

**FINAL STATEMENT of the
IYCS ASIAN CHAPLAINS AND ANIMATORS FORMATION EXCHANGE
San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines
28 May – 5 June 2002**

1. Introduction

We, YCS Chaplains and Animators of Asia, coming from Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka, have gathered in San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, for the IYCS Asian Chaplains and Animators Formation Exchange (CAFÉ). Focused on the theme, “On-line with Students – in Faith, as Animators”, we have listened to and shared each others lives, faith, and experience over the past week, and have rejoiced in coming to a deep awareness of the history, spirituality, methodology, and present state of our movement at international level, and especially in Asia. Out of this awareness, we have been able to identify the many challenges that present conditions in the world and in the Church pose for the movement, and the new challenges that these, in turn, pose for our role as chaplains and animators.

2. The Roots of YCS

We are proud to be part of the rich history of Specialised Catholic Action begun by the prophetic initiative of Fr. (later Cardinal) Joseph Cardijn in founding the Young Christian Workers (YCW) in the working class milieu in 1925. He had a deep sense of the huge gap that existed between Jesus’ promise of a Kingdom of truth, justice, love, freedom and peace (the Truth of Faith) and the suffering reality of the world of workers (the Truth of Life). He was then convinced that this gap could only be closed through building a strong movement of workers who, themselves, would work to realise it through the use of the See-Judge-Act method in small groups (the Truth of Movement). The spectacular success of this initiative inspired the formation of such groups with a similar sense of mission in the student milieu in the late 1920’s in Belgium and France, who came to be called the Young Christian Students (YCS). After that, the movement spread to all corners of the world, and made a significant contribution to the thinking that inspired the outcomes of the Second Vatican Council. YCS is currently present in 83 countries, and still seeks to transform the world of students in their schools, universities, parishes, and communities.

3. The Student World

Students today find themselves in a world that is experiencing an explosion of high-tech information technology, which gives many of them easy access to all the forms of mass communication and mass media. This has resulted in the growth of a high speed lifestyle, that demands instant gratification, and that places enormous social pressure on students to conform to current materialistic and consumerist fashions. Many therefore develop ambitions far beyond their capacities, leaving them with a sense of failure. The economic changes that have accompanied these trends have also resulted in widespread unemployment, which, along with all the other pressures, gives rise to a general sense of insecurity. In this context, most education systems are largely focused simply on preparing students for the job market, and, with the intense competition that exists for the limited jobs

available; all students are subject to continual severe pressure to succeed academically. This leaves them with very little time for other pursuits, and, least of all, for social or spiritual development. School structures, besides, make no allowance for chaplains who might accompany them.

This rapidly changing world and the accompanying insecurity make it difficult for students to concentrate, to manage their time, to be alone, or to make commitments, and they easily give up if things go wrong.

They lack direction in life, and are hence confused about what constitutes good values. There is a culture of 'living for today', which results in the pursuit of pleasure, without much moral concern, especially around issues such as sex and abortion.

Nevertheless, the students have a lot of energy to get involved and do good, especially in things that enable them to express themselves and to be creative. They are also open to learning new things from people like teachers and other adults. They are always searching for friendship, even if it is often short-lived, and generally they are very open and frank in their relationships. Many, too, are looking for faith-formation, spiritual guidance, solitude, and silence.

4. YCS Spirituality and Methodology

The YCS, as a movement of, by, and for students, is trying to bring good news into this situation in which the students find themselves. Its spirituality is chiefly manifest through the use of the See-Judge-Act (Review of Life) methodology in all group meetings and programmes. Through this methodology, the students are encouraged and assisted to look concretely, critically, and deeply at their life reality in all its dimensions (personal, social and cultural), to reflect on it and on their own motivations and attitudes towards it in the light of their Christian faith and values, and then to plan and do something themselves which will bring some positive change to their situation. In our Asian context, much of this is done with openness to, and a respect for the richness of religious traditions in our region. Through their action, followed by reflection on it, the students are enabled to discover new hope, and to experience ongoing conversion, and thus encounter God. The movement belongs to the students, and through exercising leadership themselves and learning through their mistakes, they are empowered to assume responsibility and grow as leaders who can take initiative in facing the challenges of the milieu. However, there is always a need for the faithful accompaniment of chaplains or adult animators, since the students are at a vulnerable and turbulent age, and need regular support and guidance.

5. YCS and the Church

From the time of its birth, YCS has identified itself as the Church among students, and it received the 'mandate' from the hierarchy to evangelise (bring the Good News of God's Kingdom to) the student milieu. This task remains just as urgent today, and in order to accomplish it, the recognition and support of the YCS by the hierarchy is essential. Unfortunately, though, in a number of dioceses, and in some countries, the students do not

have the full support of the local priest or bishop, which greatly weakens their capacity to fulfil the task.

