

16th Annual FABC OSC Bishops' Meet
"Social Networking for Pastoral Ministry"
Hualien, Taiwan
November 14-19, 2011

Final Statement

We, the 32 participants of the 16th Annual FABC-OSC Bishops' Meet from the ten Asian countries, comprising of bishops-in-charge of social communication, national communication directors and communication experts met in Hualien, Taiwan, from November 14-19, 2011 to study the theme "Social Networking for Pastoral Ministry."

We engaged ourselves in examining the challenges and opportunities offered by social media and its implications for the church in Asia. We acknowledge the variety of communication situations and the digital divide that exists in the vast continent of Asia. While recognizing the immense potential of the social media, we need to adapt our communication ministry to suit these varied local situations.

"Social networks are a prime example of the new communications reality we are living. Apart from how best to harness this type of communication in our own lives, we face even more questions and challenges in how best to make them part of our pastoral ministry and outreach." (Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, in his message to the 16th FABC-OSC Bishops' meeting)

The church has affirmed at all times that the goal of Christian communication is to build communion among all God's people. We recognise the potential of the social media to create and strengthen the bond of communion among all who seek God.

We are aware of the potential social media offers today for pastoral ministry, particularly in the areas of evangelisation, faith formation, worship and other forms of pastoral care. They also become powerful tools to creatively engage in education, dialogue, and in responding to the quest for peace, development and harmony among all people.

We need to be open to the immense possibilities of web-based services like social networking, microblogging, videosharing, photosharing and social gaming, and mobile devices like tablets and smartphones. These offer valuable opportunities for building up an effective community among our Faithful.

Social media also challenges the Church leaders and those with various pastoral responsibilities to be more attentive to the many voices of the people of God. By being open to

the Spirit speaking to the Church in and through the media, which are “the Gift of God” (IM,1) we can become a community of believers filled with the spirit of Christ.

New media can help “establish new forms of interpersonal relations and influence self-awareness. They pose questions not only of how to act properly, but also about the authenticity of one's own being.” (cf WCD 2011) When used with creativity, freedom and discernment, social media can help all disciples of Christ to become effective witnesses of the Good News and “multiply their contacts in ways hitherto unthinkable” (John Paul II, WCD 2002).

Christian communicators must continuously and consistently reflect the communication model presented by Christ- the Master Communicator. “There exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world: this takes the form of a communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others. To proclaim the Gospel through the new media means not only to insert expressly religious content into different media platforms, but also to witness consistently, in one's own digital profile and in the way one communicates choices, preferences and judgments that are fully consistent with the Gospel, even when it is not spoken of specifically.” (WCD 2011)

We can harness the potential of social media only if the church can provide systematic and adequate formation on them to its pastoral leaders.

While a large section of media are controlled and used for unethical purposes, Christian communicators must strive to create products that are capable of offering healthy entertainment, education and is imbued with the values of the Gospel.

Social media can be a powerful tool to respond to the deep yearning and spiritual quest of the people of our continent, especially the youth, helping them to discover God and spirituality in their lives. However we also are aware of the danger the new media can pose to promote individualism and loneliness. Efforts must be made to avoid virtual communication becoming a substitute for real presence. “Virtual contact cannot and must not take the place of direct human contact with people at every level of our lives. Direct human relations always remain fundamental for the transmission of the faith!” (WCD 2011)

During our meeting we listened to reports on the communication scenario in the respective countries in Asia and were further enriched by input sessions and hands-on training on social networking. We are convinced of the immense potential and possibilities social media offers for the Church in Asia to carry out the mission entrusted to us by the Lord. Hence we recommend the following:

1. That we as Church in Asia need to be open to social media that offers us immense opportunities for evangelization, catechesis, worship and various other pastoral ministries.
2. The church needs to creatively engage the social media to present the message of the Gospel to the people of Asia.

3. Church leaders, pastors and those in formation need to be adequately trained in social media in order to carry out their ministry more effectively.
4. Christian communicators should be encouraged to become creators of content that is attractive, engaging, particularly to the youth, and infused with the values of the Gospel.
5. For the pastoral ministry to be truly effective the Church leaders must identify and engage the services of persons who are competent in social media and rooted in faith. They can contribute much to the planning and realization of the new communication paradigms in the local churches.
6. Social media should be harnessed to build the Kingdom of God and the human community in the spirit of the Gospel and respond creatively to the three-fold challenge of the church in Asia- in accordance with its mission of dialogue with the poor, cultures and religions.