

*In Memoriam*



***Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, PhD***

11 May 1932 -13 January 2021

ARC Executive Director

This special section of *Religion and Social Communication* is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Prof. Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, long time Executive Director of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) from 1999 to 2021. His contribution to the field of communication—looking at the communicative dimensions and role of religion in societies especially in Asia, home of the world’s major religions—has been recognized around the world.

Franz-Josef Eilers was born on 11 May 1932 in Emsdetten, Germany. He entered the Society of the Divine Word at the age of 13 and was ordained to the priesthood on 8 December 1959. He

earned a licentiate in missiology and doctorate in communication with his research focusing on the communications among non-literate cultures in New Guinea. After his studies, he was called on to different roles within and outside of the Society. In 1968, he co-founded the quarterly journal *Communicatio Socialis* which centers on media ethics and Church communication. He also co-founded the Catholic Media Council (CAMECO) and became its director from 1971 to 1985. He was also involved with the World Council of Churches in Geneva and with the Vatican as consultor of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication.

In 1985, Fr. Eilers was assigned to the Philippines where, aside from exercising his priestly ministry, he taught missiology and social communication at the Divine Word School of Theology (Tagaytay City), University of the Philippines (Los Baños, Laguna), Don Bosco Center of Studies (Parañaque City), CICM-Maryhill School of Theology (Quezon City), Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome), Pontifical Salesian University (Rome) and Yarra Theological Union (Australia).

In 1995, Fr. Eilers was appointed as Executive Secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC), a position he held until 2010. In 1999, together with Asian communication scholars during the FABC-OSC conference in Bangkok, he co-founded the ARC which up until now is under the auspices of Saint John's University in Bangkok.

Since its foundation, ARC has been working with scholars to carry out research in the field of religion and social communication and organizing roundtables to serve as venue for scholarly discussion. The ARC journal *Religion and Social Communication* codifies these researches.

In 2001, Fr. Eilers founded the Master of Arts in Theology

major in Social Pastoral Communication program at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. From its foundation, the program has produced more graduates from all over Asia.

Fr. Eilers semi-retired from active teaching in 2018 but continued directing students as thesis adviser. His last membership in an advisory board was of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross' journal *Church, Communication, and Culture*.

Throughout his life, Fr. Eilers published numerous articles, books, and manuscripts on religion and social communication which have become necessary readings in the field.

In this section, friends and colleagues of Father Eilers pay their respects and honor to the man whose contributions to the study of communication is recognized all over the world. In a special way, they pay their respects to the man who became a friend, a part of their lives.

Father Eilers may have left us but his legacy lives on: to “give one’s self in love.”

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I first met Fr. Eilers in 2012 at the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School in Manila. After obtaining my Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology, I immediately enrolled in the MA Theology program with a plan of joining the academe after graduation. During enrolment, it so happened that there were no subjects offered for MA Theology so I was advised to take courses in the MA Theology major in Social Pastoral Communication--the program which he founded--as the courses that I will take in this program will be credited later on to my original program.

As classes in the graduate school were conducted in the

evenings, I would often come late as I had a day job in the Central Business District. Fr. Eilers must have been annoyed by my frequent tardiness as his discussions would be interrupted by my arrival. One evening after class, he told me that the next time I came late, he would be constrained to drop me from the roll. I was taken aback: I needed a job to sustain my studies, but I also could not just sacrifice my studies which I already invested much time and effort. By the end of that semester, I told Fr. Eilers that I had already quit my job to focus on my studies. It was then that he offered me the opportunity to join ARC.

Joining ARC was a great blessing. I was able to meet and form friendships with communication experts across Asia, go to places I did not imagine I would set foot on, and more than anything else, to learn from the expert himself—Fr. Eilers. It was in ARC where I got to know him deeply, not as a professor, but as a spiritual father who I could confide with through the regular spiritual sharing that we had in his room. He saw the best and the potential of the people he accompanied. He was even very supportive of my decision to take on a teaching job, with a special request not to leave ARC. When my father was dying and I couldn't find a priest to administer the last rites, Father Eilers volunteered to give him the final sacrament.

