Bible in the Life of the Church

Report from Province of Hong Kong

What we have done
Right from July 2011, after a two days meeting of two representatives of Province of Hong Kong SKH with the representative from ACC, we have formed a working group of members from the three dioceses and missionary area. The first stage of the implementation of the study is the translation of the provided materials for the two case studies and also the explanatory materials into Chinese. In order to facilitate the briefing of the observers of the bible study groups of two case studies that would be conducted in the parishes, we have organized two workshops collaboratively with Hong Kong SKH Ming Hua Theological College Lay Theological Studies Department. Beforehand, the theological students of Ming Hua Theological College were trained first to be the observers of the bible study groups of the workshops. During the two workshops conducted in February 2012, two representatives from each parish in the three dioceses in Hong Kong were invited. There were about 80 people and lay leaders from different parishes and mission churches turned up. During the workshops, the task and objective of the programme of “Bible in the Church of Life” of finding how Anglicans across the world engage with the Bible were introduced. Following that, test runs of the two case studies were tried during the workshops by dividing the participants into eight small groups. The materials were then handed to the participants and they should arrange the bible study groups at their own parishes. They were urged to accomplish their task by the observation of how people interpret the bible during the discussion and also to fill up the observer forms. In addition to the practical issues of the case studies, we have also shared the recent methods of studying the bible and highlighted the importance of the “The Brueggemann Exercise” so that the church members may aware that we have been nurtured in a particular style of interpretation of the bible. By the end of March, there were total 27 observers reports returned from 10 parishes. Among the reports received, one of them is discarded from the analysis as it did not choose a passage from the provided list.

Reports of the Case Study with Special Interest
Some general points are drawn from the reports.
1) The role of group leader
   In most cases, the bible study group leader are expected or forced to take a role as a biblical interpreter. If the group leader does not take this role, the lay people in the group would expect the priest there to take the role. The phenomenon shows that the majority of lay people in the Province of Hong Kong expect the leader of the church provides guidance for them for reading the meaning out from the bible for them to follow.

2) Historical and cultural background of the text
   Most of the lay people are assuming that they are taking the historical and cultural background of the text into consideration when interpreting the scripture. Though in some reports showing that when the group leader does not lead the participants in this direction, some participants in the group would bring it up. We notice that this phenomenon does not have any relation to the age or academic background of the participants.

3) The connection with context
   The connection of the study with contextual feature is highly dependent on which passage chosen since most people consider the historical and cultural background of the text as the basic key to unlock the message from the text.

4) The conclusion from each group
   Most of the groups do not move from the study to action as the lay people have the tendency to stay at self-reflection stage. The reports show that over 95% participants are willing to listen to the other with different opinions. Dialogue and discussion are shown and some groups can come up with a common conclusion. Generally the participants respect each other and so polite that they do not criticize those with different opinions.

There is a certain report highlighting the people involved in the discussion of the bible studies are rather rational. In a way, they tried to understand the passages of Galatians 3:23-29 and 1 Timothy 2:1-15 in terms of the historical and cultural understanding of the genders. Yet, there is no clear indication of the
understanding of the social status of females in the 1st century Greco-Roman world. They tend to jump into the contemporary way of claiming the equality of male and female from the point of view of recent theological understanding of the biblical passages. At the same time, they try to compare the passages of 1 Timothy with that of Genesis 3 so that they may conclude that in the Bible even in the period of the Old Testament, male and female are created to be equal. To a certain extent, in our knowledge of some recent academic methods of biblical interpretation, this jump is a bit too big and there should be a huge gap to be filled up. Moreover, as most the members are in their 30’s, they are working people and they tend to apply the equality of the genders into working places. It seems that they are still facing some kind of injustice derived from the unjust gender structure within our modern society of Hong Kong.

