

ASIAN  
HORIZONS  
Vol. 12, No. 4, December 2018  
Pages: 660-679

## GENERATING ENTHUSIASM TOGETHER Networking between Pastoral Institutes in Asia

Klaus Vellguth ♦

*Vallendar PTHV-University, Germany*

### Abstract

In *Veritatis Gaudium* Pope Francis highlights “the urgent need for ‘networking’ between those institutions worldwide that cultivate and promote ecclesiastical studies, in order to set up suitable channels of cooperation also with academic institutions in the different countries and with those inspired by different cultural and religious traditions.” One realisation of academic networking in Asia is the Network Pastoral Asia. In this Network the principals of leading pastoral institutions from all over Asia come together to support and inspire each other. During the seventh meeting of Network Pastoral Asia which took place in Myitkina (Myanmar) the principals of the institutes described their Pastoral Network as “an Asian forum of collaboration, exchange, exposure and enrichment among pastoral institutes within the universal Church, to make pastoral outreach relevant to our times.” In this article, the author refers to the different meetings of the pastoral network and explains the role of missio Aachen in initiating different networks in Asia and Africa.

**Keywords:** Africa, Asia, Ecclesiastical Education, Ecology, *Laudato Si'*, Missio Aachen, Networking, Network Pastoral, *Netzwerk Pastoral*, Pastoral, Pastoral Institutes, Pope Francis, Triple Dialogue, *Veritatis Gaudium*

“What must be the fundamental criteria for a renewal and revival of the contribution of ecclesiastical studies to a Church of missionary

---

♦ **Klaus Vellguth**, Dr theol. habil., Dr phil., Dr rer. pol., is Professor of Missiology at the Vallendar PTHV-University; Director of the Institute of Missiology; Chairman of the International Institute for Missiological Research; Head of the Theological Research Department and Head of Marketing at missio; and editor of *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*. Klaus Vellguth is married and has three children. He lives in Aachen (Germany). Email: klaus.vellguth@gmx.de

outreach?"<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis asks in the foreword to the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* and he answers this question by identifying four essential criteria. The fourth of these is "the urgent need for 'networking' between those institutions worldwide that cultivate and promote ecclesiastical studies, in order to set up suitable channels of cooperation also with academic institutions in the different countries and with those inspired by different cultural and religious traditions."<sup>2</sup> Networks of this kind have been launched by missio Aachen in recent years in both Asia and Africa in order to transform venues of international pastoral and theological reflection and forums for the international exchange of pastoral inspiration into an incubator for pastoral innovation.<sup>3</sup> The principals of leading pastoral institutions come together in these networks to report on their experiences and to support and inspire each other.

### Network Pastoral Asia

The Network Pastoral Asia was founded in 2012 and held its seventh network meeting in Myitkyina (Myanmar) in November 2018.<sup>4</sup> This meeting was attended by the principals of seventeen pastoral institutes from all over Asia with representatives coming from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. In the course of the meeting the members of the Network Pastoral Asia discussed a vision mission statement which reads as follows:

Network Pastoral Asia aims to be the salt of the earth which enriches the ministry of Pastoral Institutes in Asia in transforming the Church and building a just society. NPA is an Asian forum of collaboration, exchange, exposure and enrichment among pastoral institutes within the universal Church, to make pastoral outreach relevant to our times. NPA promotes the prophetic role of Pastoral Institutes by bringing them together in a common Asian context where pastoral approaches are analysed, collaboration is strengthened and resources are shared in order to enhance the performance of Pastoral Institutes in serving all God's people.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium* Apostolic Constitution on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, 4. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost-constitutions/documents/papa-francesco\\_costituzione-ap\\_20171208\\_veritatis-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost-constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20171208_veritatis-gaudium.html)

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium*, 4d.

<sup>3</sup> See Vellguth, Klaus, "Pastorales Netzwerk wächst in Asien. Pastoralinstitute suchen gemeinsam nach neuen Perspektiven," *Verbum SVD* 54 (2014) 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> The seventh meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia was held from 3 to 8 November 2018 in Myitkyina (Myanmar).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.missio-hilft.de/informieren/wofuer-wir-uns-einsetzen/weltkirchlich-inspirierte-pastoral/netzwerk-pastoral-asien/>

### **Pastoral Institutes as Network Partners**

Pastoral institutes, a large number of which were founded in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania in the 1950s and 1960s, have turned into promising networking partners. Inspired by the momentum of the Second Vatican Council, many of them have developed into influential training centres, offering initial and further training not just for priests, but increasingly also for the laity and for members of religious orders. Addressing the heads of the institutes, the Council Fathers had already said that there “should be fraternal and generous collaboration on the part of scientific institutes which specialize in missiology and in other arts and disciplines useful for the missions, such as ethnology and linguistics, the history and science of religions, sociology, pastoral skills and the like.”<sup>6</sup> This collaboration or networking, which the Council called for half a century ago, has so far only come about in a few exceptional circumstances, however, and as a rule it has taken the form of bilateral cooperation between individual institutes.<sup>7</sup>

In 2010 a project entitled *Netzwerk Pastoral* (“Network Pastoral”) was launched to improve communication between pastoral institutes, establish a pastoral network and facilitate a joint learning process. Under this research project, *missio* (initially together with the Episcopal aid agency *Adveniat*) and the Institute of Missiology (IMW) at the Vallendar College of Philosophy and Theology in Germany contacted a large number of pastoral institutes throughout the world, asking them to fill in a questionnaire that would provide a more accurate idea of the work they were doing. The information supplied would then be shared with all the other pastoral institutes so that they could be inspired by one another and, if they were interested, contact each other. The responses from the pastoral institutes were subsequently published in a separate wiki in four languages (English, German, French and Spanish), the profile of each institute thus becoming available worldwide on the internet.<sup>8</sup> The numbers of pastoral institutes currently represented on this wiki are 31 from Asia, 17 from Africa and 14 from Latin America.

