

Bishops' Institute for Social Communication
(BISCOM I) on
"Church and Public Relations"

Singapore
September 1 - 5, 1997

We, the 40 participants from eleven Asian countries, composed of Bishops and communication delegates from our respective Bishops' conferences at the first **Bishops' Institute for Social Communication (BISCOM)** on "Church and Public Relations", came to the following

ORIENTATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The "new way of being church in Asia" as promulgated by the fifth FABC Plenary Assembly in Bandung (1990) and the proposal of the *FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet '96* in Tagaytay City, to "see Public Relations as an important concern and act accordingly" (4.1), made us reflect deeper on this obligation.

Any Public Relations and proclamation of the church must keep in mind that she "by her essence is communication which flows out of the communication of the Trinity. She is founded to continue the communication of Jesus Christ in word and deed" (*FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet '96*). Like any other communication, Public Relations also is basically a "giving of self in love" (*Communio et Progressio*, 11).

Already, the Pastoral Instructions *Communio et Progressio* and *Aetatis Novae*, urged that the church "should take into account the principles of Public Relations" (*Communio et Progressio* 174, cf. *Aetatis Novae* 31).

Orientations

1. Public Relations should not be seen only from a business point of view but rather as a "witness of Christians and Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christlike deeds . . . above all, to live like Him in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths and persuasions, and to do His deeds by the power of His grace" (FABC Bandung, 4.1). Before all other techniques, the witness of life stays central.
2. There is an expanded awareness of Public Relations and its implications for the church as a relationship of trust and confidence between different publics within and outside the Church.
3. For building relationship with various 'publics' both internal and external, the church needs first to, clarify her vision, mission and values, based on the Kingdom, in every situation and context: Why does the Church exist? What does the church stand for? Where are we going?
4. For building a coherent identity it is necessary to effectively establish relationships within the church through communication which is transparent, dialogic, and marked by candour.
5. For her internal and external communication the Church needs to move beyond teaching and preaching to being a dialogic and communitarian Church. The FABC concerns for dialogue with the poor, cultures and people of other religions, should be a guiding principle.

6. Any changes in strategies and practices must be based on a consistent witness to life according to the church's vision, mission and values, based on the Kingdom, always remaining relevant in any given situation and context.
7. There needs to be an on-going flow of communication within the church and to outside publics to reflect Christian activities and concerns.
8. Public Relations concerns and activities should not remain on the Bishops' Conferences level but must be shared down to the most basic levels of Christian communities.
9. For any crisis, we need to prepare as a transparent and responsible church through consistent honesty and openness.

Recommendations

1. For effective relationships, the church needs to integrate Public Relations and communication training into the formation of church personnel at all levels. This should start with the training of seminarians and lay people committed to the Church.
2. To make Public Relations a reality on the local church level, some basic structures are needed which should be determined by the local needs and situation. This requires medium and long-term planning and investment in personnel and resources.
3. Public Relations activities of the church should be developed as team efforts.
4. Any person responsible for the Public Relations of the church should be properly trained. Her/his role and possibilities should be properly understood by church authorities as well as the public he deals with.
5. In her Public Relations work the church in Asia should keep in mind the need for inter-religious dialogue and the cooperation with other religions as far as possible.
6. Building relations with secular media needs not only regular information, but especially friendly relations consistently developed over a period of time.
7. Because of the uneven development in communications technology in the various parts of Asia which hinder the proper development of Public Relations within and outside the church, there should be greater sharing of resources between different bishops' conferences and local churches in special circumstances or living in isolation.
8. In a continent where Christians are a small minority, any Public Relations of the church should consider the need for Ecumenical collaboration as essential.
9. To be prepared for any possible crisis, Bishops' conferences should have a permanent Crisis Management team composed of professionals from Church and relevant secular fields.