**General Reflection**

Despite the limitation of time and manpower, it is a good chance for whole province of Anglican Church in Hong Kong to have a reflection on how we, as a Christian, interpret and use the Bible. It is also a valuable opportunity for the church members and the lay-leaders to grasp the ideas of the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion. Through the engagement with the whole project, we have broadened our horizons and opened our eyes with a much wider periscope. This may shift the focus of our primary concern of our faith from sole interest of oneself to the global interest of the creation and the social injustice. Throughout the project, we have discovered that the mindsets of the church members in Hong Kong Anglican Church are rather authoritative oriented. This observation may reflect the traditional Chinese culture is still predominant within the society. Traditional Chinese usually appeal to the authority and we like to have some straightforward guidance and answers. Following this underlying norms of thinking, our ways of interpretation are highly influenced by some great Christian leaders and thinkers in Hong Kong or mainland China in the past. The evangelistic and fundamentalistic ways of biblical studies are often adopted. Most of the church members read the bible literally and they pick some commonly used theological slogans and words directly from the bible and take them as the correct or standard authoritative message and meaning of that biblical passage. This concluding reflection is clearly discerned from the general survey of the reports of different study groups within the parishes. In most cases they tried to have some ideas of the historical and cultural background of the biblical passages. Yet, their knowledge of the context within the passage is written is limited and restricted to some rather reserved and traditional way of understanding of the bible. Further, lay people like to jump from one passage to another based on some superficial links between these passages. In some cases, they would just pick up passages with their own contemporary understanding and read into the bible so that they may justify their contemporary understanding of a certain issue within our life. In brief, Brueggemann’s reminder: “we should aware that we have been nurtured in a particular style of interpretation of the bible” is a very good direction of discerning how the church engaged in the reading of the Bible. Most of us are greatly influenced by our contexts and that is why the global community has such a vast diversity in the understanding of the biblical messages.
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Bible in the Life of the Church

The Bible in the Life of the Church
South East Asia Region – Philippines Group
St. Andrew’s Theological Seminary
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Office of the Coordinator-Philippines

Philippines Group - - Project Report

Part 1=Planning and Preparation

I.Planning for the Bible Project Seminar-Philippines Group

On January 11, 2011, Ms. Clare Amos, the Director of the Theological Education Desk of the Anglican Communion Office in London, England, UK, emailed The Very Rev. Doctor Patrick Tanhuanco, the President and Dean of St. Andrew’s Theological Seminary, the premier and only Anglican-Episcopal seminary in the Anglican Province of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP). Dr. Tanhuanco is also a member of the Steering Group of the Theological Education in the Anglican Communion 2 (TEAC 2) based in London, England, UK. Ms. Amos mentioned that for the Bible Project worldwide, South East Asia Region, the Philippines is being considered to be a User Group in the Project, and would like Dr. Tanhuanco to coordinate the Philippines Group. The plan is that the Project Coordinator, Mr. Stephen Lyon, based in London, England, UK, will come to the Philippines to meet with key persons, and conduct a Seminar on the Project. Dr. Tanhuanco is to choose the key persons who will be participants of the Seminar, conduct the User Group Bible Study after the Seminar, and report the results to Dr. Tanhuanco, who will collate the results, and report back to Mr. Lyon for the South East Asia Region-Philippines Group.

Dr. Tanhuanco aged to serve the Lord as the Coordinator for the Philippines Group. In preparation, he downloaded all the 6 documents on this Project, and the news items, all from the Anglican Communion website, as mentioned by Ms. Amos. He also coordinated with Mr. Lyon on the Project, through emails, and a face-to-face meeting on May 12-18, 2011, in Canterbury, England, where he attended (as the President of St. Andrew’s Theological Seminary) the Principals’ Consultation organized by TEAC 2, where Mr. Lyon spoke on the Bible Project to the Principals.

II.Preparation for the Seminar:

A.Participants- -Requirements and details given in an official letter

Dr. Tanhuanco talked with several ordained and lay leaders about this project, and their commitment required of them. On June 20, 2011, he wrote them an official letter of invitation to be part of this Project, the text thereof as follows:

You are invited to a special seminar which is part of a project of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

• Name of Project: “The Bible in the Life of the Church” Project, simply called “Bible Project.”
• Dates of Seminar=July 21, 2011 Thursday, to July 22, 2011 Friday.
• Time=July 21 Thursday, & 22 Friday=10 a.m. start. 12 noon Lunch. 1:30 p.m. continuation, to 3:30 p.m. Break. 3:45 p.m. Continuation up to 6:00 p.m. Dinner follows.
• Place=Our venue is the First Floor Conference Room at the National Office of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines, 275 E. Rodriguez Avenue, Quezon City. ((At the same compound as the St. Andrew’s Theological Seminary.))
• Resource Person: Mr. Stephen Lyon, Coordinator, “Bible in the Life of the Church,” Anglican Communion Office, London, England. Mr. Lyon will fly in to Manila for this Seminar, and will be the main speaker and seminar leader.
• Participants=only 6 persons specially chosen for this special seminar. Important criteria=have led or continuously leading a Bible Study group. Requirements: [1]must be able and willing to attend all sessions of this seminar. [2]must be willing to conduct one specific Bible Study (related to the seminar) with your own group, and report your observations.
• Seminar Fee, which includes lunch and dinner: All fees will be shouldered by the Anglican
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• Since all participants live in Metro Manila, they stay in their homes, and come to the seminar site during the day.

