



Dear Friends,

More than one and a half millennia ago a Spanish nun recounted to her community the rigor of the Rite of Election, which she witnessed in ancient Jerusalem. Those who wanted to be baptized were brought by their godparents before the entire governing board of the church to be examined. Catechumens were interrogated by the bishop, and if any were found ill prepared they were ordered to go and amend their lives before seeking entry into the community of Christians.

Perhaps the human psyche was more robust in the year 400 at the time of Egeria's writing. I can only imagine how modern folks would take such public rejection! Now that independence and self-authority are the values of the day, people might well pose the question: What right do these Christians have to decide who enters the church and who does not?

The enduring validity of that question leads us this Lenten season to ponder anew other connected issues of religious identity: Who are we as Christians? Who are we as Church? What are we here for and where are we going? What do we represent in the world?

It is a good time to ask ourselves what being 'elected' by God means for us in this day and age – it is a good time to renegotiate our faith!

Pick up our Lenten booklet and gather your community for a session or two to explore together what being faithful disciples of Christ means today. Let us be led by the Spirit into new life!



AG

Arthur Goh
Associate Director

Coming soon Akan datang

- * Mental Health First Aid Certification Programme
@ St Mary of the Angels, 23 Feb, 1 Mar & 8 Mar. Time: 9.30am – 1.30pm
- * Women in the New Testament
@ CAEC, 2 Highland Road, 6 Mar – 3 Apr, Thursdays, 9.30am – 11.30am
- * History of Western Philosophy by Fr Albert Renckens, SSCC
@ St Ignatius, 24 Mar – 19 May, Mondays, 8.00pm – 9.30pm

Call 6858 3011 or email spi@catholic.org.sg

an update on SCC



With the setting up the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) in parishes three years ago, there was a renewed interest in the Small Christian Communities. Why was this so? While PPCs may differ from parish to parish in terms of the people, the geographical location, and so on, the main purpose of PPC remains to ensure that the life of the parish reflects the mission of Jesus and that all parishioners are provided with opportunity to share that mission. Parishes envisioned that a church comprising many communities (not just ministries) offers good opportunity for all parishioners to share and participate in Christ's mission. In the light of this renewed interest we, the SPI pastoral training team, has been invited into several parishes to assist them in systematically building the Small Christian Communities (SCC).

In Church of the Risen Christ, Fr, John Sim and his team discerned that there was a need to create greater awareness of SCCs. So, the Parish SCC Promotion team worked with us to tailor-make an awareness programme for the parish. The strategy they adopted was to proceed development by zone – which is the parish's way of demarcating neighbourhoods. The SPI team provided training in the area of home-visitation skills to the Parish Promotion team in the last quarter of 2007. Members from the parish then went to visit the Catholics in the identified zones to invite them to the parish hall for an awareness programme. The first awareness programme was conducted in November 2007 by the Parish Promotion team, and now they are planning to continue their awareness programme to the other zones.

In the Church of St Teresa, SCCs were formed last year after the parish mission.

At the invitation of Fr Michael Arro, the SPI team continues to train the facilitators in small-group skills and gospel sharing techniques for all the newly formed SCCs.

For the Holy Family parish, the SPI team provided facilitator training for the English speaking SCCs. Some of these SCCs were formed in previous years while others wished to start new SCCs. Together with the parish priest Fr. Patrick Goh, members of the PPC identified the groups and invited facilitators to come for training to revive or start new groups. The SPI team also conducted an awareness programme for the leaders of the Mandarin speaking community in Holy Family. As a result, these leaders became keen to start SCCs. Currently, a core group is working with us to map out a strategy, as well as becoming equipped to conduct awareness programmes for the Mandarin speaking community in Holy Family parish.



In the parish of St Mary of the Angels, growing SCCs was identified as a way to help the parish to become more welcoming. SPI conducted awareness programmes for both English and Chinese speaking members of the parish community. Subsequently, SCCs were formed. The PPC, under the leadership of Friar John Paul Tan, has adopted the strategy of introducing SCCs to the catechumens in the RCIA and participants of the Alpha programme. SPI helped to conduct one such introductory awareness programme to a group of Alpha programme graduates in November 2007. As an on-going training for the facilitators of the SCCs, the parish SCC core team has invited the pastoral training team to conduct facilitators training cum retreat in March.



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An update on SCC ...cont'd from page 2

While the Church of St Bernadette had SCCs some ten years ago, many groups have since dissolved due to one reason or another. Fr Eugene Chong, with the PPC, invited the SPI team to conduct awareness programme to help the council members to decide on strategies to revive SCCs in the parish. They have identified the need to form a parish SCC promotion team and to conduct home visits. For existing SCCs, there is a need to continue strengthening and support through on-going formation.

There are other SCCs in different parishes and they continue to provide opportunities for lay faithful to share and participate in Jesus' mission to bring the Good News and to build the Kingdom of God.

The SPI pastoral training team comprises of: Daphne Leong, Teresa Lye, Arthur Goh, Msgr. Eugene Vaz, Patricia de Souza, and Bailyne Sung. We are looking for people who are enthusiastic about building small communities to join our training team! Those who are interested to find out more can contact us for more information. Please email: daphneleong@catholicspi.org or call 6858 7022.



- DL -

“LISTEN” TO THE WOMEN

The course on 'Women in the Old Testament' provided for me an opportunity to listen and discover the 'woman being'.

Through the stories of Sarah, Hagar and other women, Sr Susan Thomas, FMM, guided the participants to discover what women were like and how similar are some of the situations they faced to ours.

