



Newsletter – November 2012

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## 50 years of the CFSM in Singapore

### How it all started, - early years to 1970.

The launching of the Christian Family and Social Movement (CFSM) in Singapore and Malaysia was a local response to the call of the universal Church. Lay Apostolate Movements have developed over the past thirty years with a specific purpose: to witness the values of the Gospel in our modern society. To this end, personal conversion could not be dissociated from a transformation of the whole man in his social context.

The experience of the Young Christian Workers Movement was particularly inspiring. Some basic principles were emphasized:

- The spreading of the Christian message is most efficiently carried out from “the like to the like” – young apostles to young people, workers to workers.
- Lay apostles are more experienced than priests in the affairs of the world: professional problems, Trade Union activities, education of children, etc. The temporal order is the proper field in which lay people are called to be fully responsible.
- The particular mission of the Lay apostles is integrated to the overall mission of the Church: liberate man from the inner slavery of sin and from the enslaving external conditions of life; open to man a new life in relation to the transcending God.
- Basic formation in leadership is best achieved through the grassroots method “See, Judge, Act”.
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Lay apostolate movements working along these lines were launched in Singapore in the late 50s.

- YCW in English and Chinese for the young workers
- YCS in English and Chinese for the students.

A similar movement had to be developed for the adults. To this end, Archbishop Michael Olcomendy invited an international worker, Rene Delecluse, to come to Singapore for at least five years to start and help build an adult apostolate.

Rene had twenty years of experience as an extension worker of the YCW Movement. He came to Singapore in 1962 and lodged with the university students at the Kingsmead Hall. He met Lay leaders at the Catholic Centre in Bras Basah Road and visited priests in the various parishes. With great faith and perseverance, he worked to the growth of an adult apostolate

through group reflection, publications and seminars. Year after year, the CFSM steadily developed, out of the local context.

## **1962**

Queenstown:

Nine ten-storey blocks of flats were built in Tanglin Halt. Fr. J. Charbonnier, assistant parish priest in St. Bernadette Church visited sixty Catholic families who had just moved in. Five of six couples started holding meetings in October in the flats of Mr James Tan, Steven Tan, and other friends.

Catholic Centre

A few professional people met with Rene Delecluse: Mr Rudy Mosbergen, Mr Lee Beng Tjie, Mr Philip Motha, Miss Margaret Wong, Fr. Charbonnier, Fr. G. Keane. They studied the Encyclical “Mater et Magistra - Mother and Teacher” of Pope John XXIII on social progress and its new challenges.

Some young Christian Workers involved in T.U. activities also met with Rene Delecluse: Willie Lim, Oscar Oliveiro, Aloysius Joachim, Freddy Wong.

## **1963**

The Queenstown family groups developed with Henry Ang, John Sam, James Seng. Fr. Odo, assistant to the new parish of Blessed Sacrament, gave them strong support.

A first booklet was compiled titled, “(helpful) Hints on (starting) Family Groups”.

The T.U. leaders group organized a rally in SJI. But it was soon felt that a Christian Workers Movement would raise too many questions in the political context of Singapore. It had to be combined with the Family apostolate, and retain its character of Christian formation.

Rene wished to develop an adult apostolate, calling for the participation of families, workers, teachers and professionals. He was inspired by the model of the Christian Family and Social Apostolate in Britain. Fr Charbonnier was using some material from the American Christian Family Movement. He also wanted to include people of Chinese expression (editor...French way of saying Singaporeans who are more comfortable using the Chinese language). Both of them agreed on a movement using the same method and purpose, but bringing together a variety of groups.

A bi-lingual group was formed in the popular housing estate of Bukit Hoe Swee, under the direction of Mr & Mrs Aloysius Teo.

Pope John’s new encyclical “Peace on Earth” was published by the CFSM as an illustrated magazine in the four (official) languages of Singapore. An outline for group discussion based on this charter of human rights was also compiled by the leaders.

Singapore was at that time merged with Malaysia. A first adult group was formed in the new town of Petaling Jaya, by Fr Decroocq.