---

<sup>6</sup>Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, 34.

<sup>7</sup>An exception in this respect is the CAPPI Initiative. See Klaus Vellguth, “Conference of Asian Pacific Pastoral Institutes (CAPPI): Ein Rückblick auf die CAPPI-Initiative, Pastoralinstitute im asiatisch-pazifischen Raum miteinander zu vernetzen,” *Verbum SVD* 55, 3 (2015) 299-309

<sup>8</sup>[www.pastoral-global.org](http://www.pastoral-global.org)

## Manila 2012: Understanding Pastoral Ministry

The answers to the questionnaire indicated that many pastoral institutes were keenly interested in meeting and establishing an extensive network. This prompted missio and the East Asian Pastoral Institute to invite the principals of several selected Asian pastoral institutes to Manila for the first meeting of the Asian Pastoral Network.<sup>9</sup> The conference, which was held at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in the Philippines capital from 29 October to 1 November 2012, was attended by the principals of the Saigon Pastoral Institute (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam)<sup>10</sup>, the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (Bangalore/India),<sup>11</sup> the Pallottine Animation Centre (Nagpur/India),<sup>12</sup> the Pusat Kateketik (Yogyakarta/Indonesia),<sup>13</sup> the Singapore Pastoral Institute (Singapore)<sup>14</sup> and the East Asian Pastoral

---

<sup>9</sup>See Klaus Vellguth, "The Network Pastoral and the Pastoral Institutes of Asia," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50, 4 (2013) 313-323; Klaus Vellguth, "Asian Pastoral Network. Second Conference of the Asian Pastoral Network at the NBCLC," *Word & Worship* 47, 1 (2014) 292-297; Klaus Vellguth, "Pastorales Netzwerk wächst in Asien. Pastoralinstitute suchen gemeinsam nach neuen Perspektiven," *Verbum SVD* 55, 1-2 (2014) 26-44; Klaus Vellguth and Paul B. Steffens, "A Pastoral Network Emerges. Lively Exchange between Asian Pastoral Institutes," *Ishvani Documentation and Mission Digest* 32, 2-3 (2014) 164-173; Klaus Vellguth, "Network of Solidarity. A Broader Concept than the Provision of Assistance," Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth, ed., *Evangelii Gaudium Voices of the Universal Church* (One World Theology 7), Manila, 2015, 177-188.

<sup>10</sup>See Th   Lanh Nguyen, "The Saigon Institute," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50, 4 (2013) 376-382; "Pastoralinstitut der Erzdi  zese Hoh-Chi-Minh-Stadt," (unpublished manuscript), Ho-Chi-Minh-Stadt, 2012; Klaus Vellguth, "Pastorale Ausbildung in sozialistischer Gesellschaft. Die Arbeit des Saigon Pastoral Institute in Vietnam," *Zeitschrift f  r Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 99, 3-4 (2015) 322-330.

<sup>11</sup>See Cleophas D. Fernandes, "The NBCLC: A Renewed Mission and Role," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50, 4 (2013) 313-323. Gerwin Van Leeuwen, "Fully Indian - Authentically Christian. A Study of the First Fifteen Years of the NBCLC (1967-1982), Bangalore - India in the Light of the Theology of its Founder, Duraiswami Simon Amalorpavadass," *Kampen What is this? Journal?* 1990, page numbers?; Klaus Vellguth, "Inkulturation in Katechese, Liturgie und Bibelarbeit. Das National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Center in Bangalore (Indien)," *Zeitschrift f  r Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 98, 1-2 (2014) 117-126.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Vijay, "The Pallottine Animation Centre of Nagpur," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50, 4 (2013) 355-363; Klaus Vellguth, *Eine neue Art, Kirche zu sein. Entstehung und Verbreitung der Kleinen Christlichen Gemeinschaften und des Bibel-Teilens in Afrika und Asien*, Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2005, 245-250.

<sup>13</sup>See Carlos Putranto, "Participation in a Growing Local Church: Reflection on Pusat Kateketik," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50, 4 (2013) 364-375.

<sup>14</sup>See Thomas Arnold, "Where Will You Bring Christ? The Singapore Pastoral Institute," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50, 4 (2013) 383-407; Arthur Goh, "Eine Kirche f  r eine moderne Welt. Missionarische Herausforderungen der Kirche Singapurs," *Forum Weltkirche* 130, 2 (2011) 20-25; Paul B. Steffen, "Places and Models of Formation

Institute (Manila/Philippines).<sup>15, 16</sup> In order to learn from one another and to identify potential synergies the representatives of the pastoral institutes started this first convention of the Network Pastoral by introducing their respective organisations and talking about their working priorities. They then formulated a joint definition of pastoral ministry that was endorsed by all the delegates and took account of the Church's Asian context. It was based on a range of questions: What are the hopes, dreams and visions that inspire the work of the pastoral institutes? What are the pastoral options to which the institutes are committed? In which areas of pastoral ministry are the institutes developing their activities? What are their pastoral aims? What pastoral services and facilities are they offering? What pastoral processes have been initiated by the institutes? And how are the pastoral institutes networked?

The enormous challenges arising from the context in which pastoral ministry is provided became abundantly clear when the principals of the institutes took a trip together to the slums of Payatas on the outskirts of Manila.<sup>17</sup> Situated at the foot of Smokey Mountain, Payatas is lined by extremely basic shacks, many of them made of corrugated sheet metal. For several generations the people in this part of Manila have lived on the waste of the city, which they scavenge for reusable objects. Confronted with so much poverty and the stench of waste, the conference delegates were impressed by the confidence and courage of the slum dwellers despite the depressing reality that

---

for Mission and Ministry. Pastoral Institutes in Africa and Asia," *Verbum SVD* 51, 4 (2010) 423-438.

