

Dear Friends

A passionate foodie friend recently gave me an education on the difference between muffins and cupcakes, hoping to induct me into the high arcana of pastry appreciation. Bagels and doughnuts? Same thing right? No. Seeing how clueless I am to the world of fine bread, she has given up. For now.

Even though the enlightenment is wearing off, what remains is a wonder at the fascinating chemistry involved in the art of baking. Heat, dough, and yeast masterfully mixed in proper measure combine to produce an entirely new creation.

The metaphor of baking bread strikes me appropriate as we prepare to celebrate our nation's 47th birthday. For just as leaven is an essential ingredient in bread, religion is similarly so in a good civilization. But how to 'bake' faith properly into the 'bread' that is modern Singapore?

There are those who are of the opinion that secularism is the way to go in nation building. They say that religious ideologies, being based on faith, risk being exclusive and polarizing. Because of this reasoning, policymakers had tended to think of faith-based communities as potential threats to social harmony that are better isolated from public life. But change is in the air.

As Singaporean society matures, we are seeing more citizens speak and blog about societal issues with erudition. Many of these fine and articulate thinkers ground their arguments on religious humanism. The newspapers are also carrying more articles on faith perspectives, the most recent being Archbishop's commentary on the changes to the death penalty (ST, 26 July 2012). Religion is on the way to being seen as something that can be a positive force for the growth of our country.

Among the faith traditions, Catholicism makes a distinctive offering towards national development. Our Church teaching promotes good family life, peacemaking, religious freedom, friendship with people of other faiths and cultures (not just tolerance), social justice, a good work ethic - things which are important for the overall well-being of Singapore.

To try and exclude what faith has to say from the national conversation would be like imagining that the soul can be separated from the body. Statehood, like personhood, is fully humanized only if it is a masterfully integrated entity. How this integration occurs is the challenge. *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, states our Catholic obligation to all in the human family, to which we also belong:

"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well." (n.1)

We can start by recognizing the positive contributions of our religion to society and learn to communicate them properly to our fellow citizens. The main task for us Catholics is not to keep our faith away from our citizenship, rather it is to avoid interpretations of faith that hinder our quest for the common good.

While we profess the value of separating church from state, we also believe that Catholics are indispensable leaven to the Singaporean bread. Let us unite our faith to our care for the national life, nurturing for all a spiritually vibrant and fully human Singapore society.

Arthur

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Fifth Bishops' Institute on the Lay Apostolate (BILA) on Women

Making a Difference in the Realities of Women in Asia



Sr. Susan Thomas, FMM

It has been a long while since I attended any major conference aimed specifically at looking at the concerns of women. When the opportunity presented itself, I was immediately interested. I was informed of the BILA conference on women by Wendy Louis of the women's desk for Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC) Office of Laity and Family.

I was sure that we would be energized at such a gathering of women. But how could I get other women interested as we did not have a women's desk in Singapore? I managed to persuade another lay person, Theresa Lee who has much life experience as mother, wife and companion to others to go to the conference with me. Together

with the help of Wendy we got out a report of the realities and concerns of women in Singapore amidst our busy schedule.

The conference attracted 36 participants from 12 countries of Asia and Australia, including three bishops. It was held from 9 to 13 July at the Camillian Pastoral Care Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. This small number of women and bishops surprised me. But it seems it is not uncommon for meetings where women's concerns are at the forefront to be small. This did not in any way dampen our spirits. In fact, it facilitated for quality discussions and allowed the use of many processes to surface concerns and deeper insights.

The conference began with a beautiful gesture of welcome and friendship by the host country, Thailand. The Chairman of the Office of Laity and Family Life, Most Rev Rolando Tirona highlighted that the meeting had a double significance in that the reflection on women was taking place as FABC celebrates 40 years of its existence this year and also as the universal Church prepares to enter into the “Year of Faith”.

The country reports that followed, described the progress made in each region and the work that still needs to be done.

There is greater awareness of the situations of violence that women experience and the impact migration and human trafficking has had on the lives of women and of families. Although issues are being addressed, new concerns keep emerging. Countries such as Taiwan, Korea and Singapore highlighted the dual role women play in the home and in the workplace which created tension and stress within the family and marriage. The increasing rate of suicide among youths in Korea was also an issue of concern in fast developing economies.

