

**FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND FAITH FORMATION  
(FABC-OEFF)**

**Final Statement and Proceedings of the  
CONSULTATION MEETING ON  
*ANTIQUUM MINISTERIUM***

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Chairperson, FABC-OEFF

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## *Antiquum Ministerium* Consultation Meeting Final Statement

We, the participants of the consultation meeting on *Antiquum Ministerium* (AM), have come together to examine this document regarding the installation to the Ministry of Catechist more closely. We are 106 delegates composed of bishops, clergy, religious and lay people from Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand who met online for two days on June 8 and 10, 2022 to discern the call of the Holy Father, His Holiness Pope Francis, on the institution to the lay Ministry of Catechist. We have gathered as fellow travelers pondering our way forward: taking a step of faith together by studying, reflecting, and discerning reality carefully. We hope to learn from each other, and especially from our brothers and sisters who have already begun to implement AM in their dioceses.

On May 10, 2021, The Holy Father Pope Francis issued “*Motu Proprio*” the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium*, instituting the lay Ministry of Catechist. In this Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis directly invites “the Episcopal Conferences to render effective the ministry of Catechist, determining the necessary process of formation and the normative criteria for admission to this ministry and devising the most appropriate forms for the service which these men and women will be called to exercise in conformity with the content of this Apostolic Letter.” (AM 9)

In announcing the Institution to the Ministry of Catechist, Pope Francis has opened a new path before us. Although catechists have been in existence since the earliest years of the Church, the institution of this new Ministry makes us stop and ponder. As with all things new, this path makes us curious and cautious, wondering if we should take it. We may be reluctant to do so because the new path seems “different”, and we are unsure where it will take us. Certainly, it may seem easier and more sensible to remain on the well-trodden path, however, *Antiquum Ministerium* has given us pause to ponder on the current practices in catechetical ministry and to consider what might make it more effective.

In the pursuit of synodality, and in keeping with the FABC spirit of dialogue, we confidently travel together during this consultation meeting by praying, dialoguing with, and listening to one another. It

is our sincere wish to learn from and support each other as companions on a journey. We prayed for the leadership and guidance of our Lord Jesus on the journey of this meeting, so that each of us may do our part to bring a positive difference in our parishes, dioceses, and the Church at large.

### **Key Findings from the Survey of Diocesan Catechetical Commissions**

In preparation for a comprehensive discussion during the meeting, the OEFF had conducted a survey among FABC dioceses on their respective catechetical ministries. The aim of this survey was to provide a descriptive overview of the current reality of catechists with regard to their status and role in the community, as well as the practices involved in their formation and preparation for the ministry. The survey was carried out through April and May of 2022, receiving 127 responses from 14 conferences and member countries, including India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Hong Kong and Bangladesh.

The key findings of the survey relevant to the implementation of *Antiquum Ministerium*:

1. It is found the majority of respondent dioceses have less than 10% of catechists working full time for the ministry, less than 30% of catechists working part time and have more than 70% catechists who are volunteers.

2. Most catechists serve at the parish level, with 116 out of 127 dioceses reporting that the majority of their catechists serve parishes.

3. The majority of catechists provide catechism and faith formation for various groups in the community, but some also take on roles as community and liturgical leaders, oversee the upkeep of church premises, administration of sacraments and others.

4. Full-time catechists in more than half of respondent dioceses take on 3 to 4 different roles in the community and volunteer catechists in the majority of respondent dioceses play more than one role.

5. Most programs currently available for catechist formation are short programs which are less than two weeks long. Some programs are structured, but a significant number (55%) of dioceses

indicate that their catechist formation programs are unstructured and irregular.

6. The majority of dioceses that responded to the survey have not implemented AM and are still considering its implementation. However, most of them (69%) are interested in its implementation.

7. From the 46 dioceses that have implemented or are planning to implement the document, more than half have installed full-time catechists to the ministry. These catechists fulfil various roles and responsibilities, especially in catechism and faith formation, community leadership, liturgy and overseeing the upkeep of premises.

8. Selection of catechists for installation was based on the practice of their faith, attitude, morality and formation.

9. While formation programs vary in length and type, they generally cover catechesis, Bible knowledge, faith formation and teaching methodology

Finally, there were various comments on the implementation of AM, but the general sense is that this document highlights the importance of catechists in the mission of the church and provides an opportunity to improve lay participation and formation, as well as caring for the general well-being of catechists who have dedicated their lives to this vocation.

### **Vocation of the Catechist**

Before our journey, we first sought to understand the context of *Antiquum Ministerium* and the current reality of catechists in Asia. In doing so, we found that the formal definition of a catechist, according to the Code of Canon Law (785), is that “catechists are lay members of the Christian faithful, duly instructed and outstanding in the Christian life, who devote themselves to setting forth the teaching of the gospel and to organizing liturgies and works of charity under the direction of a missionary.” We remember the praise of St John Paul II for catechists in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*: “Among the laity who become evangelizers, catechists have a place of honor. The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church speaks of them as “that army of catechists, both men and women, worthy of praise, to whom missionary work among the nations owes so much. Imbued with the apostolic spirit, they make a singular and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church by

their strenuous efforts". He continues: "Catechists are specialists, direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers who, as I have often stated and experienced during my missionary journeys, represent the basic strength of Christian communities, especially in the young churches" (RM 73).

While it is clear that catechists have always been associated with missionary work in areas where the church is less established, the survey of dioceses has shown us that there are also many places where the role of the catechist has evolved to suit the needs of the lay faithful according to their socio-cultural and economic context. In addition to the numerous catechists involved in mission work and evangelization in remote parts all over Asia, there is also a significant number of catechists who are volunteers that have responded to the call to cooperate with the apostolate of the hierarchy in the work of catechesis.

In his apostolic letter, the Holy Father prompts us to recall that the ministry of transmitting the teachings of the apostles and evangelists has existed since the earliest days of the Church and is acknowledged as a concrete expression of a personal charism that contributes to the mission of evangelization. He added that the countless lay men and women who directly took part in the spread of the Gospel through catechetical instruction, who feel called to cooperate more directly in the work of catechesis also deserve to be recognized (AM 1,2,3,5).

Inspired by these words, it is important for us to expand the definition of 'catechist', to include those who have, in their own way, answered the call to carry out a proper mission in the community in accordance with the voice of the Holy Spirit. We remember also that the presence of qualified, effective catechists is even more important today because of the need for evangelization in the contemporary world and the rise of a globalized culture (AM5)

Therefore, we recognize that being a catechist is a specific vocation. According to the General Directory for Catechesis (112), "the catechist is a Christian who receives a particular calling from God that, when accepted in faith, empowers him for the service of the transmission of faith and for the task of initiating others into the Christian life. Through this calling, the catechist is made a participant in Jesus'

mission of introducing disciples into his filial relationship with the Father”.

By acknowledging this vocation of the catechist and in accordance with *Lumen Gentium* (30), the Holy Father has invited us to recognize, encourage, guide, and sustain all who answer this call through their installation to the Ministry of the Catechist.

### **Installation to the Lay Ministry of Catechist**

Pope Francis formally established the lay Ministry of Catechist in May 2021. In doing so, he declared the Ministry to have a firm and stable effect, also stating that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments would soon publish the liturgical Rite of the Institution of the Ministry of Catechist.

Following that, the Congregation issued a letter in December 2021 stating, “the ministry of Catechist is conferred by the diocesan Bishop, or by a priest delegated by him, by means of the liturgical rite *De Institutione Catechistarum* (Rite of Institution of Catechists) promulgated by the Apostolic See”. This rite was issued by the Congregation on 31st December 2021 and approved by Pope Francis on 1st January 2022.

Based on these statements, we understand that what distinguishes the person who is installed to the Ministry of Catechist from other lay catechists is that he or she commits to this ministry in a stable manner and is formally installed by means of the liturgical rite promulgated by the Apostolic See: *De Institutione Catechistarum*.

