

COUNTRY REPORTS***FABC 50 GENERAL CONFERENCE***

Compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat

CONTENTS

- I. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (KWI)**
- II. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei (CBCMSB)**
 - a. Malaysia**
 - b. Archdiocese of Singapore**
 - c. Apostolic Vicariate of Brunei**
- III. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM)**
- IV. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Philippines (CBCP)**

I. CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF INDONESIA (KWI)

POLITICS

Since the 1997's reformation, the life of democracy has become better and better, and this has been marked by the increasingly open freedom of expression, the information openness for the public, the establishment of some institutions to strengthen the quality of democracy, such as Constitutional Court (Mahkamah Konstitusi) and Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi). Besides, the government also intensively carries out equal distribution in the infrastructural development.

However, on the other hand, corruption is still rampant, and identity politics which has a great potential to divide society's life, becomes more vigorous.

ECONOMY

The covid-19 pandemic that has not ended yet has had a significant impact on the economy. The poor and marginalized society has suffered the most. Some of the people have lost their jobs and income. Therefore, during the pandemic, there has been an increased poverty rate. At the end of 2021, there was 9.7% (26.50 million people) of Indonesia's population of 273.87 million people.

Economic development based on natural resources has caused natural devastation, and those people whose lives depend on the land and nature become victims.

Along with technological development, there have been growing many digital-based businesses. As a result, there are also many reductions in labor and services. In addition, there are increases in the unemployment rate.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Today there is an increasing intolerance among the inter-religious faithful by the tendency to be more conservative. This intolerance, at least, can be seen in the 700 sharia-inspired regulations. They are enforced in some of the 34 provinces in Indonesia. It has developed over the last two decades. Also, 64 compulsory-wearing hijab regulations force women to

wear a hijab, especially those working as civil servants and in other institutions.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment in Indonesia is experiencing severe damage. At least, it is evident in the deforestation rate reaching 1.8 hectares/year. It has caused 21% out of 133 million hectares of Indonesian forest to be lost; 30% of 2.5 million hectares of coral reefs also experienced considerable damage. In addition, the high air, water, and soil pollution are very devastating and become the source of society's suffering.

The Indonesian society's habit, which is not wise, such as using too much electric energy, too much water, and throwing non-biodegradable waste everywhere, make this nature more devastating.

SEXUAL ABUSE/HARASSMENT BY RELIGIOUS FIGURES

Today, the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia has not received any public complaint about the sexual abuse/harassment conducted by clergy, religious men, or women. However, because there isn't any complaint, we should not think there is no sexual abuse. This abuse exists but without any official data. Sexual abuse conducted by other religious figures has been widely publicized and solved in the legal domain. For example, a teacher in a pesantren (a boarding school for Muslim students) conducted sexual abuse to his women students.

1. ANALYSIS: CAUSES

POLITICS

Political life as described above can be aroused by the very high political cost, weak law enforcement, religious politicization, and the rampant spread of radicalism. Furthermore, it can be worsened by the inequality in the distribution of state wealth so that there is a very sharp social inequality. This inequality can also trigger conflict and violence, which finally will aggravate the people's suffering.

ECONOMY

The world's weak solidarity caused the heavy-burdened economic conditions during this pandemic to help each other, especially concerning the equal distribution of vaccines urgently needed by all states.

Economic development policies oriented only in the financial and market growth have affected natural resource exploitation, which caused

natural devastation and made the poor poorer. It also shows that many economic policies still do not choose the option for the poor yet.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

The strengthening of intolerance is primarily due to the absence or lack of national vision from several policymakers and some officers of law enforcement so that they often make intolerant regulations and policies. Or, they let various actions of a group of people happen, disturbing the life together of the society.

ENVIRONMENT

Natural devastation can happen because of natural factors such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, and floods. However, severe destruction is caused by human actions in which human beings place themselves as subjects and consider nature or the environment as objects so that all-natural wealth is drained to the end. In addition, unsustainable or environmentally unfriendly development often sacrifices the environment and the future generation to bear the impact.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse happens among religious figures because of their lack of knowledge of human dignity and sexuality or because they don't reach complete and complete comprehension in daily life yet. Moreover, there is a perspective of the faithful that the religious figures such as priests, brothers, and nuns are good people so that the faithful are not necessary to control their life.

2. CHURCH'S RESPONSE

POLITICS

Regarding this political issue, the Indonesian Church seeks to provide political education to the people through various face-to-face meetings or by utilizing the communication media that have developed at this time. The goal is that the people are not only silent but are involved in political life and even participate in building an honest, good, and dignified political life. Besides that, the Church also invites the people of God to participate in fighting over public positions to take part in formulating public policies.

ECONOMY

The Indonesian Catholic Church, through Pastoral Exhortation and Apostolic Letters of the Bishops, always calls for the importance of building and empowering economic life based on respect for human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, ecology, and option for the poor. These appeals are also complemented by concrete actions such as empowering economic potential and energy through Basic Community, Fasting Action for Development, World Food Day, Microfinance Development, and Credit Unions.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Without distinction of religion, the Church needs to meet those who are geographically, economically, and educationally 'isolated or far away. The Church also needs to continue dialogue with other cultures and groups so that inclusive life together will be more vigorous. Brotherhood amid differences will be stronger.

ENVIRONMENT

The Indonesian Catholic Church fights for forest sustainability in promoting the forest care movement in Kalimantan by seeking protected forests. This effort has happened in Sintang and Pontianak, translating *Laudato Si* Action Plan (LSAP) with various socialization and animation activities at the diocese and congregation levels. In addition, he also made ecological pilot projects such as the waste house (Sacred Heart Lampung), the enzyme-making movement (parish communities in Jakarta Archdiocese), integrated and local wisdom-based agriculture (the Karanganyar farmer community, Semarang Archdiocese), eco-camp (community of CB Sisters) and many more.