Thank you very much for your partnership in the LORD JESUS CHRIST’s ministry!

Sincerely,

The Very Rev. Doctor PATRICK TANHUANCO
President and Dean, St. Andrew’s Theological Seminary
Philippines=Bible Project “User Group” Coordinator

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Participants of the Bible Project Seminar are the following:

A. Resource Person, and Coordinator for the Philippines
   1. Mr. Stephen Lyon, Resource Person, Anglican Communion Bible Project- International
   2. The Very Rev. Doctor Patrick Tanhuanco, Coordinator for the Bible Project “User Group” Philippines

B. Participants=Bible Project “User Group” Philippines
   1. SATS Lecturer Mrs. May Y. Tanhuanco
   2. SATS Lecturer Mrs. Muriel Longid
   3. ECP Evangelism & C.E. Officer The Rev. David Tabo-oy
   4. EDCP Clergy The Rev. Echanes Cadiogan
   5. EDCP Candidate for Holy Orders Mr. Melvin Bautista

C. Budget planned, and approved by Mr. Lyon for the entire Seminar amounted to U.S. $ 823.00. or Philippine Pesos 34, 582.46. After the Seminar, a detailed report with attached copies of the receipts was sent to Mr. Lyon for the record.

Part 2=Bible Project Seminar=Action Taken

The official report of the actions taken and things discussed, as circulated by Mr. Lyon is reproduced in full:

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User Groups in the ECP
Notes on action following the July 21-22 Bible Project Seminar:

Subject for the User Groups – three issues were available to be explored:

- 5th Mark of Mission – The Bible and safeguarding the integrity of creation [Case Study 1 notes, blue booklet]
- 4th Mark of Mission - The Bible and unjust gender structures [Case Study 2 notes, green booklet]
- 4th Mark of Mission - The Bible and unjust economic structures [Case Study 2 notes, green booklet]

Task for the User Groups – outlined in the green booklet pages 5,7 and 11

- Discussion of the observations [gaps] on the Biblical engagement from Study Course 1
- Biblical engagement on one of the three issues above
- Observations of how the Bible was used – see “Observing the User Group” below.

There are “Participant Sheets” for each issue in either the blue or green booklet that can be given out in advance of any meetings giving the Bible passages and questions.

Number of meetings
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The participants expressed a desire to hold a number of meetings of their User Groups. “Personal influences on reading the Bible” start the group and let them get to know one another.

Deadline from Patrick

The group recognised that for Patrick to be clear when he would need to complete the report to Stephen [see section below also] the User Groups would need a deadline date by which they had completed their meetings and the reports given to Patrick. *Patrick to supply May, Muriel, David, Echanes and Melvin with the deadline date.*

Observing the User Groups

This was seen as a vital part of the project and needed an outside person to observe [not the facilitator] and write a report on each meeting. Seminarians were suggested and also that each facilitator – those present at this seminar – might invite one to work with them. The “Observers Report Form” [one of the files given to Melvin, David and Patrick] provided a framework for them to observe each group meeting. Each group should also be described on the “Group profile form” [also one of the files given electronically]. It was suggested that if there was more than one meeting the observer would fill in a final form collating all their observations and this form together with the individual forms be given to Patrick [see Reports to Patrick and Report to Stephen below].

It was also felt that the facilitator should also write a report for Patrick reflecting on their observations of the User Groups and the way those present engaged with and interpreted the Bible.

Reports to Patrick

By the deadline set by Patrick each facilitator should give to Patrick the observers reports for each meeting held, the final observers report, the group profile form and their own report on the process for each group they facilitate. *Wherever possible it would be helpful if reports were sent electronically.*

Report to Stephen

Patrick will write a combined report for all the User Groups to send to Stephen together with the individual reports he receives so that Stephen can see not only the final conclusions but also the reports from which these conclusions are drawn. Stephen’s deadline is not until Easter 2012 but he recognises that Patrick is likely to wish to complete his work sooner.

Documents to use in this process that are available electronically and can be adapted to suit each situation:

- Notes for Case Study 1 – blue booklet
- Notes for Case Study 2 – green booklet
- Group profile form
- Observation report form
- Personal influences on reading the Bible – yellow booklet

Notes of the Principles of Hermeneutics drawn up by the group:

- Assumption that the Bible is God’s word
  - Written by people inspired by the HS
  - Sacred text and so should be taken seriously
- It is a way of God speaking to us – encouragement, challenge, reprimand
- Ready to be surprised, given new insights and discover new passages
- Identify the speaker/author – nature, background, context etc
- Identify the kind of literature which we are reading
- The “why” and “to whom” the text is being written
- Put texts in conversation with one another
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- Relevant syntax, grammar etc
- Knowing the message “then” and the message “now” from the given text
- How does the text apply to me the reader?
- Word/words used in a particular context as used in the given text and what those words mean in our own context. Use different versions.

