

Dear Friends,

Catholics celebrate World Mission Sunday in the month of October. Here at the Pastoral Institute, we too, have been pondering the idea of Christian 'mission'.

As a Catholic Christian, I associate mission as being transformed by the Spirit to manifest God's love, forgiveness, and justice to those around me. Just a couple of weeks ago, my neighbour's son was diagnosed with dengue fever. Needless to say, the parents were worried sick. The boy developed complications and besides bleeding, his liver became inflamed. My neighbour came home one evening looking lost and helpless. I went to speak with her, trying to comfort her.

Soon I realised that no words of comfort could get through to this anxious mother. As she poured out

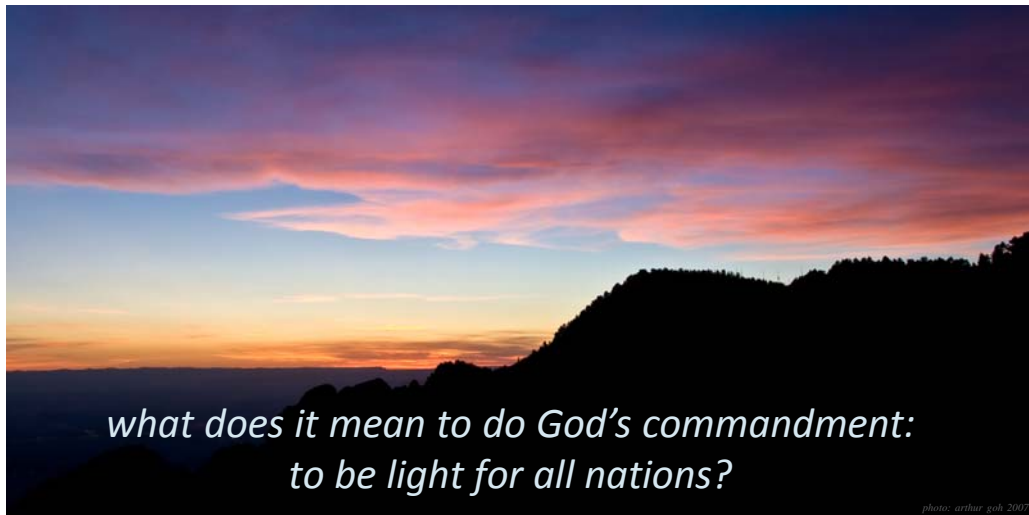
her worry and helplessness, I plucked up my courage to ask her to trust God and allow the almighty to do what is best for the boy.

As I stood there, asking her to put her faith in God, I sensed a deep connection being made in that moment, and she seemed to draw strength from my words of comfort. I was touched by this experience very much - because my neighbour is a Muslim.

That moment for me was the Spirit in action, showing God's love to this woman despite our being believers of different religions. When I recall what it is to be 'missionary', that event comes to my mind. My mission is simply to bring God to others, no matter what.

Enjoy reading the reflections and writings from this issue. Perhaps you can reflect a little on your own 'mission' as well.

Daphne



*what does it mean to do God's commandment:
to be light for all nations?*

photo: arthur goh 2007

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THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

United Nations addresses the independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity of older persons. www.who.int/ageing/event/iodp_rationale/en/index.html

Oct 5 - 26 the Synod of Bishops will meet in Rome to reflect on "The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church."

Oct 16 is world food day organised by the FAO of the UN to heighten public awareness of the world food problem and to strengthen solidarity in the struggle against hunger, malnutrition and poverty. www.un.org

Oct 17 is International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. "Whenever people are condemned to live in extreme poverty, their human rights are violated."
www.un.org/esa/socdev/poverty/poverty_links3.htm and www.oct17.org

Oct 27 is Deepavali. We celebrate with our Hindu neighbours the triumph of Good over Evil. Remember to wish them a very happy Festival of Lights!





SPI 30th Anniversary Celebration

by Joyce Gan

“The Singapore Pastoral Institute (SPI) helps our diocese continue the work of Jesus’ ministry to preach,” said Msgr Eugene Vaz at SPI’s 30th anniversary celebrations on Friday Sep 19.

The celebrations were held at Church of the Immaculate Heart (IHM) – right next door to the Catholic Archdiocesan Education Centre where SPI is – with a Mass celebrated by Archbishop Nicholas Chia, followed by dinner in the church hall.

Archbishop Chia preached the same message in his homily when he said “‘Pastoral’ means reaching out like shepherds so [to be pastoral] is not just about ‘lectural’ information but to become shepherds to the flock”,

adding that each of us are pastors called to this mission.

