

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONAL ENCOUNTER  
JULY 15-17, 2024, Indianapolis, Indiana**

**INTRODUCTION**

This historic Asian and Pacific Island National Encounter was convened by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Island Affairs (SCAPA) under the auspices of the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church. Held on July 15-17, 2024, at the Indiana University/Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), it brought together 340 culturally diverse lay leaders, young adults, priests, deacons, bishops, men and women religious.

The National Encounter was blessed with the participation of nineteen bishops including Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Pro-Prefect, Section for the First Evangelization and New Particular Churches, Dicastery for Evangelization at the Vatican; and Cardinal Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America. Bishop Larry Silva, chairman of SCAPA, Bishop Arturo Cepeda, chairman of the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, SCAPA members and consultant, Asian American bishops in the USCCB, who actively participated as Eucharistic presiders and homilists, resource speakers and panelists, and engaged in synodal harmony circle sharing and listening sessions.

**OBJECTIVES**

Guided by the theme, “Radiant Faith: The Witness of Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics,” the National Encounter was designed to –

1. highlight the contributions of Asian and Pacific Island communities to the wider church and raise awareness of how ethnic faith communities can recognize themselves as church with pastoral gifts and precious cultural values to offer;
2. foster communion, facilitate dialogue and networking by bringing together lay, bishops, clergy, and religious leaders;
3. experience mutual support and understanding and reflect on vital issues impacting Asian and Pacific Island Catholic communities, with emphasis on youth, generations, and immigrant communities;
4. provide tools that will develop leadership capacity and strengthen ministry so that Asian and Pacific Island Catholics might better respond to the pastoral and spiritual needs of the Church;
5. assess collectively what has been done to implement the bishops’ pastoral response, *Encountering Christ in Harmony*, and what new initiatives might be undertaken to continue the successful implementation of this pastoral response.

**METHODOLOGY AND ACTIVITIES**

The three-day encounter was a synodal gathering using circles of harmony allowing for an intricate weaving of voices invited to enter into listening- and- sharing with each other.

Synodality norms encouraged: a) speaking from the heart; b) listening from the heart; c) leanness of expression; d) spontaneity; and e) creating a safe space for sharing. These brought forth dynamic animated conversations, story-telling and open, genuine personal engagement. The National Encounter brought to life St Paul's words, "... *that you and I may be mutually encouraged by one another's faith, yours and mine.*" (Romans 1:12)

Participants were asked to consider how they and the Church could be **co-responsible** actors in the journey of faith among the Asian and Pacific American Catholics. The gathering was designed by, with, and for API young adults, involving them in every step of the planning and implementation process. Young adults served as liturgists, MC's, panel moderators, resource speakers in every harmony circle conversation and panel discussion alongside archbishops and bishops, leaders of national Catholic organizations and experienced ethnic pastoral leaders

Following the structure of the pastoral response, *Encountering Christ in Harmony*, listening and sharing revolved around themes examined through the lens of *Faith Expressed*: 1) Witnessing Asian Pacific Catholics in the United States, 2) Intergenerational Realities, 3) Intercultural Realities.

Through the lens of *Faith Engaged*, themes explored included: 1) Identity, 2) Generations, 3) Leadership, 4) Cultural Encounter and Dialogue in Faith, 5) Liturgy in Diverse Asian and Pacific Island Communities, 6) Evangelizing Catechesis in Asian and Pacific Island Perspectives, 7) Building Intercultural Competence, 8) Social Justice and Mission, and 9) Immigration and the Catholic Church Response.

Three well-planned multilingual Masses with profound and inspiring homilies from the presiding bishops; and several prayer services to open and close the activities of the day highlighted the universality of a diverse Catholic Church, united in one Catholic faith. These provided good models for well-planned multilingual liturgies demonstrating the richness of Asian Pacific Eucharistic celebrations and prayer forms.

A rousing keynote speech by Cardinal Luis Tagle enjoined everyone to pass on the faith...the radiant faith - proudly and joyfully practiced by Asian and Pacific Island Catholics. He reminded participants to embrace their cultural heritage as God's gift that needs to be shared. Cardinal Tagle concluded his talk with an exhortation, "By God's Grace and by God's calling, let us be witnesses to the truth of Christ. Look to Him, listen to Him, allow Him to touch us."