Together, we would go to the Radio Veritas Asia site in Palauig, Zambales for retreat, accompany him in the German Ambassador's Residence for the annual German Community Christmas gathering, fly to Saint John's for the annual roundtables, attend various symposia and conferences where he was a speaker or panel member, and even stayed with him as a companion whenever he got admitted in the hospital.

On 11 January 2021, one of our collaborators, Mr. Jairus Gianan, called me up informing me that Fr. Eilers had no appetite and was not feeling well. With the help of my mother, we were

able to contact a physician to visit him in his room. Tests were done and when the results came in, we were advised to bring him immediately to the hospital. As usual, I was tasked to stay with him. I took a day off from work to be with him.

On 13 January 2021, around lunch time, he woke me up and asked for a piece of bread. I told him that he should only take a little as his blood sugar might spike. He sat on the edge of his bed, broke the bread and began to eat. His dental appliance fell on the ground. As I was picking it up, I can clearly see him as he passed out and slowly fell on his bed. There were only two of us in the hospital room. I immediately called for help. The doctors tried to revive him but he was declared dead at 2:41 PM local time. I can still recall the events of that fateful day as if it were yesterday.

Father Franz-Josef Eilers, svd taught that the Trinity is the perfect example of communion of persons, I hope and pray that he finally comes face-to-face with the Master Communicator to whom he dedicated his life's work.

***Kenneth E. Rayco***  
***ARC Secretary***  
***Philippines***

I first met Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD when he was still in Aachen opening up the German Churches to the evangelical importance of social communications. And then, in true cross-cultural mission mode, Franz came to Asia which became his home for the rest of his long life. Franz impressed me as an all-round professional in social communications - and equally important - as a confrere with a wide and deep apostolic vision. That combination of professionalism and apostolic far-sightedness was crucial to both his witness and his work.

On one level, if you ask me who was Franz Eilers, I could reply: Franz was simply the person who got done whatever he saw needed to be done, however difficult it might appear to the rest of us. That is true, for Franz had the ability to do whatever needed doing in communications, however perplexing. But, I also knew Franz as an authentic Divine Word Missionary (SVD). The SVD have social communications as one of their key characteristics, and Franz opened up the FABC and the Asian Churches at multiple levels to the evangelization outreach of social communication. With his dedicated secretary he edited the book series *For All the Peoples of Asia*, as well as documents from FABC-OSC which he directed for over two decades, and all this apart from seeing to radio and television programmes.

When he spoke at Plenary Assemblies I found Franz to be invariably clear and to the point. While he willingly took on a heavy workload himself, Franz continually encouraged others to take up social communication professionally, assisting in contacting institutes as necessary. While never pushing himself forward into the limelight, Franz' communication outreach made the FABC known and understood among all levels of the Asian Churches. This ongoing information has been a vital element in breaking down the isolation of the minority Churches on the continent, as it permitted the creative insights and mission strategies of each Church to impact the others.

I never found Franz' immense workload and outstanding professionalism intimidating but always inspiring. And Franz carried out this multi-task creative work for the Asian Churches for over two decades. Will we ever see his likes again? Hopefully!

***John Mansford Prior, svd***  
***Indonesia***

Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD touched Church leaders, seminarians, communication scholars, and communication practitioners around the world. He was a dogged scholar in all the best meanings of that term: he kept at the nagging questions; he kept encouraging his students to meet their potential; he kept asking other scholars to help; he kept a focus on the needs of the Church; and he kept demanding the best of himself. Without his leadership and energy, the communication work of the Church in Asia could well have tapered off as it has in so many other parts of the world. Like St. Augustine, he also knew the value of communication: it was not enough to preach a brilliant sermon or teach a great course if no one could hear it or read it. And so, much of the success of his work came through the success of his publications. His textbooks shaped clergy throughout Asia and in other parts of the world and his collections of church documents and other writings on communication proved handy and long-lasting guides, as my own bookshelves will testify. As a founder of two journals dedicated to religious communication research—*Communicatio Socialis* (in Europe) and *Religion and Social Communication* (in Asia), he kept ideas alive, promoted research, and mentored new generations of scholars.

