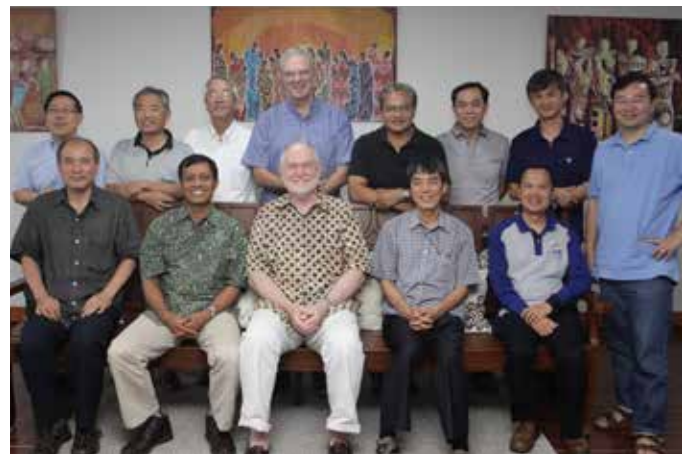


# the jesuits in asia pacific 2015



a **faith** that does **justice**



Courage teaches us to be angry in ways that are fruitful. Anger prepares us to confront what is wrong.

Living and Acting with

# Anger & Courage

“**H**ope,” remarked St Augustine, “has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage: anger at the way things are and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.” Courage teaches us to be angry in ways that are fruitful. Anger prepares us to confront what is wrong.

The Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific is an exercise in hope tasked to examine the needs that correspond to our mission and to mobilise Jesuits and companions in response to them. We cannot, as companions of Jesus, be satisfied with just any response to the needs of the times. Whatever response we make must reveal in all things the initiative of God’s love and show how the Lord is at work in our world. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,” writes the Apostle Paul.

Whether at the end of a day or at the close of a year, it is good to look back and recall both ordinary and special events in our lives. This reflection helps us discern God’s action in our world and to sense more clearly what he asks of each of us. An examination of conscience helps us to evaluate the life and apostolic activities of the Society.

As in any examen we begin with our consolations, of which there were many last year. The ordinations and final vows of young men after years of study, searching and testing; welcoming a widow who gives

to the Lord a gift of all that she owns; the faces of children in our schools, eager to learn; the evident peace and spiritual maturity of someone who has experienced the Spiritual Exercises.

It is a recurring consolation to live in Asia Pacific, among people who are by nature religious, who are open to people of different faiths. Many around us have a cultural sensibility that promotes values and respects the dignity of the human person. Then there is the sense of vitality and growth, at least in the pulsating life of the Asian cities with the overwhelming presence of young people. Almost half of Asia’s population (more than 4 billion people) is under the age of 25.

Another consolation for the Churches of Asia Pacific in recent months has been the visits of Pope Francis with a consistent message of mercy and compassion, evidenced as much by his spontaneous, pastoral and welcoming manner as by his words. Still one has to wrestle with his message, especially to us Jesuits, which could appear to hold a contradiction. On the one hand he urges us to “go to the peripheries” and on the other hand to “be open to the world around”. It becomes clear that the “peripheries” are not simply geographic, but rather he points us as well to the frontiers of values, to the horizons of the Gospel, and to those people who live on the margins of society whether they

We cannot, as companions of Jesus, be satisfied with just any response to the needs of the times. Whatever response we make must reveal in all things the initiative of God's love and show how the Lord is at work in our world.

are outcast by the economic system or by prejudice. These peripheries can be found right where we live or close to us, so instead of travelling to distant lands we are being asked to dig in deep and to accompany people. These peripheries of the heart and mind and of the Gospel will be revealed the more we take our experiences into prayer.

Of course, along with consolations, we also experience disappointments that should not be glossed over as we examine our lives and achievements. We are frequently in despair of our politicians and leaders; we are disappointed by our own failings; we find a lack of consistency or generosity in our own sharing. The scale of corruption sickens us as does the wasteful exploitation and pollution of our forests, rivers and seas, and the larceny by a few of the goods of the earth that were given by God to all. We are horrified at the increasingly harsh and obdurate treatment of refugees, at the vulnerability of migrant workers, and the prejudices confronting outcasts. Such experiences can induce a sense of powerlessness. "Attacking prejudice," wrote John Henry Newman, "is like attacking a granite mountain with a razor blade." These are the realities that give context for our discernment and planning.