<sup>15</sup> See Arthur Leger, "The EAPI: From Mission Apologetics to Mission Networking," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50, 4 (2013) 324-336; Josef Meili, "East Asian Pastoral Institute – A Power-House of Inculturation and Interreligious Dialogue," *Forum Mission* 1 (2005) 221-222, 222.

<sup>16</sup>The fact that the representative of the Multan Pastoral Institute from Pakistan (as well as the representative of the National Catechetical Centre from Bangladesh) had to cancel his participation at short notice because he was not allowed to leave the country illustrates the difficulties confronting the pastoral institutes in Pakistan. See Klaus Vellguth, "Pastorale Initiativen in bedrängter Lage. Der Einsatz des Multan Pastoral Institute für Dialog und Verständigung," *Cibedo-Beiträge zum Gespräch zwischen Christen und Muslimen* 3 (2012) 92-97.

<sup>17</sup>For more on the following see Klaus Vellguth, "Pastorales Netzwerk wächst in Asien. Pastoralinstitute suchen gemeinsam nach neuen Perspektiven," *Verbum SVD* 55, 1-2 (2014) 26-44; Beningo Beltran, *Faith and Struggle on Smokey Mountain. Hope for a Planet in Peril*, Maryknoll, name of the publisher?, 2012; Thérèse-Marie Dupagne, "Smokey Mountain. Benediktinerinnen im Elendsviertel von Manila," *Erbe und Auftrag* 84, 2 (2008) 210-212; Beningo Beltran, *Müllberge und Umweltkirche. Interkulturelle, theologische, pastorale und pädagogische Perspektiven auf den Philippinen*, Münster/Berlin/Hamburg/London/Vienna/Zurich 2007.

surrounded them – an environment where there was no “fullness of life” (John 10:10) but rather a continuous struggle for survival. This made it all the more inspiring to talk to the pastoral workers in the slums, as they had deliberately chosen a life of poverty, fully identifying with the people of Payatas and proclaiming the Gospel to them. During their discussions with Fr Orlando Normiella, who had been working in Payatas for many years, the delegates asked about the pastoral priorities of the Church there. “We don’t have any catechesis in Payatas,” Fr Normiella replied. Instead, he said, his pastoral work was based on a diaconal approach aimed at supporting people in their daily lives and satisfying their most basic and essential needs. That meant providing healthcare, food, vocational training, education for children and opportunities to generate a modest income.

This experience in Payatas at the first conference of the Network Pastoral Asia triggered lively discussions among the delegates in Manila as they struggled to formulate a shared concept of pastoral ministry – a concept capable of addressing all the different contexts of the Church in Asia as well as the challenges faced by each of the institutes. Commenting on the different interpretations of pastoral ministry, Arthur Goh, head of the Pastoral Institute of the Archdiocese of Singapore, said in hindsight about the network meeting in Manila:

I began to see that, although we all had the same question on our minds as to how we might help people to be good, faithful Catholics, the work of the people I spoke to was of a completely different kind from my own. And this is simply because in today’s day and age it’s a different matter whether we are seeking to make the Catholic faith fruitful in Singapore or in India, Indonesia or the Philippines.<sup>18</sup>

It turned out that an understanding of pastoral ministry had to be formulated for the Asian context in a specific way. Hence the delegates concluded the conference by stating the following:

Like Jesus and the disciples of Emmaus, our pastoral centres are journeying with the people of Asia. Our way is determined by the gospel and by attitudes that embody the compassionate love of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The main challenge for our Asian pastoral approach is to find ways of encountering and being enriched by the different religious traditions and cultures of Asia. In humility we are aware of our own weakness and as servant leaders we journey in our common search for God, which determines the way we are engaged to our ministries of

---

<sup>18</sup> Arthur Goh, “Herausgefordert durch Situationen extremer Armut. Das asiatische “Netzwerk Pastoral” formuliert sich,” *Forum Weltkirche*, 2/2013, 23-28.

service for a holistic and integral transformation of persons and society. As authentic disciples of Christ, we seek to dialogue with different religions, cultures and the numerous living in poverty. We understand 'pastoral' as our compassionate care to enable faith to connect with life. The pastoral task of the Church is to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our witnessing must always be practised in a gentle way so that we live in harmony with the various religions and cultures of Asia that enrich our journey.

This definition of an Asian understanding of pastoral ministry shows that the triple dialogue, formulated for the Asian Churches by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), continues to be an essential feature of Asian theology and of pastoral theology, in particular. This triple dialogue, which goes back to the first general meeting in Taipei (Taiwan) in 1972, means that the Church seeks to enter into dialogue with the various religions, cultures and the poor in Asia.

### **Bengaluru 2013: Pastoral Training and Inculturation**

The second convention of the Network Pastoral Asia, which this time was also attended by representatives of the Verbiest Institute (Taiwan), the National Catechetical Educational and Biblical Centre (Sri Lanka)<sup>19</sup> and Ishvani Kendra (India),<sup>20</sup> was held a year later in November 2013 in Bengaluru (Bangalore) in India.<sup>21</sup> This time the meeting focused on the question of inculturated pastoral training in Asia at the beginning of the third millennium and the shape it might take. The delegates at this network conference presented a range of pastoral ministry approaches and their inculturation within Asia. The Indian theologians, Felix Wilfred and Jacob Theckenath, added their stimulating perspectives on the multi-religious, socio-economic and multi-cultural context of Asia. As on previous occasions, the presentations of the two Indian theologians focused on the option of the Church in Asia for the triple dialogue. One impressive feature was the amount of positive energy generated by Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which had been published just a few days earlier. Although it was only four days old and

---

<sup>19</sup>See Piyal Janaka Fernando, "Challenges Faced in Pastoral Contextualized Formation in Sri Lanka," unpublished document, Colombo, 2013.