Our paths first crossed over 35 years ago when we both participated in international seminars exploring the connections between theology and communication—an interest he continued to cultivate in his own books and in his later work with the Office of Social Communication of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences. If his scholarship were not enough to establish his reputation in communication circles, his service to the Church would in itself do that. He combined creative thinking with administrative skills and became a great organizer of workshops and meetings for the Bishops of Asia as well as their teacher in things communicative. In his role with the FABC he served as a bridge to the communication planning efforts and policy at the Pontifical Council for Social Communication and other offices in

Rome and in Catholic organizations like Unda, UCIP, OCIC, and later SIGNIS. One could only wonder how he managed to be in so many places, seemingly at the same time.

His attentions certainly made my own work better. Because we worked in different regions of the world, we did not have much face-to-face meeting times apart from conferences. But he kept in touch. I also well remember his writing (more than once!) something along the lines of, “it’s time for you to ...” whether than meant to write an article to follow up on my earlier work on communication and theology or to explore an issue new to the Church’s concern like the impact of social media or to plan a class. He also allowed me to put my ideas to the test in workshops for Bishops and scholars in Asia. In all of this he was an academic friend as well as a personal one.

The different workshops and conferences also allowed me to see Fr. Eilers at prayer and in liturgical celebrations. He was a man of the Gospels and of the Church and of his community. He was certainly a blessing in my own life.

May his memory be a blessing for all of us.

*Paul A. Soukup, S.J.*  
*United States*

Three Catholic priests were in the vanguard of media and communication studies with particular focus on religious communication, beginning from the 1980s. Perhaps the best known of these pioneers was Dr Michael Traber, editor of *Media Development*, the quarterly journal of Christian Communication of the World Association of Christian Churches (WACC), published out of London. Dr Robert A White, edited *Communication Research Trends*, at the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture (CSCC), also in London. On the continent of Europe,



Dr Franz-Josef Eilers, director of the Catholic Media Council (CAMECO), headquartered in the little German town of Aachen, edited *Communicatio Socialis*, a bilingual journal on religion and communication in German and English.

I was fortunate to have brushed shoulders with the three priest-scholars, first as a doctoral student at the University of Leicester during the mid-eighties, and later as a researcher and academician in India. They invited me on several occasions to contribute to the three journals they edited. We continued to meet regularly at international conferences organised by IAMCR, AMIC, and other associations around the world. By the mid-nineties, the trio had moved on to Asia and Africa: Dr Traber to Bangalore, India, Dr Eilers to Manila and Dr White to Gregorian University in Rome and later to Nigeria and Kenya, to continue their pastoral and scholarly work in the missions. ( Dr. Traber breathed his last in 2006).

Under the aegis of the FABC's Office of Social Communication, Dr Eilers founded in 1999 the Asian Research Centre for Religion and Social Communication (ARC), at St. John's University, Bangkok, and its bi-annual journal *Religion and Social Communication* to bring together religious communication scholars from the sprawling continent of Asia. The annual seminar on religion and communication was a feature of ARC right from the start. He worked tirelessly to organise these annual seminars and to publish its journal regularly. But he was not a mere organiser and publisher/editor of journals and book-series; he was an invaluable contributor of scholarly articles and book reviews.

Besides, he was a prolific communication researcher. He published several books on Intercultural Communication, and edited compilations of the Catholic Church's official documents on social communication, updating them regularly. They will continue to serve as indispensable reference books for decades

to come. As the director of CAMECO, he edited *Communicatio Socialis* where some of my earliest work on Indian communication theory and Mahatma Gandhi as a Communicator were published.

