Rejoicing in the Asian and Pacific Presence

Based on the statement of the U.S. Catholic bishops, Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith

Christ Was Born in Asia

Pope John Paul II notes that “Jesus was born in, lived, died, and rose from the dead in the Holy Land,” making that part of Asia “a land of promise and hope for all mankind” (Ecclesia in Asia, no. 1). In Asian and Pacific Presence, the U.S. bishops also observe that the history of the Church in Asia is as old as the Church itself and that Asia’s profound journey of faith is an inspiration and joy for Asian and Pacific Catholic immigrants in the United States.

SHARING GIFTS AND PROMOTING HARMONY

• Harmony: Asians and Pacific Islanders teach a three-fold harmony that is central to the lives and cultures of their communities: (1) harmony with a personal God, the source of all genuine harmony; (2) harmony among all people; and (3) harmony with the universe.

BUILDING ON THEIR PASTORAL STATEMENT WELCOMING THE STRANGER AMONG US: UNITY IN DIVERSITY, THE U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN NOVEMBER 2001 ISSUED ASIAN AND PACIFIC PRESENCE: HARMONY IN FAITH. THEY WROTE ESPECIALLY TO ASIAN AND PACIFIC CATHOLICS, “TO RECOGNIZE AND AFFIRM WITH LOVING ASSURANCE THEIR PRESENCE AND PROMINENCE IN THE LORD’S HOUSE.” IN ASIAN AND PACIFIC PRESENCE THE BISHOPS CELEBRATE THE GIFTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF ASIAN AND PACIFIC PEOPLE TO THE CHURCH AND SUGGEST RESPONSES TO ADDRESS THEIR PASTORAL NEEDS AND CONCERNS. THEY ALSO AIM TO BUILD APPRECIATION OF ASIAN AND PACIFIC COMMUNITIES IN LOCAL CATHOLIC CHURCHES AND TO ENCOURAGE ASIAN AND PACIFIC CATHOLICS TO TAKE ON ACTIVE LEADERSHIP ROLES IN EVERY LEVEL OF CHURCH LIFE.

• Emphasis on Family and Education: Asian and Pacific cultures place emphasis on loyalty to one’s family, integrity, honesty, thrift, and mutual support. For Catholics of Asian and Pacific heritage, Catholic identity is intimately connected with family and local community. The Church is experienced not only as a place for public worship but also as a community where family and friends can find personal warmth and caring, and where there is constant sharing around the table of friendship.

• Profound Spirituality and Popular Piety: Asian and Pacific Catholic Americans and immigrants migrated with the experience and sensibilities of the great religions and spiritual traditions of the world, which teach them to live with a profound sense of the sacred, a holistic approach to life and salvation, and a spirituality of life-giving vitality. Many Asian and Pacific immigrants in the United States sustain their faith through devotions to Mary and the saints.

• Tradition of Lay Leadership: Lay persons are the primary evangelizers in many parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands, and the tradition lives on among many lay leaders now in the United States. In parishes where they are invited, encouraged, and nurtured, they have been active pastoral ministers for many decades.

• Contributions of Clergy and Religious: Many priests and religious sisters and brothers from Asia and the Pacific minister to the Church in the United States. In fact, 9 percent of those ordained to the priesthood in the United States in 1999 were of Asian or Pacific heritage even though Asian and Pacific persons were only 2.9 percent of the U.S. Catholic population.

• Heritage of the Eastern Churches: The Eastern churches, principally of the Middle East and India, “have been the custodians of a precious spiritual, liturgical and theological heritage” (Ecclesia in Asia, no. 27).
CHALLENGES

• Though the family is a highly prized gift, Asian and Pacific Americans experience grave difficulties in maintaining traditional family structures and values. Through family enrichment programs, dioceses and parishes should intentionally invite and aid parents to become more effective channels in developing the faith life of their families.

• In their desire to be like their U.S.-born counterparts, immigrant youth tend to reject the traditional values of their families. These youth must be taught their own histories, cultures, values, stories, and myths as a way to help them appreciate their cultural heritage. At the same time, parish and diocesan educational materials can use stories, parables, and symbols respectful of Asian and Pacific heritage.

• Single young adults need guidance during the difficult period of cultural adjustment, career change, and vocational discernment. They should be encouraged to take part in parish youth and young adult formation and leadership programs.

• Elderly parents in America painfully experience the lack of reverence traditionally shown to elders in their native lands. Parishes are encouraged to develop family ministries that incorporate more sensitive ways to reach out to elderly immigrants for social and spiritual nourishment.

