

AMECEA 2014 PLENARY ASSEMBLY 16 TO 26 JULY LILONGWE MALAWI

The 18th Plenary Assembly of AMECEA is currently taking place at Lilongwe – Malawi under the theme “New Evangelization through True Conversion and Witnessing to Christian Faith”.

The opening ceremony was held on Thursday 17th July 2014. It started with the Holy Mass presided by His Eminence John Cardinal Njue, Archbishop of Nairobi and Patron of AMECEA. This Mass took place at Civo Stadium and was attended by thousands of people who completely filled the stadium. Gracing the occasion was his Excellency Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika the President of the republic of Malawi, his vice and other political leaders. The Eucharistic celebration was well organized, inculturated and very inspiring. The Malawians once more showed their faith not only in attendance but also in expressing their hospitality and joy at hosting the plenary.

In the afternoon the opening celebration continued at the magnificent Bingu International Conference Center. The session was opened by acknowledging the AMECEA Bishops who have passed away during the past three years. Among them was Bishop Patrick Kalilombe M.Afr. The Delegates met to listen to welcoming remarks from Bishop Joseph Zuza, President of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi, Archbishop Julio Murat the Apostolic Nuncio to Malawi and Zambia, Archbishop Tarcisius Zyaye Chairman of AMECEA and Fr. Fernand Lugonzo the Secretary General of AMECEA.

Solidarity messages were also given by SECAM, CAFORD, CAMEC ACWECA among others.

The opening ended with a dinner and cultural night sponsored by the Catholic Women’s League of Malawi.

Friday 18th July 2014 was the first study day and had its sub-theme as Thanksgiving for Missionary Work and Prayer for Peace.

His Grace Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the President of the Pontifical Council for the Family gave a highly motivated presentation on the Family. He cited the importance of family as we take up the new evangelization. Family today is facing challenges such as globalization and individualization. Yet the importance of family stands as the place where we learn to be full and complete. Family needs the church and the church needs family.

Archbishop Mbilingi the President of SECAM also gave a presentation where he called upon Africa to speak one episcopal voice to the world.

A heated intervention to these two presentations followed where we heard about other threats to family such as homosexuality and same sex marriages. There was a call for the European and American Episcopal conferences to convince their political leaders from imposing such beliefs on Africa simply because it is economically poor. There was a call to develop family households in Africa. In conclusion it came out clearly that we need to have a new pastoral perspective and work on the importance of family living and family preparations. It is better to be relevant than to be alone.

The first presentation of the Plenary Input was given by Fr. Benedict Ssettuuma from Uganda on the topic “Early Missionary Work of Evangelization and the actual situation within the AMECEA region”. He gave the history of the three missionary movements into Africa and looked at how they had an influence on the continent and how AMECEA can learn from them. He concluded by stating that the AMECEA church is

evangelizing when it accepts God's mission while assessing its vision. Among other issues the church can look into today is the proper formation of laity, religious and the promotion of monastic life. The integral salvation of AMECEA people is important and must go hand in hand with the fundamental option against poverty.

The second presentation was given by Bishop Eduador Hiiboro of Tombura Yambio in South Sudan. His topic was "The environment (cultural, political, and social) within which the Church is operation in the region" Bishop Eduardo gave the present situation of the young state of South Sudan. He further went to put down the challenges in our region which include war amidst growing economies in Africa, interreligious violence, poor governance and management of stages and resources, youth unemployment, etc.

In the afternoon we had group discussions and a plenary on the morning's topics. Briefly; the groups gave means and ways of fighting tribalism; Good governance should be supported; the media is an important instrument of evangelization; poverty is at the root of many difficulties in the region. We need a quality formation at all levels, we need to empower the laity. Inculturation is a process we should promote.

The issue of Islam came out strongly: we should know and understand Islam.

Saturday 19th July was the second day of study on the theme of "Family".

The Bishop representing the USCCB presented their greetings and joyful gratitude to AMECEA. He affirmed their solidarity with Africa through the Pastoral Solidarity Fund and the formal visits which aim at furthering cooperation between the US and Africa.

The CRS president, Dr. Woo also presented greetings and best wishes from CRS. She mentioned that CRS aims at evangelizing peoples and not proselytizing, and in doing so will always collaborate with AMECEA through faith, action and results.

The third presentation of the plenary was then given by Professor Fr. Clement Majawa the Director of School of Post. Graduate Studies at CUEA. His topic was "New evangelization as an opportunity to work towards true conversion and witness to Christian Faith (emphasis on the role of family life and Small Christian Communities). Fr. Majawa noted that new evangelization has taken a center stage in AMECEA. He went on to mention that catechesis, spirituality and action are the three pillars that will lead to deeper and holistic evangelization. New evangelization is key to solving the problems of dualism or dichotomy in the faith of many in the AMECEA region. It is not about a new church but about the same old and one church. New evangelization is the consideration of new aspects of life based on the Gospel, fidelity to Christ and on Christ himself. It is new evangelization which will help us address the issues of Islam, witchcraft, Satanism, devil worship, etc. Our Small Christian Communities are a sign of our maturity and strength. They should be used to share our gift of each other in this new evangelization.

