

Hope&Joy in South Africa: An interview with Raymond Perrier, part two

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Oct. 28, 2011 NCR Today

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This is the second in a two-part interview with Raymond Perrier, the

director of South Africa's Jesuit Institute, which initiated the Hope&Joy program. Read the first part of the interview [here](#) [1].

NCR: Unity seems a strong theme of "Hope&Joy."

RP: We needed to find a device, a methodology, that would ensure that all people could come together across the full spectrum of Catholicism, to provide a platform where everyone who identifies themselves as Catholic could sit comfortably.

This device, or idea, is that our church is the church of Vatican II. In one way or another, we have ended up with everyone included in "Hope&Joy."

A Vatican III initiative would have delighted a few, but it would have been alienating and jumping way ahead. "Hope&Joy" says: Let's complete Vatican II before we start new things. There is so much of the Second Vatican Council to explore, contemplate, and put into practice.

The people have bought into this idea.

How did you get the bishops' conference on board?

The South African Conference of Catholic Bishops consists of the bishops of South Africa, Swaziland and Botswana. We presented "Hope&Joy" to them, its methodology and message, and they assumed it into their programs.

Can you be more specific about the "method" to make this project work?

In November 2010, Fr. Emil Blaser, OP, of [Radio Veritas](#) [2] organized a conference to consider issues of Catholic communications. Sean Patrick Lovett of Vatican Radio and Ms. Sheila George of the U.S. led a gathering of about 25 Catholic communicators, from the press, radio, video and software development, as well as Catholics working in secular media. For three days, we talked and worked out crisis management strategies and plans. But soon, Lovett and Ms. George saw that all these people in the room, who did not usually work

together, could spark ideas off each other. We decided we wanted to do a project together. I brought the kernel of my idea out of my bag and participants began adding more ideas and what came out was the core of the "Hope&Joy" network, a communications media core, that would provide communication or distribution channels to link people together.



I have seen the set of large cards with talking points drawn from Vatican II

teaching. How do these and the bulletins, text messages, fit into the project?

"Hope&Joy" is basically an adult faith formation program for those who do not know about Vatican II and its place in the church and the world. For so many adults, their faith formation is frozen at the age when they were confirmed. We had to look at levels of engagement according to the modern adult's learning style and time to engage in this program. We also had to make sure that we gave people enough, but not so much that they might not take an interest. We have therefore focused much of the communication around 12 key themes: mission and service; liturgy and devotions; the role of the laity; relations with other Christians; the role of women, relations with other faiths; the role of priests, religious, and bishops; economic justice; scripture; life issues; conscience, rights and responsibilities; care for the planet.

Events: The first thing to keep in mind is that as much as possible we wanted to use existing structures and events that could take on the theme of "Hope&Joy."

Thus, we organize every year a three-day theology course that tours to five different cities and attracts over 250 priests and religious. Both in 2011 and in 2012, the course is linked in with Hope&Joy: This year, an Irish Jesuit, Jim Corkery, helped us to look at the history and theology of the Council and in particular the role of Benedict XVI. Next year, a Tanzanian theologian, Laurenti Magesa, will explore the implications for the African reality of the Church.

Another example is the annual catechists' conferences in September in Durban and Cape Town, which used the themes of "Hope&Joy," derived from the Vatican II documents, to frame their gatherings. Attendance was at the usual 300-400.

In addition, we planned a "Hope&Joy" Festival here in Johannesburg. On Oct. 8, 250 people came, and the day concluded with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Liam Slattery, OFM of Pretoria, the Bishop for Evangelization.

What about the text messaging?

After events, the next levels all concern modern communication from feature articles in South Africa's Catholic magazines "Trefoil" and "[Marfam](#)" [3] and more popular articles in newspapers such as "[The Southern Cross](#)." [4] These articles are aimed at clergy, lay people, religious, educators, parents and those with the time and interest to read more deeply.

For those on the go, and for students, we offer a text message service on the themes of Hope&Joy that has attracted more than 4,000 subscribers. In May and June, people could sign up for a free weekly text, now for a small charge they receive daily inspirational thoughts on their mobile phones. As far as we know, no one else has ever tried to deliver Vatican documents in 160 characters or less!

And the parish bulletins? I noticed excellent articles, for example, on Oct. 2, the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, the theme was "For the Planet."

Yes, the Redemptorists, who have a publishing house in Merrivale, prepared 500-word essays on the themes for 23 weeks during Ordinary Time this year, ending just before Advent. Sixty thousand copies go out weekly to 280 parishes. They are only in English which is the main working language of the country.

The Redemptorists have asked theologians from the various institutes and colleges to write on each of the specialized themes.

To sum up?

The methodology, over two years, can be visualized as a staircase: We engage people at one level and then give them opportunities to move up the staircase. But we are not expecting everyone in the country to read the original documents or go on specialist courses: each person can engage at their own level. Also key is collaboration, and distribution via pre-existing events and media, ongoing feature articles in the press, bulletin essays and text messaging.

Was it your intention that "Hope&Joy" be picked up by other countries in preparation for the 50th anniversary of Vatican II?

Not at all; our focus is and remains the church and society of South Africa. But if others wish to take inspiration from it, that's fine with us.

Now this may seem like a frivolous question after all this deep stuff, but why "Hope&Joy" when "Gaudium et Spes" is translated as "Joy and Hope"?

Hope and joy sounds better! Really, the words flow better.

You were born a year after Vatican II ended. What is it about the Second Vatican Council that seems to have ignited a passion within you?

To me, it seems self-evident that we should be a church engaged in the modern world -- to use the sub-title of Gaudium et Spes. That has always been my passion. People older than me often share that passion but they need it to be reignited. People younger than me would share that passion if presented to them in the right way.

Pope Benedict XVI has announced [The Year of Faith](#)^[5] to make the beginning of Vatican II. How will "Hope&Joy" integrate this?

We are delighted that Rome is catching up with us. After all, as they say about Evolution: 'It started in Africa.' So it seems with the celebration of Vatican II, it started in Africa again. We will certainly be integrating what we do with the wider initiatives of the Year of Faith. And we hope that others will learn from us that it is not just about celebration but also about education -- and that takes time, patience and creativity!

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