This new Ministry and new rite can be seen as the formal acknowledgment of the ministry and charism of catechists in the Church. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop, in acknowledging “the ministries and charisms of the faithful” (LG, 30) to discern the vocation of the person called to the lay Ministry of the Catechist and ensure that the installation is done according to the appropriate rites.

From this, we understand that this installation will firmly bond a catechist to the Ministry, therefore the selection of individuals requires due process and consideration to ensure the right persons are installed for the right reasons.

## **Specific Recommendations**

We begin this journey with three important questions in mind. The first question concerns the identity and role of the installed person; secondly, we hoped to determine the criteria for individuals who qualify for this ministry and finally, establish how these individuals would be formed and prepared for Institution to the Ministry of Catechist.

In view of the diverse socio-cultural and economic contexts across Asia, we considered it our task to only propose general guidelines and points of consideration in relation to these questions as well as to other questions that may arise. It is our hope that these will help the bishops in their discernment regarding the installation of laypersons to the Ministry of the Catechist in their dioceses.

### **Points for Consideration**

Since the installation to the lay Ministry of Catechist is a stable form of service, which implies permanence in their position, it is important for the Catechetical Ministry of each diocese to consider these points:

1. Instruction in the faith is an essential part of the mission of the Church. Therefore, appropriate investment in and formation of catechists who directly cooperate with the mission and represent the Church is vital to the success of the ministry.

2. Being installed as a catechist is not just a job or a matter of course for all catechists; it is a vocation. Therefore, the appropriate discernment process is necessary to confirm the calling of individuals.

3. The socio-cultural and economic context of the diocese and the specific needs for evangelization and catechesis to happen more effectively.

4. The meaning of installation and the unique identity and role of the installed catechist compared to existing forms of service carried out by catechists.

5. The different roles and level of responsibility held by the catechist is justly considered, recognized, evaluated and remunerated where appropriate.

6. Recognition of and investment in this ministry, as well as the establishment of appropriate pathways for entry may also serve to

inspire and encourage the young to join the mission of catechesis and stimulate the growth of the ministry.

### **Meaning of Installation to the Ministry of Catechist**

When considering the identity of the installed catechist and the meaning of installation to the ministry, we found the following points most pertinent to the discussion:

1. It is a confirmation of the individual's calling to the catechetical ministry as a stable vocation to cooperate with clergy and religious in the mission of the Church, and requires the appropriate discernment process.

2. Installation will recognize and empower catechists to carry out their mission and teach the faith with authority after having received a systematic formation.

3. Installed catechists are role models of the vocation and mission of the catechetical ministry, inspiring others to also seek their vocation in this ministry.

4. It is a stable form of the catechetical ministry and may imply a permanent status

5. Without prejudice to the just remuneration of professional catechists who devote their entire efforts to the ministry, installation does not require the catechist to be professionally employed by the diocese.

6. Installation creates a fixed relationship between the individual and the diocese, hence, there is a need to define the rights and responsibilities of both. While the diocese now becomes responsible for the formation and supervision of installed individuals, the catechist must also commit to formation, proper preparation and dedication to the work of the ministry.

### **Criteria for Selection of Installed Catechists**

Several criteria for the selection of installed catechists have already been given in *Antiquum Ministerium*, and our discussion brought forward a few other suggestions for consideration:

1. A person of deep faith and human maturity (AM 8)
2. Actively participating in the Christian community (AM 8)
3. Having a generous and welcoming attitude toward others (AM 8)

4. Has a good fraternal relationship with others in the community (AM 8)
5. Has a vocation to the catechetical ministry
6. Having the qualities of a good leader and respected by others in the community
7. Known to have good moral character and a positive attitude
8. Have received the sacraments of initiation
9. Have undergone the required catechetical formation and has the basic knowledge of the Bible and Church teachings
10. Takes his or her vocation as a catechist seriously and is willing to commit to the formation and ministry in a firm and stable manner
11. Other criteria as required by their role in the community or diocese. There may also be different levels of qualification in accordance with their level of responsibility.

While considering the criteria, we remember the words of Pope Francis: "A catechist's work is not a job; "being" a catechist requires love, an ever stronger love for Christ, love for His holy people." We hope these recommendations we have put forward will help in the vocational discernment of catechists and allow them to realize their love for Christ and His Church.

### **Duty of an Installed Catechist**

Based on *Antiquum Ministerium*, (Par 6), "Catechists are called first to be expert in the pastoral service of transmitting the faith as it develops through its different stages... Every catechist must be a witness to the faith, a teacher and mystagogue, a companion and pedagogue, who teaches for the Church." The document has already set forth the main role of catechists, to which we have added a few suggestions:

1. The main role of the catechist is to teach, transmit and witness the faith
2. A mentor and companion for others, leading them to Christ
3. A representative who teaches for the Church
4. Experts on the teachings of Christ and the Church
5. Role models for the vocation and mission of the catechetical ministry
6. Leaders and ministers who care for the individuals or community entrusted to them

7. Close collaborators with priests and religious in the teaching of the faith

8. Other roles as required by the circumstances of the dioceses, provided they do not hinder the main role of the catechist to transmit the faith.

### **Status of an Installed Catechist**

While discussing the duty of installed catechists, it is also necessary for us to mention the responsibility of the community and diocese in acknowledging the status of their installation. We would like to make the following recommendations with this regard:

1. The catechist is installed by the bishop and should be accountable to the appropriate Diocesan Office or parish, ready to exercise their ministry wherever they are needed.

2. An installed catechist who devotes significant efforts to the ministry or is professionally employed by the diocese should receive just consideration and appropriate remuneration according to their level of responsibility.

3. An appropriate administrative structure is set up to quantify the different roles and levels of responsibility, thereby ensuring that a catechist is not unduly burdened and is adequately prepared for their role.

4. Periodic evaluation of their work in the ministry is carried out by the relevant supervising authority; adequate guidance and formation are given when required.

5. The continuous formation is provided to enhance the growth of their capabilities.

6. The selection policy and pathway for installation of a catechist is made known to the general community so that they may understand the vocation and mission of the catechists installed to the ministry.

7. An appropriate duration for their service may be set according to the needs of the diocese and the discretion of the bishop.

8. Other policies and administrative measures for selection, remuneration, guidance, and oversight of catechists according to the circumstances of the diocese

## **Formation and Preparation of an Installed Catechist**

Through our discussions on this journey, seeking to render effective the ministry of the catechist, we have come to the understanding that an effective ministry needs good and qualified human resources. According to AM, they should “receive suitable biblical, theological, pastoral and pedagogical formation to be competent communicators of the truth of the faith and they should have some prior experience of catechesis.” Therefore, we would like to put forward the following recommendations for the formation and preparation of catechists so they may become better equipped, more credible witnesses of the faith:

1. The systematic and holistic formation that would cover catechetical, biblical, theological, pastoral, and pedagogical topics as well as spiritual, psychological, and emotional preparation.

2. Appropriate formation according to their expected roles and responsibilities. Catechists who will take on leadership roles should be sufficiently prepared with leadership formation, while topics covering RCIA and proper handling of minors are given to those who serve the respective ministries.

3. The continuous formation is regularly provided for their growth and well-being. Opportunities to attend various formations also allow them to progress and specialize in different areas of interest such as RCIA, children’s ministry, youth ministry, family life and others as relevant to the needs of the diocese.

4. Catechists should be required to serve and experience the catechetical ministry for a certain number of years before installation to the ministry.

5. Other formal or informal formation programs as deemed appropriate by the diocese.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, at the end of our journey through this consultation meeting, we come to a realization that this journey does not end with the meeting but is a journey that will continue even after its conclusion. Similarly, the institution of the lay Ministry of Catechist and its implementation in the various dioceses across Asia is not just a simple ceremony or event, but a journey that will hopefully enhance the effectiveness of the catechetical ministry and bring glory to God.