Sri Lanka, recovering from a 30 year war, had representatives highlighting the plight of war widows who found no support or had received no compensation. Representatives from India spoke of the gender policy for the Catholic Church of India that the women’s commission of India had worked on and was in the process of implementation in the church at all levels. The Thai delegation spoke of how human trafficking was a major and urgent issue in the country that the church was actively seeking to address.

All the countries represented reiterated that although awareness was heightened, violence against women had not in any way diminished.

Winifred Loh, the president of AWARE and keynote speaker at the conference led us further in the reflection of how we could make a difference in the lives of women. A committed Catholic, she opened up our horizons to see how we as local churches need to engage civil society groups for a change agenda. The work of

transforming structures that are oppressive has an impact when we can form alliances with like minded partners that share common interests and values and thereby “raise a stronger collective voice”.

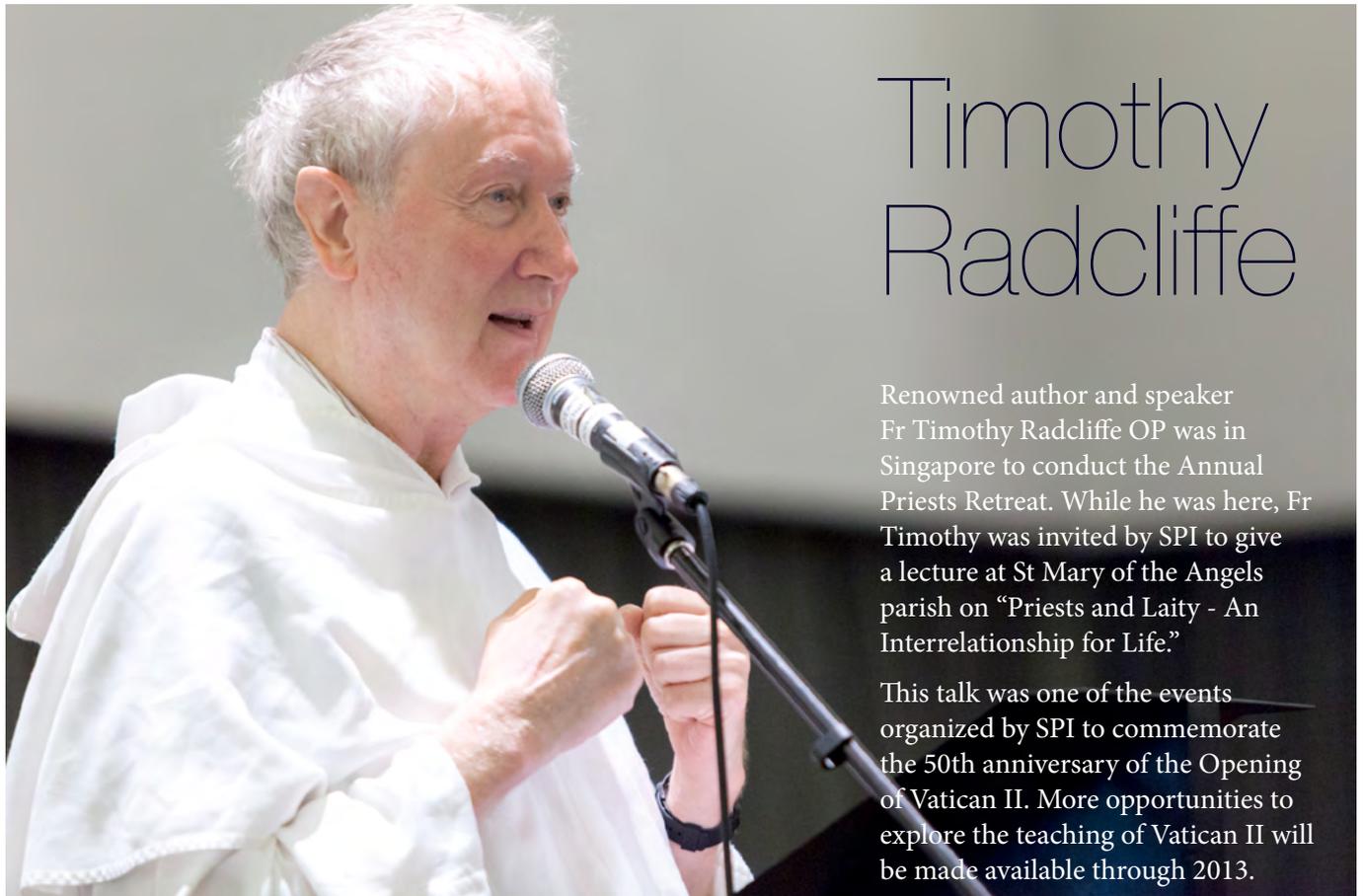
The work of formulating recommendations and directions we needed for the future surfaced tensions in the assembly between those who work on the ground, close to the struggles of poor and discriminated women, and those who emphasised the primacy of marriage and family over career for the woman.