<sup>20</sup>See Ishvani Kendra, Institute of Missiology and Communications, Pune 2013; Ishvani Kendra, 2014 Programmes, Pune 2013; Thomas Malipurathu, "Ishvani Kendra and its Contribution to the Field of Evangelization," *Mission Today* 3, 3 (2001) 329-337. Jacob Kavunkal, "Ishvani Kendra," *Dharma Deepika* 2, 2 (1998) 67-68; Jacob Kavunkal, "Report about Ishvani Kendra, Pune," *Verbum SVD* 35, 3 (1994) 269-271.

<sup>21</sup>The second meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia was held from 28 November to 2 December 2013 in the Indian city of Bengaluru (Bangalore).

therefore still “fresh,” it had already been read by all the delegates, who consequently felt inspired and elated by the style and content of the new document.

In their final statement, the delegates referred to the Asian context with its multi-religious, multi-cultural and economic injustices which, they said, gave them a special responsibility under the triple dialogue. They also emphasised the need for an ongoing evaluation of their own identity and mission – i.e. “reading the signs of the times” – as a requirement for launching new pastoral initiatives. At the network meeting they discussed the relevance of an ecclesiological reorientation, moving away from the Church’s role of preserver towards the model of a prophetic Church. One area to which special emphasis was attached was the laity. In view of the profound transformations which so many pastoral institutes were facing half a century after their foundation, the delegates noted that an institute might in fact use its identity crisis as a period of growth in its teaching content. They also felt it was highly reassuring to belong to a wider network, together with representatives of other important Asian institutes. Concerning the relevance of contextualisation, the delegates said in their final statement:

We see contextualised formation as that which brings about a direct connection between reality and the light of theology. God’s revelation is being realised in the complex socio-cultural context of our times. Our approach does not permit a compartmentalised approach to faith and life. In this exchange of faith and life both are mutually enriched.<sup>22</sup>

Commenting on the central challenges facing pastoral institutes in Asia, the delegates summed up their thoughts by saying:

Our Pastoral Centres are challenged to be engaged in a teaching role offering training within concrete pastoral contexts, in research that enables us to constantly evaluate and see with and see beyond, engaged in some form of extension service, permitting us to develop a unique methodology of insertion, engaged in forms of networking and collaboration with all like-minded agents of change.<sup>23</sup>

Profiting from this positive network experience at the Asian level, the meeting in India also provided momentum for national networking initiatives between the various pastoral institutes. For instance, the first national network meeting of the Indian pastoral

---

<sup>22</sup>Klaus Vellguth, “Growing Pastoral Network in Asia,” in Chrispine Ouma/Klaus Vellguth/Stefan Voges, *Creative Collaboration in Ministry. Network of Pastoral Institutes I Africa*, Eldoret, 2016, 115-134, 125.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.missio-hilft.de/informieren/wofuer-wir-uns-einsetzen/weltkirchlich-inspirierte-pastoral/netzwerk-pastoral-asien/>



institutes was held in Bengaluru in the first half of 2014, when 24 pastoral institutes were represented. Based on the final declaration of the Asian network meeting, they mapped out the prospects for the work of the pastoral institutes in India.

### **Saigon 2014: The Joy of the Gospel**

A third Asian network meeting followed in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in 2014.<sup>24</sup> It was hosted by the Saigon Pastoral Institute (the pastoral institute of the Archdiocese of Ho Chi Minh City), which was founded in 2004 and has since provided initial and further training courses for thousands of laypeople as well as for priests and members of religious orders. The academic programme of the Saigon Pastoral Institute has grown substantially over the past few years. In all, the meeting was attended by 18 representatives of Asian pastoral institutes from China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Vietnam – and, as on previous occasions, by representatives of missio in Aachen. The thematic focus was on the challenges posed by pluralism to the Church's pastoral work in the light of *Evangelii Gaudium*. For the first time the network meeting included representatives of the Catholic Service Center from the Diocese of Xi'an (China),<sup>25</sup> Saint Paul's College and its associated Pastoral Institute (Indonesia)<sup>26</sup> and the Catholic Pastoral Institute of Korea (South Korea)<sup>27</sup>. A detailed talk was given by the Indian theologian, Joy Thomas, in which he highlighted the significance of *Evangelii Gaudium* for the Church in Asia. He touched on a sore point in saying that Pope Francis had held up a mirror to the Church in Asia as elsewhere, which revealed it to be self-focused and self-preserving. He understood *Evangelii Gaudium* as an invitation to the Church to step out of its own comfort zone and to impact the world in the spirit of Christ. "Pope Francis is exhorting everyone in the Church to decide in favour of a missionary option and not to focus on survival strategies," Thomas said. "He is inviting the Church to show commitment and creativity in rethinking its own goals, structures, procedures and methods of evangelisation on the respective continents, and that includes

---

<sup>24</sup>The third meeting of the Pastoral Network Asia was held from 30 October to 3 November 2014 in Ho Chi Minh City.

<sup>25</sup>See Stephen Chen, "Catholic Service Center Xi'an," unpublished document, Ho Chi Minh City, 2014.

<sup>26</sup>See Yohanes Boy Lon, "Plurality of Christianity in Asia. Our Experiences in Indonesia," unpublished document, Ho Chi Minh City, 2014.

<sup>27</sup>See Bibiana Joo-hyun Roh, "What is Distinctive about Plurality of Christianity in our Context," unpublished document, Ho Chi Minh City, 2014.

