



**Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Office of Social Communication**  
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**FABC-OSC 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Bishops' Meet**  
**“50 Years After Inter Mirifica: Asian Communication Challenges”**  
**Phnom Penh, Cambodia**  
**November 11-16, 2013**

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The FABC-Office of Social Communication held its 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Bishops' Meet on November 11-16, 2013 at Caritas Centre, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The meeting was attended by 33 participants, including twelve bishops, national secretaries of social communication and delegates from thirteen Asian countries. The resource persons were Mgr. Paul Tighe, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Rome, Fr. Franz Josef Eilers SVD, former Secretary of FABC Office of Social Communication, and Bishop Henry D'Souza of Bellary, India, member of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) Office of Social Communications.

The small but vibrant Cambodian Catholic Church accorded a warm welcome and provided a conducive setting for a fruitful discussion on social communication in the Church in Asia. Interaction with the members of the Catholic community in the country, a concelebrated Eucharist with the clergy, religious and Faithful, a fellowship meal and cultural program as well as visits to historical and tourist sites enabled the participants to have a glimpse of the country and the Catholic church in Cambodia and the challenges it is facing.

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The theme of the FABC-OSC 2013 assumes particular significance in the context of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vatican II Decree *Inter Mirifica* (IM). The participants were enriched by the inputs provided by the resource persons on the historical background and the salient features of IM, which among other things, officially adopted the expression ‘social communication.’ In an age characterized by social media networks, this expression has today assumed particular significance and its adoption by the church may be considered prophetic. The Council through the IM also gave to the universal Church a positive vision of communication, established the World Day of Communications, urged the Bishops to assume responsibility for communication ministry.

The assembly noted the rich and timely resources on social communication offered by the Church’s Magisterium especially since the Vatican II. Of particular significance is the commissioning of a more comprehensive document on social communication, published in 1971 under the title *Communio et Progressio* (CP). This Pastoral Instruction provided a well-grounded theological foundation, clear direction and focus on social communication in the Church. CP is considered the *magna carta* of Church’s social communication. Since the first World Day of Communications in 1967, the Church has through the Pope’s messages, continued to teach and inspire the universal Church on a variety of themes pertaining to social communication.

In the light of such a setting the Bishops’ Meet 2013 deliberated upon and acknowledged the important issues and tasks emerging from IM:

1. The Second Vatican Council recognized the paramount importance of social communication in the Church.
2. The Council with prophetic intuition chose the expression social communication to designate the church’s communication.
3. IM reaffirmed the Church’s conviction that the “instruments” of social communication are truly ‘marvelous gifts of God’.
4. IM paved the way for the formation and establishment of structures at various levels in the Church such as the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, and recommended the establishment of national offices. It underlined the need to recognize, promote and strengthen various associations for communication.

5. IM affirmed the role and responsibility of the Bishops in giving due importance and direction to the ministry of social communication.
6. It emphasized the need to provide suitable formation for all sections of the Faithful in social communication, and to seek the collaboration of the laity in supporting the communication ministry of the Church.
7. It called in particular for a greater emphasis on the formation and training of the church leaders, especially those in formation in social communication in view of their ministry.
8. It called for meaningful celebration of the World Communication Day and to promote the message of the Pope for the occasion.
9. This year's Bishops' Meet recognized the need to develop appropriate plans at the diocesan, regional and national levels to coordinate, guide and direct the communication ministry so as to help effectively communicate the Gospel in our rapidly evolving communication environment.
10. The participants emphasized the importance of studying and implementing IM in the light of the other Conciliar documents, especially *Dei Verbum*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, as well as the subsequent pastoral instructions *Communio et Progressio* (CP), *Aetatis Novae* (AN), World Communication Day messages of the Popes, etc. Together they provide the theological basis for understanding God as a Triune communicating God and provide the doctrinal and pastoral foundation for communication ministry.

### **Recommendations**

Much has been achieved in these 50 years since the promulgation of IM that we wish to acknowledge and thank God for as a result of the selfless dedication and hard work of various individuals, lay, religious and priests as well as offices and organizations in this area of social communication. The Church in Asia has itself been much blessed through the establishment and development of offices of social communication at the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), national, regional and diocesan level in line with the recommendations of IM and other related church documents.

