

**Hospital Authority Breastfeeding Promotion Subcommittee**  
**2017 HA BF Conference**  
**Sustaining Breastfeeding Together**

**Advocacy & Support from**  
**Hong Kong Catholic Breastfeeding Association**

**Part II: In Gratitude and Baby-friendly Love**

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「愛嬰新世代」培育小組

**17 September 2017**

We must first of all thank Ms Lam and the Hospital Authority for inviting us to share at this very important conference.

We are also thankful to the Hong Kong Breastfeeding Mothers' Association (香港母乳育嬰協會) for giving us the nudge, through its very existence, that the Church should be promoting breastfeeding.

We wish also to thank Ms Christine Lam for being one of the first speakers to come to help us understand what breastfeeding involves and how to go about it.

Church-wise, we began to think about whether the Church has any tradition about breastfeeding. We immediately thought of Mary, the mother of Jesus, breastfeeding baby Jesus and we found paintings such as that by Leonardo da Vinci and we have constantly used it since.

But is there a longer tradition behind? We searched and happily found that there is a 2nd-century fresco (circa 150 CE) on the wall in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome that shows Mary nursing the infant Jesus on her lap.

It seems breastfeeding was formerly common and prominent but somehow declined and was no more something so prominent in the Church from about two hundred years ago.

Dr Ruby Lau has just shared on how we are trying to make breastfeeding an integral part of our faith in the Church.

**Life that Gives Life, Nourishes Life, Supports & Sustains Life**  
生命賜生命、生命滋養生命、生命支持生命、生命維持生命、生命維繫生命

The pregnant mother is co-creating a new individual life with her own body, mind and spirit (in synergy and in coherence with the macro eco-environment of 天地人 [Heaven, Earth & Humans]). For Christians we would translate Heaven (天) as God to say God, Earth and Humans (天地人).

The pregnant mother is sharing her body to build another body. In breastfeeding she is sharing from her body to feed and nourish the new-born infant. In fact, at the vaginal birth of the baby, she is seeding the baby with her microbiome that the baby would have the beginnings of his or her immune system for life-long health; and the microbiome is necessarily consolidated with her breast-milk, the perfect food for the newly-born, that she feeds her baby.

**Nourishing the Child**  
**& Consolidating the Child's Immune System with her Body and Blood**  
**As Christ Nourishes Christians with His Body & Blood**

In the Church, we have the Eucharist as the centre of our faith, indicating that Christ gives His own body and blood to give us new life and to continue to constantly feed and nourish us. It is only in the mother giving her own body and blood in co-creating a new life and giving her body and blood through her breast milk (which is part of her body and includes white corpuscles) to feed and nourish the baby that we could find a concrete human example comparable to speaking about the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

We hope this will be understood and become part of our understanding and teaching in the Hong Kong Catholic Church, becoming an integral part of our Church tradition that is practised and passed on

So it is of utmost importance to consider religious communities (with their understanding of life and the living out of life) as part and parcel of promoting and practising breastfeeding in Hong Kong.

**Blessing (祝福) & Oxytocin (Mothering Caring Hormone)**

The blessing (祝福) that a couple receives at marriage in the Catholic Church is a life-time blessing.

This would require that the blessing be dynamic and sustained to remain lifelong. This would in turn require the couple to constantly bless (祝福) each other and remain in the blessing of God. In this mutual relationship of care, oxytocin (mothering caring hormone) is released in the body.

We have started a liturgical ceremony for pregnant mothers together with the fathers-to-be in which couples first bless each other and the priest then blesses them.

They then speak to and bless the forming baby (胎兒). They keep their hands over the pregnant mother's belly, and the priest blesses the forming baby(胎兒) with them. Other family members may also participate.

It is recommended that they would continue to bless each other and the forming baby (胎兒) every night if possible. This would already be building a mutual threesome relationship with one another and the forming baby (胎兒) would be growing in body mind and spirit right from the beginning at this initial stage.

The natural release of the mothering/caring hormone (oxytocin) in concrete mutual caring relationship would be of utmost importance at vaginal birth-giving and we would recommend the husband to be with the mother-to-be at her birth-giving, his supportive care aiding to increase the natural release of the mothering/caring oxytocin in the birth-giving mother.

Artificial synthetic oxytocin may then not be necessarily needed.

### **Skin to skin & Breastfeeding**

The newly born baby would probably be feeling unsafe, insecure and fearful having just left the safety of the womb. So immediate skin-to-skin on the mother's chest would make him or her feel safe, also experiencing the warmth of love. This and breastfeeding would help the baby to feel a sense of security which would be helpful for the child having greater self-confidence later in life, as a continued sense of insecurity would lead to a lack of self-confidence.

It is not hard to relate this to Christian faith and Christian faith and love would encourage following this process in the child's holistic growth in body, mind and spirit.

### **Baby-friendly Love (愛嬰)**

We wish to thank UNICEF for advocating baby-friendly hospitals, Queen Elizabeth for establishing itself as a baby-friendly hospital, United Christian Hospital and Queen Mary Hospital for working towards becoming a baby-friendly hospital.

You have inspired us to try to educate a new baby-friendly generation of Catholics. We prefer the Chinese translation 愛嬰 which we have translated back into English as baby-friendly love.

### **Bombardment of Misleading Infant Formula Advertisements**

The bombardment of misleading advertisements by companies selling infant formula is still misleading a lot of people, including Catholics, especially the elderly grandparents who have a great influence (at least in terms of pressure) on the choice of breastfeeding or feeding infant formula, or the need for adding the feeding of infant formula on top of breastfeeding.

So we are grateful to the government for intensifying its promotion of breastfeeding and limiting the scope of infant formula advertisements. But there is still much to be done.

### **Government Allotting More Funds to Baby-Friendly Care from Pregnancy to 2 years old**

Hong Kong health care should concentrate more on health care than disease care so as to decrease the increasing need for more hospitals and disease care.

The most basic and effective way is to concentrate more staff-power, efforts and funds from early on for the first 3 years of life from pregnancy to 2 years old.

And this conference is a good start, concentrating on the microbiome, vaginal birth, skin-to-skin, breastfeeding; the seeding, consolidation and maintenance of the microbiome and immune system, etc. This would lead to assuring that the new generation would basically be healthy and continue to be healthy.

### **Hope that all Catholic Doctors, Nurses, Leaders & Community as a Whole Be Conversant with this and Supportive**

We hope that all Catholic doctors, nurses, health-care people, leaders and community as a whole be conversant with the above and understand that health of the body, mind and spirit from pregnancy onwards would be what God wants and would go very well with the Gospel news. It would be beneficial as well to society as a whole.

We are organizing such a conference to be held on 17 December 2017 (2-5 p.m.) at the Catholic Diocesan Centre in Caine Road and would also try to invite others from different religions to share with us. We are still thinking about the title and it may be 共創「愛嬰新世代」

You are all welcome!

Thank you.