On a personal level, Dr. Eilers was a guide and a friend, known for his graciousness, warmth and concern. My first meeting with him was in Bonn around the summer of 1986. I recall the warmth with which he received me, organised my stay at Sankt Augustin, and took me on a tour of the city, then the ‘provisional capital’ of Germany. For the next three decades we continued to meet at international conferences and at the annual meetings/seminars of UNDA-OCIC (now Signis) in India, and of ARC in Thailand. Our last meeting was at Centurion University in the city of Bhubaneswar where the February 2018 annual seminar of ARC was organised. He was his usual warm self as we bade goodbye at the end of the three-day conference. He was 11 years my senior, and it was clear to me that day that age was catching up on us.... And that that goodbye would be the last and final one.

It seems that it was only the other day that I wrote to Dr. Eilers wishing him for the Christmas season, and he reciprocated my wishes with his usual warmth. It is difficult to believe that he is no more; he was active writing and propagating the word of God till his last breath, in Asia and around the world.

**Keval J. Kumar**  
**Ahmedabad, India**

My first encounter with Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd was while serving on the Pontifical Council for Social Communications (Vatican) in the late 1980’s – 90’s. The PCSC was working on the publication of a new Catholic Communications document celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Communio et Progressio*. The new document eventually would be known as “*Aetatis Novae*” (*The Dawning of a New Era*).

Fr. Eilers brought his vast intellectual knowledge and research on Social Communications to enable the Council to tweak the new document with a fresh perspective on the role of Pastoral Social Communications Planning within the Church. His prophetic emphasis on the term ‘Social Communications’ which emerged during the Second Vatican Council, resonated throughout his lifetime. We engaged with numerous conversations during and after each Council session. Each conversation inspired me with the breadth and depth of his wisdom and deep love for challenging Catholic Church Episcopal Leadership for positioning Catholic Social Communications in the heart of seminary and pastoral formation programs.

As the years unfolded, he invited me to participate in a number of FABC-BISCOM meetings in Hong Kong, Bali, Thailand, etc. Each opportunity I discovered the deep passion he brought to his Social Communications research and teaching. He was one who encouraged and nurtured research and publication within and among all of us who knew him.

He loved sharing his teaching experiences, seeking out new insights from colleagues from around the world to share with his students. Or, even to challenge each one of us to go deeper into where our particular interests, or, pastoral experiences lie related to the rapid digital evolution. Fr. Eilers was an encourager, enabler, supporter, and, prophetic figure for hundreds, if not thousands of us around the world. He simply never slowed down with continuing his research, writing and teaching. He was a passionate, loving and caring professor for each and every one of his students.

One year he invited me to the Philippines to give a lecture at University of Santo Tomas. During that time, I encountered many of his students and listened to their individual praise and enthusiasm for Fr. Franz-Josef. Simply observing him engage with rich and deep dialogue with his students was a testimony to the quality and

profundity of his teaching. He invited me to visit Radio Veritas, where a retreat center is/was located for a weekend of relaxation and dialogue by the sea. There were others who gathered each day for his liturgies that reflected his profound love of the Eucharist, deep faith, expressed through his enlightened homilies. His simplicity but brilliant presence was a testimony for each one of us.

In the evenings, as we sat watching the sunset over the sea, we would share experiences, insights, concerns and dreams for the future of the Catholic Church with an emphasis on Social Communications and the importance of research and formation of future Catholic Leaders (women and men). Yet, his research constantly focused on a deep spiritual grasp of the theological and spiritual grounding for appreciating, understanding and communicating the meaning and value of Catholic Social Communications.

What I supremely appreciate about Fr. Eilers, besides our deep friendship, was his visioning for the future of the Catholic Church. As the years passed along, changes occurred within the placement and structure of Catholic Communications in the region. The term ‘social’ communications seemed to be losing momentum. I sensed his sorrow, and grief, that what was so critically significant to him, may be dissolving with the attraction of the rapid advances of ‘technology itself’ for the sake of technology without a larger vision of its impact. New times, new people, new directions were displacing something of the dedicated passion he wrote and spoke about throughout his life.