As with any other journey, there are no failures, simply detours, and we hope to encourage all involved in the catechetical ministry to not be afraid to take this new path and brave its twists, turns and dangers for the sake of making our Lord Jesus known and loved by a new generation in need of hearing the Gospel.

## **Background and Introduction of the Meeting**

**Pablito A. Baybado, Jr**

Executive Secretary, FABC-OEFF

Around 106 delegates composed of bishops, clergy, religious and lay people from Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand met online for two days on June 8 and 10, 2022 to discern the call of the Holy Father, His Holiness Pope Francis, on the institution to the lay Ministry of Catechist.

On May 10 2021, The Holy Father Pope Francis issued “*Motu Proprio*” the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium*, instituting the lay Ministry of Catechist. In this Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis directly invites “the Episcopal Conferences to render effective the ministry of Catechist, determining the necessary process of formation and the normative criteria for admission to this ministry and devising the most appropriate forms for the service which these men and women will be called to exercise in conformity with the content of this Apostolic Letter.” (AM 9)

The following key questions guided us in drawing up the program, its process and preparation: 1) Is the Ministry of Catechist as stipulated in *Antiquum Ministerium* relevant in the diocese/ episcopal conference? 2) If yes, who is to be installed? (Criteria of selection has to be stated). 3) What is role and functions of the installed catechist in the community/ diocese? (Description of specific role and responsibilities, especially when compared to others serving as catechists). 4) What type of formation is required to the person to be installed?

A few months after the publication of the document *Antiquum Ministerium*, Archbishop Julian Leow Beng-Kim, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia already intimated that the OEFF should study the document and organize a program to understand it and respond to the invitation of the Holy Father. On February 18, 2022, during the regular meeting its regular meeting, the OEFF, under the leadership of Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC, Bishop of Bandung, Indonesia, approved the activity and directed the establishment of a core team to work on the program, its preparation and implementation.

In the words of Archbishop Julian Leow Beng-Kim, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur and bishop member of OEFF, the consultation meeting is a gathering of “fellow travelers pondering our way forward: taking a step of faith together by studying, reflecting and discerning reality carefully. We hope to learn from each other, and especially from our brothers and sisters who have already begun to implement AM in their dioceses.”

As the keynote speaker of the consultation meeting, Abp. Julian Leow Beng Kim emphasized that the main task of this consultation meeting will be to propose and draw up some general guidelines in relation to three questions, namely 1). What is the identity and role of the installed person?; 2) who qualifies for the ministry?; and 3) How is the person to be formed? The guidelines, according to him, will be helpful to the bishops in making their own decision regarding the Institution to the Ministry of Catechist and its implementation in their dioceses. “Ultimately, it is the task of the Episcopal Conferences and individual bishops to clarify the description, the role and the most appropriate forms for the exercise of the ministry of the catechists,” he said.

The process used is the Pastoral Spiral Approach, which includes the following aspects: Experience, Analysis, Theological Reflection, Response, and Review. The Bishops deemed it important that a survey questionnaire will be sent to all the Conferences to have baseline data on the situation of catechist and their reception and implementation of the *Antiquum Ministerium*. This will serve as the basis of the discernment process and for action planning during the consultation meeting.

Thus, in preparation for a comprehensive discussion during the meeting, the OEFF conducted a survey among FABC dioceses on their respective catechetical ministries. The aim of this survey was to provide a descriptive overview of the current reality of catechists with regard to their status and role in the community, as well as the practices involved in their formation and preparation for the ministry. The survey was carried out through April and May of 2022, receiving 127 responses from 14 conferences and member countries, including India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Hong Kong and Bangladesh.

The key findings of the survey indicate that diocese-respondents have not implemented the *Antiquum Ministerium* and half are still considering its implementation. However, it is found that the majority (69%) of dioceses that have not implemented AM are interested in its implementation.

Archbishop Simon Poh Hoon Seng of the Archdiocese of Kuching reminded us of the honor of catechists by quoting *Redemptoris Missio* #73: "Among the laity who become evangelizers, catechists have a place of honor." Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC, the bishop of Bandung and chairperson of OEFF, described the consultation meeting as a way of promoting the high status of catechists, appropriately appreciating catechists' work, and providing an excellent formation for them. Therefore, we must pay good attention to the well-being of the catechists.

Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing, OFM, auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong and bishop-member of OEFF, described the two-day event as "fostering the Universality of the Church as it has provided a platform for the representatives from different parts of Asia to share and discuss on a commonly interested issue in a fraternal atmosphere, and to result with an outcome (statement/guidelines) which benefits all involved parties, including the Universal Church."

The preparation and conduct of the consultation meeting were also the fruit of the collaboration of catechetical directors and staff from the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia, the Diocese of Hong Kong, the Conference of Catholic

Bishops of India, and theology professors from the Institute of Religion, University of Santo Tomas.

Specifically, in the words of Bishop Antonius, the Office of Education and Faith Formation is grateful to the following individuals for their contribution and efforts in making the consultation meeting a success: Dr. Steven Selvaraju, Director of the Archdiocesan Catechetical Center, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur; Ms. Stephanie Chia Juei Yen from Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre; Ms. Connie Chung, the diocese of Hong Kong; Fr. Fransiskus de Santo, Bishop's Conference of Indonesia; Fr. Duming Gonzalves, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India; Dr. Mark Labuntog, FABC OEFF; Dr. Joan Christi Trocio-Bagaipo, UST; Dr. Marites Redonia, UST; and, Asst. Prof Dennis Ian Sy, UST. Specifically, the consultation meeting is indebted to Dr. Steven Selvaraju, the Catechetical Director of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, who guided the core team in coming up with a comprehensive, consultative, and inclusive program, and Ms. Stephanie Chia Juei Yen for her painstaking work in the preparation, conduct, and analysis of the survey questionnaire.

**Welcome Remarks Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC**  
**Bishop of Bandung, Indonesia**  
Chairperson, FABC-OEFF

Your Eminences, Excellencies, priests, nuns, brothers, and sisters in Christ,

Good afternoon. Thank you for being here with us today. We are delighted to be able to welcome you to our Consultation Meeting.

Of course, we would like to thank God for this beautiful event, having a consultation meeting on *Antiquum Ministerium*. This ancient ministry is the ministry of the catechist in the Church. I wish you all a "Happy Pentecost." As we know that the first pastoral activity of the apostles after Pentecost is to preach the Gospel, particularly the resurrection of Christ through which God shows His love to us. Peter stood up with the eleven apostles said "Men of Israel, hear these

words. Jesus of Nazareth was a man commended to you by God by means of miracles and wonders and signs that God worked through him, as you yourselves know. By the set plan and foreknowledge of God, he was handed over into the hands of lawless men. Crucifying him, you killed him. However, God raised him up, releasing him from the pangs of death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power." (Act 2: 22-24) What Peter did is actually the model of preaching the Gospel, a mission of Jesus' disciples, and the pastoral work of catechists.

As we know that on 10 May 2021, the Holy Father Pope Francis issued *Motu Proprio* the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium*, instituting the Ministry of Catechist. In this Apostolic Letter, Pope Francis directly invites the Episcopal Conferences to pay attention to the critical importance of lay discipleship, the vocation of catechists, and the formation of catechists in our time. "In our days, when there are so few clerics to evangelize such great multitudes and to carry out the pastoral ministry, the role of the catechist is of the highest importance" (AM #4). The Holy Father asks "the Episcopal Conferences to render effective the ministry of Catechist, determining the necessary process of formation and the normative criteria for admission to this ministry..." (AM #9). Archbishop Simon Poh Hoon Seng from the Archdiocese of Kuching reminds us of the honor of catechists by quoting *Redemptoris Missio* #73. "Among the laity who become evangelizers, catechists have a place of honor." We are reminded of valuing the dignity of catechists. We must promote the high status of catechists, appropriately appreciate catechists' work, and provide an excellent formation for them. Therefore, we have to pay good attention to the well-being of the catechists.