What was palpable in and pervaded the entire encounter experience were attendees' excitement and enthusiasm, typical Asian and Pacific hospitality and friendliness, engaging new friends from different cultural and linguistic traditions, and an eagerness to learn. Participants were energized by the prayerful moments, and compelling personal stories shared by dynamic resource speakers. They suggested and committed to try new ways to fulfill the mission of radiating their Catholic faith in their local parishes and ethnic communities. "...and therefore it makes sense that in the encounter with the Gospel, the Holy Spirit would transform this jewel of Asian and Pacific Island cultures and make it a blessing to the Church" (*Encountering Christ in Harmony*).

## **SOME LEARNINGS TAKEN HOME**

### **1. Ministry with Asian and Pacific Catholics – Where We Have Been and How We Got Here**

The session provided a comprehensive look-back on the journey of API Catholic ministry in this country; recalling the numerous stages of growth in the bishops' solicitude. Since large migration of Asian migrants and immigrants were allowed into the United States at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church has engaged in varied models of pastoral care through parish and diocesan ethnic ministries, national or ethnic churches, and ethnic faith community organizations. With the influx of refugees from Southeast Asia in the 1960's, the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) organized the Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees (PCMR) under the umbrella of Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) to coordinate outreach with Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Laotian, Samoan, Tongan and a few other API immigrant and refugee communities.

In 2008, USCCB organized the Committee on Cultural Diversity which included a Subcommittee for Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics (SCAPA) with a corresponding secretariat. This landmark action effectively raised awareness about the pastoral needs of API Catholics; including leadership in the episcopate. There are now 15 bishops (13 are active and 2 are emeriti) of Asian and Pacific origins in the USCCB hierarchy. Two pastoral statements, "Asian Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith" promulgated in 2001 and "Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Pastoral Response to Our Asian and Pacific Island Brothers and Sisters" promulgated in 2018 heightened attention and increased pastoral ministries for Asian and Pacific Island Catholics in the US Catholic Church today.

"For a bare bones operation, SCAPA staff and bishops are the oxygen to its existence. With the support of API pastoral leaders, SCAPA thrives as a chronicler of API diaspora, a beautiful repository and platform of some of the notable stories about API presence in the Catholic Church in the United States."

### **2. Synodality, Spirituality of Listening, (Panel), Faith Expressed-Faith Engaged – Witnessing Asian Pacific Islander Catholics in the U.S.**

Synodality is journeying together, allowing dynamic listening and openness to others. It provides a safe space for conversation and dialogue including intergenerational interaction.

"Spirituality is the search for meaning and purpose; being animated by God; and purifying self-centeredness...It is listening to our hunger for God through our experiences of living in the created world. Practices include: prayer, meditation, *Lectio Divina*, rituals, silence, walks in nature and others."

"The heart of Christianity is extending hospitality, making room for others, sharing in God's creation" ...In API communities, sharing food is an invitation to listen and to enter into communion and reconciliation with others. Food connects to homeland and culture; acts as inclusion and exclusion factor and manifests hospitality and gratitude.

### **3. Radiant Faith: the Witness of Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics**

Cardinal Luis Tagle enjoined the participants to...“Keep the faith and pass it on. Go! Bear fruits.” He asked, “...in the minds of people who see us, who hear us, who relate to us, after dealing with us, will they say Jesus is true or Jesus is fake?”

### **4. Bishops: A Spiritual Reflection and The Love of God Impels Us**

We are gathered together at the altar of Christ. Even though diverse, we gather to share.

API Catholics have come out of the shadows. We are more recognized and now “sit at the table.”

We must be protagonists in the New Pentecost. We are bearers of good fruits – humility, true obedience to the law of God rooted in love, receivers and givers of charity, sharing Holy Preaching, co-responsible. Father’s wise teachings: Pray every day, go to Mass. Never strive for mediocrity but strive for excellence. Be humble; never humiliate anyone. Protect, defend, nurture human life.

Pay attention to the witness of the saints. Strengthen attitude for growing, maturing in faith and a life of holiness.

Channel energies to positive actions. How can we be leaven, catalysts in our local churches?

### **5. Identity and Asian Pacific Culture and Faith**

“Our identity is the artistry of the Holy Spirit”...Our Asian and Pacific identity is manifested in our cultural values, traditions and way of life like food as expression of hospitality and friendship, served always when people visit or gather socially or at workplaces. APIs are known to be friendly, easy to get along with, and willing to reach out to people even from other cultures. APIs are joyful Catholics always praying and celebrating especially with grand multilingual Holy Masses incorporating ethnic music, liturgical movements and rituals. They demonstrate strong ethnic identity, proud to continue traditional religious prayers and celebrations, wear traditional dress, weave traditional symbols and inculcate rituals into their celebrations.