In the local Church, the *Laudato Si* Indonesian community also emerged. The *Laudato Si* Indonesia Community is a concrete answer and concern for the Church in the problem of environmental damage and global warming.

SEXUAL ABUSE

The Indonesian Bishop's Conference (KWI) asks BKBLII (join body between KWI and the conference of religious superiors) and KOPTARI (the conference of religious superiors) to work together To anticipate and deal with sexual abuse. Through various workshops and meetings, they have made multiple efforts to build religious leaders' awareness and

commitment to providing religious leaders protection for vulnerable children and adults.

Supporting Books to the workshop was also published as a means of building awareness and commitment:

1. Professional Service of the Catholic Church and Abuse of Office Authority (2018)
2. Formation Module: For the Professional Service of the Indonesian Catholic Church (2017)
3. Guidelines for the Preparation of Child Protection Protocols for Indonesian Catholic Church Institutions (2020)

3. CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CHURCH

POLITICS

The challenge faced by the Church concerning political life is that there are still many Catholics who view politics as 'dirty,' so they don't care about the existing political issues. In addition, there are still many hierarchies that are less open and supportive of the laity to get involved in political life. Yet the support of this hierarchy is significant. Externally, religious-based fundamentalist groups who like to impose their will, reject pluralism are getting stronger.

Strength: The Church can also empower various existing strengths such as educational institutions, institutions of health, existing mass organizations.

ECONOMY

The Catholic Church is still facing obstacles to developing the economic potential of the people with a strong economy to help and empower other poor people.

However, the Church also has strength, namely the presence of the Catholic Church is quite acceptable among the government and associations in society.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Internally, there is still a hierarchy and people who are still closed, meaning they are less enthusiastic about building dialogue and cooperation with other religious people or other groups in their environment. They prefer to wait for invitations from other parties to make a collaboration

rather than taking the initiative to start and invite other parties. Perhaps this is also because the number of Catholics in Indonesia is tiny, only about 3% of the total population.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental issues have not become a pastoral focus yet in many dioceses, so efforts to emerge public awareness to participate in caring for and preserving the environment are still minimal. Moreover, the collaboration between the Church and other government and private parties concerning the environment has not been maximized. Externally, environmental damage is also related to politics, meaning that there are still many leaders who ignore the problem of environmental damage.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The challenge faced concerning the issue of sexual harassment is that there are still many local church leaders, in this case, bishops and leaders of Religious Congregations, who have not provided reinforcement and awareness of the issue of sexual harassment to priests and members of their congregations. In addition, there are still many Church leaders who do not resolve the issue of sexual harassment completely, including delegating cases to the civil law authority.

4. NEW ROAD

POLITICS

The new path the Church can take is to live up to the synodal spirit, namely to strengthen the unity between the laity and the hierarchy. Hierarchy provides the moral and spiritual impetus for many people to be involved in political life.

ECONOMY

Institutions of the Church must be serious in responding to and following up the Synod of Bishops which is currently still ongoing. We hope to become a collaborative movement at the FABC and KWI levels. Moreover, this is to meet the more relevant and meaningful presence of the Catholic Church to the broader community, especially in the economic field.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

The new path is a medium of tolerance proclamation, which is limitless in space and time. Technology can carry a small, simple message from a remote place to a significant issue.

ENVIRONMENT

Ecological pastoral and ecological conversion need to be comprehensively and sustainably undertaken. Comprehensiveness involves all people of goodwill to protect and restore the environment. Sustainability means that ecological pastoral is an orderly, directed, and continuous movement of the Church.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The Church must also have the courage to stand for victims of sexual abuse. In addition, the issue of sexual harassment can also be included as educational material in seminaries and schools owned by the Church and the public.

Jakarta, 25 March 2022, the Solemnity of the Lord

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II. CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE-BRUNEI (CBCMSB)

a. MALAYSIA

From the time FABC was created in the early 1970s, Malaysia has undergone rapid changes. Not only in terms of its rapid development in the area of infrastructure, but Malaysia has also seen its people grow from strength to strength. The expansion of Malaysian into the international scene has been one of the success stories of a post-colonial developing country. When Malaysia emerged from its colonial roots to form a fully-fledged independent nation, the country was essentially rural, traditional and relatively poor.

After the post-war years and subsequent reconstruction period, Malaysia began experiencing a relative decline in agriculture's share and a relative increase in the industrial sectors' share of the national GDP. That is

why from the 1970s to the early 2000s, more and more Malaysians started to work in the rapidly growing industrial sectors. These changes not only defined the Malaysian economy but it also shaped its people in a variety of ways. This “report” is an attempt to provide a condensed background of Malaysia and articulate some of the challenges that confront not only the Church but also society at large.

1. GEOGRAPHY

Malaysia is on the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia and also in the island of Borneo to the east. While Peninsular Malaysia is located between Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia, the states of Sabah and Sarawak are located on the huge island of Borneo, is shared with Brunei and Indonesia, and borders in the north to the Philippines. The total land area is approximately: 126,853 sq mi (328,549 sq km).

In the 1500s, the Portuguese expansion arrived in the shores of Malaysia. Since Malacca was located strategically on the trade route, it was considered ‘attractive’ for the purpose of controlling the trade with East and West. Because of its importance, the interest of the British and Dutch in the region also grew in the 1800s. With the Portuguese, Dutch and the British presence in this region in different periods Malaysia was colonised for long periods of time.