1. As part of the ongoing effort to strengthen and consolidate the good results obtained thus far in the area of social communication, further initiatives need to be taken. In particular, we recommend the establishment of necessary structures wherever they do not exist. These structures should be at the service of the mission of the Church and enhance the effectiveness of the social communication ministry of the church in Asia.
2. We underline the importance of a Pastoral Plan for social communication as a vital instrument for effectively carrying out our communication ministry. Wherever pastoral plans are already in place, there is need to revisit them so as to ensure that they are effective and relevant for the times and adequately reflect the spiritual and pastoral priorities of the church's social communication. Wherever such plans do not exist, there is an urgent need to create them in line with the current communication environment and the pastoral needs of our continent. The pastoral plans for social communication should outline the vision and mission of the Social Communication Commissions beginning at the continental, national, regional, diocesan levels. In evolving such plans it is important to adopt a participatory approach involving all the stakeholders. This will ensure greater ownership and commitment in the implementation of the plan.
3. The pastoral plan for social communication should not be seen in isolation but must become part and parcel of the various pastoral priorities of the Church, thereby integrating communications into all aspects of the church's apostolate (cf. AN, no. 21). This also demands that we consider the impact of emerging realities in the area of communication such as media convergence.
4. The church's communication ministry needs to focus more purposefully on larger concerns affecting our continent and the nations we represent. This calls for greater coordinated efforts in the areas of formation, planning, resource management and utilization, research, production and other interventions. Such coordinated approach calls for greater sense of solidarity and cooperation.

5. It is necessary to evaluate the communication structures and services they render in a serious and systematic way. The FABC-OSC and national offices could play a key role in assisting such evaluation and study. Such evaluation should go beyond mere quantitative achievements and must verify whether they meet the vision and mission of such structures and offices. Regular feedback and evaluation can help verify the relevance of our communication ministry in an increasingly digital world. The pastoral and spiritual nature of the communication ministry, though at times intangible, should not be overlooked while undertaking such evaluations.

6. Considering the importance the church gives to social communication, it is essential to assign the task of leading communication at various levels to persons who are deeply imbued by the spirit of Christ the Good Shepherd. In addition to technical skills and competence, he or she should possess the spiritual and pastoral qualities that can motivate, inspire and reach out to people. Persons appointed to key responsibilities in the communication ministry of the church must have the knowledge, aptitude and commitment for such a ministry. In considering persons for appointment to various responsibilities to lead communication, it is also recommended that they are given sufficient time to prepare themselves for the task, and undergo necessary training and formation prior to taking up their responsibilities. Our communication ministry should be aimed at facilitating the sharing of a message, which is grounded in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Word of Life, to whom individuals are called to make a personal response. The example of Pope Francis in establishing contacts with people and reaching out to them in love is an inspiring model for all Christian communicators to emulate.

7. Consistent with the teachings of the church on the importance of the formation of the pastoral personnel in social communication, we strongly recommend that there be a serious and systematic program of formation of seminarians, religious in formation, priests and religious in ministry and lay persons. Such a formation program should go beyond imparting of technical skills, but must pay attention to the formation of a truly communicative person who has the necessary disposition rooted in Christ and the Trinitarian and Incarnational model of communication, capable of “giving oneself in love” (CP, 11).

8. Considering the diverse pastoral contexts of Asia, the FABC-OSC members should strive towards greater collaboration expressed through sharing of resources, personnel, as well as best practices in the communication ministry. National offices under the leadership of the bishops should ensure that the various communication organizations such as Signis, Catholic Press Associations etc work in a spirit of unity and collaboration. While maintaining their identity and mission, they should function within the framework of the overall pastoral plan for social communication and the directives and guidelines of the Bishops and Commissions responsible for social communications. (CP, no. 143)

9. We need to situate Catholic communication ministry into the cultural contexts of the people. Learning the languages and the cultural values of the people and interpersonal communication are essential even as we continue to be engaged in mass media and other forms of communication.

10. The youth are a powerful resource in the continent of Asia. The participation and involvement of young people as active agents of social communication presents an exciting opportunity and a challenge. Youth are not to be viewed as passive consumers of content but active agents in the ever evolving communication environment. It is important for communication leaders in the Church to assist, facilitate and also learn from the youth so that they can make their rightful contribution to the Church’s communication ministry and to society in general.

11. World Communications Day offers us a unique opportunity to promote the Church’s vision of social communication. The communication leaders should encourage and promote the celebration of the Day with greater involvement and participation of the Bishops, Pastors and Lay Faithful. Besides celebrating the event within the precincts of the Church, it can also provide an opportunity to offer pastoral care to communicators including media professionals. As recommended by CP, the Faithful should be exhorted to contribute towards supporting the communication ministry of the Church (no. 100).

12. Following the recommendation of CP, due attention should be given to strengthen the functioning of the office of Public Relations (no. 174). We also underline the specific role of the Spokesperson and the structures and persons to deal with Crisis Management. These functions and services should form important components of the social communication ministry of the Church.