The FABC Office of Education and Faith Formation wants to respond to the call of the Holy Father by organizing a two-day online *Antiquum Ministerium* Bishops consultation meeting.

We are grateful for the response of the episcopal conferences to the survey that we "provide a descriptive overview of the current reality of catechists and catechesis in the diocese concerning their status and role in the community." From Stephanie Chia, we got the information on 22 May 2022: "that we have received the responses of 122 dioceses from 13 conferences and member countries.

We hope that we can implement *Antiquum Ministerium* according to what the Holy Father has in his mind. This meeting will encourage and enrich us in implementing the *motu proprio* in our respective local contexts by sharing the best practices of the catechist and catechesis.

This meeting consultation can occur today because of the love and work of so many people. We are grateful to the President of FABC, His Eminence Charles Maung Cardinal Bo, SDB, Archbishop of Yangon, the Central Committee for allowing and supporting us to have this consultation meeting, and Fr. William LaRousse, MM, Assistant Secretary-General for facilitating this meeting. We appreciate the fellow bishops in the FABC Office of Education and Faith Formation: Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim, DD, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, who will be the keynote speaker today; Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing, OFM, Auxiliary Bishop of Hong Kong, who will give the Concluding remarks on the day after tomorrow and bishop Peter Huynh Van Hai, Bishop of Vinh Long. We thank you very much to the Executive secretary of the Office of Education and Faith Formation (Prof. DR. Pablito A. Baybado, Jr, Lecturer, Institute of Religion, University of Santo Tomas and Program Lead, Theology Cluster Graduate School, University of Santo Tomas, Researcher, Center for Theology Religious Studies and Ethics, UST, Associate Secretary General, Religions for Peace Asia, Coordinator, UniHarmony Partners Manila) for his passion and work in organizing and moderating our meeting. We are grateful to those who are working behind the scenes managing and preparing the meeting: Dr. Steven Selvaraju, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Ms. Stephanie Chia Jue Yen from KL Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre, Fr. Duming Gonzalves, From Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, Ms. Connie Chung, from Archdiocese of Hong Kong, Fr. Fransiskus de Santo, Bishop's Conference of Indonesia. Dr. Mark Labuntog, FABC OEFF, Dr. Joan Trocio-Bagaipo, UST, Dr. Marites Redonia, UST, Asst. Prof Dennis Ian Sy Ph.D., UST.

Finally, we thank you very much for your presence, participation, and contribution to this consultation meeting. Your presence is a precious gift to us all. May this meeting encourage and motivate us to implement *Antiquum Ministerium*. Enjoy the consultation. May this meeting be fruitful. May God bless you all.

# **FABC OEFF Consultation Meeting: Installation to the Ministry of a Catechist**

## **Keynote Address Archbishop Julian Leow Beng-Kim**

Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Member, FABC OEFF

### **Introduction**

Your Excellencies, Bishops, Rev Frs., Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I wish to thank the Office of Education and Faith Formation for giving me the opportunity to present the keynote address at this meeting.

Since the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium* by His Holiness Pope Francis on the Institution to the Ministry of Catechist, I have been discerning its implementation in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. Later, I shared my views to my fellow bishops in the FABC Office of Education and Faith Formation (OEFF) at a meeting held early this year.

In agreement with Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunyamin, Bishop Chairman of OEFF, we decided that it is important for the bishops of Asia, as well as those assisting them in the area of catechesis, to examine more closely this new development in the Church. This is why the OEFF proposed that a two-day consultation meeting be held. We wish to thank each of you for setting aside time from your busy schedule to join us at this workshop.

### **A New Path Opens Before Us**

I am sure many of you are familiar with the famous poem by Robert Frost entitled, "The Road Not Taken". It starts by describing how a traveller comes across two roads that "diverged in a yellow wood". He is curious, and takes time to ponder as to which road to take before continuing his journey.

In announcing the Institution to the Ministry of Catechist, the Holy Father has opened a new path before us. Like the traveller in the poem, we too are curious and perhaps, even cautious. We wonder whether we should take it. Some of us may find ourselves reluctant to do so because the new path seems "different" or because we do not know where it will take us. Surely, it would be easier to keep to the more common and well-trodden path.

However, it is my humble view that we are present here today precisely because we want to take the step of faith on this new path. As bishops, catechetical heads and experts and those involved in catechesis, we wish to stop and ponder, that is, to study, reflect and discern the situation carefully. We also wish to learn from each other, and especially from those who may have already installed catechists in their dioceses. We want to do this because we want to make the right decision for our people.

This is why I am certain that this meeting will be a wonderful and Spirit-led opportunity for us – as fellow travellers – to take the step of faith into the unknown.

### **Questions to Consider for the Journey**

When preparing for a journey, a traveller will have to take into consideration several factors. Therefore, I propose that during our journey we take into consideration three general questions:

The first question is “What is the identity and role of the installed person?”. I notice that when speaking about the installation of lay catechists, the first question most people ask is, “Is it relevant for our diocese?” Instead, for me, the most essential question is: “What is the identity and role of the installed person?”. Perhaps, it is only after we have done our best to respond this question, can we truly discern and decide on the relevance of the ministry for our diocese. Therefore, it is important that we have at least some basic ideas as to the description and role of a person to be installed.

In relation to this, an important point in reference to this ministry is the word “installation”. An “installation” indicates a more permanent nature of service. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments (CDWS) states that the ministry of catechist is firstly, a “stable form of service rendered to the diocese”, and secondly, it is the bishop will identify whether the installed catechist can render that particular service to the diocese.

This raises several questions, such as, what does a stable form of ministry mean? “What are the pastoral and practical implications that would arise for the community and the catechetical ministry in installing a person to the ministry? Crucially, what difference would this lay ministry bring to the diocese, since we know that most of our

catechists are lay people who are already serving on a voluntary basis on weekends in the parishes.

Ultimately, it is the task of the Episcopal Conferences and individual bishops to clarify the description, the role and the most appropriate forms for the exercise of the ministry of catechists. This includes defining what a stable ministry means, the age and qualifications of the installed catechists and other matters. As stated by CDWS, "The exercise of the ministry can and must be regulated by the individual Episcopal Conferences in terms of duration, content and modalities, in accordance with pastoral needs." (CDWS, 3).

The second question to consider is: "who qualifies for the ministry? Paragraph 8 of *Antiquum Ministerium* gives us only a general description as to qualities and qualifications of the person who is to be installed. Basically, it states that they "be men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of fraternal communion." It also indicates that it is the task of the diocesan Bishop to discern the call to the ministry of Catechist by assessing the needs of the community and the abilities of the candidates.

The third question to consider is "How is the person to be formed?" Here, I quote again para. 8 of *Antiquum Ministerium*, which states that those selected to the ministry, "... should also receive suitable biblical, theological, pastoral and pedagogical formation to be competent communicators of the truth of the faith and they should have some prior experience of catechesis." Therefore, adequate formation programmes for candidates must also be defined by the Episcopal Conferences and the individual bishops.

I believe our main task at this consultation meeting will be to propose and draw up some general guidelines in relation to three questions I have mentioned, as well as, to other questions that may arise during the course of the workshop. These guidelines will be helpful to the bishops in making their own decision regarding the Institution to the Ministry of Catechist and its implementation in their dioceses.

Your Excellencies, Bishops, Rev. Frs. brothers and sisters, these days we have been speaking about the synodal journey. In the Church of Asia, a key word we have been using is "dialogue". May we take the

step of faith and travel together during the coming days by praying, dialoguing with and listening to one another, and learning from and supporting each other as companions on a journey.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Robert Frost ends his poem with the traveller looking back on his journey many years later, and saying quietly to himself, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.” Let us pray that our Lord Jesus will lead and guide us on our journey of discovery at this meeting so that each of us may do our part to bring a positive difference in our parishes, dioceses and the Church at large.

God bless you all.