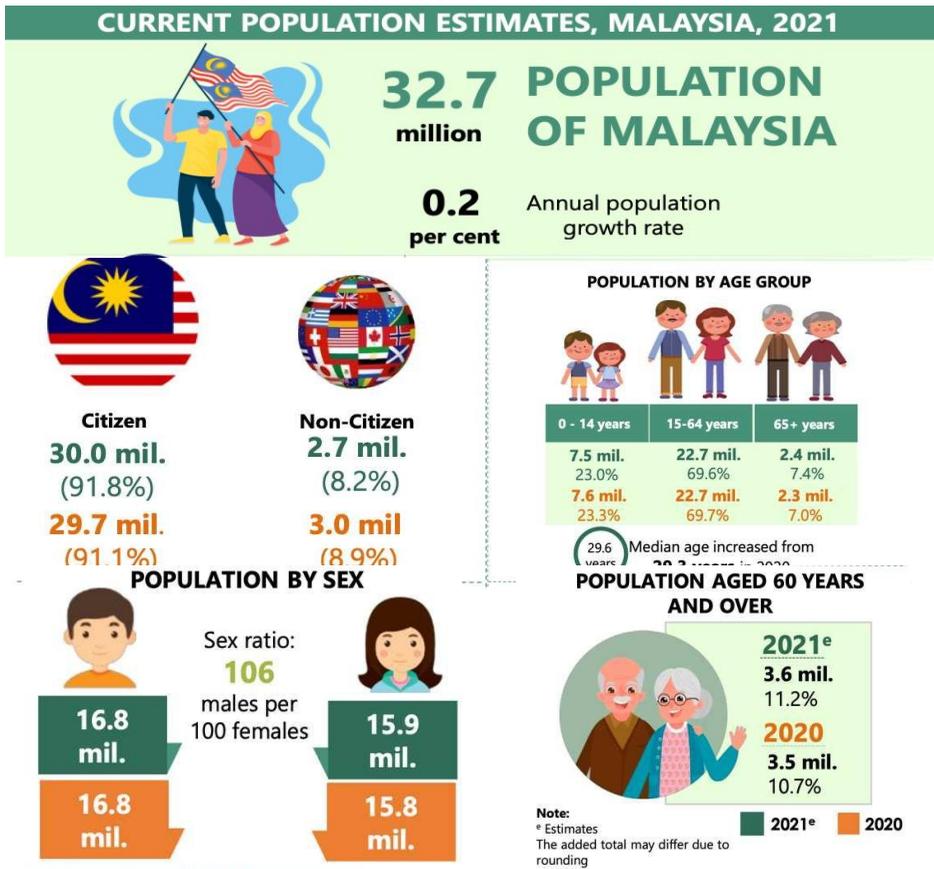
2. GOVERNANCE

Malaysia is a federal state that has a monarchy system of governance. It is comprised of 13 large states and 3 different Federal Territories. The system of governance is ‘constitutional monarchy’ which in many ways follows the Westminster parliamentary system and is categorised as a representative democracy. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia, the supreme law of the land. Since its independence from the British in 1957, the representatives to the lower house of Parliament are elected once every 5 years. Elections in Malaysia exist at two levels: national level and state level. National level elections are those for membership in the lower house of Parliament, while state level elections are for membership in the various State Legislative Assemblies. The head of the executive branch, the Prime Minister, is indirectly elected.

The monarchical system in Malaysia is considered unique as compared to others around the world: “The unique of the monarchy because is have the nine hereditrysultans elect from among themselves a ‘*Yang di-Pertuan Agong*’ (King) for a five-yearterm. The *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*

will be the King with a five-year reign that is the chief of state of Malaysia. The rotates of throne and each *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* for five years then graciously steps down allowing his brother Rulers the opportunity in turn to play role on the national stage of the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*.¹

3. POPULATION



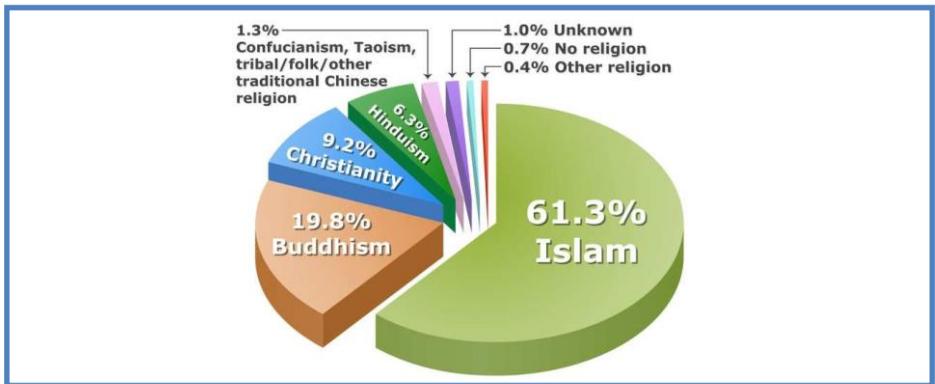
4. RELIGION

Despite the fact that Islam is the dominant religion of Malaysia, it is to be noted that Malaysia is a secular state is not an Islamic country or state

¹ <http://www.lawteacher.net/free-law-essays/administrative-law/the-malaysian-constitutional-monarchy-system-administrative-law-essay.php#ixzz3x5mYz9FG>

as wrongly perceived by many outside the region. Article 3 of the Federal Constitution states that “Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.” Though this Article has been debated ferociously in the past, it is accepted that Malaysia remains a secular state.