One of the recommendations that all agreed upon was the education of men and women aimed at building equality. Parents too need to be helped to understand the value of both girls and boys and the need for equality in raising children. Forming support groups to empower women specially those who are victims of abuse, violence or are in difficult situations is another. These recommendations among others have to be tailored to the needs of each country in Asia.

We left the meeting with more questions than answers. Women need to grow in awareness and own the potentials within that are lying dormant. I believe that empowering women and raising awareness of the discrimination that is present against women cannot be handled by women alone. Although we as women have to take responsibility and strive to empower ourselves, we need to work in collaboration with men in shaping a more equitable future for women.

What is the way forward for us in Singapore? We have many women’s groups, migrant and family based organizations that cater to women and their concerns. Is the ordinary Singaporean conscious of issues about women in society? What are areas of concern that need to be addressed, and how do we go about addressing them? How do we co-ordinate all the variant voices and do we need to do so in Singapore?

Do you have any suggestions? We would be interested to hear from you. Please e-mail your response to daphne@catholicspi.org and let us know what you think.



Timothy Radcliffe

Renowned author and speaker Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP was in Singapore to conduct the Annual Priests Retreat. While he was here, Fr Timothy was invited by SPI to give a lecture at St Mary of the Angels parish on “Priests and Laity - An Interrelationship for Life.”

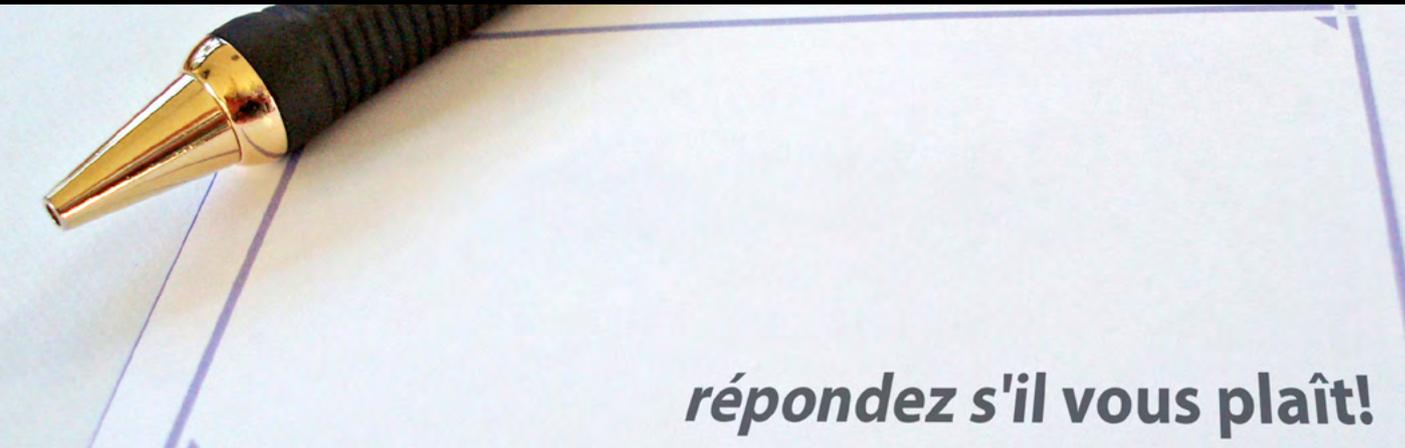
This talk was one of the events organized by SPI to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Opening of Vatican II. More opportunities to explore the teaching of Vatican II will be made available through 2013.