Asia.”<sup>28</sup> Using a SWOT analysis, the delegates highlighted the opportunities and challenges of pluralism for the Church in Asia. In their final statement the Asian pastoral theologians referred again to the importance of the triple dialogue for the Church in Asia: “We recognise the reality of pluralism in Asia which enriches a comprehensive inculturation from the threefold perspective of dialogue with the religions, cultures and the poor.”<sup>29</sup> Inspired by the discussion on *Evangelii Gaudium*, the delegates concluded at the end of the network meeting: “*Evangelii Gaudium* motivates us to find an answer to our pluralistic context in Asia, an answer that is marked by cooperation – through the formation of networks and through our commitment to the ongoing development of reality at the regional, national, continental and intercontinental levels.”<sup>30</sup>

Commenting on the importance of the Network Pastoral Asia, the representatives of the pastoral institutes emphasised how important it was for delegates to have such an exchange and that it had become a source of inspiration for the work and further development of their institutes. Moreover, they said, it was helpful for the institutes to get to know the curricula, materials and specialists of other institutes and to integrate them, wherever appropriate, into their own work. The network extended their gaze beyond their own national borders and acted as a valuable think tank for innovative processes at the institutes. Regarding the future of the Network Pastoral, it was agreed that a secretariat should be set up in Asia with the task of preparing each meeting together with the host institute. The organisation of the secretariat was placed in the hands of Cleophas Fernandes from India, the former principal of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC). This was the first step towards institutionalising the initiative in Asia which had originally been launched by *missio*. In addition, regional pastoral networks were to be established with a view to intensifying collaboration between various pastoral institutes and catechetical centres at the respective national levels. It was also underlined that future meetings of representatives of Asian pastoral institutes should help to cultivate spiritual fellowship between them.

---

<sup>28</sup>Klaus Vellguth, “Growing Pastoral Network in Asia,” in Chrispine Ouma/Klaus Vellguth/Stefan Voges, *Creative Collaboration in Ministry. Network of Pastoral Institutes in Africa*, Eldoret, 2016, 115-134, 125.

<sup>29</sup>Asian Pastoral Network, “Third Meeting of Network Pastoral in Asia 30 October to 3 November, 2014: Final Statement,” unpublished document, Ho Chi Minh City 2014.

<sup>30</sup>Asian Pastoral Network, “Third Meeting of Network Pastoral in Asia 30 October to 3 November, 2014: Final Statement,” 2014.

### Colombo 2015: Laity and Leadership in the Church

The fourth meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia took place in Colombo (Sri Lanka) in 2015.<sup>31</sup> Sixteen representatives of Asian pastoral institutes came to Sri Lanka, where the gathering was hosted by the National Catechetical Educational and Biblical Centre. It was held in the capital of this southern Asian island state where Christians are a religious minority, constituting 7.4 per cent of the population. This time the organisers succeeded in broadening the Asian network initiative to include representatives of the National Social Catechetical Training Centre of Jessore (Bangladesh),<sup>32</sup> the Fondacio Asia (Philippines),<sup>33</sup> the Woori Institute (South Korea)<sup>34</sup> and the Carceres Lay Institute for Mission (Philippines).<sup>35</sup> The topic of the conference was “Laity and Leadership in the Church.” In his keynote speech the Indian theologian, Michael Amaladoss, underlined the shared baptismal dignity of Christians, the sense of faith among the baptised<sup>36</sup> and the common priesthood of all believers. He showed the extent to which the momentum of the Second Vatican Council is reflected in a synodal understanding of the Church and through shared responsibilities between the clergy and laity for the Church’s Great Commission. In particular, he referred to the “model of Jesus” who had himself been a layman, yet in his lay position had commanded a unique level of authority. In fact, his own religious leadership had been one of “servant leadership” (see Jn 13:1-17 and Phil 2:3-11). This “servant leadership” model manifested itself in his humility and simplicity (Mt 20:25-28). At the same time Jesus had a special eye for the charisms of others and supported them. “The dignity of God’s people is derived from the common baptism of all believers, as it turns Christians into the children of God, integrates them into the Body of Christ and makes them the temple of the Holy Spirit,” said the delegates of the network meeting in their final statement.<sup>37</sup> In doing so, they were responding to Amaladoss’s talk, but they were also referring to the Council documents on this issue.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>The fourth meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia was held from 24 to 29 November 2015 in Colombo (Sri Lanka).

<sup>32</sup>See Bablu Sarker, “National Social Catechetical Training Centre,” unpublished document, Colombo, 2015.

<sup>33</sup>See Charles Bertille, “Fondacio Asia,” unpublished document, Colombo, 2015.

<sup>34</sup>See Paul Hwang, “Woori Institute,” unpublished document, Colombo, 2015.

<sup>35</sup>See Andrew Recepcion, “Carceres Lay Institute for Mission,” unpublished document, Colombo, 2015.

<sup>36</sup>Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

<sup>37</sup>Klaus Vellguth, *Kirche neu gestalten. Pastoralinstitute in Afrika, Asien und Ozeanien*, Paderborn 2017, 253.

<sup>38</sup>See Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2.

In their endeavour to identify obstacles preventing the development of a synodal understanding of Church – i.e. Church with both lay and clergy involvement – the delegates in Colombo focused on clericalism, an attitude which often still dominates the Church in Asia and whose roots reach down deeply into the initial and further training structures of the regional churches. “There is a need to step up the enablement of the laity through improvements in our training systems. The pastoral institutes are in a good position to provide initial and further training for the laity,” the network delegates noted in their final statement.<sup>39</sup> Concluding the networking meeting, they used the Emmaus pericope as a striking biblical image to express the idea of leadership involving both the clergy and the laity:

The one powerful image that came to our mind was that of the Emmaus walk. The image of a Church that is on a pilgrim journey, with a past but always rejuvenated as she is called to respond to new challenges in the diverse and changing context of Asia. This walk is in partnership and in co-responsibility between the laity and the clergy, all called to a servant leadership in a ‘synodal model’ of the Church.<sup>40</sup>

As well as dealing with issues of lay enablement and lay leadership responsibilities in the Church the conference delegates articulated prospects of a shared vision for the pastoral network in Asia. They pointed out that the Network Pastoral Asia is primarily intended as a network for any institutions in Asia that offer courses in initial and further pastoral training for the laity, clergy and members of religious orders. Its purpose is to foster a deeper understanding of the ongoing development of pastoral theology with a view to initial and further training in Asia. One important benefit of networking was seen by the representatives of the Asian pastoral institutes in the resulting synergy effects and an exchange on pastoral stimuli, contacts, ideas and processes. They saw it as a major challenge to the Network Pastoral Asia that scope should be provided for learning from one another, that a forum should be created where ideas can be exchanged and new pastoral challenges can be jointly reflected upon, that a shared history should be written by the representatives of the different pastoral institutes and that the members of the network should encourage one another to experiment and to engage in new pastoral practices.

