

**THE FIRST EAST ASIA MEETING ON WOMEN**  
“Discipleship of Women – Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.  
Bishop Lei International House, Hong Kong.  
15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2005.

*God created human beings, making them male and female, in God's image and likeness*  
(Ref: Gen. 1:27)

**Introduction:**

In 1986 the 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of FABC in Tokyo first addressed the problems facing women in the Church and in the world as a serious challenge, demanding a response. Since that time, follow-up meetings have continued the process to highlight the plight of Asian women whose lives are constantly impinged upon by the rapidly changing times, to urge concrete action for transformation. This First East Asia Meeting on Women follows the South and South East Asian regional meetings to respond specifically to regional realities of women.

Delegates from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau & Mainland China welcomed the invitation of the FABC Office of Laity and the Hong Kong Central Catholic Council of Laity to get together. Motivated by previous FABC Office of Laity (Women's Desk) sponsored gatherings (BILA I, II, & III) on Women, 34 women, a layman, 2 Bishops, and a priest spent 5 days, reflecting, praying and discussing on the theme “Discipleship of Women – Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.

We had the privilege to enter the sacred space of the lives, stories, struggles and hopes of women in Hong Kong which reminded us of reality in our own countries. Guided by Jesus' words and actions for women's liberation in our liturgical reflections, the inputs from women resource persons, the sharing of participants, together with the sharing from our countries, provided insights into women's lived reality. For us this was truly a time of grace ...

**Our Insights:**

1. Discipleship of Jesus has the same conditions for all, regardless of race, sex and colour.
2. As countries sharing some common cultural heritage rooted in Confucianism, we acknowledge that we have both treasures to be preserved and things to be changed.
3. We need to nurture the attitudes of memory, celebration and teleology\*<sup>1</sup> in order to face the challenges posed by the reality of our East Asian countries.
4. Economic globalization with its strong profit motive has caused high rates of unemployment among men and pushed women into the workforce as cheap and exploitable labor. This has placed a huge burden on the personal resources of women impacting their lives and that of their families. This has created the phenomenon of feminization of poverty
5. Economic globalization has also created mass labor migration of women from neighbouring poorer countries. Many of these women suffer discrimination and violence in the country in which they work, and the break up of their own family at home. Some of these women are tricked into prostitution.
6. The phenomena of economic globalization and its agent, capitalism, has brought much destruction to the environment.
7. Many women are the innocent victims in the HIV-AIDS pandemic.
8. The presentation of women in media as sex objects and subordinate beings, together with pornography, contributes to rising violence against women
9. Woman's God given instinct to value and nurture life, especially in her womb, is threatened by societal pressures and the easy availability of abortion.
10. Some victims of domestic violence have begun to be open to seek help. They have a great potential and strength to help themselves, to stand on their own feet as well as to reach out and help other women in need.

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<sup>1</sup> transcendence

11. When women come together in sisterhood, through understanding and support from each other they are able to overcome their difficulties and grow in self-confidence.
12. Solidarity and Networking with women's organizations are important.
13. Women's expressions of liturgy allow us to dialogue in faith with women disciples and challenge us to redefine and develop our spirituality.
14. The Gospel of Jesus and his story presents good news to women.
15. Women are trapped by conflicting poles of old and new pressures of a changing society.
16. Society is strongly influenced by consumerist values
17. Society lacks education for both women and men on gender equality.
18. Asia needs a feminine and mothering Church, hence the need to foster qualities of compassion, caring, gentleness, hospitality and warmth. The Church needs to become inclusive and embrace people in a non-judgemental way. These feminine qualities can be learnt from Jesus.
19. In a world characterized by "homelessness" in which "most people do not feel at home" the mission of Church can be that of fostering hospitality;
20. Women can enrich the Church and make her more human.

### **Our Challenges:**

1. To put into practice our teaching and recommendations at the grassroots.
2. To co-operate with women to face the challenges of today's complex society which is greatly influenced by unfair economic systems.
3. To build true partnership of women and men; to help develop skills of assertiveness in women.
4. To evoke men's awareness about problems affecting women; to help them become aware of attitudes and behaviours that make victims of both men and women in a patriarchal system..
5. To journey with disadvantaged women, caring and accompanying them in their pain
6. To enhance the feminine quality of the Church;
7. To learn from Jesus how to relate with men and women, and become agents of reconciliation

### **Recommendations**

1. To create a space in parishes for women to come together in sisterhood for reflection, mutual help and support. This will help them grow in self-confidence.
2. Educate parishioners on how to teach children the right attitudes on relationship, marriage and the concept of Life according to God's Plan;
3. Set up support groups for victims of domestic violence and work for its prevention;
4. The Church community through the parishioners are urged to adopt a caring attitude towards single families and inclusion of divorced women;
5. Enable women to raise awareness about being caught up within traditional cultural patterns, a complex economic system and a changing world.
6. Motivate theological education and Scriptures studies from a feminine perspective.
7. Foster the concept of family and Church as a community of love in which man and woman are equal partners.
8. Recognize the gifts of women in the Church and facilitate their sharing in the decision-making process;
9. Review positively, the role of pastoral sisters in the Parish.
10. Organize a comprehensive and holistic marriage preparation and on-going parenting and marriage enrichment courses to give couples/parents the skills needed for good communication, building of relationships, and effective parenting.
11. Foster dialogue /communication between different cultures, religions and peoples at different levels so that isolation is overcome and participation is enhanced;

### **Conclusion**

These days of prayer, reflection, and deep insights have energised us to take up the challenges seriously. Renewing our faith, hope and love in our Triune God, Mary, and with the company of saints (our ancestors) let us journey together and find ways and

means to enhance women's discipleship of Jesus to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We are sure that Mary on whose feast we began our meeting, will accompany us through her constant intercession.

We are deeply grateful to our gracious host, the Diocese of Hong Kong for their generous hospitality and support in all aspects that contributed to the success of this First East Asian Meeting on Women. We would like to thank in a special way the women of the Hong Kong Council of Catholic Laity who attended to our every need and facilitated the smooth functioning of the Meeting.