How do I bring Christ with Me?

Last year SPI produced the Lay Apostolate Sunday [video](#) that explained our baptismal obligation to bring Christ with us to all aspects of our daily life. This year, we continue with another video segment connecting our life of worship with our life of mission, and focus on the question: How do we bring Christ with us?

Keep your eyes open and look out for the LAS video this year, coming to a parish screen near you.





répondez s'il vous plaît!

Have you RSVP'ed?

Saying 'Yes' to Christian Discipleship Through the RCIA

Amanda Yeo

'Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?'

-The Summons

Reading through the Rite of Acceptance for the first time a couple of months back, I felt short-changed being baptised as an infant. No one bothered to ask me if I wanted this faith that will bring me eternal life! It was like receiving an invitation to a party where I had no say in the matter and simply told 'we have RSVP-ed and you are to attend the party whether you like it or not'. As an infant, barely a month old, my parents and godparents had RSVP-ed that I would be initiated through baptism and brought up as a disciple.

Over the last six months, having met numerous people in various parishes, I have had the privilege of hearing many share their conversion stories. What struck me was that faith seemed more precious to those who have consciously chosen to be disciples at some point in their life. Some were 'born again' cradle Catholics; others were converts. It struck me that there were people out there wanting to be invited to the party. These people wanted to RSVP to this discipleship that was RSVP-ed for me! The Rite of Acceptance where inquirers join the order of catechumens is that 'yes' to the invitation to the party where catechumens, as part of the household of Christ, are embraced with a mother's love and concern by the Church. (RCIA n.47)

What happens at this party? RCIA n. 75 tells us.

Catechesis: You will be provided a suitable catechesis that will gradually introduce you to the complete treasures of the Church. In most cases, this catechesis

will take into consideration the liturgical year and include celebrations of the word. This catechesis is intended to lead you to a deep sense of the mystery of salvation which you desire to participate in and appropriate knowledge of Church teachings.

Familiarisation with the Christian way of life: With the help and example shown by sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community, you will learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, deeper conversion towards Christ and conviction to repentance.

Liturgical Rites: These help to strengthen and purify you with God's blessing. Participating in the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays with the rest of the Christian community prepares you for your eventual participation in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. There are also suitable rites of minor exorcisms, blessings, and anointing with the oil of catechumens which you may participate in.

Apostolic activity: Working with others to spread the Gospel, building the Church through personal witness of life, and profession of faith are ways you can start practicing your discipleship!

This party is one where you will be mentored in Christian discipleship. This party cannot be hosted without catechumens. So, thank you catechumens for being here so that we can have it! Since it is a party for the catechumens, we should plan it for the catechumens' benefit: it's not only about fun and games, balloons and confetti but at the core an introduction to the loving presence of Christ and knowledge of God's Kingdom.



Illustration by Joseph Tey

Ah Beng Learns About Vatican II

These are the discoveries of Tan Ah Beng, blur Catholic with a heart of gold. We will eavesdrop as he discovers more about what the Second Vatican Council means for him.

Shanti:

Beng ah, next year is 50th anniversary of Vatican II, you know or not?

Beng:

Vatican II simi lai? Is it that movie got Tom Cruise acting one?

Shanti:

Aiyo, no lah. You Catholic for so long already, still blur about what Vatican II is. Cannot be that you forgot what you learnt in catechism class right?

Beng:

Oh OK I remember now, it was this big meeting that happened long time ago. So what's the big deal?

Shanti:

Vatican II was important in many ways. It taught us about our active roles as lay people, and encouraged a new understanding of what the Church is. It promoted an attitude of dialogue

and friendship with people of other faiths. Also, Vatican II is why we have Mass in English now.

Beng:

Huh? Mass not always been in English meh?

Shanti:

Before was only in Latin, one. But we're too young to remember those days.

Beng:

So Vatican II updated 'old' Catholicism. Good what, old means obsolete – everything must update one – like my iPad software. Don't update wait all the new apps incompatible cannot use, then jialat.