Part 3=Consolidated Reports of the User Groups-Philippines

I. User Groups Conducted Bible Studies:
After the Bible Project Seminar, most of the Participants conducted one or more Bible Studies with their User Groups and gave Dr. Tanhuanco their reports. These reports were collated by Dr. Tanhuanco, and given below.

II. Group Profile:

1. Since this is the Philippines Group, Dr. Tanhuanco is happy to report that all the user groups put together, we represent the three major geographical group of the whole Philippines! There are people from the north geographical group=Luzon, from the center=Visayas, and from the south=Mindanao. There are 6 Anglican-Episcopal Dioceses in the Province of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP), and Dr. Tanhuanco believes that all 6 dioceses are represented in this Project.

2. As to men and women, within the age levels, there is a balance for all 3 age levels that all levels were represented: 15-35, 36-60, and 61 and beyond.

3. As to the socio-economic situation of all the user groups, most came from the low income group, yet, again, all levels were represented: low income, middle income, and high income.

4. As to the mother tongue of all the group members, since they represent the 3 major geographical group of the whole Philippines, they speak different Philippine dialects. The languages the Bible was read and discussed are the most common for the whole Philippines=the national language called Pilipino, also called the Tagalog dialect, and English, which is widely used in the educational system of this country.

5. The user groups vary in the length that they have been meeting. Some were groups which were already been meeting for months or years as Bible study groups, while a few were called for the first time for this Bible Project Bible study.

6. The average educational qualification for all user groups members is a high school education, some in college, others are college graduates, with a few who graduated with a Master’s degree, and at least 1 or 2 with earned Doctorate.

7. Subjects the User Groups covered:

8. The different User Groups covered different issues. All in all, the following issues were covered and discussed, and the Bible Passages studied:
   - 5th Mark of Mission- The Bible and safeguarding the integrity of creation. Bible Passages studied include=Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

III. The Setting of the Bible Study:
All of the groups met in an informal manner. Most have brief sharing and exchange of pleasantries before or after the Bible Study event, but there is no formal worship, nor use of liturgy for all the User Groups.

1. Participation:
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The different group facilitators (most of our Bible Project Seminar Participants) were able to conduct the Bible Study, enabling all their insights on the issues and Bible text and the User Group members to participate and share being studied.

2. Bible versions used:
The different User Groups mostly indicated they used English Bibles=New King James Version, NIV, NASB, Good News Bible, and others. One User Group used the Pilipino (the Philippine national language) Bible alongside the English Bible.

3. The Bible Study, focussing specifically on the use of the Bible: During the Bible Study, everyone has a Bible, at least has the passage before them=at least one User Group photocopied the entire Bible passage to be studied to be sure that all members got the same version. Another User Group reported that their members used different versions of the English Bible.

4. Most of the User Group read the Bible passage aloud. After the reading, some Groups used the questions given by the Bible Project Booklet as springboard for discussion, followed by relating it to the issues faced today in the individual's context, and relating again to the Scripture passage being studied. All groups focused on the central theme of the text, and the issued being dealt with. Because of time constraints, as the groups reported, use of theological frameworks to interpret the text is limited, or not used at all.

5. The authority of the Bible in the Bible Study process: All User Groups indicated that the members highly respect the Bible. The Bible’s authority is respected. No one questions what the Bible says. Moreover, because of the Bible study process, some have indicated they want to study the Bible more, and spend more time on the Bible as they learn the valuable lessons that they can use in their lives. Thus, they see the Bible as an authority in matters of life and conduct, and respect it all the more.

IV. Action resulting from the Bible Study process:
Some User Groups members decided to do any of the following: [1] Continue to meet as a group to study the Bible. [2] To read the Bible everyday, or more often than they are doing before the Bible Study. [3] To join a regular Bible Study group in their local church.

V. Overall Conclusion:
“The Bible in the Life of the Church’ Project has been a blessing to the Episcopal Church in the Philippines. It is a seed planted in the midst of a religious people who knew the authority and importance of the Bible, and now start to see the application of the Bible’s truth in their lives! May God the Holy Spirit makes this seed grow to maturity as we obey His leading, to see a vibrant church with His vibrant people, putting to practice His Word in our life and Christ’s Church, to the glory of God the Father. Amen! Report respectfully submitted by:

The Very Rev. Doctor PATRICK TANHUANCO
President and Dean, St. Andrew’s Theological Seminary
Philippines=Bible Project “User Group” Coordinator