

NEWS

Christ@Work



From left: Ms Esther Fong, Director of *International Catholic Program for Evangelisation (ICPE)*, Mr James Wong, Executive Director of *Family Life Society (FLS)*, Dr John Hui, Master of the *Catholic Medical Guild (CMG)*, Ms Tan Su Shan, Executive Director of *Morgan Stanley*, Dr Finian Tan, Chairman of *Vickers Financial Group* and Mr Willie Cheng, Convenor of the *Archdiocese Crisis Coordination Team (ACCT)* and Former Country Managing Director of *Accenture* share their experiences in this panel on how carving out time to do God's work contributes to their effectiveness in their regular jobs. Photo by Joyce Gan

Hundreds of Catholics attend conference on how to practise the faith in the workplace

By Joyce Gan

SINGAPORE – A long list of Catholic who's who in business, government, academia and the professions were on these panels that addressed issues of significance to working Catholics at a Nov 12 conference with the theme "Christ@Work".

Among those participating were J. Y. Pillay, Chairman, Singapore Exchange; Peter Ng Kok Song, Founder and National Coordinator, World Community for Christian Meditation and Managing Director (Public Markets), Government Investment Corporation; Mathew Jacob, Regional Director, People and Organisation, Microsoft Asia Pacific; Gerard Ee, President, National Council of Social Services; and Willie Cheng, Convenor,

Archdiocese Crisis Coordination Team, and former Country Managing Director, Accenture.

This rare gathering of so many high-powered Catholics willing to speak and to answer questions on how to balance faith and work attracted an audience of more than 500 persons to the conference which was held at the RELC International Hotel. The crowd would have been larger except for the limited seating capacity of the hall.

One observer noted that this demand for conference seats is a good sign of the

seriousness with which many Catholics wish to bring Christ to the workplace, have Christ at the workplace and be Christ-centred at the workplace.

But the demanding nature of the workplace often creates situations of conflict and a good measure of effort is often required to not offend or retaliate.

Gerard Ee, President of the National Council of Social Services, suggested to the audience in his address, "Doing His Work Outside Work", that if Christ brings us to a task, we can be

confident that he will bring us through it.

"We belong to God 24/7," he stated softly but with conviction, and urged his listeners to resolve workplace crises in ways that allow for God's glory to manifest.

Mr Ee exhorted them to discipline themselves to put God in the centre of their lives. This is a refrain underlining the speeches by all the other speakers. They all emphasised that the key to having Christ at work is to embrace our faith wholeheartedly and to integrate it into every facet of our lives.

Ben Wong Heng Chew,

Managing Director of Sun Microsystems confirmed as much when he said "the Christ at work is the same as the Christ in church, the Christ at home and the Christ at entertainment".

During discussions on how best to express the Catholic faith at the workplace and yet remain impartial and sensitive to non-Catholics, Mathew Jacob of Microsoft Asia Pacific, rallied the audience to be true witnesses to the Catholic faith.

How readily we accept people who "flaunt their sexuality in every other way" in the office, he quipped, but fear that we are being intolerant if we hang a crucifix in our office space.

Mr Jacob also allayed the concerns of young working adults who struggle to attain promotion and recognition by sharing his faith journey as well as his "rags to riches" story, and stating his awareness of the one who brought him to where he is today.

"Seek first the kingdom, the Lord will take care of the career," was his call to those facing dilemmas in their jobs.

This God-career balance, or "God-career conflict", as some prefer to

call it, is a problem faced by Catholic working adults. To what extent can a Catholic dedicate himself to work before he is considered to be "serving two gods"? The panelists unanimously agreed that working hard does not detract one from serving God so long as one does not make success an end in itself. Affluence in itself is not wrong but we are wrong if we forget God in our chase for affluence.

"It's not about the big bucks, but the beatitudes!" remarked Deacon Harold-Burke Sivers, Founder and Director of Aurem Cordis, a Christian evangelisation and apologetics organisation dedicated to the dissemination and promotion of Catholic values, principles and teachings.

Members of the audience were also encouraged to serve in ministries despite being in the rat race. They were told that a lack of time is not a sufficient reason for not being involved. The speakers were good examples that it is feasible to live out faith experiences in the working arena, and to do so in challenging positions, said Juliana Foo, an organiser of the Christ@Work conference. □