



Dear friends,

We are already celebrating the first week of Advent and many of you will be using the Advent reflections and activities. We have heard some good feedback and appreciate your views. You can give us more views and get involved in our pastoral conversations using our **online forum** which can be accessed from our website.

The year 2008 will be a Sabbatical year for me. Time to renew and rest and re-create. I shall be away from the office but not always out of Singapore. The highlight of my year will be a pilgrimage to the Holy Land which I have never visited. Keep me in your prayer. I will keep in touch with you through the online forum and our website photo gallery.

Taking over my pastoral portfolios will be Arthur Goh - Associate Director. Taking over my work of coordinating training and resources for Pastoral Councils and Small Christian Communities will be Daphne Tan and the new coordinator for the Diploma and Certificate Programmes is Janice Ng. Other staff behind the scenes who continue to give great service and support are Teresa Hoe who is in charge of accounts and is our office manager. Angela Fernandez our librarian, Lucy Kang and Melinda Reyes our reception cum admin assistants.

We all send you our warmest wishes for Christmas and wish you joy and peace as you contemplate the God who became one like us even to the beauty and vulnerability of a baby.



Yours in Christ

Wendy Louis

wendyl@catholic.org.sg

We wish Wendy a good sabbatical year and that she will be back fully rested and re-charged. From all of us @ SPI

What's Happening in 2008

FMCP

A new course is beginning in January. Those interested, please sign up now. Call 6858 3100 or email spi@catholic.org.sg

Call to Faith Workshop

2 workshops scheduled on 12 & 19 January, for catechists in the Archdiocese to use the Call to Faith materials.

Anniversary of Apostolic letter of the late Pope John Paul II - Mulieris Dignitatem (Dignity and Vocation of Women)

A series of courses, talks and studies to commemorate this document beginning with "Women in Old Testament" by Sr Susan Thomas from 3 Jan 08 for 5 sessions. Call 68583011 or email spi@catholic.org.sg to register.

Lent is early in 2008 – Look out for the Lenten booklet.

Rite of Election 2008

This will take place on 16 & 17 Feb 08.

Western Philosophy (part 1)

This interesting course by Fr Albert Renckens, SS.CC. begins on 24 March at Church of St Ignatius. Look out for it!

Year of St Paul

2008 June – 2009 June has been designated as the Year of St Paul. Programme will be made known close to date.

SCC Day – October 11

A day of gathering & celebration for all SCCs in the diocese.

Visit of Fr Jose Marins in November

Fr Jose Marins from Brazil has been promoting SCCs in Latin America for many years. He will be in Singapore in November, look out for details.

Anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation of late Pope John Paul II on the vocation & mission of lay faithful - Christifideles Laici

Look out for reflections on this document.

A reflection on the First Readings of the Sundays of Advent



During the season of Advent the readings highlight texts from the **Prophet Isaiah**. In our latest issue of 'Spirituality' Vol 13 Nov/Dec 2007, there is a very helpful article by Kenneth Overberg SJ about the prophet Isaiah, I have taken some extracts from this article.

"**Isaiah** exercised his prophetic ministry in and around Jerusalem, from about 742 B.C.E. to 701... These were terrible times of war and devastation... It is very important to remember that a prophet is one who reads the signs of the times in light of the covenant relationship between God and the people...

Three distinct parts make up the biblical book of Isaiah.

Chapters 1-39 give us the words and works of Isaiah of Jerusalem (together with some later additions) remembered and handed on by his disciples and eventually compiled by editors. Chapters 40-55 come from the time of the exile in Babylon (587-538 BC) and an unknown prophet simply called Second Isaiah.

Chapters 56 - 66 describe the time after exile, back in a desolate Jerusalem with another unknown prophet called Third Isaiah.... The book spans two hundred years.

First Week: Peace and nonviolence: Isaiah 2:1-5

During the first week of Advent, Isaiah's remarkable vision of hope and trust invites us to reflect on our own times, not unlike Isaiah's. Yahweh's ways lead to peace.

What steps will we take to walk in these ways? How can we contribute to conflict transformation in our communities and cities and even our world? Do we really trust that God will do this - in and through us and all the nations?

Second week: Justice and Hope: Isaiah 11:1-10

Because there are many similarities between Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom and Jesus' vision - justice, joy, nonviolence, peace - it is not surprising that the early followers of Jesus noticed these similarities and frequently referred to Isaiah in telling their stories of Jesus...

How can this passage from Isaiah help our celebration of Advent? The prophetic imagination allows us to see life in a new way, saying to us that we are not enslaved to the present conditions. So we can reflect upon injustice in our world today and make our own ordinary-but-real contributions to extending justice to the poor and afflicted...

Third Week: Joy and Liberation: Isaiah 35:1-6

Scholars tell us that today's passage from Isaiah, although part of chapters 1-39, actually comes from a much later period, probably after the exile in Babylon, that is, after 537 BC. Whoever was the actual author, these biblical words still speak to us... we too long for liberation. We too are oppressed by violence, war, poverty, and a host of other social and personal evils. We too long to hear words of promise, hope, and life. And we do hear them - every Sunday as we gather for Eucharist...

In what people and events do I find signs of God's Reign in my life? How do I contribute to God's Empire? This week of Advent invites us to take some time to reflect, remember, be joyful and give thanks!