• A pastoral approach that emphasizes a threefold dialogue—with Asian religions, cultures, and the poor—could be fruitful at all levels of the Church in the United States. First, recognizing key themes of the spirituality and theology of religions—especially Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Taoism, and some indigenous religions—is essential to understanding Asian and Pacific communities. Second, a dialogue with cultures is needed because for too long Catholicism and Christianity have been seen by Asian and Pacific people as “Western.” At the same time, authentic formation in Catholic faith and piety is essential for Asian and Pacific Catholics. Third, a dialogue with poor Asian Americans is needed because, contrary to popular perceptions, many are in need of help.

• Differing cultural modes of expression make intercultural communication skills essential. Asians and Pacific Islanders are rooted in cultures of hospitality where person-to-person relationships are vital to human interaction and communication, and Asian and Pacific immigrants are drawn into the life of the parish through these relationships. Parishes can offer diversity and intercultural communications training for more effective hospitality and empowerment.

• Each immigrant group has sought to maintain its community—for Asian and Pacific groups it is particularly important to balance the community’s need for a sense of security with the need to experience what it truly means to be Catholic in the local church with strong ties to the bishop.

• National divisions, prejudices, and biases exist among Asian and Pacific communities. Second, a dialogue with cultures is needed because for too long Catholicism and Christianity have been seen by Asian and Pacific people as “Western.” At the same time, authentic formation in Catholic faith and piety is essential for Asian and Pacific Catholics. Third, a dialogue with poor Asian Americans is needed because, contrary to popular perceptions, many are in need of help.

• Each immigrant group has sought to maintain its community—for Asian and Pacific groups it is particularly important to balance the community’s need for a sense of security with the need to experience what it truly means to be Catholic in the local church with strong ties to the bishop.

• National divisions, prejudices, and biases exist among Asian and Pacific communities. Second, a dialogue with cultures is needed because for too long Catholicism and Christianity have been seen by Asian and Pacific people as “Western.” At the same time, authentic formation in Catholic faith and piety is essential for Asian and Pacific Catholics. Third, a dialogue with poor Asian Americans is needed because, contrary to popular perceptions, many are in need of help.

PASTORAL RESPONSES

To continue to fully support the growth and maturity of Asian and Pacific Catholic communities, the U.S. bishops recommend the following strategic actions:

• That dioceses and parishes make every effort to welcome and to evangelize Asian and Pacific people and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and the Catholic faith;

• That Asian and Pacific Catholic leaders explore the potential of Asian and Pacific pastoral institutions to offer (a) continuing education to clergy, religious, and lay leaders in the United States, (b) theological courses—especially in the area of liturgy—that present an Asian and Pacific perspective, (c) orientation programs, (d) catechetical materials, and (e) language and intercultural skills training;

• That Asian and Pacific Catholic leaders promote coalitions between Asian and Pacific communities and their organizations to build a strong advocacy network and establish solidarity. They need to be complemented by structures of inclusion and communion with other communities in the multicultural local churches and especially with the local bishops.

• That Asian and Pacific church leaders explore together with the U.S. bishops an appropriate national structure for Asian and Pacific Catholics that would give recognition, active voice, and official liaison with the U.S. bishops’ conference;

• That dioceses and parishes fully explore the potential benefits of the threefold dialogue with religions, cultures, and the poor by (a) offering intercultural communication training, (b) encouraging ecumenical and interfaith prayer services, (c) encouraging advocacy on behalf of the human rights and dignity of immigrants, migrants, and refugees, and (d) addressing the various forms of racial prejudice and discrimination within the Church and society at large;

• That dioceses and parishes develop mobile ministries to reach small and isolated Asian and Pacific Catholic communities;

We bishops recommend that in parish and diocesan ministries, Asian and Pacific communities be encouraged to participate as active caregivers, family evangelizers, advocates and promoters of priestly and religious vocations, and pastoral agents.

—Asian and Pacific Presence

Rejoicing in the presence of Asian and Pacific Catholics, the U.S. bishops state in Asian and Pacific Presence that they hope to “concretely strengthen our ties with our Asian and Pacific communities” and will “enabling their voice to be heard among ourselves and the Church at large.”

Estimates of Asian and Pacific Catholics (updated in 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>U.S. Population</th>
<th>U.S. Catholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>4,107,621</td>
<td>349,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>3,499,921</td>
<td>2,267,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>3,260,460</td>
<td>149,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1,779,679</td>
<td>495,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1,748,324</td>
<td>205,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>1,336,000</td>
<td>57,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>158,221</td>
<td>37,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micronesian</td>
<td>127,015</td>
<td>63,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>96,362</td>
<td>19,272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guamanian (Chamorro)</td>
<td>77,038</td>
<td>61,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongan</td>
<td>39,532</td>
<td>6,325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>