Yet one recurring consolation for me, given the role of the Jesuit Conference, is the increased sense among Jesuits that we are a part of a big picture, that we have a large task, and that we can do it better the more we work together. The announcement in recent months that another General Congregation is convoked for 2016 is reinforcing this sense of universality. In preparing for the 36<sup>th</sup> General Congregation we will inevitably take stock of what our prophetic mission asks of us in local situations and across the world and of how we cooperate to discern and fulfil it.

The tremendous movement across borders of people, goods and information, and the increased connectivity between cities, corporations and



communities is recasting our sense of ourselves. The Society of Jesus is a part of this new situation in Asia Pacific and across the world, and so has to discern these movements and adjust in order to be effective in its mission. Engaging effectively today requires mobility. Mobility implies freedom and generosity, but also cultural sensitivity and networks of local knowledge. When creatively deployed, our institutions prove to be springboards for international cooperation. The ability to move across cultures, languages and contexts requires skills and sensitivities that do not come naturally or easily to anyone. In order to be truly an international body with a universal mission, the Society has to plan, organise itself and prepare its members for this new world. As Jerome Nadal remarked, "the world is our house".

Contextual analysis, planning and evaluation are the stock in trade of a corporation or an NGO. For us, a faith community, our planning is integrated with a deep sense of mission. We rely on inspiration, hope and the prophetic call for justice. "I am counting on you to 'wake up the world', since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy," Pope Francis said in a recent address to members of Religious Congregations.

In this Annual Report on the Jesuit Conference



powerful friends in favour of the poor. Indeed in those 40 years, a considerable number of Jesuits and companions lost their lives because they stood by and identified with those who are oppressed or afflicted. Later General Congregations added nuance to this mission, calling us to a threefold dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with religions. This is how we interpret the message of the Gospel today and we have an article on how we are moving forward with this mission in Asia Pacific. Another article describes the formation stages for a Jesuit, and of the need for formation in less traditional areas. One cannot respond effectively to our demanding mission without enlightened preparation.

During the year now finished we recalled and celebrated the Restoration of the Society 200 years ago in 1814 after a cruel suppression that lasted almost a lifetime. We reaffirmed our belief that the Spirit wishes to use Jesuits for the life of his Church and that he is ready to confirm us in creative fidelity to this divine call. Like the first Jesuits, we know that the search for the lost sheep will lead us to the peripheries, to those crossroads where the burning demands of humanity confront and are answered by the Good News of the Lord.

May I thank all who contribute so generously to make the Society's mission in Asia Pacific so fruitful and joyful.

of Asia Pacific, we offer some glimpses into what the Jesuits in Asia Pacific are doing. Through these stories I hope it is clear why we do what we do. The Holy Father has called this year a "Year of Consecrated Life" so we report on Religious in Asia. This has special meaning for us since for the first time in centuries the Pope is himself a member of a religious order.

With Christianity a minority religion in most of the countries in our Conference, interreligious dialogue is particularly important for us, and we discuss here how it is encouraged in Sanata Dharma University in Indonesia.

Forty years ago Decree 4 of General Congregation 32 brought a prophetic edge and focus to the Society's declaration of its mission as "serving a faith that does justice". Turmoil followed this since the decree seemed to mean that we might abandon

**FR MARK RAPER SJ**

President, Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific

# An Amazing Gift to the Korean People



Photos (above and on the cover): Preparatory Committee of the Pastoral Visit of Pope Francis to Korea

In August 2014, the Jesuits in Korea welcomed Pope Francis to their country with hope, hope that, in the words of then Korean Jesuit Provincial Fr John Won-sik Sin, his visit would “bring Korean society, presently so stained by greed and division, a dynamism to unity and new hope”.

It was Pope Francis’ first visit to Asia. Why South Korea, some people asked? The simple answer was

that the Holy Father was going to celebrate the sixth Asian Youth Day and beatify the 124 martyrs of Korea.

However the choice also gave the Pope the opportunity to hold up the Church in South Korea as a model of evangelisation. The Catholic Church in South Korea was founded by the Catholics he beatified on August 16.

Crowds of worshippers lined the streets leading up to Gwanghwamun Square for the ceremony. The square was the site where the unrepentant Catholics were paraded before they were publicly executed 200 years ago.

“They were willing to make great sacrifices and let themselves be stripped of whatever kept them from Christ – possessions and land, prestige and honour – for they knew that Christ alone was their true treasure,” Pope Francis told the crowd in his homily. “They challenge us to think about what, if anything, we ourselves would be willing to die for.”