With the arrival of the different ethnic communities, came with them also was their respective beliefs. In that sense, the various religions that are practised by the peoples of Malaysia reflect the diversity of the country. The diagram below the percentage distribution of Malaysian population by religion:



5. ISSUES OF PRIMARY CONCERN

a) Reforming governance towards greater transparency and combatting corruption: The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is the leading global indicator of public sector corruption, providing an annual snapshot of the relative degree of corruption in 180 countries and territories. Based on the CPI 2020, out of 180 countries, Malaysia ranks 57. This indicates that Malaysia sits in the lower half of the CPI spectrum. In the same report it is stated that some 71% of Malaysians think that Government corruption is a big problem, with Parliament, the police and Government officials ranked the highest for the perception of corruption among public institutions. The practise of corruption has become institutionalised at some levels that is a cause of worry for not only the Church but also for many Malaysians. Ironically, in an era where religious revivalism seems to be on the rise, there also seems to be a rise of social ills in Malaysia. One may profess a particular faith and also adhere to all the strict rules and

observances, yet there is also an increase or moral decadence demonstrated in corruption, discrimination, lack of respect (tolerance), human trafficking, financial misappropriations, crime, etc.

b) Islamisation and Politization of Religion: In recent decades, there has been a revivalism in most of the religions, especially Islam, the State has found it opportune to use religion for its own benefit. Rather than secularisation that seems to be happening in many parts of the region, there seem to be 'sacralisation' of secular institutions. This 'phenomenon' is the impact of the Islamisation that is taking place in Malaysia. In order to exert greater control on the people, especially the Muslims who form the majority of the population of Malaysia, the State uses religion to justify its actions. The implementation of the concept of 'shariah-compliance' on matters concerning business, law, banking, and politics are some of the ways that this 'sacralisation' occurs in Malaysia. One can argue that the impact is only on the Muslims but this is not so in the case of Malaysia. The sacralisation of power has brought about discriminatory policies on those who do not profess the religion of Islam. In fact it is not just the non-Muslims that are disadvantaged, even those who are considered 'liberal' in their thinking within the Muslim community are set aside. In that sense, 'liberalism' is considered anti-Islam and a threat to those who want to keep the purity of Islam. Despite the fact that Malaysia is portrayed secular and developed nation, there is a frightening strand that views modernity and the use of religion in the politics of the day.

c) Poverty: A 2018 report estimated that 43% of Malaysian households were relatively poor, defined as earning less than 60% of the median income. The income gap between the top 20% of households and the other 80% in Malaysia had doubled from 1995 to 2016. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed more people to poverty and Malaysia's poverty rate spiked to 8.4% in 2020 a direct consequence of the pandemic. Despite the development of essential infrastructure (e.g., highways, skyscrapers, airports, world standard conventions centres, etc.) poverty is still an issue to be addressed in Malaysia especially in non-urban areas. The poor in this context are not only the materially poor but must include those who have no equitable access to education, healthcare, and even digital content. A holistic approach towards the human development of the person is a concern for the Church.

d) Urbanisation and Internal Migration: According to the report titled East Asia's Changing Urban Landscape: Measuring a Decade of

Spatial Growth, Malaysia is among the more urbanized countries of East Asia, and its urban population continues to increase rapidly. The World Bank Report states that the rate of urban population growth, 4.0% a year, on average, was among the fastest in the region. Data from market research firm Statista revealed that in 2017 nearly 75% of the country's population now lives in cities. The concern for the Church in this changing landscape is to find new ways serve, engage, and reach this influx of people who have moved to urban areas.

e) Migrants and Refugees: The UN's refugee agency, UNHCR reported in 2020 that nearly 180,000 refugees and asylum seekers are registered with the agency. The ever-increasing presence of migrants and refugees in Malaysia also calls for the Church to be pastorally care for them – humanitarian and spiritual assistance. The presence of migrants (documented and undocumented) and refugees has also changed the pastoral landscape in many of the parishes. Not only the care for their material needs is now a concern, but their spiritual welfare is also a concern for the Church in Malaysia.

f) Individualism: Among the many consequences of modernity in Malaysia is the growing stress on individuals as opposed to time-valued structures such as family, community and society. In Malaysia with the trend for smaller families and urbanisation of societies, it has been become more obvious that individualism is one of the effects of modernity. The changing face of the family has indeed influenced the basic structure of the family and community. Though it is not possible to pin the problems of modernity on individualism, it cannot be totally discounted that some of the problems of communalism stems from individualism. The insular world view can isolate the individual from understanding the need for the common good or mutual dependence for the betterment of society.

g) Family: The family is the most basic structure of society. It is from the family that communities are built and societies that shape a nation. Modernisation has had its impact on the family. The growing number of nuclear families in the context of a more affluent society brings with it challenges to the life of the Church. Issues like smaller families, aging population, pursuit of better life, are only some of the impacts on families. The COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted social, emotional, and economical lives of the family.

h) Youth and Relevancy of Church: In a rapidly developing country like Malaysia, the relevancy of the Church to our young people seems like

a mountain that is to be scaled. Today's challenge is to give our young people a knowledge and understanding of the Word of God, to lead them to Jesus and then to train them in service for God and man. In this 21st century, the young people have greater exposure and opportunities compared to those 50 years ago. With society becoming more and more affluent, the social changes in the life of the young person makes the question of the relevancy of the Church and perhaps even God, far more challenging for them today. The proliferation of social media in Malaysia especially among the young has bought about a new generation that has embraced a new world view of life.

i) Interreligious Dialogue: The Malaysian population is considered a potpourri of cultures, ethnicity and religions, there is already a natural setting for engaging in dialogue. However, there are some conditions that make this a greater possibility. First and foremost, the freedom of interaction precipitates the opportunities for dialogue. In Malaysia, people of different ethnic or religious background are able to live amongst each other is a good starting point for dialogue. In other words, the general population does not live in communes with people of same ethnicity or religion. The fact that one's neighbour can be a person of another religion provides positive conditions for greater understanding and respect. Secondly, the national school system that was introduced in the early 1970s provides another locus that gives rise to better social interaction. Children at a very young age are exposed to different religions and cultures through their social interactions with other children. Thirdly, inter-faith and inter-cultural marriages are a common sight in Malaysia and therefore this too makes informal dialogue a reality. With the changing political and social landscape, interreligious dialogue is becoming more challenging due to the politicization of religion at various levels.

j) Environmental Concerns: Malaysia is blessed with forests that produce oxygen, take up carbon dioxide, keep our climate regulated, provide water, and provide food and shelter to all kinds of plant and animal life, and also for people who live in the forest and rely on the forests to provide them with their livelihood. The seas that surround Malaysia has been home for centuries for all kinds of marine life, including coral reefs. Our seas provide us with an amazing variety of fresh seafood. Malaysians are amongst the highest consumers of sea food, compared to other people across Southeast Asia. However, Malaysia has not been spared from the ecological crises that has gripped the world. On the whole, *Laudato Si'* has

been received positively in Malaysia and there is still room to foster greater study and collaboration for a 'purposeful impacting change'.

