

EVANGELISATION



Witnessing Christ in the World

## No. 4

Dialogue  
within the  
Church

“What were  
you arguing  
about on the  
way” Mk 9:33

In this fourth issue in the series on Evangelisation, the need for dialogue within the Church is explored.

Mission is one and undivided, having one origin and final purpose... Looking at today's world, we can distinguish three situations...

First, peoples, groups and social-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel is not known... secondly, Christian communities (where) the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care... Thirdly... where entire groups of the baptised have lost a living sense of faith... in this case what is needed is a 'new evangelisation' or 're-evangelisation'

*Redemptoris Missio, Pope John Paul II, 1990, # 31-33  
www.vatican.va/edocs*

## An inspiring meeting

In the male dominated, patriarchal villages of the Parkari Kholis, women are very much in the background. They stay silent and seem to be 'invisible,' so much so that I too found myself forgetting that they were present. These women have hopes and dreams, opinions and ideas and much to share and teach if only they were given the chance. I too have to work hard at breaking the barriers to enter into their world views. One evening, Lalji, the Catechist and I called in on a family. As I sat under the light of the magnificent night sky, I watched the young married woman prepare the meal. A Pakistani woman's role involves lighting and tending the fire, preparing and cooking the vegetables and bread, serving the meal, first to the guests, then the men of the house and lastly to herself, by which

time only a little food is left. When I asked her her name, it was her husband who answered. I tried to understand my feelings and reactions. Was it anger, guilt or something deeper? What I saw before my eyes was an act of sacredness and beauty. The Eucharist we celebrated after the meal was probably one of the most real and profound I experienced.

There are times when we're more open to be drawn deeper into the mystery and significance of what seems ordinary. The encounter with this woman affected me deeply, giving me courage to reach out and share with others. *Columban Fr Tomás King has been in Pakistan since 1992.*



## Facilitating Dialogue

In the Diocese of Broken Bay, parish communities are being invited into dialogue with **neighbouring** parishes. Also **within** communities the Parish Support Unit facilitates dialogue between groups and parishioners. Implicit is the belief that much is to be gained by **structured** dialogue which listens with an understanding heart as did Jesus to the woman at the well. In one parish, a man who had been sceptical, was so impressed with the process to identify and improve blocks to communication, he used it in his business the very next week.

In over sixteen years in parish and diocesan ministry, it has been my experience that people appreciate the opportunity to speak, to be heard, to be acknowledged and respected. I agree with Sr Mary Benet McKinney's observations that "in any gathering, to the degree that you can get all those pieces of wisdom out and allow them to interact with one another, to that degree you come closer to the wisdom the Spirit has to give the group at this time."

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“The partisan, when he is engaged in a dispute, cares nothing about the rights of the question, but is anxious only to convince his hearers of his own assertions.”

Plato (427 BC - 347 BC), Dialogues, Phaedo

“Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought in human beings by the Spirit who blows where it wills”

Evangelii Nuntiandi, Paul VI, 1975.



The Church in Australia today is diverse and changing. It is multicultural with a variety of movements, Rites and groups. Numbers regularly participating in the Eucharist in many parishes are decreasing and ageing. Many, especially the youth are disconnected from it. There are “service station Catholics (come and top up till the next time) and “supermarket Catholics” (take a bit of this and a bit of that).

Under the Holy Spirit, Vatican II set the Church on a new journey. It has meant changes, and divisions have emerged. Like the Corinthians some say, “I am for Paul, I am for Apollos”, 1 Cor1:12, so in the Church today. People and groups can take entrenched positions. Sometimes they operate in isolation and lack of awareness of each other. However, no one group or model of church has a monopoly on the fullness of God’s truth. There can be obstacles that block us from talking to each other: traditions, culture, gender, hierarchy, fear. Paul challenged Peter’s understanding of what it was to be Church. Gal 2:11,12. If the Church is going to expand its understanding of itself, then there has to be **dialogue within it**. Structures and processes are necessary to bring differing groups and people together.

Jesus’ arms outstretched on the cross are a powerful image of unity. A vertical (prayer) and a horizontal (social) dimension unite the Church. The way Jesus prays, listens, communicates and acts shows us how to evangelise both ourselves and our Age. A Church with open arms trusts the Spirit at work. In seeking wholeness and truth, as Fr John Prior svd says, “in dialogue no one group or person can assume a sense of superiority over the others. The ultimate goal is metanoia, ... a transformation of hearts.”

“I would ordain single or married women and married men if church policy changed”, Bishop William Morris, Diocese of Toowoomba

www.cathnews.com/news/701/37.php

“So, let us not be blind to our differences - but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved.”

John F. Kennedy (1917 - 1963)

Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.

J. K. Rowling, “Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

## Learn More @

Read the “Catholics Who Have Stopped Going to Mass”, research project. (Bob Dixon, Oct 2006)

www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bishops/confpres

View the dvd /video “Romero”

or read <http://salt.claretianpubs.org/romero/rindex.html> about the transformation of Archbishop Oscar Romero

### Prayer

We are here before you Holy Spirit, conscious of our innumerable sins, but united in a special way by your Holy Name.

### What Can I Do?

Ask “Who are those in my faith community whose voices are not heard? who are invisible? the most influential? the most entrenched?”

Learn skills in active listening.

Initiate a “Getting to Know You” gathering, targeting different Church groups.

Visit a church of another Catholic Rite eg. Maronite, Melkite.

## “ Chat Points: ”

- Discuss with and listen to someone who might have a different or similar opinion to Bishop Morris.
- What are some of the polarised groups in the Church that should dialogue?
- What structures and processes would enable this? Discuss the Broken Bay example.
- What can we learn from the ecumenical experience on how Catholics and Protestants overcame differences?
- What can Oscar Romero teach us about dialogue?



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