Transformation is a natural progression in migrant lives. American-born APIs are naturally transforming allowing the “releasing of the glory of God expressed in one’s own culture combining with those of others to allow growth for more faith, more trust and more love.”

#### ***Challenges Faced***

- a) While ethnic communal activities provide comfort and a sense of belonging, “cliques and silos exist within API communities,” preventing genuine unity and unifying collaboration.
- b) Interfaith or interreligious marriage is a pain point in Asian families. Numerous Asian families are religiously diverse - Buddhists or animists believers and converted Christians in a family. And they live in communities of similar religious diversity. Families find it difficult to plan a wedding between a Catholic and a Buddhist or a Protestant.

- c) Many bishops and pastors have opened their arms to the presence of APIs in the local churches. A few still do not offer pastoral programs which welcome and provide continuing faith formation for small API groups who worship only in their first language. “We are not seen and not recognized as true members of our parishes.”

***Co-Responsibility Recommendations and Best Practices: (Identity)***

- Invite yourself to the parish. Voice your presence to your pastor. Do not wait to be invited. Befriend and establish relationships with the pastor and parish.
- Be more involved and visible. Volunteer to serve in parish ministries. “The emphasis is on active participation in parish life.”
- Promote ministry through home visits and sharing food. Outreach and connect with other people of other ethnicities. Embrace others to become part of the larger community.
- Celebrate feast days of API saints to increase understanding of universality and Christ’s presence in the lives of holy men and women of API heritage.
- Learn greetings, introductions, respectful expressions in different languages to break the ice/barrier with certain groups.
- “Stay rooted and in close proximity with pastors and bishops.”

**6. Generations**

Intercultural realities no longer just pertain to racial cultures. Now, generations demonstrate varied cultural expressions. These differences between generations are identifiable in Asian and Pacific families both in the spiritual realities and faith expressions. Generational divide exists in many levels among the Asian and Pacific Catholic communities.

**Challenges Faced:**

a) Cultural - Traditional cultural values, norms and roles practiced among the first generation immigrants often times clash with those practiced by the Asian American second generation citizen children who are socialized into the dominant secular culture.

b) Language - The gap is wide between English fluency and language preference of the younger generation from the preference and fluency of the first generation in using the first language of the homeland. “Language barrier has been affecting intergenerational harmony. There’s a fear of losing the language; and if language is lost, the fear is that culture will get lost too.”

c) “Advance technology has taken over the lives” and interests of young people. Many have ignored learning about their traditional cultures, values and traditions. Most prefer to use their electronic devices rather than engage in human interaction or person-to-person communication. Proficiency in navigating the digital world is a barrier to smooth intergenerational relationships.

d) Catholic Faith transfer and practice - Church and the Catholic faith provided a “stable feeling of ‘home’ for immigrants settling in the U.S. “ Newly arrived immigrant families prayed together” Today, there is an increasing disconnect between the active practice of the faith among

API Catholic parents and their children who have relaxed or stopped practicing their Catholic faith.

In addition, even “parents are less strict with their children.” Time demand from multiple work schedules and adjustment to new ways of life have skewed the balance for parents-to-children transfer of the faith and active Catholic faith practice. Many young APIs no longer actively practice their faith. “Parents think the API youth are isolated and separated from the church and conclude the youth born in America have a ‘different mentality.’” “The more American they become, the less Catholic they are.”

e) Just like other American families, influence and pressure from the secular world has overcome traditional values in the lives of API families. Changing values and behavior dismay parents who are not ready to cope with the changing realities.

### ***Co-Responsibility Recommendations and Best Practices:***

- Listening is a good tool for bridging relationships. Ministers and leaders must learn to listen first. Active listening is important to developing the feeling of “belonging” across generations.
- “Gather the family in prayer, teach children simple acts of kindness and charity, help the less fortunate including the disabled.”
- Priests and religious men and women who minister to small non-English-speaking immigrants like the Burmese refugees make a big difference in their pastoral care. “Religious and clergy who speak the first languages have been mediators for families and helpful in bridging or reconciling inter-generational challenges.” They have successfully kept Catholics, Catholic.
- “Reverse Missionary” - With the vibrancy of many Asian and Pacific Island Catholic communities in this country, they have brought new ways to evangelize, strong family movements, vibrant youth and young adult ministry models. These may be shared with mainstream Catholic organizations and missions and may enrich current best practices.
- Offer seminars or conferences which are intergenerational, intercultural to encourage dialogues and bridge-building among cultural families and across generations.