Shanti:

It's more like the Church growing up a bit. Vatican II didn't create a 'new' Catholic Church lah – and whatever is old doesn't mean it's bad. We have a valuable tradition, but we have to find modern ways to convey what's valuable about it.

Beng:

Like my Ah Kong, he's super-cool. 84 years old but he know how to e-mail and Skype. He also friend me on Facebook the other day some more, don't play-play!

Shanti:

That's why we are thankful for Jesus! Even though He was God, he still offered himself to be like us humans: to laugh, cry, suffer pain, get hungry, and stuff like that. All out of his love for us.

Beng:

My Ah Kong is like Jesus!

Shanti:

Vatican II tried to follow the same style – calling the Church to show God's love by being in the world and to make it better because we Catholics are working in it.

Beng:

Church must grow one meh? All the time we act like we're perfect already.

Shanti:

You think Jesus came into the world already an adult from day one is it?

Beng:

Ha ha, I get the point – as long as we are still on this earth we must grow. But I'm only a lay person wor, last time my catechist tell me "lay person means: not priest, not nun, not brother. Like nothing like that. He said our job is just to pray, pay, and obey!

I quite obedient one. Also I pay, every week I give five dollars to the collection. Sometimes I also pray: I pray snooker, I pray soccer...

Shanti:

Very funny. Seriously.

Beng:

Joking only lah. You know I pray what, we go Mass and Novena together so often!

Shanti:

Vatican II taught us to pray differently, not just privately and asking God for things all the time. It invited us to active participation in the liturgy and opened up what God calls lay people to do through their baptism.

Beng:

So we actually got job one! I thought only the holy-holy type were good Christians. I always knew that being Catholic is about more than just going to church.

Shan, how come you, like, know so much ah?

Shanti:

Oh it's because I do this weird thing where I go to this special place called a 'library' and I perform this exotic activity called 'reading'.

You ever heard or not?

Beng:

Walau, you suan me.

I also quite interested in finding out about Vatican II leh, but I not like some people so relax and so much time to read. Got crash-course or not?

Shanti:

I'll FYI you when got events happening like talks or what. This upcoming year will have.

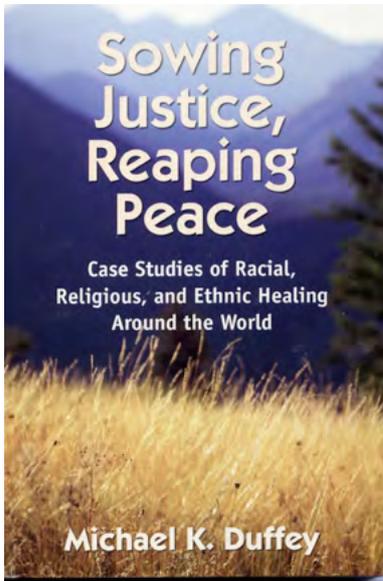
Beng:

Set. You accompany me can? Then we can go to our favorite thosai place for supper after that. Shiok.

Shanti:

Just what I need, Manja Man and his bottomless stomach.

Editor's note: Please consult a local if you find Singlish terms and syntax in this column difficult to comprehend. It's actually not so hard, one.



Title: Sowing Justice: Reaping Peace
Author: Michael K. Duffey
Publisher: Sheed & Ward
Pages: 216

Ann Shirley Hoffner

The author has put together case studies for reflection and discussion. His book is an in-depth but easy to read, study of historical data, with a focus on the negative impact such historical events have had on people and nations. These accounts aid in tracing the beginnings of social issues and struggles that are prevalent today, legacies of the past, and how groups or individuals have responded to such injustices.

In order that the audience has the basic knowledge of Catholic Social Teachings, he starts out by first mapping out the 10 Principles (below), so that students can identify which of the social teachings have been violated, why and then examine how things can be made right.

A) Regard for persons in society

- 1) The sacredness of human life requires that human beings not be harmed but be respected and accorded freedom and equality.
- 2) The “common good” requires the promoting of social conditions that allow persons to achieve their fulfillment.
- 3) Members of society share responsibility for one another’s well being and must work on behalf of the common good.

B) Justice for persons and groups

4) Distributive justice requires that all persons receive a share of the world’s goods, sufficient to meet their needs and those of their families.

Social justice requires that individuals contribute to the well being of society and that society has a duty to enable them to do so.