I discovered through the course that I am made to be who I am and I need not prove my worth by doing the things that men would do in this male dominated society was affirming for me. I find this is especially true for working women. Often, women have to put in double effort doing what men do in order to be considered as on par with them!

The other discovery I made is that as opposed to the physical strength of men, the women's quiet inner strength was God's gift to humanity. This inner strength provides the stability and comfort in the family and we see this in how Isaac drew strength from his mother Sarah, and later from his wife Rebekah.

Listening to these women helped me to listen to myself. It is in this listening that snippets of who I really am began to surface.

I am looking forward to the other courses in the study on women so as to allow more of me to emerge, as woman and can play my role in the plan of God. What better year to make this journey of discovery as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II document on women and to realize the feminine genius in us!

Join me on this journey in the next course on 'Women in the New Testament' with Sr Maria Lau, IJ. This course begins on 6 March, Thursday, 9.30am – 11.30am. Call 6858 3011 or email spi@catholic.org.sg to register.

- DL -



+++What is the Faith that We Teach?+++



Even before the great Trinitarian or Christological doctrines were formed, the community of believers had already been knee-deep in catechetical ministry. Making disciples was Jesus' first order of the day. While the practice of "handing on the faith" is ancient, the idea of what "faith" actually comprises has changed as history progressed.

In the time of St. Paul and the early Church, faith was *socialization* into "the way." Newcomers were inducted into the believing community when they learned to imitate the conduct of the founder Jesus Christ: they became disciples when they showed kindness to widows, fed the hungry, were devoted to prayer, and bore witness to the Good News.

As Christianity moved from being persecuted to the favored religion of the Roman Empire, socialization gave way to *membership* in the Church. When the ruling classes became Christian, most of Europe and the surrounding Mediterranean civilizations wanted to be Christian as well – sharing the faith of the nobility had many advantages. For the next sixteen or so centuries, faith became understood as a series of theological propositions that are collectively held. One became a disciple if he or she assented to the doctrinal beliefs.

After the divisive trauma of the Reformation, faith also came to be seen as *loyalty* to a particular Christian church. Catholic scholastic theology did not help matters as faith became objectified as a "sacred deposit" like a Roman Catholic heirloom that can be passed on from generation to generation.

The state of Christian faith has not become simpler in our time. Today Catholicism faces a crisis of legitimation: with many other worldviews offering alternative

meanings of life, the Catholic church no longer possesses the moral authority it once had. Modern people, including many Catholics themselves, now listen to the church much the same way as they listen to any other person or group with a view to offer.

Appealing to the fact that the Son of God himself instituted our tradition does not seem to increase our credibility. In this era, characterized by relative-ness, each group asserts its own validity on the basis of their own authoritative source: the Christians claim they have Jesus Christ, the Socialists do likewise with Karl Marx, the Economists have John Maynard Keynes, Islam has Muhammad, the Technophiles have Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, and so on.

What will faith mean for us if we interpret this co-existence as competition? And then, considering catechesis, what kind of faith-education will result?

(Tell us what you think at www.catholicspi.org/forum)

- AG -

Welcome to SPI Library



All members of The Singapore Pastoral Institute Library are invited to renew their membership for 2008. New members are most welcome too! Email: library@catholicspi.org. Check our website www.catholicspi.org or visit us at CAEC, 2 Highland Road #02-02 Singapore 549102.

The Feminine Genius

An update on the coming events:

- 6 Mar – 3 Apr: Women in the New Testament by Sr Maria Lau, IJ.
4 sessions on Thursday, 9.30am–11.30am
@ CAEC, 2 Highland Road.
- 7 & 14 May: Feminist Theological Reflection
by Arthur Goh & Vera Handojo
2 Wednesdays, 7.30pm–9.30pm @ 55 Waterloo Street.
- 26 June – 24 July: Women in the Old Testament Part 2
by Sr Susan Thomas, FMM.
5 sessions on Thursday, 9.30am–11.30am
@ CAEC, 2 Highland Road.
- July: Women's Spirituality
by Edwina Yeow & Sr Elizabeth Lim, RGS.
Dates to be confirmed.
- August: Panel Workshop on the document *Mulieris dignitatem*
"On the Vocation and Dignity of Women"
Drama production on women by Stephanie Kwok and Co.

Last quarter: Ad hoc seminars for reflection on women's roles in society: family, workplace, etc.

A light moment...

Fish for Lent

John Smith was the only Protestant to move into a large Catholic neighborhood. On the first Friday of Lent, John was outside grilling a big juicy steak on his grill. Meanwhile, all of his neighbors were eating cold tuna fish for supper. This went on each Friday of Lent. On the last Friday of Lent, the neighborhood men got together and decided that something had to be done about John. He was tempting them to eat meat each Friday of Lent, and they couldn't take it anymore. They decided to try and convert John to become a Catholic. They went over and talked to him and were so happy that he decided to join all of his neighbors and become a Catholic. They took him to Church, and the Priest sprinkled some water over him, and said, "You were born a Baptist, you were raised a Baptist, and now you are Catholic." The men were so relieved, now their biggest Lenten temptation was resolved.

The next year's Lenten season rolled around. The first Friday of Lent came, and just at supper time, when the neighborhood was setting down to their tuna fish dinner, came the wafting smell of steak cooking on a grill. The neighborhood men could not believe their noses! WHAT WAS GOING ON? They called each other up and decided to meet over in John's yard to see if he had forgotten it was the first Friday of Lent. The group arrived just in time to see John standing over his grill with a small pitcher of water. He was sprinkling some water over his steak on the grill, saying, "You were born a cow, you were raised a cow, and now you are a fish."