this regard.

The members expressed fear and concerns in adopting internet and social media in the ministries. The concerns were: issue of privacy, reputation, being vulnerable, institutional threats, erosion of cultural values and ethos, copyright issues, psychological and behavioral impacts, distraction and negative effects on human relationships. Many felt that we are not doing enough to make efficient use of the power of internet and social media in our ministries. We tend to limit ourselves to traditional ways of evangelization and proclamation without realizing that social communication and interaction have, to a large extent, moved to social

media. People look to internet for knowledge, establishment of relationships, communication and answers for life's problems. When these online activities are done without ethical guidance and discernment, result in frustration and anger, they can be very harmful. This is where the faithful and the people need resilience, protection and accompaniment.

### **Recommendations**

1. Promote awareness on the relevance, importance and impact of internet and social media in our life and ministry.
2. Consider internet and social media as a tool, so make proper discernment in the responsible use of it by all of us.
3. Initiate compulsory media education in schools and parishes, for students, pastoral workers and catechists. At every level, we need experts to go to the schools and teach the positive and negative impact of digital media.
4. Set up media management and PR at every level to defend the Church from false accusations and to press our demands with Govt and public. (no more resorting to SSS; i.e., Suffer Silently and Smile)
5. Encourage everybody to be creators and curators of good news storylines of hope, love, beauty, forgiveness, reconciliation and motivation. Keep in mind the wider society to reach out to all.
6. Invest in the creation of effective media team and resources; human, financial and material also create a social media manual for the benefit of all the users.
7. Establish the link between communication ministry and youth ministry; as most of our target group falls in that category. We could also identify talented, exemplary youth, who could help the pastors in teaching and guiding other people in the use of digital media.
8. Make social media literacy a compulsory part of formation programs of our seminarians which should be evaluated and monitored regularly.
9. Create sustainable fund at all levels for digital media related training and work.
10. Conduct regular digital media training to implement these recommendations at different levels.

Taking the imagery of a CROSIER, we have the duty to; a) Lead the people in the proper and ethical use of internet and social media, b) Feed the people with correct and genuine information and c) Protect the people from potential dangers and pitfalls of digital media.

### **Christ Has No Online Presence but Yours** (*Meredith Gould*)

Christ has no online presence but yours,  
No blog, no Facebook page but yours,  
Yours are the tweets through which love touches this world,  
Yours are the posts through which the Gospel is shared,  
Yours are the updates through which hope is revealed.  
Christ has no online presence but yours,  
No blog, no Facebook page but yours.



**Bishops Meet 2017**

FABC