## **1964**

Queenstown developed as the first satellite town of Singapore. A booklet of social enquiries was compiled under the title: "To our new neighbors, a Christian welcome". It was used by family groups in Queenstown, Bukit Ho Swee, Red Hill Close, Jalan Rumah Tinggi. A campaign of welcome was carried out 1 June. Members also participated in the Government campaigns for cleanliness and for planting trees. Chinese speaking groups were better organized in Queenstown with Peter lee, Mr Huang JinFu, and in the Church of St. Bernadette with R. Cheah. Joseph Leong, and Mrs Clara Lee. A program in English and Chinese was prepared on the theme: "Celebration in Singapore". The meaning of the main festivals of the year in Singapore was studied with the purpose to develop a more positive understanding among Christians, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims.

Miss Catherine Ng, vice president of the Legion of Mary was employed by the CFSM as a full-timer with an office in the Catholic centre. She welcomed many people and moved about in the parishes.

A teachers group was formed with Miss Betty Tan and her friends. A family group composed of young couples from various areas of Singapore joined the ranks of the CFSM on the invitation of Fr James Tan, their spiritual advisor. This Group is still active in the parish of the Holy Spirit.

A coordinating committee was formed with leaders from the various types of groups. The booklet "New City" written by Fr, Charbonnier with the help of Mr Tan Tien Boon, an Estates Manager, summed up the experience of the Family apostolate in the new Housing Estates of Singapore and opened some horizons for the future.

## **1965**

The Second Vatican Council was of great encouragement to the laity. The "decree on the Lay Apostolate" was introduced to the Groups in English and Chinese. The Easter Seminar on "Christian Responsibility", held in Kuala Lumpur gathered 430 participants from the YCS YCW and CFSM. Some Joyful Vanguard advisors also participated.

The talk given by H.L. Msgr. Vendargon directed the Lay leaders to the new orientations of the Constitution on the Church. It was printed by the CFSM and widely circulated. Lay leaders of the CFSM in Singapore gave Sunday homilies in various churches in order to introduce to the faithful the teachings of Vatican 2.

## **1966**

An illustrated magazine on Vatican 2 was composed by Fr, Charbonnier and Fr Paul Tong and published by the CFSM.

The Constitution on "The Church in the Modern World" offered wonderful perspectives to the Lay apostolate. An enquiry program for group discussions introduced its contents to the CFSM members under the title "At the Service of Man".

In the same spirit, an important seminar was organized in Singapore around the theme “At the service of the Nation”. A talk was given by MR E. Barker Minister of Law. Over a hundred and fifty personalities took part.

Mean while new groups were developing in the middle class housing Estates such as Siglap, with Mr & Mrs Holmberg, Jo Hu, Willie Lim.

### **1967**

CFSM leaders, Rudy Mosbergen and Catherine Ng led the Singapore delegation to the world Council of the Laity in Rome. By that time Singapore CFSM was affiliated to both the International Movement of Christian Workers, and to the International Christian Family Movement.

### **1968 – 1970**

Pope Paul VI Letter on the “Development of Peoples” was a new source of inspiration. The CFSM Inquiry Program, “Development” was compiled in 1968 for Singapore and Malaysia. New Chinese speaking groups were formed, thanks to the support of dedicated lay leaders such as Paul Tan (Serangoon Garden), Joseph Wong – a school principal (Macpherson) and Miss Bernadette Yong in the City area. The Chinese groups organized successful Choirs Competitions. Under the dynamic direction of Fr, Paul Pang O.F.M., they became a source of inspiration to the apostolate in Chinese.

Family Groups developed in Siglap with the strong support of Fr Nicholas Chia.

Fr Gregory Yong, (who was to become Bishop of Penang, and later Archbishop of Singapore) offered his services as spiritual director to a group in Macpherson estate. Fr Fossion, who had the experience of the Family Apostolate in Taiwan, multiplied neighborhood groups in the new parish of the Holy Spirit. Fr J.J. Troquier. Chaplain of the YCS became advisor to Teachers and Workers Groups.

In July 1968, the Archbishop formed a Lay Commission with a mission to inquire into the fields open to the activity of the laity, to consider the problems of formation and to present recommendations for the constitution of a Diocesan Council of the Apostolate of the laity. Mr Rudy Mosbergen was elected president and Miss Catherine Ng Secretary. Fr J. Charbonnier (CFSM) and Fr Joseph Ho (YCW) were appointed joint Chaplains by the Archbishop. The report was produced a year later.

**This was written, (some time in 1980's) – by Fr J. Charbonnier, MEP – one of those instrumental in nurturing the CFSM in its early days.**