6. ANALYSIS & CHALLENGES

There are various reasons as to why the above "issues" are a cause of concern for the Church in Malaysia. It is not easy to point out accurately the reason(s) because these are caused by a variety of reasons. The following is an attempt to highlight three of the reasons.

a) Economic Affluence: Malaysia is considered as one of the faster growing economies in Asia. The economy of Malaysia is the fourth largest in Southeast Asia according to the International Monetary Fund 2020. It is also the 36th largest economy in the world. Given this growth, Malaysians generally enjoy affluent lifestyle compared to almost all other ASEAN countries. The economic affluence has a direct correlation with the peoples reliance on God or even the need for God.

b) Ideological and Media Influence: The dawn of modernity has also brought about a newfound freedom to many people. Unlike in the past where most people found certain religious practices as inspiring and saw it as a means towards a higher goal, this new freedom with the ideological influence(s) brough about accessibility to digital media also leads people to develop their own set of values and also a rationale to form their own "beliefs". In this sense then the accessibility of information through technology has also opened the way for people to develop their own set of values and justification for the behaviour. This indeed has an impact on the more traditional forms of religion.

c) Egocentrism: In the past, like many other countries in Asia, Malaysia have always promoted a communitarian way of life as opposed to a secluded and individualised living. The communal dimension focusses on the common good and the betterment of society. Among the effects of modernity and urbanisation is egocentrism - having or regarding the self or the individual as the centre of all things. The drive to succeed in life causes most people to be trapped in the rat-race which is further compounded by urban living. Smaller families, gated-guarded communities, pressure to succeed are some of the causes. In this sense they have a direct impact on the practise of religion because the communal dimension and the common good that all religions call its adherents are seen as counterproductive.

d) Post-Pandemic Church: In the post-pandemic era, the Church will have to play an integral role in healing and rebuilding of our fractured

and dispirited society in the wake of this deadly disease that has swept away so many of our certainties and securities. Being Church is going to be about healing and rebuilding individuals and communities and restoring hope in humanity and people's trust in the love of God and his mercy. Economic, emotional, psychological, and spiritual recovery and restoration will be at the core of the Church's ministry.

7. FUTURE PATHWAYS

In a spirit of prayerful discussions and discernment, the Church in Malaysia needs to incorporate in its very essence new pathways that characterises the local Church for a new way of being Church in Malaysia. The six pathways are not "models" that compete with one another; rather they complement one another and permeates every missionary activity on the Church in a way that makes the Church more wholesome:

a) *A Community Church*: The Church in Malaysia has to be a Communion of Communities, where laity, religious and clergy recognise and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called by the word of God which, regarded as the quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small communities (e.g., neighbourhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Ecclesial communities and Covenant communities). There they pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they bare "one in mind and heart" (No. 8.1.1)² The Church as *community* calls for an understanding that the Church acts as a catalyst to be the bridge between communities (communion of communities). The Church is called to be the leaven in society not just for Christians but also for all communities. She is called to build peace among communities and not otherwise. If the task of 'making disciples' then brings about division and unrest among the other communities that habit the kingdom, then the task of 'making disciples' comes into question.

b) *A Participatory Church*: It is a Participatory Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful are recognised and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realised (No. 8.1.2).³ A participatory Church calls for the church to be immersed and

² Federation Asian Bishops' Conference, *Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium (Final Statement)*, 5th Plenary Assembly of FABC Bandung, Indonesia, 17-27 July 1990.

³ Ibid.

relevant in the lives of all peoples. The Church cannot exclude itself in an attitude of 'holier than thou' and be isolated from the world. The task of 'making disciples' must facilitate the common good of humanity and work towards making the kingdom a reality.

c) *A Dialoguing Church*: Built in the hearts of people, it is the Church that faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all (No. 8.1.3).⁴ A dialogue that listens and engages with religions, cultures and the poor (No. 8.1.3).⁵ A dialoguing Church seeks to engage with peoples of all traditions and cultures in a variety of ways, without having a need to impose itself on the other. Dialogue of culture and deeds are among the ways in which the Church can be tasked to build bridges. At the heart of the task of 'making disciples' is to make disciples for the kingdom and not disciples for the Church. This in no way belittles the task of making disciples of the faith but that should flow from 'making disciples' for the kingdom.

d) *A Prophetic Church*: It is a leaven of transformation in this world and serves as a prophetic sign daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable kingdom that is yet fully to come (No. 8.1.4).⁶ A prophetic Church speaks for humanity. She is the voice of the voiceless, marginalised, poor, oppressed and those in need. The Church cannot discriminate one against the other for she exists for all irrespective of religion, race, social status, gender, etc.

e) *A Disciple-Making Church*: Despite the existence of Christianity in this region can be traced to over five centuries, the expansion of the Church in terms of the greater involvement of the people of God could be traced to the post-Vatican II era. The people of God (clergy, consecrated men & women, and laity) must be engaged in the life of the Church and dependently building God's kingdom. A disciple-making Church must then seek to help everyone abide in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, rooted on the word of God, and engaging with one another in a spirit of communion and mission.

f) *A Missionary Church*: The Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.⁷ As a missionary Church, she focuses on discipleship. What does it mean to follow the Lord and to carry out the implications of this seriously in one's life? The Church is intended to illuminate the purposes of the institutional structures and the sacramental aspects of the church, and to ground the missionary thrust toward evangelization and social transformation.

g) *A Nation-Building Church*: Given that Malaysia is fragmented by its politics, the Church has an integral role to play in nation building. The Church must lead to live in harmony and peace and care for creation by working for others. We are all pilgrims on a journey, walking in one direction...towards God. Every Christian has a duty to contribute to national-building and uphold truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom for all. The Church must lead in changing mindset and getting involved in the "common good" for society as this is an integral part of the Catholic faith.