Nevertheless, chaplains are frequently appointed to accompany the movement, although the vast majority of them have so many other assignments, that they have little time to effectively fulfil the role. Many lay animators, too, are frequently appointed to fulfil this task, although they are often not given much power or freedom to exercise their role fully in the Church's pyramidal structure. A more serious problem, though, is that many of those chaplains and animators appointed do not know the movement, which often results in them imposing a different identity on the groups for which they are responsible. This problem could be overcome if the students are taken into the bishops' confidence and always consulted before chaplains or animators are appointed. Another way of addressing it could be for the hierarchy to introduce the YCS spirituality and methodology as an integral part of priestly formation programmes.

6. The Role of Chaplains and Animators

Having reflected on all these realities above, we chaplains and animators believe that we, together with all other chaplains and animators, have a crucial role to play in ensuring the growth of the YCS and in the accompaniment of all its members. Therefore, in order for us to be "on-line with students – in faith, as animators", we have come to identify our role in the following way:

6.1 Foundational Needs

6.1.1 Commitment to the YCS Movement

The commitment of YCS chaplains and animators to the movement is rooted in the knowledge and understanding of God's love. Thus, they are committed to live out and spread the kingdom values (e.g. love, trust, justice, peace, freedom, honesty and forgiveness) in the student milieu.

The strong and deep commitment of the YCS Chaplains and Animators is expressed through humble service for the training and formation of students – they are committed to accompanying students: leading and guiding them to look at life concretely, critically and deeply, to discover themselves, to develop their potentials as agents of change in their milieu, and helping them to develop good Christian values.

As the chaplains and animators empower the youth and the students, they too are committed to empowering themselves. They should preferably, be fully involved in the movement and commit time and presence for ongoing information, formation and transformation to help them deepen their faith and convictions which are sustained by a strong prayer life.

The chaplains and animators commit themselves to the movement through integrating the YCS spirituality and methodology in their daily life. Their appointment is not merely a job but a service in journeying with students.

6.1.2 Need for ongoing formation

As the IYCS Asian CAFÉ 2002 end, the participants see the need for ongoing formation for chaplains and animators at all level (local, national, regional, and international). This conclusion is based on their experiences, knowledge and wisdom gathered through the process of studying world reality, Church, YCS movement and the role of chaplains and animators.

As a result of this CAFÉ experience the participants are convinced that ongoing formation should include the following content:

- a) That the YCS is a part of a big Christian family which has the responsibility of bringing the world reality closer to the kingdom of God (e.g. love, trust, justice, peace, freedom, honesty and forgiveness) through helping students to take up leadership in helping others to develop a better quality of life
- b) That the YCS is a movement of the students, for the students and by the students who are involved in decision making, planning, implementation and evaluation
- c) That the YCS promotes unity in diversity of life, religion, beliefs/faith and culture;
- d) That chaplains and animators should grow in a deeper understanding of the movement's history, spirituality, methodology and the place of the Movement in the Church.

6.2 Be on-line with students

6.2.1 Desirable Attitudes

Chaplains and Animators should accept students as persons and relate to them as persons and help them to grow into personhood by the example of their own attitudes towards them: kind and compassionate, caring, loving and understanding; approachable, welcoming, flexible, genuine, sincere and trustworthy, able to keep confidences, friendly, consistent humble to listen, to be challenged in accepting one's own limitations.

6.2.2 Desirable Knowledge:

Working for the fulfillment of God's kingdom, YCS chaplains and animators should strive to possess the following desirable knowledge:

WORLD	- realities of the youth and students (local, national, regional and international) realities of society, economy and politics (all levels) culture
CHURCH	- history, structures, culture, religions and denominations, spirituality and practices Holy Scripture, teachings, sacraments

YCS	- History (local, national, regional, international) spirituality and methodology (see-judge-act) coordination (all levels)
CHAPLAINS/ANIMATORS	- clear and deep knowledge of the movement - awareness of the world and church realities - understanding of the definition and functions of the role as chaplains and animators

6.2.3 Desirable Skills

For Chaplains and Animators to get on line with students certain basic animator skills are necessary:

- a. Concern and Understanding: be open to approaching and understanding students by being sensitive to their home backgrounds; by being comfortable to listen to their topics of interest especially issues related to sex, friendship and intimacy; by being open to what seems 'strange' in teenage culture; by being attentive to teenage behavioral patterns.
- b. Creativity: use attractive and interesting ways of getting to speak and listen, to share and discuss; and be open to new ways of learning rather than just giving lectures;
- c. Community-building: find different ways of getting students to interact in the process of doing little tasks and exercises; and get them not only to speak about what they have done but also how and why they did their work;
- d. Communication: not only to share ideas and information but also to be aware of, and express their feelings in a comfortable way without blaming anyone;
- e. Conflict-resolution: to listen attentively to each other and become aware of the different ways in which we look at situations, express ourselves and do our work and how these may be the cause of many conflicts;
- f. Coordination: arrange to have YCS groups at different levels to meet and share their experiences and occasionally work together; have regular meetings for chaplains and animators of different places to be in touch with each other;

6.3 In faith

6.3.1 Being rooted in faith as Chaplains and Animators

As Chaplains and Animators we are asked to put ourselves on the line - we have to be role models to our students by being 'people of faith'. Jesus reminds us to be salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5, 13-16). We have to be people of spiritual depth if we are to exert influence on the young people in our charge. Above all, we have to be models of YCS Spirituality in the way we live our Kingdom values (e.g. love, trust, justice, peace, freedom, honesty and forgiveness) and in the way we live in community with other people.

Further, we have to keep on deepening our faith and strengthening our spiritual life by constant prayer and reflection, silence and solitude, and thus be in close union with God. Faith is an ongoing process and we have to keep deepening our relationship with God.

Also, as Chaplains and Animators, we encounter difficulties and frustrations. Without being clear and strong in our faith, it would be quite easy to give up hope, to get stuck in the realities of the situation, to give up or even isolate ourselves from our team members. It is

only in faith, that we can keep on using the Review of Life to go beyond the outer world and the personal world to find strength in the inner spiritual world.

6.3.2 Develop the Spiritual life of our students

- We have to allow students to share their life experiences regularly
- Instead of touching on too many topics during one session, we have to give them time to deepen their understanding of their experiences
- They also have to listen attentively to other people's sharing of experiences
- It is good for them to experience moments of silence and solitude
- Students should also be given the opportunity to express their inner world and come to see more clearly the motivation for their actions and activities
- Let them go deeper into their hearts and listen to God speaking to them; also, let them learn to speak directly to God on their own
- Gradually, help students discern and make their own decisions based on Christian principles and values
- Help them realize that in their 'everyday life and actions' they can be evangelizers of Kingdom of God.

6.4 As animators

6.4.1 Helping students 'become alive'

Chaplains and Animators are encouraged to help students 'become alive' by helping them be aware of their Godly gifts and the chance to exercise these gifts. This can be done through regular well-planned, meaningful and participative exercises and activities which help students to:

- to observe, using all their senses, what is going on around them
- to use their thinking ability in different ways: analytically, critically, logically, and creatively.
- to learn to be aware of their feelings, to reflect on what is happening within them, to express their feelings in a suitable way without blaming or hurting others;
- to exercise their imagination to express creativity, especially in solving problems
- to discover hidden talents
- to share concrete, life experiences (tell their stories)
- to discover the 'wisdom', the values, that help us to improve the quality of life together
- to discover and express spiritual experiences.

6.4.2 Using YCS Methodology to help students take responsibility for their decisions and actions

- make a program of meetings/sessions to help the students to improve in leadership, take up responsibility and face challenges in their student milieu
- help students to consciously go through the process of 'seeing' (the external situation, the people involved and in what way they are involved and affected by the external situation, the effect on the 'seer') into their experiences concretely, critically and deeply

and understand to the best of their ability why such experiences occur.....the truth of life/reality

- encourage the students to 'reflect/judge' by helping them to look more deeply into themselves and into Scripture or other wisdom books through silence, sharing, and prayer.....the truth of faith;
- finally, the students are helped to discern the 'action' ...individually or collectively... that will improve the quality of life, and help the 'truth of life' come closer to the 'truth of faith'.
- Integrate the Spirituality and Methodology of the YCS in all programmes and actions
- The Movement should set targets and aims for each individual/cell annually and that some form of celebration be held to mark the success of these programmes
- Chaplains and Animators should have sound knowledge about the Method and be secure in applying this Review of Life
- In general, the Chaplains and Animators should help the students to discover their own answers rather than give answers directly
- Chaplains and Animators should not make the students 'bound' to follow them but rather accompany the students, raise questions, and slowly help them to reach their own decisions, be aware of the consequences and face them. There are occasions when circumstances may force the Chaplain/Animator to 'intervene directly' and promote further discussion/new decisions.

• *This refers to all the movements affiliated to, or collaborating with the International YCS, which includes those with different names to YCS, namely Student Catholic Action (SCA), Philippines, and Catholic Youth Association (CYA), South Korea.*