Photos (middle and bottom):  
Preparatory Committee of the Pastoral  
Visit of Pope Francis to Korea



He added that the martyrs were also unique because they were not converted by missionaries but learnt about Catholicism themselves. They brought the books back to Korea to spread the Catholic faith and were executed by the royal authorities for doing so.

A little more than 5.4 million people, about 10.4 percent of South Korea’s population, are Catholic.

The Korean Jesuit Province is one of the larger provinces in the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific, and one of the fastest growing. For the Korean Jesuits, the visit by the first Jesuit Pope was an amazing gift to all Koreans.

The papal visit received tremendous news coverage but for his brother Jesuits in South Korea, there were three vignettes that they will hold especially dear. Fr Se-il Taejon Oh SJ, who teaches at Sogang University, shares these with us.

- **When Pope Francis decided to pay a private visit to his brother Jesuits on August 15, the second day of his visit.** With only half a day’s notice, more than 100 Jesuits gathered at the Jesuit residence in Sogang University to meet with him. After we welcomed him, he gave us the very warmest advice, “Console, console, console the people of God ... Don’t rebuke them even in a confession.”
- **When Pope Francis drove around Gwanghwamun Square before the main mass for the beatification of Korean martyrs.** He was guided by Fr John Che-chon Chong SJ, the current Korean Jesuit Provincial who was acting as his personal translator and assistant, to get out of the car and bless the father of a victim in the Sewol ferry disaster. That the Holy Father did so was a great sign of God’s love for the Korean people.
- **When he greeted people living in a home for the disabled.** A three-year-old mentally retarded boy would not look at him but sat sucking his finger. The Pope pulled the boy’s finger out of his mouth then put his own finger in his own mouth. After several seconds, the boy finally looked at the Pope who was smiling at him. This was a great lesson from a religious leader who wants to authentically communicate with everyone, particularly those most in need of God’s love.

As Fr Oh said, “His warm presence and smiling face made unforgettable footprints in the hearts of Korean people. When he left to return to Rome, we could hear from even non-Catholic Koreans that our fantastic dream was over!”

Credit: Preparatory Committee of the Pastoral Visit of Pope Francis to Korea

For Fr John Che-chon Chong SJ, the papal visit from August 14 to 18 last year was a magical time. For those five days, he was Padre Juan to Pope Francis, as he served as the Holy Father's personal translator and assistant.

He had been apprehensive about the "job" because he had not spoken much Spanish since he finished his studies in Spain in 2000, but all his anxieties disappeared when the Holy Father smiled at him. "He is a magician to make people feel calm and peaceful," said Fr Chong. "From the beginning, I felt like I was talking to an older Jesuit who I admired and that I could treat him as one of us."

While he has many treasured memories of the time with Pope Francis, the highlight was when Santo Padre, as he called Pope Francis, met and comforted the father of a 15-year-old girl who had perished in the Sewol ferry disaster. This happened on August 16, just before the mass of the beatification of the Korean martyrs.

Fr Chong says that at breakfast that day, he had told the Holy Father that 500 to 600 relatives of victims of the ferry disaster had been invited to attend the mass even though many were not Catholic. Some of them had been at Gwanghwamun Plaza for more than 30 days and Bishop Kang, president of the Preparation Committee of the Papal Visit to Korea had said, "We cannot

celebrate the sacrament of charity after expelling those who are mourning."

Later, when he was in the car with the Pope as they drove around Gwanghwamun Plaza before the mass, Fr Chong pointed the group out and asked if the Holy Father would like to meet them, even though the government did not want the ferry disaster to be highlighted. Pope Francis' response was "Let us consider what is prudent." After a short period of silence, Fr Chong asked him again and the Pope said yes.

Fr Chong led the Pope to Mr Young Oh Kim, who had gone on a 33-day hunger strike to get the government to investigate the disaster that had taken his daughter's life. It was a highly charged moment. Pope Francis took the man's hands and looked into his eyes. The man, who was not Catholic, said to him, "Do not forget us. Remember us."

He then asked if he could give the Pope a letter he had written to him. The Pope said yes, took the letter and, instead of handing it to an aide as everyone watching expected, he put it in his pocket. That was a tremendous moment of solidarity with and compassion for the people who were suffering the most, a group that the government was ignoring, said Fr Chong. "I felt at the moment that the Holy Father was listening to the man with his whole heart, that his presence and actions were sacramental."

