

Formation of Hong Kong Catholic Youth on Faith and Social Concern

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Most people will agree it is not an easy task to carry out Catholic faith formation in 21st Century Hong Kong. The formation of youth may be even more difficult.

For so many years, however, Catholic Social Teaching encourages the Catholics to participate in social action, to care about social needs. Young Catholics should live out their faith in daily life and implement their Christian mission by social participation.

Youth Faith Formation is an Uphill Battle

In most parishes in Hong Kong, formation mainly covers liturgy, catechism class and sodality activities. Regarding social concerns, even though some parishes have their Social Concerns Group, they focus their action on social services only. Seldom do parishes run any formation to enhance lay Catholics' social analysis and reflection.

Some diocesan commissions have focused on this aspect. For example, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission and Catholic Commission For Labour Affairs have been playing an important role in promoting social concern among parishioners, but the participants are not that many. The youth are even less interested. The Diocesan Youth Commission touched on social concerns in some formation topics which we will elaborate on later.

FCS Leads the Students to go into their Community

Regarding formation about social participation, the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students (FCS) is an important

organization we cannot neglect. FCS was established 54 years ago. Nowadays it is the platform for Catholic students from 13 tertiary institutions. It encourages Catholic students to join together to take up their special mission as Catholic intellectuals. FCS also pushes them to be concerned about the most underprivileged groups in society. The main object of FCS is to implement the Second Vatican Council spirit of Church Teaching: to localize the church, and to implant the faith spirit into actual life. FCS also helps students to understand the life at the lowest level of society and help students to join the campaign for basic human rights so that people can create a more just and more peaceful society.

Every year, the FCS executive committee sets a social concerns target, for example, concern for the street sleepers, for refugees, for children living in trans-generational poverty. Through different kinds of activities, FCS lets students achieve an in-depth investigation into related social issues. FCS also encourages students to walk with the underprivileged and to speak out for the underprivileged in their struggle for justice.

Unfortunately, however, the number of young people joining the Catholic Society (Katso) has been decreasing. Their interest in participation in social issues is getting weaker and weaker. For the last few years quite a number of Catholic Societies have failed to form an executive committee, so the energy for social involvement is dwindling. Luckily, every year at the “June 4 Prayer meeting”, “June 4 Candlelight Vigil” as well as the “July 1” march, Catholic students still organize formation and reflection courses to assist the younger generation to get involved in social issues. Besides, every year through participating in the “Real Life Experience” program and joining the East Asian Youth Meeting, students can achieve a more in-depth understanding of specific social topics.

The Involvement of the Diocesan Youth Commission

The Diocesan Youth Commission (DYC) plays a definite role in the formation of faith. As we mentioned in our recent work plans, the target group of DYC is young people between the ages of 12 and 35. It includes secondary school students, tertiary students and young employees.

The DYC believes that schools, parishes and major activities are the three main domains for our pastoral services. School pastoral work focuses on upbringing and educating, that is evangelization. Parish pastoral work focuses on ministry and formation, that is new evangelization. Major activities are trans-domain work which links up schools and parishes, the two important platforms for youth pastoral work. We are working to evangelize and at the same time to re-evangelize. In the process, leadership training is also one of our main concerns.

For the last two years, the DYC decided to implement the “Circles of Commitment” which enhance a sense of communal belonging and at the same time high-light the uniqueness of youth. It has become the framework of youth pastoral work in Hong Kong.

The “Circles of Commitment” value the young people’s different kinds of needs. It points out that we cannot take care of all young people with one single item. This model envisions that among the youth there are different levels of commitment. During their development, the youth have different needs. This is true especially when they are in growing in different ministries.

The “Circles of Commitment” model categorizes the youth into five main groups that are the five target groups of youth pastoral training programs. For the parishes these five groups are: cultural Catholics (who come to Mass on special occasions like Christmas or Easter), congregation members (Sunday Catholics), community members (members of sodalities), devoted members (those who assist in sodalities) and core members (organizers of sodalities). For devoted members, the main pastoral element is social action. Through this they expand and establish a bigger community.

Coordinators of youth pastoral work should observe the needs of the youth. They should tailor special items according to the needs. They should give the youth suitable formation with gradual goals. This can help the young people to discern and develop their special graces in Christ, help them follow Jesus, step by step, learn to put Jesus at the centre of their lives and achieve the final aim of loving God and loving people.

Pope Francis’ Enlightenment on Social Concern

Generally speaking, the Church in Hong Kong is not particularly active in forming new Catholics to take part in social transformation. The Hong Kong Diocese, however, never lacks some prophetic ministers and the faithful. Their witness always prods us so that we will not stay put. Moreover, the words and actions of our Holy Father Francis and the recent “Umbrella Movement” also give us new momentum.

It is believed that the testimony of Pope Francis not only affects the lay Catholics’ view of Church social action, it also influences the mentality of people outside the Church. Pope Francis practices what he speaks. He is concerned with people as well as society. His speech is powerful and deeply touching for people’s hearts. For example on September 16, 2013, he mentioned during a daily Mass that lay Catholics should not be indifferent to political issues, but voice their suggestions and also pray for governing bodies, so that they can serve the community with love and humility.

In November 2013 Pope Francis promulgated his Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, the Joy of The Gospel. In Chapter IV, Section 2, “The Inclusion of the poor in Society” he said, “Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members.” (EG 186)

Pope Francis reminded us, “Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society.” (EG 187)

Although not every Christian has read the Holy Father’s words, there are some who are deeply touched and are working hard to spread the message. Actually the Pope is just following the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Church. He uses his words and his actions to elaborate for us the Church’s social role and responsibility. Indeed, quite a number of young people are attracted by his words and his work which reinforce the importance of social concern.

Conclusion

Lately the “Umbrella Movement” gave the whole city a great jolt. It woke up more and more Hong Kong people, especially the young people, to care about society. We saw that a great number of youth who were not concerned about social issues in the past have become active now. It created a certain space for the Justice and Peace Commission, DYC, FCS and a number of parishes to organize formation activities for the youth, helping them to analyze and reflect on this campaign and other social problems from the angle of faith.

Looking into the future, this campaign will likely last for a very long period. We have to grasp the signs of the times and equip the new generation of Catholics so that they will joyfully and actively be concerned about society. We should help them to learn the teaching of the Gospel and the Church’s Social Teaching so that they can live out their faith in daily life and fulfil our Christian mission to society.