## **Findings from Survey of Diocesan Catechetical Commissions**

**Ms. Stephanie Chia Juei Yen**

Archdiocesan Catechetical Centre

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

In preparation for a comprehensive discussion during the meeting, the OEFF conducted a survey among FABC dioceses on their respective catechetical ministries. The aim of this survey was to provide a descriptive overview of the current reality of catechists with regard to their status and role in the community, as well as the practices involved in their formation and preparation for the ministry.

The survey was carried out through April and May of 2022, receiving 127 responses from 14 conferences and member countries, including India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Hong Kong and Bangladesh. Since its aim was to describe the reality of catechists as a whole, the survey is limited in its capability to characterize the diverse socio-cultural contexts of the various dioceses and the resulting impact on the catechetical ministry. However, the information gained from this survey is an important foundation of our discussion as it allowed us

to have a simple and comprehensive overview of the current reality for catechists.

### **Summary of Findings from Survey of Diocesan Catechetical Commissions.**

The findings of the survey can be divided into two broad categories: a descriptive characterization of catechists from around Asia and a qualitative sharing from dioceses that have implemented or plan to implement the document *Antiquum Ministerium*.

Firstly, the survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of full-time, part-time, and volunteer catechists in their dioceses. While employment status is an imperfect measure of the catechetical ministry, it is a simple measure of commitment in terms of time and workload for catechists. It is found that the majority of respondent dioceses have less than 10% of catechists working full-time for the ministry, less than 30% of catechists working part-time, and have more than 70% of catechists who are volunteers. Most of these catechists serve at the parish level, with 116 out of 127 dioceses reporting that most of their catechists serve parishes.

In addition to this, the survey found that most catechists are involved in the catechism and faith formation of various age groups and communities, but their involvement includes and is not limited to, taking on roles as community and liturgical leaders, overseeing the upkeep of church premises and the administration of sacraments. In fact, full-time catechists in more than half of respondent dioceses will take on 3 to 4 different roles in the community and even volunteer catechists in most respondent dioceses will play more than one role.

With regards to the formation and preparation of catechists, it is found that most programs that are currently available for catechist formation are short programs less than two weeks long. Some programs are structured, but a significant number (55%) of dioceses indicate that their catechist formation programs are unstructured and irregular.

In the second part of the survey, it is found that the majority of dioceses that responded to the survey have not implemented *Antiquum Ministerium* and are still considering the implementation. The major factors being considered include the relevance of the

document to the context of the diocese, uncertainty about the implications, awaiting the guidelines, and a lack of candidates. However, it is found that the majority (69%) of dioceses that have not implemented it are interested in its implementation.

Based on the qualitative sharing of 46 dioceses that have implemented or are planning to implement the document, more than half have installed full-time catechists in the ministry. These catechists fulfill various roles and responsibilities in the ministry, especially in the catechism and faith formation, community leadership, liturgy and overseeing the upkeep of premises.

Regarding the selection and formation of catechists for installation to the ministry, the top 5 criteria include individuals who live a Christian life, have completed the necessary formation, are of good moral character, and positive attitude, as well as recommended by the parish priest. While there is no standard length or type of formation, the top 5 themes for catechist formation include: catechesis, Bible knowledge, Catechism of the Catholic Church, faith formation and teaching methodology.

Finally, there were various comments on the implementation of *Antiquum Ministerium*, but the general sense is that this document highlights the importance of catechists in the mission of the church and provides an opportunity to improve lay participation and formation as well as caring for the general well-being of catechists who have dedicated their lives to this vocation.

## **Summary of the Workshop Reports**

**Responses from the group sharing and discussion on proposed guidelines on the lay ministry of Catechist.**

**1. How can the Ministry of Catechist make the catechetical ministry more effective?**

- Installation means authority being given to the Catechist
- Installation of a Catechist would make people realize the mission is official.

- They will be formed to be more equipped, to be more credible witnesses of the faith, and develop themselves to become committed and fruitful in the ministry.
- An effective Catechetical ministry needs good & qualified human resources.
- The installation makes the catechists more aware of the responsibility in the ministry.
- It makes catechetical ministry more extensive in the sense that we have more people who can reach out to the needs of people in every dimension.
- It empowers more catechists in the mission of the church. It will awaken the sleeping giant of church which is the catechist.
- The commissioning of catechists confirms the calling of the person. It is a mark that the catechist has undergone systematic formation and thus make him/her aware that it is a lifelong commitment.
- Installed Catechists will be given recognition to the priest as evangelizers.
- They will be recognized and honored by the community, and they will be given the authority to teach the catholic faith.
- An affirmation from the Church that they are chosen and sent.
- Before the installation (one Sunday) there should be a catechetical formation for the congregation so that the people may find it not as an ordinary event.
- It will give the catechist a stronger mandate; it is a ministry now. The volunteers who go every Sunday do not fall on this. Catechists may be those who do what the priest does in the far places.
- The installation makes catechists more effective, and we will clarify their duties.
- More about the appreciation of the institution of being a catechist to make them more committed and challenged.
- The installation of Catechists gives a sense of recognition, responsibility and mission to the Catechists. It also shows additional ecclesial support by putting catechesis as a priority in ecclesial work. However, the meaning of this installation to this particular ministry needs to be well defined and understood by the recipients or the candidates. They must first realize that it is a call from the Holy Spirit and is different from

the installation being received by those in the formation for priesthood.

## **2. What are the appropriate roles and responsibilities of an installed catechist?**

- Mentor to other catechists, especially the new ones
- Assistant to the Priest in Parish-level in the area of Catechism.
- Community leaders, funeral services, etc., preparing children for Sacraments, helping in other church activities.
- Can be leader/head of the ministry of education in the parish, including Catechism, - education, evangelization, lay-faith formation, preparation for those who will receive the sacraments, and leader to other volunteers.
- Permanent character: they should be able to teach very well the faith to the children and adults. In a society too secularized, standing as a lay leader to other catechists/people.
- To make some materials and modules to help in the formation program.
- With the catholic school in the parish, they will serve as a contact person and a key person.
- To facilitate the Sunday school and coordinate the information.
- To form the people's faith, especially those experiencing wars in their country.
- Animators of the community, they accompany others, they are community builders, and they are the bridge between the Parish priests and the people.
- Willing to go to certain places, especially to areas where there are no available priests.
- They are sent to the community to do pastoral works on behalf of the parish priest.
- They are manning the volunteer catechists. The professional Catechist can manage the formation program of the volunteer catechists.
- They should also be seen as promoters of vocation and have a lifelong desire to help with them.
- In mission areas, Catechists are pinpoint persons who do everything.
- The catechetical installation should be rooted in each diocese to be responsive to each specific pastoral need.

- Guided by the parish, undergo regular formation, and should be provided a manual if possible.
- Automatic missionaries to far flung localities

### **3. What is the place of the catechist in the community they are serving? Who are they accountable to and who is responsible for their well-being?**

#### *What is the place of the catechist in the community?*

- Installation would give a sense of permanence.
- Assisting the parish priest, being dialogue partners.
- Catechesis for special groups.
- Responsible to the parish, to the community they are serving. They need to be respected leaders and have the quality of a good leader.
- Catechists belong to the community they serve.
- They take care of the community. They are like religious leaders. They are teachers of the community.
- The first question has to do with the respective religious experience of the community. They can be teachers.
- The catechists are ministers of the Church or the community that they are serving.
- They are ministers with their installation; they are honorable.
- They aid/help the parish priest of whom they must be accountable to
- They must be primarily stationed in the parish, regularly trained, and formed to readily perform as aids to all parish activities.
- There must be full time catechists at least for smoother performance of responsibility and assurance of continuity and development of programs.
- Should be something special from the bishop, installation v/s ordinary commissioning

#### *Accountability of the Installed Catechist*

- Installed catechists should be accountable to the parish priest.
- They are accountable to the parish in terms of the work, in terms of responsibility to the community and the Lord and oneself, to nourish oneself, etc.
- Accountable to the Diocese and Parish.

