

CATHOLIC CULTURAL DIVERSITY NETWORK CONVOCATION
ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDERS

I am grateful for this opportunity to be a voice for the Asian/Pacific communities. My reflections come after many prayerful moments and after seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We are a people of Asia and the Pacific Islands. Our rootedness in the Catholic faith comes from our deep and abiding beliefs in the tenets of our Creed and faith tradition:

- God as creator of all things visible and invisible
- Jesus, born of Mary, as the redeemer of us all
- Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection – the price of our redemption
- So as not leave us orphans, the coming of the Holy Spirit to guide, inspire and give life to the Church
- And to Peter, “upon this rock I will build my Church” – a Church that is called to be truly catholic – “universal”

We, as Asian Pacific Catholics, stand firm in our beliefs.

We, as Asian Pacific Catholics, are proud to hear the words of Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation Ecclesia in Asia: “The Church in Asia sings the praises of the ‘God of Salvation’ (Ps 68:20) for choosing to initiate his saving plan on Asian soil... In ‘the fullness of time’ (Gal 4:4) he sent his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ the Savior, who took flesh as an Asian!” He points out that “because Jesus was

born, lived, died and rose from the dead in the Holy Land, that small portion of Western Asia became a land of promise for all mankind.”

We come from the different nations of the continent of Asia and the islands of the great Pacific Ocean with diverse peoples, languages, cultures, religions, philosophies and social, economic and political systems.

Some of these are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Atheism, Confucianism, Taoism, Animism, Shintoism. Then there are absolute monarchies, constitutional monarchies, democracies, communism, and dictatorships. As well as first world nations, third world nations, poverty, prosperity, freedom of religion, religious persecution, peaceful nations, war torn nations and genocide.

Our histories and civilizations are ancient dating back before the time of God’s call of Abraham out of the land of Ur. The diversity of our makeup is so vast and so great, yet, we strive to live in harmony with God, with nature and with one another to fulfill the desire deep within each of us, the true peace that was proclaimed by the angels at the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: “Glory to God in the highest and peace to all men with good will.” Thus harmony is not simply the absence of strife but lies in the acceptance of our diversity and our richness.

Acknowledging the diverseness (**diversity**) and richness, we are called and invited to live in unity, the unity that Jesus prays to the Father “may they be one as You and I are one.”

Our journey has been blessed by God’s providence, our faith in God and by the love and generosity from our uncommon brothers and sisters. Did each of us who are here today in our wildest dreams ever think we would be in this great nation, in

this ministry, on this campus at this moment if it weren't by faith and God's providence? We are often asked the following questions: Did you make the journey on your own? Did you plan to come to the United States and leave everything behind? Why are you here when your own people, relatives and friends are still back home? Is there a reason? Is there a purpose from God? Can these questions be answered through the eyes of faith?

Each of us has a different journey but we can testify that God is with us and has blessed our journey. Around this time 35 years ago when my family left Vietnam on a boat heading out to the ocean from a channel near Vung Tau with bombings and explosions near and around the boat, my mother with her crucifix in her solemn hands stood in the bow of the ship commending the souls of all the members of our family to God. Death was so close and yet it was faith in God that helped my family through that experience. Our journey to begin a new life in a new land would have been almost impossible without the love, support and generosity of the Catholic Church, its charitable organizations and programs. But above all, it was our faith in God that helped us through our first difficult days, weeks and years.

We have faced obstacles in our path: discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, misunderstanding, language barriers, and different styles of communication. And there were the different cultural values, individualistic versus communalistic, materialism, indifferent ways of making decisions, different ways of expressions both physical and mental, different ways of worshipping, disintegrating family values with adjusting to a new life, trying to fit in and obtaining wealth in the shortest time possible. In spite of all these obstacles, impediments and predicaments, there are many stories to tell.

Stories of hard struggle for physical survival and for human dignity, especially stories of women, who were discriminated against because they were poor and a minority and how through their faith in God who vindicated Jesus and gave him a new and transcendental life after death inspired and sustained them to overcome bouts of self-doubt and despair.

Stories of hope. Stories of effective solidarity with one another in a community of love and mutual acceptance of shared spiritual and material resources, of common work to build a more just and equitable society across gender , racial, ethnic, economic and political differences.

We are encouraged by the reflection of Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan: “I dream of a Church that is the holy door always open, embracing all, full of compassion, that understands the pains and sufferings of humanity, protecting, consoling and guiding all people to the Loving Father.”

Today, we want to seize this opportunity to acknowledge our identity as persons from Asia and the Pacific Islands living in the United States. Our dynamic and multi-directional movement is leading us to a new construction of identity and relationship to the dominant American culture. This new identity is transforming us, and at the same time, inviting us to share our gifts and contributions with the United States as our country and with the U.S. Catholic Church as our church.

We want to acknowledge and express our sincere appreciation to the USCCB for their continued support for the Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics. We are resolved to continue to collaborate with the USCCB in their strategic actions for

the Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics as stated in the 2001 document “Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith” (pg 21ff).

Our vision for the future is to re-echo and reiterate the commitments of the USCCB communiqué in 2001 that stated:

We hope that this third millennium – with the yearning of the universal Church and the foresight of the Holy Father – to concretely strengthen our ties with our Asian and Pacific communities here in the United States and in their homelands. We will enable their voice to be heard among ourselves and the Church at large. We pray that the Church can be truly a sacrament of harmony and unity, a Church that is complete and whole.”