---

<sup>39</sup>Vellguth, *Kirche neu gestalten. Pastoralinstitute in Afrika, Asien und Ozeanien*, 254.

<sup>40</sup>Asian Pastoral Network, “Fourth Meeting of Network Pastoral in Asia, 24 to 29 November 2015: Final Statement,” unpublished document, Colombo, 2015.

### Guwahati 2016: *Laudato si'*

What are the special features of an indigenous perspective on the Encyclical *Laudato si'*? That was the question addressed by the fifth meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia,<sup>41</sup> which was held in October 2016 in Guwahati (India).<sup>42</sup> The fact that questions of (tribal) culture and an economy in the interests of the poor were discussed shows that this can be regarded as a specific contribution by Asian pastoral theology at the outset of the third millennium. At the conclusion of their fifth meeting in Guwahati in North-East India the representatives of the Asian pastoral institutes united in the Network Pastoral Asia noted:

*Laudato si'* and the tribal perspective brings home to us that our relationship with the earth belongs to the realm of faith. It is not just a socio-political issue of international dimensions that has drawn people together to address with urgency this issue. We read about the 'Gospel of Creation' in the encyclical. Quoting John Paul II, the encyclical says, "Christians in their turn 'realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith'" (*Laudato si'* 64). Having a holistic perspective on life, tribal cultures find it easier to integrate their faith and their relationship with creation. Day and night and the seasons are marked by the rhythm of the flow of the earth and its times. From this perspective of faith we must build up a spirituality in dealing with creation."<sup>43</sup>

Regarding the globalisation of ecological destruction the representatives of the Asian pastoral institutes wrote:

In many parts of the world, like in North-East India, tribal lands and natural resources are being aggressively encroached upon. For the tribal

---

<sup>41</sup> The first meeting held in Manila (Philippines) in 2012 examined the "Understanding Pastoral Ministry in Asia"; the second meeting held in Bangalore (India) in 2013 explored "Contextualisation and Inculturation"; the third meeting held in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) in 2014 studied *Evangelii Gaudium*, and the fourth meeting held in Colombo (Sri Lanka) in 2015 looked at "Laity and Leadership in the Church."

<sup>42</sup> Klaus Vellguth, "Gemeinsam begeistert unterwegs. Pastoralinstitute in Asien und Afrika vernetzen sich," *Diakonia* 47, 2 (2016) 74-86. Klaus Vellguth, "Journeying Together with a New Vision," *Word & Worship* 49, 3 (2016) 275-295; Klaus Vellguth, "Network of Solidarity. A Broader Concept than the Provision of Assistance," 177-188; Klaus Vellguth, "Asian Pastoral Network. Second Conference of the Asian Pastoral Network at the NBCLC," *Word & Worship* 47, 1 (2014) 292-297; Klaus Vellguth and Paul B. Steffens, "A Pastoral Network Emerges," 164-173; Klaus Vellguth, "The Network Pastoral and the Pastoral Institutes of Asia," 313-323; Klaus Vellguth, "Pastorales Netzwerk wächst in Asien. Pastoralinstitute suchen gemeinsam nach neuen Perspektiven," *Verbum SVD* 55, 1-2 (2014) 26-44.

<sup>43</sup> Network Pastoral in Asia, "Final Statement of the Fifth Meeting (25 to 29 October 2016 in Guwahati (India)," unpublished document, Guwahati, 2016.

people, their life depends on nature and is intertwined with it. Destroy ecology and you destroy tribal life. Their rhythm of life is based on the cycles of life in nature and on natural resources. Learning from tribal cultures, we see the need to build up a spirituality of harmony and not of aggression. In this sense it was said that women are closer to the earth than men. Men dominate creation; women are more in harmony with and closer to the earth, mother earth.<sup>44</sup>

In the perspective of the reflections in *Laudato si'* they pointed out:

In many ways we have sinned against the earth and this calls for an 'ecological conversion'. *Laudato si'* says it well, quoting Pope Benedict XVI: "'The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast'. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion" (*Laudato si'* 217). This conversion will call for a change in our life-style which consumes less because the earth is our only home which must be preserved for future generations. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "Earth has enough to satisfy everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed."<sup>45</sup>

The fifth meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia was an impressive illustration of the practical application of the triple dialogue approach to creation theology issues in a debate on pastoral theology.

### **Labuan Bajo 2017: Pope Francis' Leadership Style**

The sixth meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia was held in Labuan Bajo (Indonesia) in 2017.<sup>46</sup> It was attended by the principals of 17 pastoral institutes.

The meeting was devoted to the pontificate of Pope Francis and his style of leadership within the Church, which was subjected to a detailed analysis. A charismatic and exemplary leader, Pope Francis refers the Church back to the message of the Gospel. He does so not only by his use of striking formulations, but also – and above all – through his symbolic deeds and the vision of his pontificate. A man of prayer and deep faith, he is willing to learn from mistakes. Pope Francis is someone who can listen and talk to people. The integrity of his person and his approach make him a source of inspiration and a shining example for pastoral workers and leaders who are prepared to face up to challenges. Among the hallmarks of his leadership of the

---

<sup>44</sup>Network Pastoral in Asia, "Final Statement of the Fifth Meeting (25 to 29 October 2016 in Guwahati (India)," unpublished document, Guwahati, 2016.

<sup>45</sup>Network Pastoral in Asia, "Final Statement of the Fifth Meeting (25 to 29 October 2016 in Guwahati (India)," unpublished document, Guwahati, 2016.