The surprise of the onlookers was tangible, and several people cried as they watched. Later, Fr Chong was told that several journalists in the press centre had cried when they watched the scene on the television screens.

Shortly thereafter, Mr Kim expressed interest in joining the Church and is now taking catechism classes.





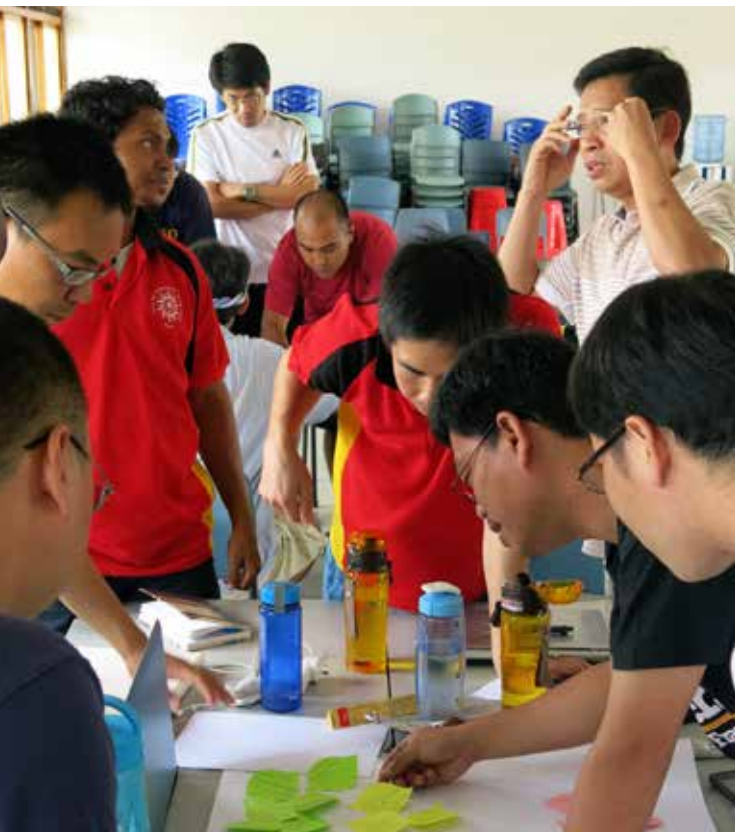
# Preparing Jesuits for Mission

At the very heart of the Jesuit vocation lies a personal commitment to follow the call of Jesus to work through him, with him and in him at the service of the Kingdom of God, which grows anywhere love and justice flourish: “Follow me and I will make you into fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). This is why several documents on Jesuit formation claim that God is the educator par excellence and why training for mission cannot succeed without helping the young Jesuit foster his friendship with Jesus. Through a solid and regular prayer life, the young Jesuit in formation cultivates his intimacy with Christ, which slowly teaches him

how to better discern, teach, behave and love as Jesus himself would do. In fact, without an ability to convert himself daily in front of the Gospel and a deep desire to grow as a disciple of Jesus, a young man is unfit to enter or to stay in the Society of Jesus.

Another crucial dimension of Jesuit formation is to learn how to gain an ever-growing freedom of heart in front of all those things that can become a real obstacle to serving the mission well. Some examples of obstacles are over-dependence on the affection of our family or good friends, too great an attachment to material comfort, a recurrent desire to feel 100 percent secure, our own ideas or prejudices





regarding other persons or social classes or cultures or religions, our inner fears and anxieties, a lack of faith in God's actions, having too strong a need to have our achievements seen and praised by others, and giving too much attention to our own self-respect and face. This is why Jesuit formation endeavours to provide not just solid training in spiritual life towards conversion, but also a few psychological tools to help the future priest or brother to know his own personality better – his talents and limits, the inner wounds brought by early childhood, his patterns for leadership and the maintaining of relationships, his own greed, sexual impulse, anger or blues, etc. The more a man learns about how to cope well with his own imperfect character and psychology, the better he can serve others.

