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BISCOM VII ON SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND ASIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES

The FABC Office of Social Communication will hold the seventh "Bishops' Institute for Social Communication" (BISCOM VII) on May 11-16, 2009 at Assumption University, Bangkok. The theme of the seminar-workshop will be "Social Communication in Catholic Universities of Asia: Facts, Experiences, Challenges." Representatives of Catholic universities in Asia with communication courses will be invited to share the content of their courses, teaching methods as well as experiences in this field. Some bishops are also expected to come and share their related concerns. The meeting is organized in cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in the Vatican.

PHILIPPINES: PIPE ORGAN FESTIVAL

The Manila Cathedral-Basilica (MCB), considered home to the biggest pipe organ in Southeast Asia, held the 3rd Pipe Organ Festival Dec 5- 10, 2008. Organ performances and choral concerts highlighted the functions. MCB Rector Msgr Nestor Cerbo said the festival showed MCB as the powerhouse of liturgical music in Manila archdiocese. It highlights the "big part" music plays "in man's effort to communicate with God," he added. Philippines is also home to the famous Las Pinas Bamboo Organ, declared by the National Museum as a "National Cultural Treasure" for being the finest and the only one built in the 19th century (between 1816 and 1824) that remains in good working condition. (CBCP NEWS)

INDIA: FILM ON LOURDES' SAINT PREMIERED IN GOA

The film "Our Lady of Lourdes," produced by Kalamar Rao, a Hindu, premiered on Dec 21, 2008 in Panaji, capital of Goa state. V. R. Gopinath, also a Hindu, directed the 85-minute film which depicts the life of Saint Bernadette Soubirous and her visions of the Blessed Mother in Lourdes, southern France, in 1858. The film was made in English, and dubbed in French and the South Indian languages - Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil. The film won honorable mention at the 2007 Accolade Film Awards in San Diego, California, and reviews at the 2008 French Film Festival. Rao's personal visits to Lourdes and the encouragement of Archbishop Marampudi Joji of Hyderabad helped him complete the film. (UCANEWS)

SRI LANKA: PROTEST OVER NEWSPAPER EDITOR'S MURDER

More than 10,000 protesters including media groups, priests, nuns and lay people rallied on Jan 12 during the funeral procession of murdered news editor Lasantha Wickrematunga, a Christian. "Sunday Leader" editor Wickrematunga, 50, was shot as he drove to work on Jan 8 by unidentified gunmen. This was the second of recent major attacks on the media in Sri Lanka. On Jan 5, a group of gunmen ransacked and set fire the largest private TV station in the country, popularly known as "Sirasa." (UCANEWS)

MALAYSIA: CATHOLIC NEWSPAPER THREATENS ACTION AGAINST GOVERNMENT

Malaysian Catholic newspaper "The Herald" has been told to stop publishing its Malay language edition while its row with government on its use of the word "Allah" as translation for "God" is still resolved in the courts. Authorities say "Allah" should only be used by Muslims. In response, Archbishop Murphy Pakiam of Kuala Lumpur and publisher of the weekly newspaper wrote to the home ministry saying that it has seven days to revoke its decision or face legal action. "We believe that this condition constitutes a serious violation of our constitutional freedom of expression and speech," the prelate said. The legal battle is due to be settled by February 2009. Religion and language are sensitive issues in multi-racial Malaysia, which experienced deadly race riots in 1969. About 60 percent of the nation's 27 million people are ethnic Malay Muslims, who dominate the government. The rest of the population includes indigenous tribes as well as ethnic Chinese and Indians - practising Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism, among others. (CN)

SINGAPORE: DEAF CATHOLIC COMMUNITY ATTEND RETREAT

The deaf community from Johor and Singapore attended a two-day annual retreat themed "Jesus, the bread of Life" at St. Francis Xavier Major Seminary on Dec 7-8. It was conducted by Brother Lionel Thomas, a seminarian from Malacca-Johor diocese. Participants were given a deeper insight and understanding of the Eucharist. Other activities included Praise and Worship, where members jumped and clapped as they let their "fingers do the talking"; Holy Hour when they knelt in adoration and prayed in Sign Language; a forum; and meditation based on biblical verses. (CN)

INDIA: 'CHRISTIMES,' BIBLICAL NEWSPAPER RELEASED

A newspaper titled "Christimes" was released at the Don Bosco Provincial House, Bangalore on Dec 13, 2008. Salesian Fr Gilbert Choonal, editor of the paper, said readers will be brought to the "imaginary media world of the times of the Gospels to bring alive the 2000-year-old story of Jesus." Some 500 copies were sold on the day of the paper's release. The next issue in Easter 2009 will report on the Passion and Death of Jesus leading to the Resurrection.

SINGAPORE: CATECHISM FOR THE ELDERLY IN THEIR OWN DIALECT

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP) holds catechism classes in the Central Business District's Sts. Peter and Paul church Tuesday evenings for elderly and illiterate people using Cantonese, a Chinese dialect. Most of the participants are in their 70s and from a Buddhist background. They are led on a weekly tour of the faith through stories, readings, and materials from a local Catholic bookshop. (UCANEWS)

PHILIPPINES: BISHOP WELCOMES POPE'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Archbishop Angel Lagdameo welcomed the Vatican's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/vatican which was launched on January 16. It is "very timely" to use YouTube to reach young people who spend more time with computers, the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) said. The Vatican channel provides news clips on the Pope's activities in four languages. Vatican Spokesperson, Fr. Federico Lombardi, said the project has been underway for almost two years. "The pope has been informed of our project and has approved it with his customary poise and warmth," Lombardi said. The CBCP Media Office has launched its own channel at www.youtube.com/cbcpmedia in April 2007. Today, it has more than 70 video clips on statements and programs of the CBCP. (CBCP NEWS)