8. A FUTURE LANDMARK

The Catholic Church in Malaysia for the first time will come together as clergy, religious and laity to celebrate, listen and walk in the light of the Lord. (cf. Isaiah 2:2- 5). The Pan Malaysian Pastoral Convention (PMPC) scheduled for 2026 will have three (3) objectives:

- (i) Coming together to express our oneness and celebrating our richness of diversity and uniqueness in communion with Christ as the Catholic Church in Malaysia;
- (ii) Accepting challenges and opportunities, we are strengthened in communion to grow in hope, holiness and mission;
- (iii) As a communion of missionary disciples, we become more the salt of the earth and light of the world.

To celebrate, listen and walk as "one Church" will be groundbreaking because this has not taken place before. Parish and Diocesan assemblies are regular occurrences and so is the Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Conventions (1986, 1996, 2006, 2016). To be able to bring the diversity of the different communities of Malaysia will be a stepping stone in the building of a united community with a common

⁷ Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity - *Ad Gentes*, 7 December 1965, n. 2.

passion and mission. It is the hope that we, as church, can focus on challenges affecting the Church in Malaysia especially Family, Church, Social and Ecological issues and in respond to them in the mission of the Church in Malaysia to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

CONCLUSION:

The Church in Malaysia has grown over the centuries – from clergy centric to a more collaborative Church. However, the Church here does not just exist for herself. The uniqueness of Malaysia offers both the regional universal Churches a plurality and diversity that can shape the understanding of church and mission. The transcultural adaptability of the Church in worship, the interfaith engagement in daily living, the catalyst for peace and unity are among the contributions of the Church in Malaysia. As much as dialogue and proclamation is integral to the life and mission of the Church, the Church in Malaysia sees peace building as integral to the mission of the Church and being at the forefront with others in the fight against injustices regardless of race or religion.

Despite the many challenges that face the Churches in Malaysia, we recognise that cultural diversity has always been part and parcel of the Malaysian identity, and inter-cultural engagement and dialogue between various communities fosters a sense of unity that is significant in creating a sense of nationhood. Working together with others provides the Church the opportunity to offer a cultural diversity that is embraced and incorporated in their respective faiths and contributes towards fostering a sense of nationhood among Malaysians and to the world at large.



b. ARCHDIOCESE OF SINGAPORE

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following report concerns the ecclesial situation of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore from 2020 to 2021. It will cover the challenges of the Church in Singapore (2020-2021), an evaluation of these challenges, how the Church has responded, and how the various organisations in the Archdiocese have perceived new ways of being Church in response to these challenges.

The Archdiocese of Singapore exists within a multi-racial and multi-religious densely-populated city-state. In 2020, the Singapore government’s Department of Statistics reported that Catholics numbered 242, 681 (7.02%) out of a total resident population of 3, 459, 093 aged 15 years and above. The resident population only accounts for Singapore citizens and Permanent Residents (PR).¹ It does not take into account the non-resident and fluid migrant population that Singapore also has, which is estimated to be as many as 360,000, conservatively rounded down from an extrapolated percentage of Singapore’s total population of 5, 453,600²

General Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Estimated Catholic population (All citizens/PRs/Non-Residents): 360,000 ■ Diocesan Priests: 72 ■ Religious Priests: 75 ■ Religious Brothers: 31 ■ Religious Sisters: 167 ■ Charitable and Social Institutions: 32 ■ Educational Institutions: 45
Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 5 districts ■ 30 Parish churches ■ 2 Devotional churches

2. CHALLENGES OF COVID-19: SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this report, an online survey was completed by a sample size of 50 archdiocesan organisations, which included local parishes, religious congregations, and major archdiocesan organisations. The survey sought to establish the demographics of the organisations, their challenges in 2020 to 2021, and the types of resources or help required in achieving their organisational missions.

¹ Department of Statistics (DOS) Singapore, “Religion”, Singapore Census of Population 2020, *Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion*, accessed from https://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/reference/cop2020/cop2020-sr1/census20_stat_release!

² Based on an older percentage of Catholics (6.74%) from the Department of Statistics (DOS) Singapore, “Religion”, *General Household Survey (GHS) 2015*, accessed from <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/publications/ghs/ghs2015content>.

ATTENDANCE AS COMPARED TO PRE-COVID TIMES

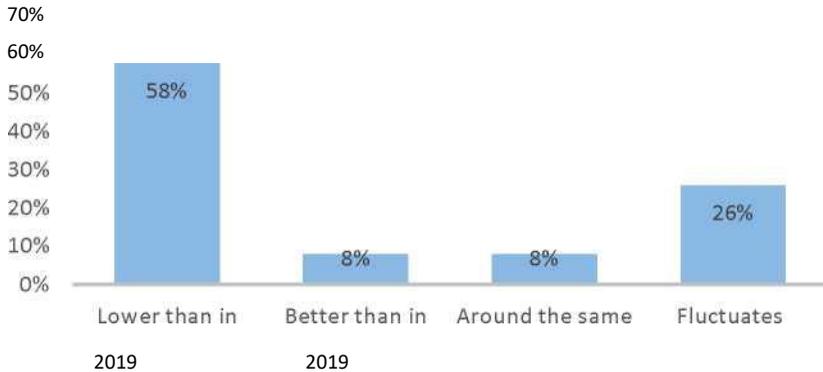


Figure 1: Ministry involvement in surveyed Catholic organisations (in 2020-2021) in comparison to pre-COVID times

