

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE

XXII WORLD CONGRESS OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA

THE AOS INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE

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On the day of the Ascension, Jesus entrusted the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel and indeed the whole evangelising activity to the Church. To preach the Gospel is an obligation as Saint Paul reminds us: “*Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel ... it is a charge entrusted to me*” (1 Cor 9,16). Since the beginnings and ever since, the history of the Church and its growth have been marked by this commandment of Jesus to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth and to reach out to the “least [of our] brothers” (cf. Mt 25,40) in every part of the world. To accomplish this mission, the Church has always tried to adapt itself to new situations offered by the modern inventions which have revolutionised communication and have made new possibilities available to proclaim the Word.

The late Pope John Paul II has repeatedly stressed the opportunity the Internet provides today for evangelisation as the new communication technologies have transformed our relation with the world and with others. In his Apostolic Letter *The Rapid Development*, Pope John Paul II tells us that “*the use of the techniques and the technologies of contemporary communications is an integral part of [the Church’s] mission in the third millennium*” (N.2) and he quotes Pope Paul VI who wrote in *Evangeliū Nuntiandi* that the Church “*would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means*” (N. 2).

Recently, on 23rd March 2007, Archbishop John Foley, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, sent a message to the European Bishops' Committee on media, stating that forming Catholics as media and communications professionals is one of the priorities for the Church. Among the top priorities for the Church in communications, the Archbishop included the following: “*improved Internet presence (e-learning, virtual press, blogs, video, free access), media and communications formation and training for clergy, religious, lay people of all ages and study and better use of evolving media languages with sensitivity to local cultures (inculturation)*”.

Today information technology has become one of the most utilized instrument of information and participation. It can reach out even to the most remote areas, which would otherwise be completely cut off from the rest of the world as they are deprived of the more conventional channel of information and communication. The Website is a new and powerful resource for the AOS worldwide network, we are only starting to discover all its possibilities, hence the importance of always trying to update and adapt it so that it can always better achieve the service it is meant for.

In the conclusions and recommendations of the XXIst AOS Congress in 2002, several times the delegates have underlined the importance of Information technology, of a website, of e-mails which are all essential components today for networking. They have recommended that in these

fields there should be “innovation and new initiatives” and that AOS personnel be better trained in IT and languages, especially English. Also there was a general call for all AOS personnel to be proactive and contribute to the AOS International Website, if we want it to reflect the life and concerns of all.

The AOS International Website was born following the AOS Coordinators’ meeting in Rome in January 2004, when AOS (then England and Wales) proposed to the Pontifical Council to investigate about the possibility of establishing an AOS International Website, especially designed to provide a new service to our apostolate in the maritime world, whose aims would be to inform, to form, and to provide new pastoral tools to all our members.

The main objective we had in mind was for the of the AOS International Website to support the Pontifical Council (AOS-International) in its mission. A website is basically a tool to share information as widely as possible in view of pastoral initiatives to be taken by those who are responsible for it. It was also seen as a means to:

Enhance visibility:

The AOS International Website is required to publicise the work of AOS to the wider Church, to the People of the Sea, to partner organisations and to all who are interested in the work of the Church and the dignity of people who depend on the sea.

Strengthen the AOS network:

The AOS International Website is required to facilitate communications among AOS personnel worldwide. It must be a service to the whole AOS community, enabling its members to contact each other and share relevant information about those they serve and services provided.

A tool for international pastoral outreach:

The AOS International Website is intended be a tool for the service of AOS. It should be a project tool enabling collaborative pastoral working and distribution of information and pastoral resources. It should also include a reporting function to facilitate planning at national and international levels.

AOS International is the owner and editor of the Website, it has the editorial control, while it is managed technically in London helped by the “AOS IT Working Group”. The members are consulted as the need arises. Our Website is still at the running in stage and it is still being built, but I am confident that gradually we shall find our cruising speed overcoming any difficulty in the dialogue between AOS International and AOS-GB.

We all know that the AOS International Website is not the only AOS website. There are several national websites. While the national websites stress primarily of course the national aspects and concerns, the AOS International Website has as its vocation, to concentrate on the international issues and items of international interests and to reflect the directives of the Pontifical Council, who has the ultimate responsibility for it.

The Website is already technically a wonderful achievement and we should congratulate those who have put so much effort in its construction.