One of my great joys was co-editing a book publication tribute to Fr. Eilers with Dr. Helmuth Rolfes (Germany) titled “Communicatio Socialis: *Challenge of Theology and Ministry in the Church*”. Kassel University Press. 2007.

In the past few years, Fr. Eilers and I would Zoom meet.

Praise God for Zooming opportunities! He never was one not to learn a new technology if he could help it. During those zoom chats, he constantly praised his students. He shared what they were studying, researching, writing and his hopes and dreams for each one of them. He simply did not want them to carry on his legacy but for each one to make a unique passionate commitment for advancing Social Communications in the Catholic Church.

I frequently have indicated in lectures I have given around the world that Fr. Eilers is the most expert Catholic Communicator who not only knew every Catholic Church document written concerning Catholic Social Communications, but could quote references without blinking an eye. Furthermore, he contributed to the depth of the concepts articulated within those documents, advancing them to a new, enlightening levels of understanding and application.

Our last Zoom conversation occurred prior to Christmas 2020. His vibrant energy for what was important to him radiated through the conversation. We were speaking about collaborating writing an article on the impact of the pandemic on the explosion of the use of virtual/digital technology in education. We were to reconnect after the New Year to expand our conversation. This never occurred.

Fr. Eilers is one of a kind. His passing is one of our great Catholic losses. Yet, as I think about it, I am reminded of his constant praise and love of his students. I realize that each one of them now carries Fr. Eilers torch into the future. They are to transmit forward the love, passion and faithful dedication for reimagining how to communicate faith in a rapidly shifting digital milieu. In this way, we each pay tribute to our dearest friend, Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers. He always remains one of our great friends, mentor and educator in the wide world of Catholic Social Communications. May his writings continue to inspire many into

the future of Catholic Social Communications.

***Sr. Angela Ann Zukowski, MSHS, D.Min.  
United States***

I met Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd almost two decades ago in the AMIC Conference which was held in Singapore. We had several hours of one-to-one discussion during the conference since we had a common interest in media and religion as individual research scholars. It was followed by a meeting (workshop or seminar) on the subject that was held in Bangkok supported by the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication. At that time not knowing much about Fr. Eilers or ARC, with reservation, I accepted the offer to write a paper on “Media and Hindu Religion” and attended the meeting in Bangkok. Since then I was interacting with Franz-Josef, though a few years ago, Franz-Josef indicated his inability to attend the meetings and had mentioned about old age and deteriorating health. He often did not personally attend the meetings though he was in full control of the program. Jointly, the program continued with financial support of missionary funds provided by Franz-Josef. Not knowing his church connection and Asian Research Center, for me Franz-Josef was an individual who took my advice for inviting scholars and supported them. At least one meeting that was held at MICA, Ahmedabad, he had provided some financial support. It has been a cordial relation and mutual support between us. I will miss him.

***Binod Agrawal, PhD  
India***

A thousand words will never be enough to describe one’s relationship with Fr. Eilers. Nonetheless, I will attempt to briefly illustrate how I perceive him and are my impressions of him. I

first met Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD in 2011. He used to be a professor of Intercultural Communication at the CICM Maryhill School of Theology in Quezon City, Philippines, to second-year theology students. I never thought that more than a mere professor, Fr. Eilers, would later impact my life and become a mentor, a “spiritual companion,” and motivator. In these lines, I would like to bring out a few reflections about this fatherly figure to many, who posed valuable and vital contributions to the Church and impacted the lives of many tremendously.

At the CICM-Maryhill School of Theology, Fr. Eilers’ class was one of the most appreciated. Our class was composed of seminarians, religious men, and women hailing from various corners of the world. The subject he taught was very instigating and thought-provoking because he spoke eloquently about his missionary experiences coupled with sound theology shaped in advanced thinking. I am not afraid to say that his classes brought together high theologizing and vivid human experiences among cultures. He impressed many with his communication style to the extent that his simple presence among students was “the power and the point” in whatever he would convey. Deeply touched by his subject and his heart-warming methodology, I would later enroll in the Social and Pastoral Communication Program at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, Philippines.