From Figure 1, as expected from anecdotal data, a large majority (58%) of surveyed Catholic organisations reported that the attendance in their various ministries had fallen as compared to their pre-pandemic numbers, i.e., before 2019. Of these various ministries, the top five primary ministries reported in order of highest frequency was:

- **Teaching and Faith Formation:** e.g., Catechism, Bible study
- **Sacramental and Liturgical:** e.g., the Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing the Sick
- **Outreach to Non-Catholics**
- **Social Mission:** e.g., soup kitchen, supporting the poor and needy, humanitarian aid
- **Community-based:** e.g., foreign language communities, communities with special needs, Neighbour Christian Communities (NCCs)

For 26% of those surveyed, attendance varied although no immediate pattern or reason was apparent for the fluctuations. It was noted however, that a majority of the 26% were parishes and one possible reason for the fluctuations could be due to the sheer range of audiences they were ministering to. In contrast, 8% of the respondents reported comparatively better attendance and another 8% reported that attendance remained around the same. Of these organisations, only one was a parish. The others catered to niche audiences such as families and couples in crisis or had a niche specialisation since before COVID-19, such as teaching and faith formation. Organisations such as the Archdiocese's Office for Catechesis

(OFC) and Archdiocesan Biblical Apostolate (ABA) also noted that they already had an established event structure for conducting their ministry, e.g. having over 20 courses scheduled throughout the year, or offering more than one Bible talk a week. Factors such as niche groups and ministry output which could be moved online without a significant loss of quality or content, could be a key factor in the organisation’s continued ability to engage, in contrast to the parishes, who may not have had sufficient resources to be able to meet the pastoral needs of their entire congregation, thus resulting in a loss of engagement.

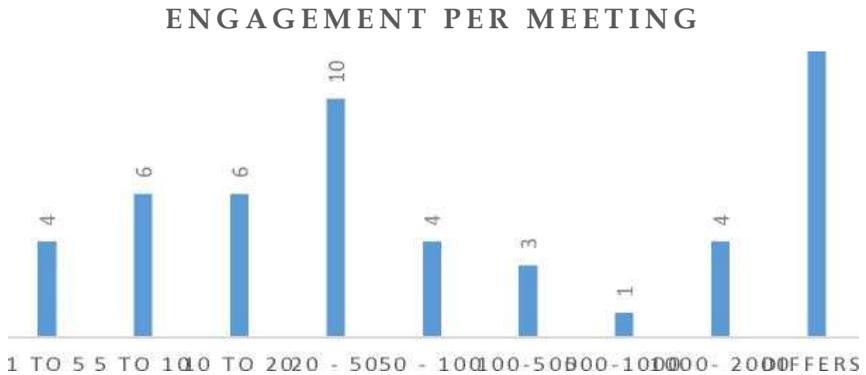


Figure 2: Engagement of people per meeting

Figure 2 shows the amount of people that had been engaged by the various organisations at each of their meetings over the course of 2020 to 2021. Groups of 20- 50 people were the most common group size, although 12 other organisations indicated that their attendance numbers varied too drastically to provide an estimate and would have depended on the type of ministry as well. Engagement would also have varied in terms of physical and online presence, since there was a range of government regulations during this time which limited physical group sizes including Mass congregation sizes. It is worth noting that during this period, all organisations reported the use of online platforms as an outreach option, thereby reflecting once more the valuable connectivity offered via online platforms.

MANPOWER AVAILABLE (PAID STAFF & VOLUNTEERS)

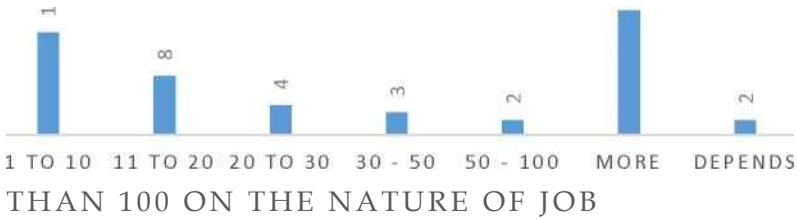


Figure 3: Manpower for ministry available in individual organisations

Figure 3 reflects that the two highest frequencies of manpower were “1- 10” persons and “more than 100” persons. 17 organisations had more than 100 people working for the organisation, whether as paid staff or volunteers. Of the 17, 14 were parishes, 3 were religious congregations and none were Archdiocesan organisations. The second most frequent response was 14 organisations, which had 1- 10 staff and volunteers working for them. Of these, 7 were parishes, 3 were religious congregations and 4 were Archdiocesan organisations. This disparity could reflect different resource needs of the organisations and is worth further investigation, especially among the parishes.

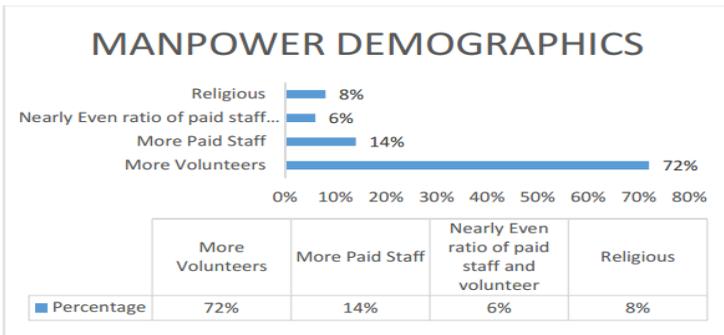


Figure 4: Manpower Structure of the Organisation

Figure 4 reflects the large proportion of volunteers in church organisations in comparison to paid staff. This applies across parishes, religious congregations and Archdiocesan organisations. It remains to be seen whether having a higher number of volunteers equates to the effectiveness of the organisation in terms of pastoral outreach, since more

in-depth study is required of the type of jobs that the volunteers are involved in (e.g. outreach versus cleaning the pews), the organisation’s own mission, and the volunteers that it attracts.