- 5) Societies must give first priority to meeting the needs of the poor and vulnerable.
- 6) Persons have the right to join with others to work for their mutual well being.
- 7) Persons have a right to participate in the decisions that effect their social, economic, political and cultural life.
- 8) States must seek peace and justice through nonviolent means, resorting to the use of violence only when the criteria of “justifiable war” exists.

C) Respect for the earth

9) The principle of stewardship requires care for the physical world, in recognition of its intrinsic value as well as our dependence on it for life.

D) Religion and Politics

10) Faith ought to be translated into action in the world. Belief in the coming of the Kingdom of God requires Christians act and advocate on behalf of more just societies. Governments must protect the freedom of persons and groups to express their religious beliefs.

Duffey then moves to historical case studies, including the Balkans, Central America, Ireland. Here in the interest of space I outline two situations - South Africa and Woman & Children.

South Africa

During the Dutch colonization of Africa, Dutch farmers (Boers) gained control of land in the Cape region and prospered. Between 1950-1980, 4 million Africans were removed from towns, villages, homes, farms and businesses, transported in flatbed trucks with whatever they could carry and dumped on arid, rocky wastelands designated as “ancestral” homelands, which lacked drinking water, electricity, public sanitation, health facilities and schools. White missionaries converted natives and established native churches for them, since they were not welcomed into white congregations. One Boer wrote, that as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, it was her duty, to resist “placing Africans on the same footing as Christians, which is contrary to the laws of God”. In 1955 a group of women in South Africa known as the

“Black Sash” organized the “Women’s Defense of the Constitution”, which protested the disenfranchisement of colored people, who were stripped of their voting rights and the right to private property, the Bantu education laws that denied adequate education to natives and the removal of natives to “homelands”. Even after the fall of apartheid in 1990, most of the nations wealth remained in the hands of the whites, whilst 4 million Africans were robbed of everything as a result of apartheid policies and practices. Women like Sheena Duncan, Ruth Mompoti, Albertina Sisulu, Ela Gandhi, Rachel Alexander continue to struggle for the rights of women and children and all human beings in South Africa. U.S. theologian Walter Wink noted that whites pleading for blacks to struggle non-violently, obscured the crucial moral fact of white passivity, that allowed injustice to grow until its victims reached combustion point. When the ones urging for non-violence are the very ones benefitting from apartheid.

Women & Children

Today ‘slave owning’ is past and is replaced by a ‘new slavery - slave holding’. Extreme poverty is the driving force, that puts people at the mercy of those who can control their means for survival. Conservative estimates put the number at 27 million, enslaved by those who ‘own’ their labor through a meagre loan which in turn creates a very profitable ‘debt bondage’. Designer clothing, electronics, athletic shoes, carpets, polished gems, made in factories throughout the Third World, where women and children do much of the work in sweatshops, working long hours in miserable conditions, for subsistence level wages. Their only hope is to develop strong unions, to push for labor reforms within their countries and bargain for just wages.

Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico produce 70% of the clothing exported to the U.S. Workers are poorly paid, unable to meet basic needs, whilst foreign corporations and industries enjoy tax incentives and huge profits, but pay their employees in pesos and sell finished goods in U.S. dollars. Clearly, a pure “market driven economy” geared only towards production and profits undermines the human dignity.

Children’s victimization in wartime include recruiting them for combat. Amnesty International reported that in 1998, 300,000 youths between the ages of 7 and 17 served in combat roles in 30 war zones. These children, if they survive, carry the physical and psychological damage into adulthood. The United

Nations has passed the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” acknowledging that in too many countries, children’s lives are plagued by armed conflict, child labor and sexual exploitation.

Making Peace

Duffey’s historical studies tell of the scars of racial and social discrimination, exploitation of the poor and helpless, hate crimes, disrespect of the other, a lack of equal opportunity for all, greed, robbing the other of liberty and voting rights, denial to basic human needs - shelter, clean drinking water, food, health care, education. Upon reflection, we must ask ourselves, what are the injustices we witness right now in our own homes, workplaces, country, and whether we have contributed to injustices; bearing in mind that every wrongful act not only harms us personally but has a social dimension as well. Injustice is capable of causing grave consequences, creating wounds that run deep, that undermine the lives of many, in some cases for several generations.