## **7. Leadership**

Pastoral leaders competent to minister in intercultural settings are needed in all levels of ministry in the Catholic Church today. Intercultural competency is one of several foundational skills important to successful pastoral leadership. We need leaders who are full of vitality, mentally healthy, culturally intelligent, technologically savvy and willing to serve as catalysts for co-responsible missionary discipleship.

### **Co-Responsibility Recommendation and Best Practices**

- Parishes and dioceses invite/include APIs in leadership formation programs.
- Ideally, pastoral leaders in all local churches including bishops and priests, experience a Building Intercultural Competence Seminar.

- Bring back the importance of community and communication. Asian Pacific cultures are communitarian. “We especially need to learn to put away our phones and tech devices so can truly share and listen to each other and build community once more”

## **8. Cultural Encounter and Dialogue**

Cultural intelligence is understanding “why” people are the way they are, knowing the reasons behind their actions. It is not imposing do’s and don’t’s rather cultivating knowledge and understanding about other people and their cultures. Cultivating cultural intelligence is a must in a Catholic Church whose members are from all corners of the planet. There are many parishes which have successfully embraced interculturality and have grown with grace. Others continue to struggle. With the synodal process, it is hoped that parishes who are thriving will be able to share the culture that helped them thrive and spread the attitude of openness to change, necessary to sustain the workings of the church today.

### ***Challenges Faced:***

- a) Unlearn attitudes that prevent harmony and reinforce stereotyping and generalizations or preconceived expectations. “Let us not be chained to deeply rooted broken parts of our past.”
- b) Some archdioceses/dioceses/parishes have yet to integrate pastoral care for different ethnic communities. While financial factors are critical elements, a “mentality of scarcity regarding budgets and space sharing in a parish “can be resolved if all groups and the pastor resolve the issues TOGETHER.”

### ***Co-Responsibility Recommendations and Best Practices***

- Develop and strengthen attitudes that encourage intercultural/interreligious dialogue by allowing guidance by the Holy Spirit, patience, openness, respect, mutual understanding, self-reflection on prejudice, tolerance, courage to share and have your voice heard, mindfulness and others.
- Organize regular intercultural community gatherings - Eucharistic celebrations, processions, potlucks, fellowship, choir concerts, etc. Be sure to include children, adolescents and youth.
- Revitalize lay ecclesial movements incorporating and forming APIs in lay ministry in parishes and dioceses.
- Include “cultural translators,” not just language interpreters – resource persons who can explain cultural differences and bridge understanding between cultures to bring about harmonious relationships.
- Be thankful for the gains and successes. “Marvel at the wonder of tiny seeds that have been planted in our ministries in the last few years; now sprouting— a symbol of new season, of hope.”
- “Be humble enough to ask for help when needed.” Asian silence and “modesty” do not solve problems.
- “Show appreciation to priests and religious who were persistent and who never gave up

## **9. Liturgy in Diverse Asian and Pacific Island Communities**

### ***Co-Responsibility Recommendation and Best Practices***

- Bishops welcome to preside at API liturgical celebrations like Simbang Gabi, Marian feasts, Chinese Lunar New Year, Our Lady of La Vang Feasts, etc. Continue to invite them.
- While some bishops discourage liturgical movements, many allow during special Eucharistic celebrations. API Eucharistic celebrations incorporate traditional liturgical dancing - Indian, Hawaiian, Samoan, Vietnamese, Hmong, etc. as prayerful expressions of love and praise to God.
- API Marian devotions strengthen faith and are effective evangelization magnets. In many instances the constancy of these devotions to Mary as Mother of God and Mother of the Church have kept faith alive in API families and communities.
- Multilingual Masses are sources of inspiration, joy, ethnic pride and community unity. There are many models. Always consult the Office of Liturgy to ensure church norms guide the planning and execution.

## **10. Evangelizing Catechesis in API Perspectives**

### ***Co-responsibility Recommendations and Best Practices***

- API families must persevere and continue to raise Catholic families. The family is the domestic church and thankfully has remained so in many Asian American families.
- As active missionary disciples we can be a joyful presence in the lives of others.
- “The basis of evangelization is relationship.” We must be intentional in our mission to evangelize. Meet “others” where they are and engage with them.

## **11. Building Intercultural Competence**

Intercultural competence is the capacity to “communicate, work, relate across cultural boundaries.” Educating ministers and pastoral leaders about cultures and intercultural relationships is the foundation of intercultural competence.