Another important challenge of Jesuit formation is to empower future priests and brothers so that they can serve, accompany and/or train people, with enough joy, abnegation, intelligence, discernment, common sense, discretion, flexibility, humility and creativity. Without possessing at least a few of these abilities, it will not be easy for them to pursue the main aims of the Jesuit mission: to inseparably promote faith and justice, to train men and women at the service of a more attractive Church and/or a better world, to do mission works at the frontiers i.e. where other priests usually do not go to serve, and to dialogue and cooperate with people of other cultures and/or religious faiths. This is why even as the young Jesuit studies philosophy or theology, he is asked to serve with confreres and collaborators in different kinds of challenging works to teach him how to work as part of a team and help him become a more mature, wise and loving human being. These works include service to the sick or to prisoners, teaching in a high school or university, social works at the service of the poor, intellectual research, preaching in front of an audience, youth training or pastoral leadership, media work, and spiritual guidance.

Last but not least, the main characteristic of Jesuit formation is the *Magis* spirit. It means to learn how to reflect and to work at a deep level, so that the result of one's efforts in mission work can produce many good and long-term fruit. Jesuit formation insists much on the high quality of intellectual studies, which should not only include a solid introduction to the human sciences such as philosophy, social analysis and anthropology and/or psychology, but also good training on how to reflect, write or speak on various subjects in depth, with a sharp, critical spirit in front of the sources of knowledge which man uses, and with the realization that any reality is often quite complex to understand and judge. In this spirit, the young Jesuit is encouraged to experience at every stage of his formation various mission contexts, which will help him work effectively in today's global and multi-cultural world.

**FR OLIVIER LARDINOIS SJ**  
Assistant for Formation, Chinese Jesuit Province



Basic Jesuit formation is long. Although it varies from Jesuit to Jesuit, some take as many as 13 years to become a priest, and then several more years after ordination to reach tertianship, which is the last stage of Jesuit formation. Jesuit formation formally ends with the taking of final vows. And this is just formal training.

Increasingly we are finding that to serve the mission effectively today, formation is needed in other areas as well. We encourage Jesuits to come together regularly to share, learn from each other and collaborate in circles such as those for formators, novice masters, brothers, scholastics and brothers, and vocation promoters. A gathering of young priests and brothers is being planned for 2015 or 2016. We also organise programmes to foster understanding of two major religions in Asia Pacific – the Asia Pacific Theological Encounter Program (Dialogue with Islam) and the East Asia Theological Encounter Program (Dialogue with Buddhism).

In addition, we have run workshops for local superiors, formators and even major superiors in the last two years.

The Formation for Formators Workshop is especially timely. Following a needs assessment of Jesuit formators in 2011, three modules were designed with the intention of offering one module a year. Module I (Psychology and Formation) in 2013 and Module II (Spirituality and Formation) in 2014 were well received. Module III (Community and Formation) will be held in August 2015.

More recently the major superiors agreed that a major concern at the Jesuit Conference level is the need for leadership skills. Accordingly, a full-day session is planned as part of the Major Superiors Assembly, which is held every six months. In 2015, the sessions planned are on Apostolic Planning in January and Community Building and Change Management in July.

The Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific is now working on a program for emerging leaders. The Leadership Development Program will be carried out in four modules over a period of 18 months.

**FR NORRIS SEENIVASAN SJ**  
Delegate for Formation,  
Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific



# Religious in Asia Pacific

**T**he Vatican has dedicated 2015 to celebrate the consecrated life. It is, as Cardinal Bráz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, said a time to look back at the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion, and to face the future with hope. For Jesuits, and for all Religious, the year also offers an opportunity to look back reflectively on the changes that the Council led to in our lives, and at where we are going.

October marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Vatican II Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, in which the Council set the renewal of Religious life into its overriding concern to rediscover the simplicity and richness of faith in Christ in the contemporary Church. The Decree

set out the task simply: “The up-to-date renewal of the Religious life comprises both constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes, and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time” (*Perfectae Caritatis* 2).

For Religious Congregations this meant recognising the difference between tradition and traditions. Tradition is the spirit of the founding of the congregation based on a radical following of Jesus. Traditions are all the ways in which that spirit became embodied in institutional and personal practices, and in patterns of relationships as the congregation developed. Renewal meant recovering the original spirit and so discerning how well the traditions of the congregation embodied it in the present world.

The Council recognised that the meaning of practices and patterns of relationship can change over time. A school set up for the poorest children can in time end up serving the affluent. The simple dress that shows the link of Religious to ordinary people in one generation can become a distinctive habit that set them apart in another time. Forms of address and distinctions between educated and less educated Religious may express the conventions of one time and run counter to those of another.

