

# DEVELOPING A SPIRITUALITY OF UNIVERSITY CHAPLAINCY

**“Final Statement of CAFE 2005 – Chaplains, Animators, Formation and Exchange”**

***IMCS Asia Pacific:  
Chaplains, Animators and Student Leaders***

**“Empowered To Accompany Students With  
Their Escalating Power”**

We, the 32 chaplains and animators and student leaders from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Australia, have gathered here in Yogyakarta for the Chaplains Animators Formation and Exchange (CAFÉ), from September 11- 18, 2005, hosted jointly by International Movement of Catholic Students Asia Pacific (IMCS AP) and Perhimpunan Mahasiswa Katolik Republic Indonesia (PMKRI).

## 1. Our Context in a Glimpse

With the three regions (South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia) in dialogue, we realized the emergence of certain trends within our Asian Pacific context:

- **Politics:** with the state shirking its responsibilities, and the enormous influence of the multinational companies, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), the sovereignty of the state is increasingly eroded; the politics of “war on terror” is camouflaging the covert operations of the armament industry and diverting much needed resources for the alleviation of acute hunger and starvation-deaths in our world;
- **Economics:** the process of privatization augmented by neo-liberal capitalism has produced uneven economic growth that has exacerbated the existing divide between the urban and rural, the wealthy and deprived, while creating a sizable middle class, resulting in a growing marginalization of the majority;
- **Religions:** a growing fundamentalism/sectarianism has heightened the majority-minority status and consciousness while religions are increasingly perceived and presented to us as ‘enemies’ rather than our source of inner strength;
- **Civil society:** the militarization and politicization of the civil society is insidiously on the increase with the violation of human rights of the poor, the Dalits, the indigenous, the migrants, women, children in society, spawning simmering ethnic crises that are on the verge of explosion;
- **Environment:** the degradation of the environment continues unabated vastly detrimental to the poorer nations;
- **Migration:** the migration of refugees and internally displaced persons, including students, have become more acute in recent decades;

Amidst such developments, we also witness a steadily growing awareness in relation to the assertion and development of peoples' rights, and the pressing need for networking of the diverse socio-political groups and forces.

## 1. Realities of the Student World

At the same time, we are aware that such trends have impacted the student world in the Asian Pacific context in ways that warrant our attention:

- Education: has failed to be educative/formative for human development or service of the grassroots communities but has become highly “commodified” and students have been used as gateways to capture the markets and accentuate the consumer tendencies. This failure has been exacerbated by the influx of foreign educational institutions which remain a lucrative business in the hands of “corporatocracy”;
- Media: though it is a source of voluminous information, the transnational corporations have effectively utilized media through information technology to corrupt students with the ideology of capitalism and with images of vulgarity;
- Identity: university students' identity is at stake, suffering from fragmentation, marginalization, leading to a loss of personal and group identity;
- Commitment: despite the erosion of their power, students still have the creative resourcefulness to remain as prime movers and popular educators, acting as beacons of hope and optimism.

## 2. Chaplaincy in Transition: Challenges Ahead

Chaplaincy is at crossroads, bereft of role models. Chaplains suffer from anxiety and insecurity as we see our roles usurped by the erosion of values in society, mass media and information technology.

### 3.1 Ministry of Accompaniment

Yet as chaplains and animators, we experience the joy of accompaniment that we understand as a togetherness in a journey. This accompaniment involves a process of self-emptying which calls us to sacrifice our time and comfort to stay in touch with the university students. It is a journey characterized by commitment, compassion, empathy, patience, trustfulness, understanding so that our presence empowers the university students. In doing so, university students are “impowered” in their struggle to achieve the purpose in life, becoming fully human while at the same time, deepening their solidarity with the marginalized.

In our accompaniment, *we need to be more student-centered and allow students to take the lead.* Chaplains and animators need to enable them to develop a

deeper critical analysis of the emerging discourses and mega-trends so as to identify the root causes and the “invisible enemies” in our context. Together, we need to discover a new spirituality with humanism at its core, through initiating a dialogical process among diverse peoples, cultures, religions and spiritualities. In this way, the university students are empowered to gradually transcend all human boundaries. Finally we need to channel the human resources and actualize the potentialities of university students toward social change as we network with like-minded organizations.

### 3.2 Theological Dimension of Accompaniment

In our ministry of accompaniment, we are convinced that Jesus is our teacher and friend. Like Jesus, our ministry challenges us to manifest the Reign of God that is already in our midst. With every struggle for equality and justice, each expression of mercy and compassion, each attempt at bringing about reconciliation and peace, our ministry ushers in the Reign of God. Our ministry becomes all the more inclusive and dialogical whenever we re-live Jesus’ inclusive table-fellowship of equals in a manner that the lowly and marginalized felt esteemed and empowered by our presence. As we struggle in our ministry, we are encouraged by the “hiddenness” of God’s Reign that is ever efficacious in empowering our university students in ways unknown and beyond human expectation.

### 3.3 Bridging Two Worlds

Realizing and recognizing the similarities and dissimilarities causing the distance and divide between the Church and the university student world, the ministry of accompaniment alerts chaplains and animators to the need of acquiring new skills and techniques to support and supplement their ministry. Central to this ministry is the use of a participatory process and optimizing team efforts in order to match the zeal and energy, aspirations and dreams of the student community that is calling for a new model of church and society. To do so, chaplains and animators have to remodel and transform ourselves, enable the university students to enjoy and relish the learning processes that involve a journey of critical discourses and self-introspection, and the discovery of a spirituality.

### 3.4 Gender Equality

Gender sensitivity has to permeate all our thinking and activities both within and outside the church, to resonate with the university students who know of human rights, specifically gender equality, and to reinforce the complementary roles of women and men. This would call us once again to continue to revisit the gender inequalities in the Church, families and society in order to challenge and rebuild new paradigms of power relations between women and men that are emancipatory in nature.

### 3.5 Inter-Religious Dialogue (IRD)

The reality of our context has changed with the presence of believers of the world religions in our neighbourhood. Therefore IRD in the Asian Pacific region is the way forward and it has to be grounded on core principles that constitute the spirituality of our common humanhood. God's omnipresence in all religions has to be discovered, recognized and experienced as a saving presence. This presence which precedes us will bring about a world where we are one family of diverse religions in a common struggle for humanity.

### 3. Recommendations for Chaplains and Animators

As chaplains and animators, we affirm and recommend the following:

- Facilitate the university students to build and “impower” self-esteem to exercise their creative and dynamic leadership;
- Accompany the university students and discover together a spirituality which has a humanization process as its pedagogical tool;
- *Engage in a process of learning and re-learning in order to ensure a sustained critical consciousness, skills and methodologies among the chaplains, animators and the university students;*
- Realize and understand that our ministry involves “engendered” team work rather than isolated individuals in the midst of complexities and diversities of multiethnic and multireligious context;
- Encourage and assist our students to be committed to inter-religious dialogue;
- Exercise our responsibilities in rediscovering the prophetic and liberative dimensions of the Church to empower the university students whom we accompany;
- Promote ongoing and regular integral formation and exchange programs that sustain the chaplains and animators as well as the university students.

We believe that CAFÉ has initiated a critical process of reinventing the roles and functions of chaplains and animators within the diverse contexts of Asia Pacific wherein newer models, skills, strategies and spiritualities are expressed to harness the university students' escalating power and energy. We are convinced that CAFÉ has given us an edge to enable the university students to handle the newer trends, issues and problems arising from their contexts and thereby establish a new humanity wherein equality, justice, love, fellowship reign supreme.