JAPAN: CATHOLICS JOIN BEATIFICATION THROUGH INTERNET, PRAYER

Catholics throughout Japan who were unable to visit Nagasaki in person for the Nov 24, 2008 beatification of Blessed Peter Kibe and 187 Martyrs gathered at churches, convents and homes to watch the ceremony over an Internet simulcast. Sapporo's Tsukisamu Church erected a screen in the sanctuary for the broadcast. About 80 people from surrounding parishes gathered to watch, praying along with the people assembled in Nagasaki and singing along with their songs. The annual youth gathering of Yokohama diocese was changed last year to coincide with the beatification. At the youth's Mass on Nov 24, an email message from the Youth Beatification Preparation Committee of Nagasaki was read. (JCN)

"... young people, who have an almost spontaneous affinity for the new means of communication, (to) take on the responsibility for the evangelization of this 'digital continent'. Be sure to announce the Gospel to your contemporaries ... the greatest gift you can give to them is to share with them the 'Good News'..."

- Pope Benedict XVI, World Communication Day 2009 Message

HONG KONG: SIGNIS-EAST ASIAN ASSEMBLY ON FAMILY

Nearly 200 people attended a film-show which opened the First SIGNIS East Asian Film Seminar Nov 29-Dec 3, 2008. The seminar, themed "Depiction of Core Family Values in East Asian Movies," highlighted the challenges in this "modern, mediated society" in regards to traditions and family values. Guest speakers included Fr. Peter Chung, vicar general of Macau diocese, Fr. Kim Min-Soo, secretary of the Korean Bishops' Commission on social communication, and Jesuit Fr Jerry Martinson, vice president of Kuangchi Program Service in Taiwan. The seminar is expected to setup a movie database of family values for research purposes. (SIGNIS)

INDIA: BACKPACK JOURNALISM COURSE OPENED

The Jesuit-run St. Xavier's College in Ahmedabad, Gujarat state inaugurated a "Backpack Journalism Course" on Dec 28, 2008. The ceremony had Ajay Umat, state editor of Gujarati daily "Divya Bhaskar," as chief guest as well as Jesuits' Provincial Superior in Gujarat, Fr Keith Abranches. Backpack journalism or multimedia reporting uses text, still photos, animation, graphics, video and audio to present elements of news stories picked by journalists themselves on the field. (SAR NEWS/ OJR)

BISHOP OF HUALIEN NOW FABC-OSC BOARD MEMBER

Bishop Philip Huang Jaw-ming of Hualien (Taiwan) is the newest member of the FABC-OSC Executive Board of Bishops. Bishop Huang took the post on January 1, 2009 for a term of three years. The prelate joins Archbishop Lawrence Saldanha (Lahore, Pakistan), Cardinal Oswald Gracias (Mumbai, India), Bishop Honesto Ongtioco (Cubao, Philippines), and Bishop Berard Oshikawa (Okinawa, Japan) in giving direction to FABC-OSC and Radio Veritas Asia, the continental short-wave station which is under the responsibility of the FABC. The former auxiliary bishop of Kaohsiung diocese, Huang, 55, was appointed bishop of Hualien diocese in 2002. He heads the communication commission of the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference of Taiwan. Bishop Huang succeeded Bishop John Tong of Hong Kong in the FABC-OSC board, who helped the office since 2002.

KOREA: 18TH CATHOLIC MEDIA AWARDS

The Catholic Bishops' Committee for Social Communications chaired by Bishop Thaddeus Cho Hwan-kil held the 18th Catholic Mass Communications Awards at Myeongdong Cathedral, Seoul on Dec 2, 2008. Mr. Kim Tae-gyun's film "The Crossing," about the tragic situation of North Korea, won the Grand Prize. Mr. Jeong Han, producer/director at Jeonju TV, won in Broadcasting for his TV program "Let the dandelion blossom!" Kyunghyang Daily won in the Press Category and Mr. Jeon Byeong-seok, President of the Moonye Publishing Co. Ltd, won in Publishing. In his congratulatory remarks, Bishop Cho said, "All the prize-winning works are concerned about the marginalized in society... speaking for the socially weak... I would like to urge them to continue such activities." (CBCK NEWSLETTER)

CHINA: SCRIPTURE READING CONTEST

Over 200 faithful of Dong Po parish in Si Chuan joined the first Scripture Reading Contest on January 14 to celebrate the Year of St. Paul. This kind of contest is widespread among Chinese Catholic communities because according to some priests, they help common people understand the Bible, and once they have understood, they will be able to transmit it to others. The contest was successful according to reports, despite the still insecure living conditions in the area due to the effects of the May 2008 tragic earthquake which hit the area. (FIDES)

TAIWAN: BISHOPS DISCUSS DISTANCE-LEARNING PROPOSAL FOR CHINESE THEOLOGY STUDIES

In their Nov 24-28, 2008 plenary assembly, bishops of the Chinese Regional Episcopal Conference have discussed the possibility of developing Taiwan as a distance-learning center for the study of theology in Chinese. This proposal would involve providing online courses or video-taped lectures. The bishops' Commission for Education and Culture will coordinate preparation of the proposal. (UCANEWS)

INDIA: CHILDREN SAY THEY HAVE NO TIME TO READ THE BIBLE

A recent survey of 800 Christian children in Bangalore aged 12 to 15 years reveals that a majority of them have no time to read the Bible even if they want to. The children blame the hectic curricular activities for their lack of knowledge of the Bible. More than 60 percent said parents inspired them to read the Bible, while 30 percent were inspired by priests and religious. The survey was conducted in observance of the "Year of the Word of God." (SAR NEWS)