

## Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Gathering of Pastoral Leaders



On November 8-9, 2019, close to fifty pastoral leaders from various parts of the country gathered at the Maritime Conference Center in Baltimore, Maryland.

The USCCB Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Island Affairs (SCAPA) convened this exciting and important meeting participated by SCAPA members and consultants, pastoral leaders and those who minister to Asian and Pacific Island (API) Catholics, ethnic ministry advisers, and representatives from the National Asian and Pacific Island Young Adult Advisory Team. The Secretariat of Cultural Diversity provided the needed support to the Subcommittee.

Bishop Oscar Solis, chairman of SCAPA, in his letter of invitation to participants, underlined the purpose of the gathering, “to track the progress of, examine best practices and explore ways to get wider support for the dissemination and implementation of the USCCB statement

*Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Pastoral Response to Our Asian and Pacific Island Brothers and Sisters.*” Bishop Solis added, “Following the overwhelming approval of Encountering Christ in Harmony by the U.S. bishops at the Spring 2018 General Assembly, various dissemination and implementation activities have been undertaken at the national, diocesan and local levels.”

The leadership and support of the SCAPA bishops present at the gathering- Bishop Alex Aclan, Bishop William Justice, Bishop Thanh Nguyen and Bishop Oscar Solis were truly valued and appreciated, and they offered practical wisdom and pastoral insights.

The presence and engagement of young adult leaders from diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds with abundant skills and talents are wellsprings of hope and inspiration.



*Members of the Young Adult Advisory Team with Bishop Solis, Bishop Justice and Sr. Myrna*

The opening night with the “Welcome and Introduction” of participants allowed for particular cultural expressions and traditions to greet each other, and it made even more distinctive the encounter with one another, especially those who met others for the first time.

To note, the Gathering commenced with prayer and concluded with the Holy Mass, and these profound moments of encounter with the Lord also deepened and nourished the encounter with others. Various statues and icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints venerated by many Asian and Pacific Islanders enhanced the environment and prayer space, and these too “represent the continual connectedness Asian and Pacific Island Catholics have” with Our Lady and the saints.

The participants highlighted some shared wisdom which include the following-

- Encountering Christ in Harmony (ECH) offers an opportunity to mobilize Asian and Pacific Island Catholics (APICs) as well as the greater Catholic Church to once more get fired up to fulfill the evangelizing mission of the Church...
- While the first pastoral statement was written to recognize the presence and gifts of APICs; and to welcome them into the Catholic Church in this country (Harmony in

Faith); the new pastoral response, Encountering Christ in Harmony, calls Asians and Pacific Islanders to take on missionary discipleship and prepare them to be more actively involved pastoral leaders in Church life.

- There is a need to know the content of ECH and more importantly, to share it with others. APICs have been receivers of ministry, now is the time to be ministry givers/providers for the whole Church.
- APICs exhibit unique cultural traditions and vibrant expressions of the Catholic faith. These rich cultural traditions and faith expressions can be used to promote a culture of encounter especially through the value of harmony. They can take the initiative to invite other ethnic communities to their cultural, social and faith celebrations, in so doing demonstrate genuine encounters with Jesus in the “other.”
- Strong intercultural communication skills/ intercultural competence is important and helpful in a culture of encounter.
- Don’t be afraid to ask where the others are from. Listen and tell your story.
- Encountering Christ in Harmony is not only for Asian and Pacific Island Catholics but for all cultural families that make up the US Catholic Church. Bring ECH to the parish level. Educate priests and pastoral leaders about who APICs are and their ministry needs.
- A sense of belonging is what youth and young adults are longing for. It is important to continue the culture of dialogue and engagement and to work to become catalysts of change for a renewed faith, to be agents of change and transformation.
- Bishops need to foster Asian and Pacific Island Catholics who have pastoral gifts to offer to the U.S. Catholic Church and challenges as they strive to live their faith.

As the participants were divided into working groups during the gathering, they discussed and reflected on the guide questions:

1. What do we recommend SCAPA focus on in Encountering Christ in Harmony implementation in 2020-2023?
2. What are next steps for the working groups?

Several recommendations were offered by the Young Adult Advisory group, the Resource Development group, and the Education and Formation groups. Their insights and recommendations were presented the following day to the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Island Affairs during its Fall meeting in Baltimore.

The SCAPA and the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church are very grateful to all the participants who took the time from their busy schedules to be part of the momentous gathering and for offering valuable pastoral insights to move forward the implementation of Encountering Christ in Harmony. Special thanks to those who assumed roles in the program- Welcome and introduction, liturgy, as well as the facilitator, presentors and reporters.

Malo, Malo, thanks be to God!