### ***Co-reponsibility Recommendations and Best Practices***

- Racism is real. We should not stop educating ourselves and others about the evil racism brings. Anti-Asian Hate is racism.
- Revisit the Office of Intercultural Affairs already established in some dioceses. These are growing gardens, long-held secrets which promote interculturality to full bloom in dioceses. These are wellsprings that provide on-going restorative strategies to end isolation, silos, and invisibility especially of small ethnic Catholic groups.
- “Let us be BICM practitioners. “ Ask the support of pastors to build intercultural skills among leaders in your parish.

## **12. Social Justice and Mission**

Faith without action is not faith.

Most if not all participants in APINE have participated in many forms of social action and advocacy from delivering meals to senior citizens, helping refugee families find employment and housing, assisting the elderly access health care, helping undocumented immigrants with legal services and many others.

### ***Co-Responsibility Recommendations and Best Practices***

- Continue to serve vulnerable populations. Volunteer in parish or diocesan social services: food pantry, legal aide, etc. Visit newcomers and provide social services in coordination with parish ministries or diocesan programs.
- Volunteer with the Diocesan Catholic Charities or Catholic Social Services especially to assist new immigrants and refugees. We have been recipients of assistance; let us now be grateful givers and service providers.

## **13. Immigration and the Catholic Church's Response**

### ***Co-Responsibility Recommendations and Best Practices***

- Encourage your parish to create an Intercultural Committee and volunteer to serve in that committee. Organize activities / events to welcome the newcomers and assist them to integrate into parish life. "Remember that we were immigrants ourselves."
- Be aware of immigration laws and policies. Advocate with your lawmakers for policies which protect the rights and dignity of immigrants, migrants and refugees.

## **COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS**

### **What are you learning from this Encounter?**

*"This has been inspiring. My first time to meet different communities, experience different ways to pray."*

*"Powerful and meaningful." "Joyful." "Energizing." "Hopeful." "Grateful."*

*"I love the California sushi and the connection to Scripture. Food leads to hospitality."*

*"Spirituality of abundance – Spirituality of Scarcity – fresh explanation about world view."*

## **SAMPLE MENTIMETER RESPONSES**

### **How can we enliven the faith expressions within our intergenerational family realities?**

*Quality family time to pray together, to engage all generations on a regular (weekly perhaps) gathering time.*

*Encourage membership in youth and young adult programs like Kids for Christ, Eucharistic Youth Group, Singles for Christ, etc.*

*Intentional inclusion/invitation of young people in parish social and religious activities. Empower some youth leaders to be part of the planning team.*

*Weekly praise and worship karaoke.*

**What has been my API experience of tension between unity in diversity among various communities?**

*Challenging but enriching. Only respect each other. Saw no tension.*

*Very good collaboration.*

*Majority group tend to dominate. Some sort of discrimination.*

*No interest in knowing other cultures.*

*Lack understanding of cultural differences.*

**LAST WORDS**

(Clarissa) I love this quote of Pope Francis — *“To dream of a different future we need to choose fraternity over individualism as our organizing principle. Fraternity, the sense of belonging to each other and to the whole of humanity, is the capacity to come together and work together against a shared horizon of possibility.”* ... *“Solidarity acknowledges our interconnectedness: we are creatures in relationship, with duties toward each other, and all are called to participate in society. That means welcoming the stranger, forgiving debts, giving a home to the disabled, and allowing other people’s dreams and hopes for a better life to become our own. We do not just act for the poor but with them.”*

While there will always be pot holes and some road blocks during our journey as members of the Catholic Church in this country, the Asian and Pacific Island National Encounter held last July in Indianapolis demonstrated vitality and growth in our communities and ministries. Considered the fastest growing Catholic population, it was moving to observe API pastoral leaders and ministers more confident in negotiating their place in the Church and American society. There was infectious vibrancy in the sense of identity expressed and engaged through myriad pastoral activities and liturgical and devotional practices. One can feel increased pride and joy in being Asian Pacific, American and Catholic and a strong resolve to serve and be more active and better-formed missionary disciples. Participants left with a robust resolve to be co-responsible to “embrace our missionary call...as members of the one Body of Christ, [to] forever proclaim the gospel of love and mercy!” (ECH p. 49)

Asian and Pacific Island National Encounter opened windows and doors for many participants who experienced such a gathering for the first time. Many expressed interest to offer similar experiences in their regions and dioceses in collaboration with their bishops and pastors. Looking forward to Asian Pacific Island National Encounter 2026!