More than a professor, Fr. Eilers became a mentor of a considerable number of lay, religious, and clergy people. As a mentor, he would never be satisfied with mediocrity. Instead, he would encourage each of his students “to go beyond the book” and be creative in thinking. He always saw his students’ capabilities and did his very best to help them “develop proper dispositions for ministry.” One could not negate that he would appear as an intimidating “German Shepherd at first glance;” however, such an impression would not last long, as each could see how kind and humane he used to be.

I remember vividly how he guided me in the process of writing my thesis. Each advice, uplifting word, plausible correction, pushing forward are marked throughout the pages of my research and treasured in the intimacy of my heart and mind. As he would say, “I am here to kick you,” he indeed kicked me forward to do research that bridges pastoral theology and people’s “conscientization.” In the beginning, I should confess, I was not convinced about my paper; he was. From sources to revisions, he guided me to the conclusion and beyond the chapters written down to sharing experiences. As a mentor, it is still worth mentioning that he has been a prolific professor in the field of communications, always striving to bring out from his students new insights, ideas, and innovation in the ministry of communication within and beyond the Church.

Besides being a mentor, Fr. Eilers became my “spiritual companion,” as he was for many. Interestingly, he was a kind of “allergic” to the expression “spiritual direction,” as for him, one is responsible for his own growth process. As a “spiritual companion,” he stressed much on the importance and significance of one’s prayer life, which goes beyond structured and formal prayer periods or methods. For him, prayer was the core of his life. He witnessed that up to the last moments of his journey among us, as he would say, “God has his own ways.”

Being a young missionary priest led me to seek out Fr. Eilers’ meaningful advice. Yet, more than being a “speaker,” he was a listener. He was never judgmental. He never looked down on people. Each encounter with him elicited from me a renewed look into life and ministry. Each opportunity to see him nurtured my missionary vocation and made me grow as a person, as a Christian, and as a priest. Each meeting has recharged my energies and boosted my desire to serve the Lord through communicating life and hope. I see him as an inspiring missionary who always promoted the “sharing of faith.”



From a mentor to a “spiritual companion,” Fr. Eilers has become a motivator to many. He always saw the best in people, and he enthusiastically led them to see the best in themselves and nurture it. His interest was not focused on himself but others’ growth and development, above all his students, his mentees, his “spiritual companions.” As a motivator, he would see beyond one’s academic limitations and exert effort for one’s blossoming by tickling their mind towards research. I guess he was born to motivate others.

Needless to say, he has been a prolific writer, especially in the field of Social Communication. He wrote extensively on his praxis on the field. He wrote with mastery and authority. He wrote as one who has a heart for the ministry of communications, which pervades social means. Communication for him was at the heart of an encounter. Communication for him is what happens in circumstances of life. Communication for him is what makes us who we are. Hence, his “face was not on the book,” as he would say whenever asked what his Facebook account was, and whether there were likes, hearts, emoticons, fostering communion was at the core of communication for him

I had the privilege to meet him a few days before his demise. After meeting him for the last time on January 6, I would never imagine that; indeed, that was the last time to encounter him physically on earth. I am thankful for having found on him the loving face of the Lord as a mentor, a “spiritual companion,” a motivator, and beyond. His legacy will continue to thrive on each person he has touched, on each mind he has advised, on each person he has formed, and on each communicator he has pushed forward.

*William F. da Silva, CICM  
Philippines*

### **Setting:**

There were two things that changed the face of the modern era: modern communication media in the world scenario and the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church held fifty years ago. It was all during this time that Fr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd emerged as an energetic, ever dynamic, pastorally encouraging, and spiritually a gracious missionary communicator from Germany, via Vatican to Asia through the SVD congregation in the Philippines.