He stressed the importance that “laity be kept well-informed and live up to what God calls them to in their charisms”. It is therefore “not sufficient just to [provide] courses but to help [participants] see how they can use it for the good of the church”.

deeper love for God’s Word as well as to support parishes in organizing their own Bible apostolate teams to nurture this same love amongst parishioners.

The mission of the other two arms – Pastoral and Catechetical – aim to conscientize people to claim their baptismal responsibility by using their gifts and forming themselves to put on ‘the mind’ of Christ.

“SPI has a long way to go but we can’t just rely on those directly supporting it, but on all of us,” said Archbishop Chia. “Generally, many good laity think the church depends on priests and religious while they remain in the background. This should not be. We’re all part of the church.”

“We all know there’s much to be done but it’s not sufficient to just say that but ask what we can do. Each of us is gifted in a different way. Let us be



grateful to God for the blessings he’s showered upon us and be really aware of these blessings and make good use of our time, talents, resources,” he concluded.

Arthur Goh, Associate Director of SPI, who organized the event with his team, is thankful for SPI’s journey. He said at the end of Mass, “We’re 30 years old and although we’ve served the diocese all this time, we’re not tired of our mission yet. On the contrary, we are energized, we have grown through the years.”

Archbishop Chia also added that he is “particularly impressed by what’s contributed by Msgr Vaz and Father Ambrose Vaz through Scripture”.

The Vaz brothers hold Bible courses at SPI throughout the year and they are generally very well-attended. The Biblical arm of SPI aims to foster a



The Next 30 Years

by Wendy Louis

The work of SPI over the past thirty years has been closely tied to the life and demands of the local, regional, and universal Church. It involves providing for the needs of the laity and the church, firstly in the development of more rigorous programmes of formation that are certified. Archbishop Nicholas Chia began such a two year course in 1988 which continues today in the form of the Diploma in Adult Faith Formation (DAFF) and the one year Foundations in Ministry Programme (FMCP). The SPI has also been instrumental for helping to set up Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs) and encouraging PPC members right from the beginning. This work continues today, through changes and revivals. The “see, reflect, act” communitarian approach is implemented in all publications especially the Lenten sessions, in order to build up a foundation in the faith as well as strengthen the experience of community.

Pastoral ministry workshops have developed according to new needs. Much of the work at SPI is inspired by the directives of the Second Vatican Council:

- towards a more participatory church, and laity who are conscious of their mission
- a greater emphasis on a Christ-centred and word centred Church, in the Council’s theology of communion.
- towards a more open, outward looking Church “In the Modern World” with a spirituality of dialogue and pilgrimage.

Catechetical, biblical and pastoral dimensions of formation were merged in 1993 in an effort to share a common vision and to work in unity. This threefold collaboration continues today.

Our direction for the next 30 years will come from reading the signs of the times, together with guidance from the local diocese; from pastoral letters and exhortations of our archbishop, as well as from the larger church; from the Holy Father, and the Asian Bishops’ Conferences.

When I imagine the Church of the future, it is not glitzy or glamorous. It is however, young and vibrant even as the population ages. It has very little to do with grand liturgies and huge donations. Rather it is ordinary people who have an extraordinary relationship with Christ, motivated to love in simple, practical and extraordinary ways in their families, their neighbourhoods and everywhere else.

What do we need to do to bring to life the gospel within, the Spirit of Love dwelling in our hearts so we can bear Christ authentically? That is what the SPI has to get right.

First of all we need to realize that we have only one thing to offer the world that is worth anything and that is Christ. If we forget the Lord in the

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midst of all the doctrine and skills and techniques then we have failed miserably. Our experience is that, while on the one hand, people are very simple and want the message simplified for implementation, on the other hand, because of the society we live in, their way of thinking and the filters they use to process their

experiences of life necessitates a more sophisticated approach to reach them and to truly change mindsets towards God. SPI will need to reach people at all intellectual and emotional levels while holding on to the key message of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

A lesson I picked up while in Europe was that the church has paid a very heavy price as a result of developments in society, in politics and in thinking. Christians had remained complacent and neglected to take into consideration social trends and events. Immense ornate basilicas resound to the footsteps of tourists admiring some ancient architecture which housed an ancient ritual which is no longer relevant or meaningful.

For us in Singapore, it is too easy to be lulled into complacency about the faith of our people, especially the young. Our churches are full today and we have many entering the church through baptism. While we celebrate and thank God for this fact, we look for signs that the faith is truly rooted in the hearts of the people – in their daily lives, in economic and political decisions, in loving fidelity within relationships and so on. There is a need to “stay awake” in order to see what is happening at the base, and try to support and build up the faith of Catholics.