- There must be a monitoring in the diocesan level.
- In most cases they were assigned in the parish work/context, the parish priest is their immediate superior, and the bishop since this is a lifetime ministry.
- They have to come under from the bishop. It is like a minor order like the lector. The bishops then send them to the parishes especially where catechism is needed.
- The immediate person responsible for them is the parish priest. They need to work together with the parish priest to work for the faithful. The diocese decides the amount of remuneration for the catechists. But the amount is minimal. But as mentioned a while ago, the faithful also provide for their catechists. It really depends, after all, to the context of every diocese or place.
- The catechists must first of all be accountable to oneself. Second, the catechist must be accountable to the parish and diocese who sent him/her.
- First is the parish priest since the parish priest is the catechist of the catechists. After the parish priest is the Diocesan Catechetical Director since he represents the bishop and lastly, the diocesan bishop. This flow goes the same with the question: who is responsible for their welfare?
- Accountable to the parish and under the care of the parish priest
- The catechists are accountable to the Diocese, they report to the priest in charge of the Ministry of Catechist
- The catechists being given a special role in the Church is accountable to the Church (especially to the ones they minister to), the Bishop, the Diocesan Catechetical Director, and their parish priest.
- Accountable to the parish and the bishop, as the bishop does the job through the parish
- Should also be in communion with the catechetical centres who should take up an intermediary and coordinating role between the bishop and the parish.

***Responsibility for the Well-being of the Installed Catechist:***

- The bishop should be responsible for the installation, formation and sending of catechists.
- Funded by parishes.
- Diocese bearing the cost of formation.

- Parish Pastoral Council discusses the needs of Catechists.
- Bishops must give instructions to the standard life of Catechists. Standard higher than that of a teacher. Subsidy and Scholarships to each and every diocese. There must be a criteria for the salary of catechists.
- It should be on the parish priest, Bishop, and the parish.
- It depends on the diocese if they can provide the benefits on the catechists, esp if the parish cannot supply or support their needs. If the parish cannot afford, then the diocese will take over
- The parish take first of all the security of the catechist.
- Well-being they are different kind of forms, being paid, allowance.
- The terms of responsibilities if it is permanent, then it must be a lifetime, but I will still go for perpetual, and must be a shared responsibility, with the parish and the diocese.
- The bishop is the immediate responsible, but the formation is the on the parish priest.
- Most of the catechists are taking care of the villagers. In return, the parish priest and the villagers give in return for the catechists like donations. But it is the archbishop and bishop who are the first ones responsible for the catechists.
- Catechist who are installed must be accountable to the bishop and the parish priest. It is from the bishop to the parish priest. In some places the community cannot take care of the parish priest and the catechist for some reason which is unusual. So, it is the diocese who provides for them. That is why if there is a full-time service rendered by catechists, they should be given a remuneration since they sacrifice and they give their life.
- They should be given remuneration by the diocese and the parish community.
- They should be given just remuneration by the Church. The community should take care of them.
- The parish is responsible for those catechists who work in the parish and the volunteer catechists. They hold regular meetings as catechist to discuss their responsibilities and programs.
- The sustenance of the Catechists could be considered by the Diocese.

- Professional Catechists are considered Diocesan employees. In addition, there are also volunteer catechists in the Diocese. The volunteer catechists have no salaries and allowances.
- The Church(community),the Bishop, the Diocesan Catechetical Director, and their parish priest are the ones also responsible for the well-being of the catechists (spiritual formation, intellectual formation, and monetary assistance.) The document invites the Episcopal Conferences to carefully take into consideration this matter (AM. 9)
- The community is responsible, especially, the priests and the bishops.
- The parish priest may be responsible for their well-being. They must be very supportive to the catechists.

#### **4. What are the criteria for selection of catechists to be installed?**

- Willing to be installed for life.
- Age must be around 20-60 years old.
- At least College graduate.
- Has undergone catechetical formation. Formal or informal.
- Has basic knowledge of CCC or CFC, familiar with the Church Teachings.
- Has attended seminars/formation on Church teachings and open to further learning.
- Has good moral character, is faithful, prayerful, peace-loving, friendly, living witness to the Gospel, flexible.
- Has the vocation to be a catechist.
- Knows basic catechetical pedagogies.
- Must have received the sacraments of initiation.
- For married, must be married in the Catholic Church - Committed servant-leader, missionary.
- Knows basic technology skills.
- Active in Church activities.
- Proficient in English and the local language, a good communicator.
- Has good relationship with the Parish Priest.
- Endorsed by the Parish Priest and must be recommended by the Bishop/ Archbishop.
- Recognized by the parishioners, supported by the parish community.

## **5. How can we prepare and form installed catechists to be more effective? (The unique formation and preparation for installation)**

- Continuing contextual multi-cultural and multi-religious formation in the spiritual, psychological and emotional level, to help the person achieve holistic formation.
- Assist non-professional catechists to take college degrees such as religious education.
- A two-year program for the catechists the first part is about the bible and about the faith, the second part is pedagogy.
- Provide scholarship to catechists for their advanced studies.
- Form them as community builders, communication skills, digital training.
- Formed them as leaders who can work well with Bishops, parish priests and other lay leaders in the community.
- Skills formation on teaching and pedagogy, coordination and transparency.
- Must have 2 – 3 years of exposure and experience in the catechetical ministry as a requirement for installation.
- A new way of naming catechists: Assistant Catechists; Associate Catechists; Master Catechists.
- Catechists should also specialize in Youth ministry, Family and life, and other ministries relevant to the need of the parish/diocese.
- The diocese must partner with other Church instrumentalities like universities, media outlets, in order to come up with a solid formation and structure for the ministry of catechists.

### ***Antiquum Ministerium* and Beyond: Experiences and Insights**

**Dr. Steven Selvaraju**

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Archdiocesan Catechetical Center

Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur

### **Introduction**

The Consultation meeting on the implementation of Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter, *Antiquum Ministerium*, organized by the FABC

Office of Faith Formation and Education (OEFF) was held on 8 and 10 June 2022. The proceedings of the meeting are well documented by OEFF in the Final Statement, as well as, in the other materials collated after the meeting. Therefore, it is not my wish to repeat here what has been adequately stated elsewhere. Instead, I wish to present personal experiences and insights, both as a participant at the meeting and as someone who specializes in the field of catechesis.

### **Diverse Responses Needed**

It is evident from the findings of the survey conducted before the meeting and from the sharing and discussions at the meeting that a single response or approach to implementing the lay Ministry of Catechist as proposed in *Antiquum Ministerium* would not be feasible. This is due to the rich, varied, and complex contexts within which local Churches in different parts of Asia exist and carry out the evangelizing mission of announcing the Good News of Jesus Christ, as well as the personnel, structures, and strategies associated with the catechetical ministry in the dioceses.

For example, in most dioceses, lay people, who voluntarily serve with dedication as catechists are providing faith formation to the young and to adults. Therefore, “What would be the difference in the identity and role of these lay catechists in comparison to the installed lay catechist? Also, there are dioceses where full-time and even part-time catechists are already exercising all if not, many of the duties and responsibilities that will be performed by an installed catechist. What then would the installed catechist be doing that is different? In addition, there are many other questions to consider.

In response to these questions, it would be easier for some of us to immediately or without in-depth reflection to refuse to consider the implementation of lay persons to the Ministry of Catechist because it is irrelevant, or it will “clericalise” the laity. The establishment of the lay Ministry of Catechist by the Holy Father is a call and a challenge for us to take the step of faith and to sincerely discover whether a new form of lay ministry is possible in the Church in Asia. Therefore, it falls upon each diocese, under the leadership and guidance of the bishop, to study the document, and seriously discern the necessary process of implementation, or in certain cases, the non-implementation of the ministry in our dioceses.