<sup>46</sup>The sixth meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia was held from 8 to 13 November 2017.

Catholic Church are his simple lifestyle, close cooperation, solidarity with the poor and concern for nature.

### **Myitkyina 2018: Fostering a Joyful Spirituality among Lay Leaders**

The seventh meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia was held in Myitkyina (Myanmar) in November 2018<sup>47</sup> and attended once again by the principals of seventeen pastoral institutes. Support for the gathering was provided by Bishop Francis Daw Tang (Myitkyina Diocese), Bishop Raymond Sumlut Gam (Banmaw Diocese) and Bishop Philip Za Hawng (Lashio Diocese). The wide-ranging theme of the meeting, based on the document issued recently by Pope Francis entitled *Gaudete et Exsultate*, was “We are called to build up a joyful spirituality for Lay Leadership’s engagement in the socio-pastoral ministry of the Church.” A social and historical introduction was followed by an analysis of the present-day role of the Catholic Church in Myanmar and of the social and political challenges it faces. The theological debate which ensued was based on the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* published by Pope Francis. A discussion was then held on the extent to which the training of young people as catechists and lay leaders was an appropriate measure to extend Catholic pastoral ministry at the local level. During the meeting a vision mission statement was formulated which is designed to provide guidance for Network Pastoral Asia’s image of itself and future way of working.

Learning about the situation of local people and thus gaining insights into the specific pastoral context with all its practical challenges was once again an impressive experience in Myitkyina. Reporting on the gathering of the network in the region of Kachin in the Northern Myanmar, Tony Menezes from India wrote:

A very significant experience for the NPA members was a visit to an IDP (internally displaced persons) camp. It was heart-rending to see what happens when big foreign powers (read China) collude with local authorities to forcefully evict the original settlers from their ancestral land. An utter disregard for culture, tradition, customs, human rights, and ancestral ways has resulted in a brutish might-is-right situation forcing citizens to live as refugees in their own motherland. The IDP camps house thousands of people living in sub-human conditions with no certainty of what the next day would bring. The tragedy of all this is that the people are at no fault, and this is a result of unbridled human gluttony and cruelty. As some of them said, — Our blessing became our curse. The land of the people blessed with minerals and vegetation became an object of greed and

---

<sup>47</sup>The seventh meeting of the Network Pastoral Asia was held from 3 to 8 November 2018 in Myitkyina (Malaysia).

violence for the local politicians and the foreign Chinese industrialists. The church personnel (both official and lay) being proactively engaged in humanitarian relief in these camps, despite their meagre resources, is something truly commendable in this bleak scenario.<sup>48</sup>

The first seven network meetings were held in Manila (2012), Bangalore (2013), Ho Chi Minh City (2014), Colombo (2015), Guwahati (2016), Labuan Bajo (2017) and Myitkyina (2018) and there are plans for the continued gradual growth of the Network Pastoral Asia. The eighth meeting will take place in Malaysia in November 2019, by which time the Network Pastoral Asia hopes to have made new contacts and recruited more pastoral institutes for the network.

### **A Glimpse at Africa**

Growing interest in a pastoral network can also be observed in Africa. Inspired by the positive experience gained in Asia, the first conference of the Network Pastoral Africa was held at the Lumko Institute in Johannesburg. Like the first network meeting in Asia, the conference focused primarily on a contextual (i.e. African) concept of pastoral ministry. Defining this concept with reference to the African continent, the delegates said:

The term 'pastoral' is multifaceted. It implies being Christ-like in our day-to-day engagement in all spheres of life. It includes activities that aim at making the vision of the Kingdom of God, proclaimed by Jesus Christ, meaningful and relevant to the African context and rooted in its cultures. It promotes human dignity and the fullness of life as envisioned by Christ: 'I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.' (John 10:10) Pastoral work is founded on friendship with Jesus – a friendship which has to be shared and lived with and through others – and includes supporting the growth of self-esteem, spirituality and faith of individuals and communities, embracing all aspects of life holistically, respecting cultural diversity, engaging in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, opting for the poor and marginalised, empowering women in church and society, harnessing the dynamism and vitality of youth for Christ, working towards the common good, involving itself in humanitarian acts, promoting healing and reconciliation at all levels, researching the root causes of inequality, advocating for justice, providing education and formation. Pastoral activity reaches beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church by being and cooperating with all people. The Pastoral Cycle is an important instrument to this end.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Tony Menezes, "Network Pastoral Asia (NPA) Meet. Fostering a Joyful Spirituality among Lay Leaders," *Ishvani Kendra*, ed., *Mission Scan* # 180 (November 2018) 2.

<sup>49</sup> Network Pastoral Africa, First Meeting of Network Pastoral in Africa, 8 to 10 November 2013, "Final Statement," unpublished document, Johannesburg, 2013.



This endeavour to formulate a specifically African understanding of pastoral ministry clearly shows that theological perspectives depend on the surrounding context, particularly when we compare it with the thoughts coming from the Network Pastoral Asia a year earlier. Whereas the Asian understanding of pastoral ministry is largely dominated by the minority situation of Christians on the Asian continent and their response in the form of the triple dialogue, pastoral ministry in Africa is particularly challenged by the need to address the continent's pressing social issues.

Subsequent network meetings took place at the Kungoni Culture and Art Centre in Malawi (2014), the AMECEA Pastoral Institute in Kenya (2015), the Lumen Christi Institute in Tanzania (2017) and the Tamale Cross Cultural Institute in Ghana (2018). The principals of the African pastoral institutes will gather for the sixth network meeting at the Capuchine Research and Retreat Center (Ethiopia) in February 2019.