In the fourth presentation of the Plenary, Bishop Charles Kasonde of Solwezi diocese, Zambia gave a paper on the topic "Role of Seminaries and other Houses of Formation in enhancing New Evangelization". He noted that the role of seminaries and houses of formation is cardinal in the new evangelization. Seminarians are to be brought up as disciples and apostles. It is the disciple whom Jesus sends out as apostle. The seminary is the training ground of the apostle. It therefore needs good formators who can adequately teach by sharing their hearts as at Emmaus. In formation, four pillars continually interchange, and these are human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral. As the seminarian matures he evolves into a prayerful pastoral agent. The seminary is therefore a school of the Gospel. With regard to new evangelization, AMECEA needs the courage to forge new paths towards what is changing in the region.

From the group discussion of Saturday, it was recommended that AMECEA take to the synod on the family, its reaffirmation of the institution of marriage in the church as it stands today. It was recommended that each diocese come up with a family desk and effective diocesan tribunal. The plenary saw the need to use laity in the formation and catechetical preparations.

It called for ongoing formation of clergy and asked the bishops to be near their seminarians. SCC were invited to get involved in the direct formation of seminarians. The plenary saw that in fact everybody is a formator of seminarians.

Youth formation was highly recommended in the new evangelization.

With regard to the Small Christian Communities; dioceses could work out syllabi for their meetings, they could address healing ministry. Catechist formation should foresee the animation of SCCs.

Before the end of the day, the Secretary General officially greeted the Missionaries of Africa and sent the AMECEA greetings the Superior General Fr. Richard Baawobr.

Sunday 20th July 2014

This day was dedicated to solidarity visits. The various Episcopal Conferences where assigned parishes to visit for the Sunday Eucharistic Celebration: Eritrea in Masamba, Ethiopia in Area 23, Kenya in Chigoneka, Sudan/South Sudan in Kawale, Uganda in Maula, Zambia in Mtima Woyera, Other Delegates in Chimutu, Tanzania in Kanengo.

At Kanengo, the Bishops were led by Archbishop Msusa of Blantyre. They were 22 bishops in all 2 priests and 2 lay women. There were about 3000 people in the arena for the Mass. The whole Eucharistic celebration was well animated with very nicely prepared songs and dances. The Bishop of Arusha preached and towards the end of the mass gifts were shared. The parish gave the Tanzanian Conference two beautiful painting by a local artist. In turn the Conference also gave a gift to the parish.

After Mass, the Bishops were given a presentation on the Centre for Social Concern by Fr. Jos Kuppens

A lovely meal was then shared. It was nicely prepared in the parish hall.

Smiles and joy was all one could see everywhere! Asanteni sana! Taminyadilani!

Monday 21st July

The theme of the study day was "Youth".

The USA PMS representative Fr. Andrew Small OMI talked to the assembly. He mentioned that the major responsibility of his association is church helping church. As PMS USA they have a proposal to help sub-Saharan Africa develop its land in the effort to end hunger on the continent. They hope to do this by investment and training of church personnel. Through an investment fund, a social impact investment, they would get funds to finance agricultural projects for seminaries or houses of formation. In doing so training seminarians and church personnel in the area of agriculture.

Sr. Thereza Marcazzan spoke on behalf of Pauline's Publication and in her short speech she invited the Episcopal Conferences to collaborate in the translation works going on in East Africa.

The fifth presentation and plenary input was on the topic "Role of Chaplaincies and Institutions of Higher learning in enhancing New Evangelization". This topic was divide into two.

Bishop Martin Mtumbuka of Karonga Diocese – Malawi, spoke on the role of Catholic Universities and Fr. Chaima spoke on the Role of Chaplaincies.

Bishop Mtumbuka noted that new evangelization has three important components; bringing the Gospel to those who have not heard it, nurturing the faith of those who know the Gospel and thirdly rekindling the faith in those who are lapsing. This is the mission of the church.

Catholic universities are primarily called to holiness and as such to evangelize because they are a living cell of the Church. As Catholic they have to demonstrate their catholicity in daily life, in research and in their results. They should search for the truth and lead their students to this.

Among the challenge Catholic universities face are: over enrolment of none Catholic staff, enrolment of anti-Catholic students; shortage of catholic professional to run these institutions and a hostile environment of operation (e.g. government expectations).

Among our ways forward could we not use more women in these universities instead of waiting for clergy to do so?

Catholic universities will better have a greater collaboration with house of formation. They can also contribute to the creation of good political leaders in Africa. Luke 8:14 Matthew 28:14

To re-enkindle the faith, the best tool to use is our universities. We're not alone in this, He is with us!