## **An Opportunity to Gather**

The meeting also presented an important platform for the clergy, religious, and laity in Asia, including experts, directors and heads of offices and centers, and those holding positions of responsibility in the area of catechesis to gather, share their views and experiences, and to listen to one another. During the discussions, participants spoke about many issues related to catechesis that went beyond *Antiquum Ministerium*. A number of them expressed the urgent need to explore ways and methods to improve the formation of catechists in their parishes and dioceses, to promote the vocation and well-being of catechists, and to develop appropriate programs, resources, and structures at the diocesan and regional levels.

Clearly, this demonstrates that there is a necessity to create more opportunities for Asian catechetical experts and those holding positions and responsibilities in the dioceses to discuss these and other related issues, to listen, and to seek adequate responses. So far, these opportunities have been infrequent. FABC publications show that a major catechetical gathering, the first Pan Asian Conference, with the theme: “Catechesis for Asia, Towards the Year 2000 and Beyond” was organized by the Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy” and held in Singapore on 12-13 October 1995. Beyond that, I recall personally attending a gathering on the theme: “Family Catechesis: Contextual Challenges” also organized by the same FABC Office, in Bangkok in 2006.

It is timely for the topic of catechesis to be highlighted again at the Asian level, and for a formal gathering to be organized. This is more so because the realities in the world have changed rapidly since the catechetical meetings in Singapore and in Bangkok. Much has also happened in the Church and in the area of catechesis. The promulgation of *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) in 2013, the publication of the Youth Catechism in 2010, the new “Directory for Catechesis” in 2020, and other publications present to us a wider and richer understanding of catechesis which requires further study, reflection and discussion on our part.

## **Strategies and Approaches in the Light of the Asian context**

It is also essential for catechetical experts and others working in the area of catechesis to meet to discern and propose ideas, strategies, and

methods that are relevant to the context of Asia. For too long, it has been a tendency for Asians to depend largely on the insights and writings of experts from other parts of the world, especially from the West, for the latest strategies and approaches in catechesis. Certainly, this does not in any way imply a sense of disrespect for their invaluable work and efforts. Many have benefitted from the contributions made by these experts and others. However, Asia has its experts too. We recall with admiration and fondness the vision, efforts, and writings of Fr. Amalorpavadass, a “giant” of catechesis not only in Asia but in the universal Church. However, he passed away tragically in an accident in 1990. What has happened since then in the Asian field of catechesis? Are our present experts in Asia not developing their own approaches and strategies? If they are, could they be confining or limiting their expertise only to their dioceses or countries? Perhaps, they are already sharing their knowledge and skills, but maybe we are neither listening nor paying attention because, after all, they are only Asians. Or is it that they are ready to share their ideas but the right platform has not been made available at the Asian level? This is why it is important for regular opportunities to be created for those involved in the field of catechetics to help them to share and exchange ideas, expertise, and experiences. New approaches and strategies could be introduced and discovered. It could also promote greater collaboration and networking in terms of catechetical personnel, resources, and materials and in other areas. The availability of online platforms and other social media forms these days allows for gatherings to happen more easily and frequently. Where possible, onsite gatherings can also be arranged. Such gatherings would bring invaluable benefits not only to the participants but to the Church in Asia as well.

## **Conclusion**

The Consultation meeting on *Antiquum Ministerium* is an important event not only in terms of discerning whether the lay ministry of Catechist could become a reality in the dioceses in Asia. It also provided a suitable avenue for those involved in catechesis to meet at the Asian level. However, it would be very unfortunate if the meeting is seen as a “one-off” event. That is if efforts and discussions to explore further the numerous issues related to catechists and to catechesis in general, end with the meeting. Instead, it should serve

as a spark, which ignites greater interest and effort among us to continue the process of exploration and to discover paths in the field of catechesis in the Catholic Church in Asia. May the Holy Spirit guide us in our endeavors.

**The Catechetical Ministry – Ancient but Anew with Joy**

**Ms. Connie Chung**

Director

Catholic Diocesan Catechetical Centre

Diocese of Hong Kong

I am grateful for the privilege of participating in the survey and the two-day consultation meetings, held on June 8 and 10, organized by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference-Office of Education and Formation ("FABC-OEFF"), to discern the call of the Holy Father, His Holiness Pope Francis, who issued "*Motu Proprio*" the Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium* instituting the lay Ministry of Catechists ("AM"). I was given the opportunity to be one of the moderators during the sharing sessions where I heard opinions and thoughts igniting the flame of hope of this initiative from representatives in this region. I would like to thank the bishops for their eminent presence and inspiring speeches, thank Dr. Bong for his excellent leadership, and thank the working team and directors of catechetical centers for putting together their minds and hearts in the AM Statement. I am also grateful for the honorable accompaniment of Bishop Stephen Chow, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha, and Father Peter Choy, Vicar General, representing the Diocese of Hong Kong.

Being a catechist, a trainer of catechists, and a director of the Catechetical Center in the Diocese of Hong Kong, I feel the joy and the enthusiasm of Pope Francis in instituting the ministry of catechists. The ministry is an ancient one and is now brought anew with joy! This is possible because of Christ, our true Master in catechesis. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ("EG") reminds me that Christ is the "eternal Good News" (Rev. 14:6) and He renews our faith and joy every day. His wisdom, His beauty, and riches are inexhaustible.(EG #11)

The FABC-OEFF initiatives chart new paths where the catechists and the dioceses walk together in joy. Through the discussions inspired by the AM, at least three aspects of newness may be identified in such an institution. Firstly, it is remarkable that the catechetical ministry established is one meant for lay persons only (AM #6-8). The ministry is not to replace the pastoral responsibilities of the clergy but is recognized as a specific form of lay ministry of the Church. Secondly, the catechetical ministry is regarded as a vocation recognizing its stable form of services for the Church (AM #8) instead of a kind of “come and go” voluntary services. The well-being and remuneration of catechists are also revisited. Thirdly, the catechetical ministry will operate under the guidance of bishops who are the vicars of the Great Shepherd in their respective dioceses. New calls for discernment of charism on the part of bishops will be considered as an important agenda.

Pope Francis does not give us a proposal only. He calls for an implementation plan and for this, FABC-OEFF contributes to the very meaningful discussions and comes up with the AM Statement. It is contemplated that the AM Statement will be circulated to the bishops for broad guidelines of the implementation. Pope Francis invites the “Episcopal Conferences to render effective the ministry of Catechist, determining the necessary process of formation and the normative criteria for admission to this ministry and devising the most appropriate forms for the service which these men and women will be called to exercise in conformity with the content of this Apostolic Letter.” (AM#9) Accordingly, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has published the Rite of Institution of the lay ministry of Catechist.

I would like to share some of my reflections here as far as implementation is concerned. I reckon that it rests on three critical questions to be asked by the catechist himself or herself: Am I touched by Christ so that I can touch others? Am I ready to take up this vocation? If so, what is required from me in respect of formation?

Am I touched by Christ? A catechist shows the face of Christ as Jesus showed His face to his apostles. When I was a catechumen, I was deeply touched by the first chapter of the Gospel of Saint John. I was inspired by the apostles who never forgot the moment when Jesus turned and showed His face and touched their hearts: “It was about

four o'clock in the afternoon" (Jn 1:39). As a catechist now, I go forth and touch the hearts of many. The evangelizing power of the Church is set in full force when we execute the mandate of Christ: "go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). For this mission, it is worthwhile for us to ponder what Pope Francis expects from the catechists: "every catechist must be a witness to the faith, a teacher and mystagogue, a companion and pedagogue, who teaches for the Church." (AM #6)

Am I ready? The institution of ministry presupposes a strong sense of vocation of lay catechists. It can only come from an intimate relationship between Christ and the catechist who, because of this relationship, is joyful and most willing to commit himself or herself to the Church. This is not a job earned, but a kind of vocation as the gift of Holy Spirit bestowed. This is not a voluntary work, but a genuine and firm response to the calling. By this institution, the laity come to realize that they "are given this special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them (the laity) that she can become the salt of the earth." (AM #6)

What is required from me? If catechists are to form others in their Christian faith, then the catechists need to be formed in the first place. We can only give what we have appreciated. Formation of catechists is inseparable from the institution of the ministry. Pope Francis has categorically listed out the concrete requirements of receiving the ministry. "It is fitting that those called to the instituted ministry of Catechist be men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, being generous and living a life of fraternal communion. They should also receive suitable biblical, theological, pastoral and pedagogical formation to be competent communicators of the truth of the faith and they should have some prior experience of catechesis."(AM#8)

I also find resonance in the new Directory of Catechesis which asks for internalization of the formation of catechists. It says, "the work of formation acts as a transformation of the person, who internalizes the evangelical message existentially and in such a way that it may be

light and guidance for his ecclesial life and mission.” (Directory of Catechesis, #131).