Will the church of the future be alive with people sharing faith and life in small Christian communities, movements and ministries bringing the gospel into the warp and weave of their lives and the lives of all they touch? It is not about having more programmes and more activities. It is really about people taking their lives into their own hands and living the faith consciously and joyfully. Let us hope and pray for the Spirit to guide and lead us all.

Ministers of Christian Initiation Meet



by Arthur Goh

Representatives of parish RCIA teams from twenty one parishes convened at Solomon Hall in the offices of Caritas Singapore (CSCC) on 29th August 2008. This meeting was intended as an opportunity for participants to get to know other practitioners of RCIA ministry from the various churches in the Archdiocese. Focusing on what services the Pastoral Institute can provide in support of the parish ministries, the team members of each district conversed with one another about the issues surrounding the care of catechumens and the work of Christian initiation.

Many of the concerns raised were perennially familiar; better formation of lay catechists, sounder ways to prepare godparents and sponsors, improving collaboration with other ministries within the parish, strengthening clergy-laity relations in RCIA work, and so on.

One of the newer concerns participants voiced was the need for information regarding canon law – especially where it pertains to catechumens. RCIA teams and sponsors are often bewildered by the canonical process of helping catechumens who are impeded from full initiation because of legal issues. It was felt that some understanding of church law would enable parish teams to support their pastors, and offer better care for catechumens who need to defer their initiation. The RCIA desk will look into possibilities of inviting speakers to present regular overviews of church law, particularly concerning the sacraments.

There was also a request for improved literacy in mental health issues. People of all kinds join the RCIA, but some individuals have mental conditions that prevent them from participating properly in the initiation process. These could be

referred for professional help. Knowledge of common mental illnesses and their symptoms enable team members and sponsors to recognize when their inquirers or catechumens require help from qualified mental health personnel. Mental health literacy allows pastoral ministers to make informed choices; who may otherwise extend themselves beyond their competence or even inadvertently cause harm to those they are caring for. A good course to attend in this regard is “Mental Health First Aid” organized periodically by the Pastoral Institute.

Whenever we meet I see signs of how lay ministry is evolving. As RCIA teams gain more experience in the practice of Christian initiation ministry, they learn to develop more appreciation for the mission of Christ and the nuances that are involved in catering to the needs of modern day catechumens.

CATECHESIS AND EVANGELIZATION

Portions of the following article were taken from Functional Images of the Religious Educator by Timothy Lines

Mention the term or profession “evangelist” in conversation today and the response likely will be a sneer, a sigh, or an awkward silence. The ancient, previously-honored role of evangelist has fallen upon hard times, due to those unscrupulous individuals who have abused their role and its audience for their own personal gain. Although the term is currently in disrepute, it still signals an important and necessary function in modern society.

An evangelist is primarily a proclaimer of a story—a story that gets at the deeper meaning of good news. While the term “evangelist” originally had no inherently religious connotation, it came to be used by and identified with the early Christians who went about spreading what they considered to be the “good news” of the Christ event. Obviously then, being an evangelist is an integral part of being a religious educator.

In a generalized sense, evangelists are also omnipresent in modern society. Turn on a television set, and one will immediately be confronted with the “good news” of a particular deodorant, slimming spa, or “cure-all” drug. Open any newspaper, and read a particular version of interpreted world events. Evangelists always give their own version of events, filtered through explicit, implicit and null

influences. The difference in evangelists is that some are subtler, some are more dishonest, and some more effective than others in presenting their agendas. The objective of convincing others, however hidden or open, remains the same. What legitimate religious educators strive toward, however, is to be open, honest, ethical and effective in the efforts to convince.

As catechists, may we always proclaim the good news with conviction and joy in our hearts!

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded of you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Mt 28: 19-20)

Mark Your Calendars

Secondary
Coordinator District
Meeting

Saturday, November 15th
10 am-12 pm
Christ the King

or

Saturday, November 22nd
10 am-12 pm
Our Lady of Lourdes

This is a meeting for all secondary level coordinators to share ideas, build community and plan together for a unified future in our catechetical ministry.

RSVP by October 31
christidisher@catholic.org.sg
regarding which meeting you will be attending.

Archdiocesan SCC Day 08

11 October 2008
(Saturday) 1.30pm-6.00pm
Catholic Junior College
Training & Development
Centre

Welcome address by :
Archbishop Nicholas Chia

Keynote speaker :
Fr. Patrick Goh

You go into the vineyard too

This is the annual event to celebrate the Small Christian Communities in the archdiocese. This year, the focus is to help SCCs see the mission work that they can do in their neighbourhoods. “You go into the vineyard too” is the theme for this year, and we invite all the “workers”, whether you are called at the first hour or the last to come. See you at Catholic Junior College on 11 October, from 1.30pm - 6.00pm.
Call 6858 3011 for more information.

