

Encountering Christ: An Asian and Pacific Island Perspective

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Encountering Christ in Harmony Pastoral Response



Photo: Back row (left to right) – Fr. Ricky Manalo, CSP; Fr. Augustine Baek, Msgr. Joseph Trinh, Bishop Oscar A. Solis, D.D.; Deacon George Reade, Fr. Albert Avenida, Fr. Simon Kim, and Fr. Linh Hoang, OFM.

Front row (left to right) – Corrine Monogue, Jayne Mondoy, Sr. Myrna Tordillo, mscs; Sr. Ma. Jennifer Nguyen, LHC; Mar Muñoz-Visoso, Eva Diaz, and Cecile Motus.

On August 2018 the Most Reverend Oscar A. Solis, D.D., Bishop of Salt Lake City and chairman of the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Island Affairs (SCAPA), convoked a meeting of Catholic leaders from/who serve Asian and Pacific Island communities across the country. Our task: to produce a plan for disseminating and implementing the USCCB statement *Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Pastoral Response to Our Asian and Pacific Island Brothers and Sisters* (ECH: API). Developed by the USCCB Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Islands Affairs and approved by the U.S. bishops at their June 2018 General Meeting, this document serves as a guide to promote the Church's pastoral outreach to our Asian and Pacific Island brothers and sisters.

As an Asian and Pacific Islander (API) born and raised in Hawaii, I immediately identified with the descriptive API: ECH narrative. The document describes key distinctions and commonalities

of the API cultural tapestry in the United States and celebrates the diversity of our heritages and traditions. More importantly, the bishops urge the Church in the United States to be attentive to the level of representation and equality given to APIs at national, diocesan, and parish levels and to listen, learn, and respond to our pastoral needs.

The document addresses four major concerns for Asian and Pacific Island Catholics – Identity, Generations, Leadership, and Culture of Encounter and Dialogue – and provides helpful examples for engagement. There is a depth of wisdom in each component which sparked connections, insights, and stories from my personal life as well as pastoral ministry experience. I offer these in brief summary:

Identity and Generations

“Asian and Pacific Island Catholics are made up of ethnically, racially, culturally, nationally diverse groups of people that share a single faith.” (ECH: API, p.16)

I applaud the way in which the ECH: API document helps the reader to break down the monolithic identity often associated with the terms “Asian” and “Pacific Islander” while providing practical pathways toward encounter (including inter-generational encounters), understanding differences, finding common ground, and the development of a more inclusive community.

In my personal experience, the widespread use of the term “Asian” and “Pacific Islander” is a recent phenomenon. APIs in Hawai’i commonly identify with a specific ethnic group(s) i.e. Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Hawaiian, Samoan, Chuukese, etc., each with a particular religious identity and unique expressions of the faith. That each Asian and Pacific Island ethnic group is unique is an important distinction made throughout the document and worthy of consideration as we move forward with implementation.

Leadership and Cultural Encounter and Dialogue in Faith

“All persons in a position of authority over the community are called to model the Christian life. The understanding is that they are able to lead and do exceptional things because of their trust in God and the support of the people.” (ECH: API, p. 35)

“Christ’s redeeming grace, his mercy, and his truth can touch and transform us in our cultural specificity and can make us heralds of the Good News to others.” (ECH: API, page 41)

Provided with opportunities to exercise leadership and engage in cultural encounter and dialogue in the faith, the API community has many gifts to offer as illustrated by the following story:

Smiling for the photographer, Mr. Choi proudly displayed his recently earned diocesan Certificate of Catechesis. A convert to Catholicism at the age of 78, he enthusiastically enrolled in the catechist certification program being offered in his native Mandarin language. “I love the Catholic Church, yet as a catechumen, all my instructions were in English. As an elder, I am respected and considered a leader in my community, especially by teenagers and younger adults. I’ve been searching for the right words in my native language that would allow me to be a better

evangelizer and now I feel more confident in my ability to help them and others who speak Mandarin to come to know Christ.”

What are your stories of encountering Christ through a response to Asian and Pacific Islanders in your community? It is my hope that as we journey through the implementation process, our stories will be woven into yours, and yours into ours as we become better servants of Christ and bearers of his love for all to see.