The call to renewal was inevitably disruptive. The traditions that some Religious found to impede the freedom of the Gospel were nourishing for others and provided a matrix for a generous life. To come to a fresh understanding of the spirit that animated the founding of the congregation and to discern how best to embody it in the modern world demanded deep reflection on the Gospel and also great struggle.

In the Asia Pacific region, as elsewhere in the Church, the energy given to helping Religious deepen their understanding of faith in the light of the emphases and language of Vatican II was enormous. Many dioceses and larger Religious Congregations established centres for renewal. Throughout the region Jesuit theologates and teachers were extensively involved in adult faith education.

The influence of the East Asian Pastoral Institute in the Philippines is particularly notable. It exposed Religious to the thoughts of good pastoral theologians and to the experience of other Religious from many cultures and congregations. It also introduced an educational pedagogy in which lectures were complemented by seminars, and participants explored their experience as one of the sources of theology. This responded to the Vatican II desire for Catholics to participate actively in the life of the Church.

Many of those who came to the institute were entrusted with deepening the formation of Religious in their own local churches, so its effect spread far beyond those who came to study there.

The ways in which Religious Congregations embodied the founding spirit of their congregations differed depending on their local context. For example, in many countries, the Religious found it difficult to work outside of Church institutions, so schools, hospitals and parishes became the locus of their work.

Also, in many nations in this region, Christians formed a small minority in societies that were predominantly Buddhist, Muslim or Confucian. In such societies visible signs of religious identity were common and accepted, so distinctive religious dress could be reassuring to Catholics and be an effective public symbol of the Christian faith to others.

However, this was not the case in more secularised cultures, and most Religious Congregations began dressing more like the man and woman in the street. Allegiance to the Catholic Church increasingly depended on personal commitment, not on communal loyalty. Religious, too, had to rediscover personally the founding Gospel spirit.

Many found that their commitment was not deep. Their departure came at a time when Religious vocations dropped sharply. As a result the responsibility for sharing the faith in schools, hospitals, social ministries and parishes has increasingly been taken by laypeople. This has freed many Religious to work directly with marginalised people outside of Catholic institutions.

There is much to celebrate, but throughout Asia Pacific the challenge is to live with passion and keep hope in a world changed so rapidly by the growth of social media, by the economic ideology that Pope Francis criticizes so trenchantly, by climate change and by globalisation.

**FR ANDREW HAMILTON SJ**



# Learning Interreligious Dialogue

## in the World's Most Populous Muslim Country

*With Christianity a minority religion in most of Asia Pacific, dialogue with other religions is necessarily an area of focus for the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific. Our goals for the next five years include entering into the frontiers of culture and religion in the field of interreligious dialogue, supporting Jesuits and collaborators who are actively involved in the fourfold dialogue recommended by the Church, and building bridges linking individuals and communities of good will. Here we share our experience in translating these goals within a framework of Ignatian Pedagogy in the Interreligious Dialogue class in the Theology Department of Sanata Dharma University in Indonesia.*

**I**n the country with the largest Muslim population, we make an effort to look upon our encounters with other believers as pilgrimages across religious boundaries. In so doing, we have developed a learning process inside and outside the classroom by setting up a certain educational methodology.

Scott Daniel Dunbar argues that interreligious dialogue is first and foremost an interpersonal activity, not an “armchair exercise”. According to him, the learning process in the Interreligious Dialogue class should not only be “descriptive” or “prescriptive”, but also “experiential”, because we are expected to be able to deal with (1) interpersonal communication, (2) different religious commitments, (3) a mutual attitude of respect and open-mindedness implying a willingness to learn from the other, and (4) significant religious contents in, or implied by, the encounter.

The problem comes out when we realize that having entered into the process of formation to the religious life, being aware or not, we are somehow limited in getting access to real encounters with believers of other faiths. How many friends and colleagues from different

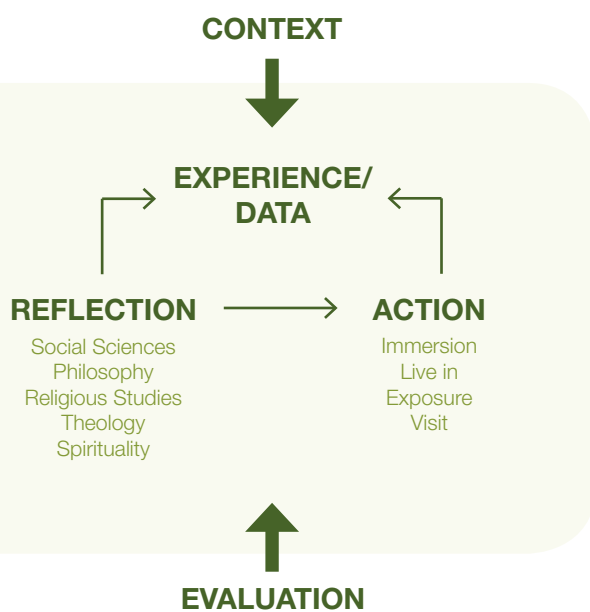
religious backgrounds do we have? What is the quality of our relationship with them?