Before receiving the ministry, catechists have to answer the three questions during the discernment process. In going forward, catechists will have to collaborate with the bishops, priests, deacons, and lay faithful in his/her diocese so as to proclaim the Good News in spite of the challenges of the day.

Yet, we are not alone. We walk with brothers and sisters in Asia, especially under the guidance of bishops. Collectively, FABC-OEFF helps foster inter-diocesan dialogues and encourages future cooperation and exchanges on this distinctive agenda of the day. FABC-OEFF offers us a platform for each of the dioceses to explore new paths in response to the calling at this urgency of the timing.

In this newness and joy, the FABC-OEFF initiatives bring together the hearts of evangelization in the Asian context and especially, through the consultation meetings where the Holy Spirit is at work. The AM Statement brings impetus to the implementation of this new ministry in the dioceses. While the dioceses may differ in their cultural settings and pastoral needs, the AM Statement nevertheless sheds light on the developmental path of this ministry. It is believed that the consultation work is only a beginning as there will be continuous dialogue, guided by the Holy Spirit, in making this a meaningful new chapter of evangelization.

Lastly, may I share some encouraging words from Pope Francis: “Nor can we forget the countless lay men and women who directly took part in the spread of the Gospel through catechetical instruction.” (AM#3) The spread of Gospel relies on us! This keeps our vocation alive. But far from being complacent, we have a long way to go, and let us remain humbly open to the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Once again, thanks to FABC-OEFF and the team. May our Lord continue to bless the catechists in their upcoming ministry.

**Summary and Closing Remarks**  
**Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing, OFM**  
Auxiliary Bishop of Hong Kong  
Member, FABC-OEFF

**On the Process**

- The program was well organized, followed closely, and developed smoothly.
- The time allotted both for group sharing and open discussion was sufficient and well-balanced.
- The moderators for group sharing and open discussion were competent in guiding discussion and in making brief summaries to facilitate the flow.
- The hard work of the Secretariat in coming up with a statement for the Meeting is praiseworthy.
- It was a pity that the scheduled break was skipped somehow. For an almost three-hour online program, a short break in between is desirable.

**On the Content**

- The Survey of Diocesan Catechetical Commissions helps a lot in presenting the reality across the continent and provides necessary materials for discussion.
- With the presence of representatives from various parts of Asia, who occupy different roles and positions in their respective diocese, for example: bishops, priests, religious, theologians, catechists and formators etc., the discussions, dialogues and exchange of ideas in the Meeting was rich, concrete and inspiring.
- Participants were active in group sharing and open discussion. The fact that many left their sharing, feedback and ideas in chat room reflected the enthusiasm to take part. It was very encouraging.

**On the Fruits**

- Occasion for learning: The installation of the ministry of catechists is new to the Church. It will take much time and effort for all the concerned parties: the laity, the catechists (paid and

voluntary) and the clergy to understand, accept and appreciate it. The Meeting served as an occasion for further understanding and deeper reflection.

- Catalyst for implementation: The great majority of the participants showed positive attitude towards the installation of the ministry of catechists. It would be an encouragement for those dioceses that have not yet decided for its implementation. Moreover, the guidelines that the Meeting would like to produce would be a great assistance for those dioceses that have implemented the AM or are still considering its implementation.
- The Meeting itself helps in fostering the Universality of the Church as it has provided a platform for the representatives from different parts of Asia to share and discuss on a commonly interested issue in a fraternal atmosphere, and to result with an outcome (statement/guidelines) which benefits all involved parties, including the Universal Church.

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## FABC Papers:

158. Meeting of the Presidents of Doctrinal Commissions under the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), 15 - 18 January 2019, Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, Bangkok, Thailand by FABC Office of Theological Concerns and Central Secretariat, March 2019
159. Responses to Doubts, Questions and Criticisms with regard to Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia*, Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, Pontifical Alphonsian Academy, Rome, June 2019
160. Catholic Schools in Asia: A Shared Mission among Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful in the Light of Recent Papal Documents, 24 - 28 September 2018, Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand, FABC Office of Consecrated Life (OCL) and Office of Education and Faith Formation (OEFF), edited by Pablito A. Baybado Jr., Executive Secretary, OEFF, September 2019
161. Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Thailand and Japan, 19 - 26 November 2019, organized by Catholic Bishops' Conference of Thailand and Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, edited by FABC Central Secretariat, December 2019
162. Awakening Climate Change Concern in Seminaries: For Bishops & Seminary Formators of Priests in Asia, 4 - 8 November 2018, Salesian Center Of Spirituality, Hua Hin, Thailand, FABC Office of Clergy (OC) and Office of Human Development (OHD), submitted by Fr. Philip Lazatin, SDB, Executive Secretary, OC, April 2020
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164. Migrants, Refugees, the Displaced and Human Trafficking and Renewable Energy Options in the Asian Context, FABC Office of Human Development (OHD) in Collaboration with the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB) & the Asia-Pacific Justice and Peace Workers Network (APIPWN). Hotel Beach Way, Cox's Bazaar, Chattogram,

- Bangladesh, 11 – 17 February 2019, submitted by Ms. Deepika Singh, Project Coordinator of OHD, December 2020
165. FABC 50 General Conference Guide Document 29 November 2020, *Theme: FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia "...and they went a different way."* (Mt 2:12), edited by the FABC 50 General Conference Core Group, July 2021
  166. Responses to the Guide Document for the FABC 50 General Conference, 29 November 2020, *Theme: FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia "...and they went a different way."* (Mt 2:12), submitted by the Episcopal Conferences / Countries of the FABC, Central, East and South Asia, August 2021
  167. Responses to the Guide Document for the FABC 50 General Conference, 29 November 2020, *Theme: FABC 50: Journeying together as peoples of Asia "...and they went a different way."* (Mt 2:12), submitted by the Episcopal Conferences / Countries of the FABC, South-East Asia, August 2021
  168. The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflections from Asian Perspectives, submitted by FABC-Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), edited by Estela Padilla, Executive Secretary, OTC, August 2022
  169. The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflections from Asian Perspectives, submitted by FABC-Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), edited by Estela Padilla, Executive Secretary, OTC, August 2022
  170. Country Reports: FABC 50 General Conference, submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), The Syro-Malabar Church, The Syro-Malankara Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church, compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022
  171. Country Reports: FABC 50 General Conference, submitted by the Vicariate Apostolic of Nepal, Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference (PCBC), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL), compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022

172. Country Reports: FABC 50 General Conference, submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (KWI), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB). a. Malaysia, b. Archdiocese of Singapore, c. Apostolic Vicariate of Brunei, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Philippines (CBCP), compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022
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176. Synthesis Reports, Synod of Bishops 2021-2023, submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), Catholic Bishops' Conference of Central Asia (CECAC), Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), Syro-Malabar Church, Syro-Malankara Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church, compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022
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181. Which Church? What Kind of a Priest? What Kind of Formation? Reflections on Priestly Formation in an Epochal Change, H. Eminence Cardinal Lazzaro YOU Heung Sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy, 17 October 2022

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