### **Authenticity:**

He had a unique and authentic experience in the world of Social Communication. He was a voracious reader, well read and an accomplished writer, publisher, communication professor in various parts of the world. It was at this time around 1996, he became the Executive Secretary of Social Communication for the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference. In one word, he “changed” the entire perception of communication in the Asian Christian context. I was closely associated with him in most of the conferences.

### **Goal is Social Communication:**

His one and only goal was Social communication for Evangelization, Mission, and Pastoral Ministry. He viewed and presented his whole gamut of ideas, experiences, thinking and interactions all in this field of Social Communication and therefore it is global.

### **Soul is Pastoral:**

All the communication dimensions must be geared towards the perfect message, language, and delivery of Pastoral Communication; he insisted on and lived up to that ideal. In fact, Eilers used

the power of media to become a voice of the voiceless, promote morals and pastoral values, empower churches and reform the communication thinking. He was always so relevant when questions were being raised on the objectivity, practicality and credibility of social communication today.

### **Heart is Intercultural and Interreligious:**

He might be the first Catholic communicator to write and introduce more about intercultural communication than anyone else. There were so many Asian level conferences for Bishops, communication specialists, practitioners, strategists, pastors, catechists and teachers. He sought to it that we look, think, and execute everything in terms of dialogue and interactions.

### **Mind is Asian and Ecumenical:**

Leave alone his breadth, width, length of travel in Asia and the globe; he had his mind as an Asian, he thought and wrote like an Asian, always keeping in touch with the Ecumenical Churches and with an ecumenical spirit.

### **A celebrated Religious and a Missionary:**

As a Catholic religious belonging to the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), an international missionary congregation, he taught, and lived for a long time at the Divine Word Seminary in Tagaytay, Philippines. As an exemplary religious priest, he gave importance to religious and priestly formation a communication dimension. His day never ended without spending quality time before the Blessed Sacrament in silence with the help of the ever present Holy Spirit. Whether we stay in a hotel or communication centres he will see to it that we celebrate the Mass everyday without fail. This kept him going ever stronger in the love of God and love of neighbour through religious communication.

## **Passion for Communication:**

Fr. Eilers is known for being gracious and generous with his recognition of others' hard work, initiative and endeavours in communication. With his passion, he moved the entire FABC toward a significant social and pastoral change through the power of his ideas and the way he shared them through his writings, teaching and research. As a master communicator, Fr. Eilers did many things to promote positive disposition, direction and dialogue. As a man of prayer, he did even more to model the power of persuasive, educative, and advocacy communication. He had a bold and constant articulation on communication theology and Missiology as well. He was a person endowed with rare insights, with a broad vision of communication and social media. He cared for his non-Christian friends, communicated the meaning of symbolism to his students, and committed himself as a pastor to all.

*Fr. Sebastian Periannan, PhD  
India*

I am probably the most inappropriate person to pay tribute to Fr. Franz-Josef, since I have never met him. However, I would like to mention a few words about what he left for us and what ARC has inherited from him.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to present my research at ARC conference in Bangkok in March 2020. At the time of my presentation, I was still a Ph.D. candidate and it was my first conference presentation outside of my university. After the arrival at the hotel, I was on my way to meet Fr. Anthony Le Duc and other ARC members at St. Louis College, but I lost the way. Fortunately, Fr. Anthony contacted me while I was in the middle of a small maze of alleyways, and the motorbike driver near me talked to him directly in Thai language and drove me to the meeting place for free. Yes, for free for some reason! Fr.

Anthony and Dr. Chainarong Monthienvichienchai as well as other members present welcomed me with nice smiles despite my late arrival. The sisters from the college offered me a cup of tea, fruits, then dinner. I was overwhelmed by the hospitality and warm atmosphere around the dinner table at the college.

