



ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Asian Youth Day opens with young people from 22 nations, to give Asia a brighter future. Interview with Bishop Joel Baylon, President of the Bishops' Commission for Youth and organizer of AYD

Manila (Agenzia Fides) – The youth are “agents of true change and transformation before their respective church communities, families and friends...” hope for the Church's evangelization and for the future of Asia. With Asian Youth Day (AYD), it is hoped that their faith will be strengthened, they will grow in their enthusiasm, and they will become protagonists in the mission. This is what Agenzia Fides learned from Bishop Joel Baylon, President of the Filipino Bishops' Conference Youth Commission, in describing the objectives of Asian Youth Day, which begins today, November 20, in its diocesan phase and on November 23 on an international level, with an opening ceremony in the Diocese of Imus, south of Manila.

Bishop Baylon is head of the organization committee for the event that has been called the “WYD of Asia” and will be attended by over 900 Filipino youth and 600 others from 22 Asian nations. The main theme of the event is: “Young Asians, Come Together, Share the Word, Live the Eucharist!” It is a call that will also reach youth in countries in which the Church lives a more difficult situation, such as in China, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

What is the aim of Asian Youth Day?

Firstly, it is hoped that through this event the young delegates will be able to RENEW their faith and deepen their love and devotion for the Word of God and the Eucharist. Secondly, it is also hoped that the delegates will find God in the realities, problems and challenges that they face today. Thirdly, we hope and pray that this will lead to real transformation of their lives, and that they will become agents of true change and transformation before their respective church communities, families and friends.

How many are expected to attend?

About 600 asian delegates and close to 900 official Filipino delegates are expected to participate, plus about 1300 Filipino volunteers and facilitators - hence a total of about 2800 will be present during the celebration of Asian Youth Day. There are 22 Asian countries represented: Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Macao, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, East Timor, Vietnam, and Philippines.

What are the highlights from the program of events?

The main celebration of Asian Youth Day will begin on the 23rd with an opening Mass and welcome ceremonies at the Cathedral of the Diocese of Imus, in the presence of various bishops. The final day of AYD, Nov 27, will end with a concelebrated Mass presided by Bishop Rolando Tirona of Infanta (Philippines), chairman of the Office of the Laity and Family of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). The main speakers during the plenary sessions of the AYD are: Bishop Cornelius Sim of Brunei - (Nov 24) "Young Asians, Come Together, Celebrate the Word"; Archbishop Dominic Jala of Shillong, India - (Nov 25) "Young Asians, Love and Live the Eucharist"; Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong - (Nov 26) "In the Roads of the Word and the Eucharist, Young Asians, Be Heroes in Mission."

What are the main challenges for youth in Asia?

Trying to strengthen their faith and give witness to it before a world that is increasingly becoming materialistic, self-centered and indifferent to the things of the spirit, trying to sustain their respective faith-communities (home, parish or school) where they will find support and be a source of vocations among the youth, trying to create a more functional networking of churches in Asia that will be a venue for sharing experiences/success stories and working together on a pastoral level.

Can young people become agents of change in church/society?

The church in Asia today is facing a very big challenge. While there is a growing number of young people who are giving their time, talents and some even their treasure to the mission of the Church in Asia, this same Church is being pushed to the sidelines of people's lives. And there are a variety of factors that influence this - political, economic, religious, even cultural.

These realities also challenge us to be open to dialogue with members of other faiths, especially the young among them. Inter-religious dialogue helps us to open doors to discovering common grounds towards sharing of faith experiences, peace-making, advocacy for the environment and other modern-day concerns. AYD is very much aware of this role of the Church, hence through this big event (AYD) we sincerely hope to make this clear to the young. And since we are realistically aware that there is more to this than merely gathering together for 4-5 days, we hope that after this event, the different churches and parishes and youth groups that will send their delegates to this event, will work more closely with them (the young) in order to translate what will transpire here at the AYD into more concrete, realistic and contextualized manners of forming, accompanying and guiding the young towards becoming true agents of change in the name of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 20/11/2009)