We need some concrete ways to facilitate moving across religious boundaries and going beyond comfort zones, and it is clear that such a learning process should be developed inside and outside the classroom. In addition, the process should encourage grasping the experience of others from within, in accordance with the Christian spirituality of kenosis.

Our educational methodology has three main steps. Firstly, an effort to deal with the positive and negative nuances of the existential experience, including the data found in the reality. Secondly, an attempt to broaden the horizon of knowledge through some informative content and critical reflection as discovered in the wisdom and ideas developed by certain thinkers, philosophers, theologians and religious leaders from various religious backgrounds. Thirdly, a verification or falsification of the points acquired through action, one example of which is an immersion or exposure in a community of other believers such as an Islamic boarding school, Buddhist vihara, Hindu ashram and a non-Catholic community.



In the framework of Ignatian Pedagogy with its five elements, it can be illustrated as follows.



After some years accompanying the students in the learning process of interreligious dialogue, we have noticed that the pilgrimage across religious boundaries follows certain phases.

- There is a certain prejudice and fear in encountering another religious tradition. As in any case, *tabula rasa* (Latin: blank slate) does not seem to exist here.
- One tends to judge another religious tradition from the perception of “what is” and to see his or her own religion from the perspective of “what ought to be”.
- One starts to experience an internal tension with a mixture of fascination and repulsion.
- One feels a call to understand the other religious tradition in depth as well as to evaluate critically his or her own religion.
- One becomes conscious of the new horizons and the values of which he or she might not have been aware before.
- One has recognition of the need to deepen his or her faith and to respect other religious traditions in the process of mutual enrichment and transformation.

## INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE



Our encounters with people from other religious backgrounds stimulate our minds to build a faith reflection in accordance with the dynamism of the context in which we live.

Ignatian pedagogy is a learning process that involves all human forces – mind, heart, body – to develop a capability for building a critical reflection and substantive values as well as a way of proceeding that corresponds to the context. Interreligious dialogue has challenged us in three areas – mind, heart and body.

Our encounters with people from other religious backgrounds stimulate our minds to build a faith reflection in accordance with the dynamism of the context in which we live. The context of Asia is characterized with religious plurality, and we are challenged to take religious plurality as a *locus theologicus* for building a contextual Theology and Christology.

The 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus states: “It (i.e. the theological reflection) has to explore the meaning of the Christ-event in the context of the spiritual evolution of humanity articulated in the history of religions” (Decree 5, No 9.5). The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences speaks along similar lines: “Therefore we commit ourselves to take every opportunity to make Jesus Christ and his message known in a way that is acceptable to Asians, presenting him to them with an Asian face using Asian cultural concepts, terms and symbols!”

Then, in light of the Ignatian spirituality of finding God in all things (SE 230-237), we are also challenged to discover in our inner life His presence among other believers. The lives of St Charles de Foucauld and Louis Massignon inspire us because their faith “came to life again” through their encounters with Muslims.

Finally, by realizing that people meet not primarily as religious communities but as individual persons or members of a particular society, we are challenged to enter into concrete collaboration with people from any religious background to combat social problems such as poverty, environmental devastation and religious radicalism. This task is indeed urgent for the Society at large.

**FR JB HERU PRAKOSA SJ**  
Coordinator of Dialogue with Islam,  
Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific



# Living a Faith that does Justice

## in Asia Pacific

The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement. For reconciliation with God demands the reconciliation of people with one another.