During the dinner, it was mentioned that Fr. Franz-Josef was unfortunately unable to attend the conference this time, the first conference without his physical presence. However, he would make an appearance at the opening ceremony online. I could only imagine how difficult it was and at the same time how rewarding it was for him to establish this organization thus far and stayed in Asia for such a long period of time. Patience, tolerance, love, compassion, and love were pouring from him through Christ to the members of ARC, I sensed it immediately.

I strongly believe that ARC is a legacy of Fr. Franz-Josef, and ARC is a living testimony to him in playing a significant role in both ecumenical and interreligious dialogues as well as establishing and maintaining a peaceful co-existence among different religions. No matter how small the impact may have been in the beginning, he had initiated the project and he had developed the organization. If we add the populations of both East Asian countries, i.e., China, Japan and Korea and South Asian countries, i.e., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and etc. to South East Asian countries, we have about a half of the entire human population in these regions. Therefore, without dialogue and communication among people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, it is unlikely to achieve the goal of loving and peaceful society in these regions. Speaking positively, if we pursue the vision of Fr. Franz-Josef, it is very possible through both academic and non-academic dialogue and communication to achieve and maintain a peaceful Asian continent, which can possibly send positive ripple effects to other parts of the world, including Fr. Eilers' home continent of Europe.

I truly wish I could have met him, but through the members and staffs of ARC and its journals, I am convinced the inheritance

of Fr. Franz-Josef remains now and onwards.

***Fumihiko Matsumoto, PhD***  
***Japan***

When I first made my acquaintance with Fr. Eilers in 2015 at a conference organized by the Society of the Divine Word, Australia Province, I was not yet familiar with the field of social communication – at least not in an academic and systematic way. My field was religious studies, and I had and still have a keen interest in religious environmentalism. However, upon encountering Fr. Eilers, he suggested that I could research and write on a relatively new topic called “cybertheology” and to present it at an upcoming International Roundtable of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication in Bangkok, Thailand. One of his complaints about the submissions that he had received thus far was that too many of the abstracts were case studies rather than research that involved more theoretical thinking and approaches.

Despite being rather uncertain about this new topic, I decided to carry out the research, eventually writing an article on the topic for the ARC journal. Although this activity did not take me deeply into the field of digital theology itself, since I have never been a professionally trained theologian, accepting Fr. Eilers’ invitation did take me down the path of thinking, researching, and doing quite a bit of writing on topics that represent intersections between religion/society and digital communication technology. Needless to say, this journey has been extremely eye-opening academically, enriching professionally, and rewarding spiritually.

Not long after my first participation in the ARC Roundtable, I was invited by Fr. Eilers and the ARC Board to collaborate as ARC Deputy Director and to serve as the journal’s assistant editor, both under the tutelage and guidance of Fr. Eilers. Working under Fr.

Eilers for five years, I learned that on the one hand, Fr. Eilers was extremely staunch in certain matters that he saw as essential to the mission and vision of ARC. On the other hand, he was also very open to new voices and contributions from others. He was never so protective of his “child” that he could not listen to others’ ideas or be receptive to new ways of doing things.

Despite me being in Thailand and Fr. Eilers working from the Philippines, Fr. Eilers proved to be a true communicator not only in his theorizing and teaching, but also in practice. No email to him ever went unanswered. No LINE message was ever read without a response. And no request for input was ever left unattended. It was always something of a wonder for me to see how an octogenarian managed to teach, mentor numerous students, keep in touch with former students and colleagues, accompany others spiritually and professionally, read and write new research, and still had time to answer every email in details and every LINE message in a timely manner. Fr. Eilers was able to do all of this because he was truly rooted in God from Whom he drew the needed inspiration, grace, and strength to live out his vocation as a Catholic Social Communicator – in his work, in his personal life, and in his relationship with others.

In many ways, I owe my present and future work to Fr. Eilers. Indeed, when I met him at the event organized by the SVD, of which we are both members, I certainly did not expect that this encounter would change my professional life in so many ways. But by the grace of God, the encounter took place and I have been all the better for it.

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