### **Networks change the Church**

Missio initiated the pastoral networks in Asia and Africa in order to strengthen the pastoral institutes there. At the same time it is interested in being a member of the networks itself so that it can find out more about the work of the pastoral institutes in Africa and Asia, take due note of pastoral debates, respond to ideas and suggestions and contribute valuable practical knowledge gained by the pastoral institutes in Germany. It would seem at first sight that the development of pastoral networks in Asia and Africa is strengthening the universal Church<sup>50</sup> as a learning community by promoting dialogue within South as well as between South and North. After all, the main point of the pastoral networks in Africa and Asia is to embark on a joint pastoral exchange and learning process. However, when a pastoral network is developed, such a process clearly reflects a concept of solidarity that overcomes any reduction to mere assistance (assistentialism). In fact, the process expresses the very essence of solidarity, as its players move forward in fellowship with one another and therefore manifest the universal Church as a

---

<sup>50</sup> See Hildegard Wustmans, "Verbindungen alleine reichen nicht aus. Lerngemeinschaft Weltkirche," Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth, ed., *Weltkirche in Deutschland. Miteinander den Glauben leben* (Theologie der Einen Welt 6), Freiburg, 2014, 145-158; Stephan Ackermann, "Laboratorien der Weltkirche laden ein und fordern heraus," Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth, ed., *Weltkirche in Deutschland. Miteinander den Glauben leben* (Theologie der Einen Welt 6), Freiburg, 2014, 4, 171-181.

community rooted in solidarity.<sup>51</sup> This community overcomes any distinctions between (financial) givers and takers among the regional churches and also any dichotomy between the universal Church, on the one hand, and regional churches, on the other. Church becomes a living network, a microcosm which shows what the Church in its universality can be at this level – but only if it overcomes its fixation on itself. It was this kind of forward-looking ecclesiological profile that Pope Francis wished to see when he wrote in his Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion.” And a few sentences later: “Excessive centralisation, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”<sup>52</sup> The two parallel processes of decentralisation and networking are the essential dynamic forces that will help the Church overcome its own Eurocentric fixation (which, with hindsight, should soon be perceived as Eurocentric provincialism) and give it a new global and cosmopolitan face in the age of globalisation and glocalisation. Whilst the (re)discovery of regional churches is a response to the glocalisation movement, the current networking that is taking place at so many different levels is a necessary ecclesiological process in the age of globalisation.

Promoting the formation of international Church networks is a contribution to universal Church work in Germany in which the universal Church assumes concrete shape as both a learning community and a supportive community (in the real sense of solidarity). The involvement of representatives of the German regional church in pastoral networks can help to uncover pastoral visions, models and initiatives that may well prove helpful for the regional church in Germany. In the age of globalisation this presumes the requisite trust that the Holy Spirit is not active exclusively in the universal Church or in a particular regional church, but rather in its Pentecostal, polyphonic manner in all regional churches. The pastoral networks are places where one can listen attentively to the workings of the Spirit and “advance along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.”<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> See Klaus Vellguth, “Netzwerke der Solidarität. Zur Weitung eines assistenzialistisch verkürzten Begriffsverständnisses,” Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth, ed., *Weltkirche in Deutschland. Miteinander den Glauben leben* (Theologie der Einen Welt 6), Freiburg, 2014, 224-238.

<sup>52</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 32, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

<sup>53</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 25.

Just how helpful it can be for the German regional church to network with pastoral institutes in Asia and Africa is apparent from the experience gathered in recent years in the Diocese of Hildesheim<sup>54</sup> and in the Archdiocese of Berlin.<sup>55</sup> As part of the *missio* project “Spirituality and Community Building” contacts were established with pastoral institutes in Asia in order to find inspiration for pastoral ministry in Germany and ways of developing a participatory Church. It will be very interesting to see what further pastoral processes will be triggered in the years to come by this external input. In April 2016 a diocesan office was set up to chart the way forward in pastoral ministry in the Archdiocese of Cologne. Its task is to turn universal Church input (especially from the Philippines pastoral institute *Bukal ng Tipan*) to good effect for pastoral work in the Archdiocese of Cologne and to adapt it to the pastoral realities there. It can be assumed that other German (arch)dioceses will be inspired by the burgeoning openness of the universal Church in the age of globalization (and glocalisation) as they develop their pastoral perspectives. They will put an end to inner-Church relations based on assistentialism. In future, there will no longer be churches of the North which delight in playing the role of generous regional church donors within the universal Church and in which the universal Church is deemed (erroneously) to have exclusively theological and pastoral roots. The regional churches of the North, which may (still) be financial donors, will in future increasingly come to regard themselves spiritually, pastorally and theologically as “receiving churches.”

Importance will attach here to developing and fostering ecclesiastical network structures at the universal Church level. Such structures are based on the understanding that different players within the Church contribute valuable theological, pastoral and spiritual skills and thus enrich other players within the network. Moreover, contributions can be made independently of a contributor’s financial prosperity. Whenever such networks are developed, particularly with the involvement of universal Church agencies (which may also act as organisers of the networks), this helps considerably towards the development of a lively exchange (South/South and South/North) between different players in the Church. Moreover, when universal Church networking structures are

---

<sup>54</sup> See Christian Hennecke and Gabriele Viecens, *Der Kirchenkurs. Wege zu einer Beteiligung*, Würzburg, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> See Vera Krause, “Geteilte Vision. Pastoral auf den Philippinen,” *Herder Korrespondenz* 70, 3 (2016) 41-43.

created, the word “mission” – which is by no means a one-way street – is freed of its ideological baggage and genuinely filled with life.<sup>56</sup>

Pastoral ministry is understood in different ways in each of the regional contexts. When the wide variety of voices can be heard in the universal Church, it experiences a new Pentecost in the age of globalisation/glocalisation. One major challenge for the (universal) Church is to ensure that this polyphony of voices within it can be heard loud and clear. The pastoral networks in Asia and Africa are encouraging examples illustrating how this can be achieved and a Pentecost can be celebrated anew in the universal Church.

---

<sup>56</sup>See Klaus Vellguth, “Pastoral global. Kirche als weltweite Lerngemeinschaft,” *AnzSS* 120, 10 (2011) 20-23.