(GC32, DECREE 4, NO 2)



**T**okyo, October 1960. Six Jesuits from Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Indonesia gathered to discuss the need for pan-Asian social action. It was a turbulent time and the world around them was a stage dominated by dictators and a battleground for the East-West ideological confrontation. The people in most of the countries in Asia lived mired in abject poverty and under oppressive regimes. At the end of this meeting, the Committee for the Development of Socio-Economic Life in Asia or SELA was born. This was a Jesuit organisation with a specific task to promote social apostolate activities in the region with a central office first in Hong Kong, then Bangkok and eventually Manila. This organisation predates the Jesuit Conference and any other Catholic network in Asia Pacific. Little did the six Jesuits know that this initiative was to anticipate no less than the seminal Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation, which was published 15 years later in 1975.

Decree 4 made the promotion of justice an absolute requirement for the service of faith, which is at the heart of the Jesuit mission. The justice of the Gospel demands changes in the political, economic and social structures of society. These changes start with transforming our own “attitudes and habits which beget injustice and foster the structures of oppression” (Decree 4, No 32). The SELA initiative was vindicated and it generated an important awareness and many social activities in the provinces and regions in Asia Pacific.

Forty years after Decree 4 was published, Asia Pacific is a very different place. It is the world’s engine of growth and the area with the largest social mobility. Ideological divide has morphed into a struggle for



Living a faith that does justice is arduous but it is what we are all called to do as companions of Jesus.

dominance in politics and especially in economics. Democracy has gained traction in many countries but is elusive in some swayed by the rhetoric of Asian values and occasional threats of military coups. Unjust structures remain and have taken different shapes while continuing to marginalise segments of society. The relative prosperity that many people now enjoy has come at a hefty price. The insatiable demand for energy, minerals, timber, palm oil and other natural resources brings wealth to big multinationals but wreaks havoc on indigenous people and the environment. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen as economic structures favour those with capital.

SELA was disbanded in the early 1990s because the work it represented was losing vitality. However, its vision would live on. In his 2000 letter, “On the Social Apostolate”, Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach offered an observation of the state of this mission throughout the Society that expressed what was happening in Asia Pacific. “There seem to be ever fewer Jesuits available and less prepared for the social apostolate, while those already in the field are sometimes discouraged and scattered, somehow lacking in collaboration and organisation.” He instructed all Jesuit Provinces, Regions and even Conferences to establish the role of social apostolate coordinator.

It took some time for this instruction to find



appropriate expressions in the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific. In 2008, almost reminiscent of SELA, the office of the social apostolate coordinator was resurrected along with a consultative team that helps the coordinator. An annual meeting of people working in social ministries began to take place regularly. More importantly, the Jesuit Conference organised a social mapping analysis in 2009 to paint a profile of the Jesuit works in promoting justice and to identify the lights and shadows.

The social mapping analysis uncovered interesting facts. At the time of the survey, only 30 out of 1,680 Jesuits in our Conference worked in the social apostolate, 20 percent of social ministries were headed by lay people and one third of such institutions were located in just one province. The ministries focussed on issues related to migration, environment, indigenous people, civil society participation and religious fundamentalism. Although there was awareness of the justice dimension across the board, almost everyone surveyed was concerned with the lack of the real presence of Jesuits among the poor.

An important outcome of this mapping exercise was the decision in 2010 to take migration and reconciliation with creation as common apostolic priorities for the Conference. Subsequently, a network

of contact persons working on ecology issues (Father/Mother Greens) and the JCAP Migration Network were established to facilitate collaboration on the two priority concerns. The Jesuit Conference also takes part in the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network (GIAN), an international network of Jesuit individuals and organisations to promote justice in migration, governance of natural and mineral resources and on ecology issues. Collaboration is a key strategy in this era of interconnectedness, and the laity is an equal partner in this effort.

In the Middle Ages, St Anselm coined a phrase in scholastic theology which still applies today – *fides quaerens intellectum*. The Latin phrase translates to “faith that seeks reason”. The context of the period required someone of faith to explain the fundamental tenets of his belief. Now, in the midst of structures that marginalise the poor, the proclamation of this faith is operative in the promotion of justice or, in other words, *fides quaerens iustitiam*. Living a faith that does justice is arduous but it is what we are all called to do as companions of Jesus.

**FR BENEDICTUS HARI JULIAWAN SJ**  
Secretary for Social Ministries and Coordinator for the Migration Network, Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific



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3/F Sonolux Building, Ateneo de Manila Campus,  
Loyola Heights, Quezon City, 1108 Philippines  
Tel/Fax: +63 2 426 5974 E-mail: [jcapsj@sjapc.net](mailto:jcapsj@sjapc.net)

Editor: Karen R Goh, [comms@sjapc.net](mailto:comms@sjapc.net)

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