Fr. Chaima noted that the situation on the ground shows that there is little joy in spreading the Gospel in institutions of learning. Yet Islam and Pentecostals are spreading there.

Chaplains need to be trained who will ensure growth in faith conversion and transformation.

In the open forum what came out was that:

Sometimes in trying to be modern we water down our identity as Catholic in the Institutions of Higher learning. We have to come up with ways of maintaining this identity. The network of universities should be encouraged. The issue of scholarships also came out strongly. Seminaries should be opened up to universities and we can later work out university seminaries.

Strong and well-formed chaplaincies are an important aspect we have to work towards. The training of chaplaincies is important and we should work round this. There are courses currently offered at Gaba. We should work towards having teams of chaplains in our institutes of higher learning.

The sixth presentation was done by Bishop Bernadini Francis Mfumbusa Bishop of Kondoa Tanzania. The topic was Influence/Impact/Role of new digital technology ICT and Social Media in the Evangelization work of the Church.

Bishop Mfumbusa noted that we are in an information age where every five years there is an information revolution, where the digital revolution is going on fast as we move from analog to digital world. All these affect the way we evangelize.

Today we are in a knowledge economy. Knowledge is richness. And this knowledge is accessible by the digital instruments. How do we respond to this reality of our age?

Since 1989, the church has been eroding with the birth of the www. Consequently in the new evangelization we need to master the new means of technology such as Facebook, twitter, what's up etc. We need to accept that the print media is dying out. There is a cultural shift where knowledge is today belonging to the little ones in a family, the shift where communication is now multimedia.

How can we reach the various groups of people today?

We have to acknowledge that there are digital natives and digital immigrants. There is anonymity on the internet. As such we have to post and update a lot of Catholic content on the internet.

Modern technology can be destructive. The question is how to better use this information. But joining the wagon we just have to. We are obliged to join because Google and Wiki are the modern oracle. Internet footprint is a must. Social media in the parish is a must. Print information must emphasize digital knowledge.

The digital world has brought about more democratic governance. We too as church will be forced to be more accountable

Challenges are surely there. There is the danger that this technology is also very addictive. The crook on the web are many and destructive indeed. But then we cannot avoid this way of communication which is part of our world today. There is no option to new media.

The world is moving on and communication has changed. If we are to be meaningful we have to move along. The cyber world is a jungle which can even swallow one by addiction. But we have no choice, we had to move towards the new age.

New evangelization will definitely have to embrace ICT.

Tuesday 22nd July 22, 2014 had its theme, Inculturation.

The 7th and only presentation and plenary input was given by Bishop James Maria Wainaina, Bishop of Muranga Kenya. He spoke on "Liturgy and Inculturation as channels of New Evangelization". In his well thought out paper, the Bishop cites liturgy as the work of Jesus for the people of God. He says liturgy is the locus of the encounter between God and mankind. While he promotes digitalization of liturgy he gives caution on how it will have to be done.

Bp. says we cannot evangelize a culture without inculturation. The two are so linked and they bring out a new culture once done. The local value of the Church is important but through evangelization or inculturation the universality is adequately catered for.

Following some group work the plenary came up with the following findings.

- ✓ *Areas where we have done well as AMECEA in inculturation:*
- ✓ *Use of local languages in liturgy*
- ✓ *Processions in liturgy Offertory word etc.*
- ✓ *Local songs and hymns with local instruments and melodies.*
- ✓ *Celebration of solemnities*
- ✓ *Translation of liturgical books*
- ✓ *Use of art and symbolism*

Areas we are yet to improve on as AMECEA

- ✓ *Research in healing ministry*
- ✓ *Art for catechesis, infrastructure, prayer*
- ✓ *Sacramental. Matrimony, penance, Christian initiation*
- ✓ *Funerals and commemoration of the dead*
- ✓ *Preparation and deliverance of homilies*
- ✓ *Inclusion of women in liturgy*
- ✓ *To use our local values and traditions in catechesis.*
- ✓ *Vestments*

The plenary observed the need for member conferences to regularize some of the inculturated moves in their countries. There was a proposal to rework the sign of peace to come after the penitential rite in the Mass.

In wrapping up the topic, the moderator thank the presenter for the scholarly presentation. In our quest for inculturation we must appreciate liturgy as central to the church, as it is the encounter with God. Liturgy has to be put into each culture and this is inculturation. As the apex of the Church, Mass is the center of catholicity. In the process of inculturation we need due diligence and to follow the due process while keeping the confines of the law.

In the light of new evangelization our gestures must speak to our culture. Consequently we have to find a way of taking on board the digital culture which has come to stay with us.

The study session ended with the correction of emerging issues. These were not captured here but will be provided once they have been approved by the business sessions of the Bishops.

The day ended with a beautiful dinner where the Kungoni Cultural Troupe led by Claude Boucher performed for the delegates.

Christopher Chileshe, M.Afr