Fourth Week: With us is God: Isaiah 7: 10-14

The birth of a child is a profound symbol of hope. This fourth Sunday of Advent invites us to ponder birth and new life, to renew our trust and hope even in threatening times. We can be people of hope, just like Isaiah, Paul, Mary and Joseph, because past present and future, God comes to save us, strengthening our hearts with abundant love. God is present in the depths of our being, in creation and uniquely in Jesus.

With Isaiah of Jerusalem our Advent prayer helps prepare the way for the celebration of Christmas."

CALENDAR for 2008 Jan - Jun

Pastoral Courses & Workshops

Women in Old Testament by Sr Susan Thomas, FMM

5 sessions beginning 3 January 2008 (Thursday), Singapore Pastoral Institute

Brief History of Western Philosophy (Part 1) by Fr Albert Renckens SS.CC.

8 sessions beginning 24 March 2008 (Monday) at Church of St Ignatius.

Pastoral Care of the Terminally Ill by Sr Una Boland

12 April 2008 (Saturday), 2.00 – 6.00pm, Singapore Pastoral Institute

Mental Health First Aid Certification Course by Mr Joachim Lee

To be confirmed.

RCIA & Catechetics workshops

Call to Faith Workshop by the NIE Training Team

12 January (Saturday) 2.00 – 5.30pm, Singapore Pastoral Institute

19 January (Saturday) 1.30 – 5.00pm, Church of the Holy Spirit

RCIA Rite of Election 2008

16 February (Saturday) 7.30pm, St Mary of the Angels

17 February (Sunday) 2.00pm, Immaculate Heart of Mary

Introduction to the RCIA by Arthur Goh

3 weekly sessions beginning Friday 4 April (Friday), 8:00-10:00pm, Singapore Pastoral Institute

Biblical Courses

The Book of Deuteronomy by Fr Ambrose Vaz

8 Tuesdays beginning on 15 Jan (morning 9.30 – 11.30am, evening 7.45 – 9.45pm)

The Letters of St Paul: Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians by Fr Ambrose Vaz

10 Tuesdays beginning on 18 Mar (morning 9.30 – 11.30am, evening 7.45- 9.45pm)

Salvation History by Msgr Eugene Vaz

20 Mondays beginning 23 Jun, 7.45 – 9.45pm.

All Bible courses above held at the Singapore Pastoral Institute, 2 Highland Road.

Book review:

“Creating Small Church Communities by Arthur Baranowski”

Fr Arthur Baranowski is a priest and pastor of the Archdiocese of Detroit. He is a member of the board of the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring Into Communities in the United States of America.

In his book, “Creating Small Church Communities”, he shares stories and methods on restructuring a parish into small church communities in the US. The reasons he gives for restructuring the parish are similar to the ones we have here. For example, he shared that many in today’s society are faced with less stable relationships; they are bombarded daily by a consumer society about having a ‘good life’ and the ‘real thing’. Many individuals live day to day, staying on the surface of experience, never questioning the basic assumptions of society. Yet, the basic life-style required by Christ for his disciples demands decisions that are counter-culture. Many Catholics are not able to experience this discipleship life-style when they only experience church for one hour a week, how is faith relevant in their lives and how can they make discerning decisions with regards to their faith life without a faith community?

Another reason for restructuring the parish is that the mission of the parish is meant to foster an experience of love and an experience of faith. Under the present parish structure, although we care for the sick, the homeless and broken-hearted, yet, many fall through the cracks in parishes and they receive no help to face the challenges of life. How to preach a life of love and faith when many cannot experience love and faith because parishioners hardly notice each other?

The RCIA was another reason cited for restructuring parishes. The Catechumenate creates a setting for trust to be built and genuine sharing of life and faith together. This experience ends abruptly when the catechumens are baptized and initiated into a parish community that does neither of those things they experienced on their RCIA journey.

Hence, the need to re-look at how we are being ‘Church’ and the model of small church communities seemed to be the best possible place where Catholics are able to experience love and faith and live a life of love and faith.

While the reasons and vision are similar, Fr Baranowski’s plan and methods to start small communities are different from the experience in most parts of Asia. His model requires a highly qualified team of ‘Pastoral Facilitators’ who take on the tasks of moving and forming the communities at the ground. These facilitators are able to lead as ‘experts’ in the small communities. The communities are basically ‘Word’ centered. However, they rely very heavily on these facilitators and good focus questions to help

the group to share on the 'Word of God' and in deciding tasks. These focus questions direct the group's discussions and may not be in touch with the life of the group in their particular context.

The AsIPA (Asian) way of listening to the Word of God empowers the laity to take responsibility for their response to the word of God proclaimed and shared in the group. Through gospel sharing, the Spirit moves within the community to form and direct them. The word of God is broken, shared and then 'acted upon' based on the needs in that neighbourhood and in the community.

I realize that here in Asia, we have been promoting the 'Asian Integrated Pastoral Approach' (AsIPA) for some time. This is a well thought out approach which builds the 'small-scale' church in the neighbourhood and empowers the laity to take charge of their faith life. It is an approach which requires much fine tuning but has its own particular strengths. There is international interest in the AsIPA method in particular in Germany and some other 'Western' churches. What is attractive is the vision of the community as the church in this or that locality. This is counter-culture, goes against the grain of urban individualism but Fr Art is convinced that Community is the way to go.

By Daphne Leong