Those who are anxious to push for reconciliation must first examine every painful historical detail in truth and then only try to reinstate justice, forgiveness and peace. To forget crimes is to forget the victims. Perpetrators must take responsibility for their actions, remove conditions that allow the reoccurrence of wrong doings and make restitution. Victims must resolve not to retaliate with vengeance and move forward in forgiveness. Peacemaking must be the ‘committed will’ of all concerned, in order to successful rebuild, re-instate justice and nurture social solidarity.

What would probably strike most readers, is why those who have experienced intense suffering at the hands of other fellow human beings, would embrace religion, and even till today hold on to the faith. Maybe because each of us acknowledges that deep within us there exists a power greater than ourselves, that created and sustains all things, and deep within our being the Creator has left His mark and we gravitate towards that Presence. Furthermore, in the case of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, we know that it is God who made the first move to reach out to human beings, and we imitate a just God in striving for the truth and for what is just, hoping that grace will help us will triumph over all the injustices we commit against our own kind.

This book is available for borrowing at the Pastoral Institute Library, call number 261.8 DUF.



The Pastoral Institute was established in 1978 to assist the Archbishop in providing faith formation for the Catholic Archdiocese in Singapore. Today, the Institute continues to carry out this responsibility in the catechetical, biblical, and pastoral aspects of Christian ministry. In addition, the Institute looks to the preparation of those who serve the Church in various ministerial capacities, and identifies emerging issues that have pastoral import on the life of the local Church.

This newsletter is published monthly for internal circulation within the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore.

Staff:

Director:	Arthur Goh
Director of Catechesis:	Fr. Erbin Fernandez
Pastoral Research & Training:	Daphne Leong
Rite of Christian Initiation:	Amanda Yeo
Coordinator of Parish Catechesis:	Jane Lau
Asst Coord of Parish Catechesis:	Isabel Ho
Catechetical Admin:	Sylvia Stewart
Accounts:	Teresa Hoe
Library:	Angela Fernandez
Formation Courses:	Janice Ng
Reception & Biblical Liaison:	Melinda Reyes
Admin & Logistics:	Randy Seow

Address:	2 Highland Road, #02-02, Singapore 549102
Tel:	+65 68583011
Fax:	+65 68582011
Pastoral/Biblical:	admin@catholicspi.org
Catechetical:	catoffice@catholicspi.org
Web:	www.catholicspi.org

BOOK OF REVELATION

Fr. Ambrose Vaz introduces participants to the genre of Apocalyptic writing and its proper interpretation in this twelve week scripture course.

12 Tuesdays, 7, 14, 21, 28 August, 4, 11, 18, 25 Sep, 9, 16, 23, 30 Oct. CAEC, 2 Highland Road.

9:30am to 11:30am, or 7:45pm to 9:45pm.

Contribution: \$80.00. Contact [Melinda Reyes](#) for registration details.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RCIA

Arthur Goh and Amanda Yeo will help participants familiarize themselves to the guidelines of Christian initiation, the rites, and discuss the various roles of RCIA ministry. Suitable for baptized Catholics, especially those called to serve in RCIA work.

4 Fridays, 17, 24, 31 Aug, 7 Sep. CAEC, 2 Highland Road.

8:00pm-10:00pm. Contribution: \$20.00. Contact [Melinda Reyes](#) for registration details.

PERSONAL COMPASS: SEXUALITY & MARRIAGE

Fr. David Garcia explains the moral principles promoting good human sexuality that underpins the Church's teaching on Christian marriage.

6 Thursdays, 30 Aug, 6, 13, 20, 27 Sep, 4 Oct. CAEC, 2 Highland Road.

7:30pm to 9:30pm. Contribution: \$80.00. Contact [Janice Ng](#) for registration details.

DEALING WITH MID LIFE TRANSITIONS

Sr. Florence Wong FMDM conducts discussion and prayer around the issue of Christian ageing.

2 Tuesdays and 2 Fridays, 4, 7, 11, 14 Sep. St James Room, Blessed Sacrament Church.

7:30pm to 9:30pm. Voluntary contribution. Contact [Melinda Reyes](#) for registration details.