AGE GROUPS OF TARGETED AUDIENCE

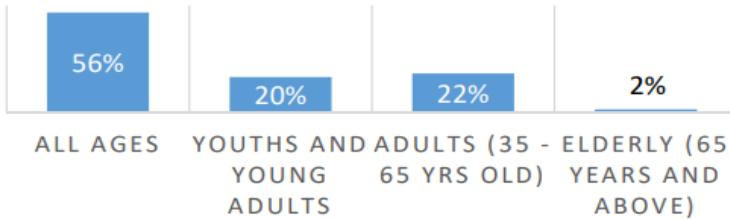


Figure 5: Age Groups of Target Audience

In Figure 5 all age groups” was the highest frequency for a target audience, while the frequency for youth and young adults (20%) was comparable to middle-aged adults (22%). One interesting finding is that of the organisations, only 2% have ministries that focus solely on the age group 65 years and above and both respondents are parishes. As of June 2021, 16% of Singapore’s residents are aged 65 years and above.³ The link between retirement and religion has often been made, including the idea that ageing individuals increasingly shift from a materialistic view of the world to a more cosmic one, in a shift known as “gerotranscendence”⁴ Since adulthood contains such broad life stages, ministering to those at retirement age in particular may be one of the paths forward for the Church in Singapore.

FREQUENCY OF MINISTRIES

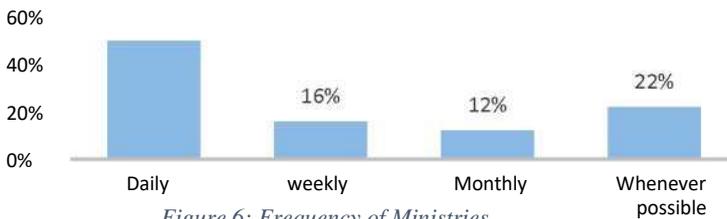


Figure 6: Frequency of Ministries

³ Department of Statistics (DOS) Singapore, “Population Trends, 2021”, accessed from <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/population/population2021.pdf>, p. 3.

⁴ Lars Tornstam (2011), “Maturing into Gerotranscendence”, *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 43 (2), <https://www.atpweb.org/jtparchive/trps-43-11-02-166.pdf>.

MEANS OF CONDUCT OF MINISTRIES

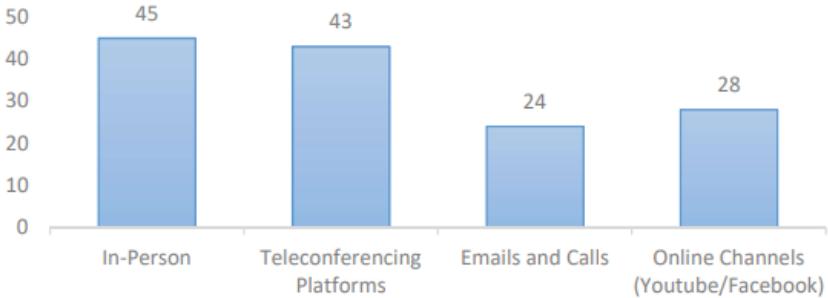


Figure 7: Means of Conducting Ministries (Multiple Options)

In spite of the constraints placed by the pandemic, the survey revealed that 50% of church organisations surveyed still carried out daily ministry (Figure 6), via multiple options. Almost all (45 out of 50) managed to continue in-person ministry in some form, while 43 organisations also made use of teleconferencing, emails, calls, and online channels through social media platforms. This showed flexibility and adaptability in continuing engagement through multiple avenues, and may prove worthwhile as an alternative to face-to-face engagement, depending on the ministry's mission.

WERE THERE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO MANAGE CONCERNS?

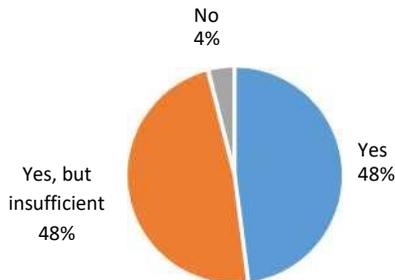


Figure 8: Resource Availability

In relation to the challenges faced, a large majority (96%) of respondents reported that they do have resources available to them (Ref. Figure 8). However 48% of the overall respondents claimed that although they might have the resources, it is insufficient for their organisational needs. The resources that are available to these respondents include Zoom accounts that are paid using donations such as love offerings, whereas most

of the resources they needed help with were concerning assistance with digital media training and using communicative media tools, resources for formation programme for spiritual growth, or monetary support for continued ministry, even as government regulations limited their ability to function. The 4% of the respondents that did not have any resources available to them did not specify the reasons as to their lack of resources.

3. NEW PATHS FORWARD FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE

3.1. CATERING TO THE SENIOR CATHOLIC (65 YEARS AND ABOVE)

Adhering closely to government regulations such as vaccinations and the limited attendance for religious services hindered the ability for ministries in churches to meet face-to-face and ministry work as there were no in-person visits. Ministries for the homebound such as the Society of St. Vincent De Paul (SSVP) could not carry out their ministries effectively and the lack of face to face interaction anecdotally also resulted in a lack of personal connection. However, as Singapore moves into an endemic phase which allows face-to-face meet-ups, the Archdiocese might consider the spiritual needs of Catholic adults above retirement age.

3.2. BUILDING TECHNOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCE GROUPS

Organizations and church groups have had to quickly pivot to using online platforms and other non-physical meetings. This has impacted the elderly especially who may not be familiar with computers and using online channels such as Zoom. Thus, providing accessibility to the elderly has been a challenge. There are also other technological limitations which cause the engagements and interaction online for some groups to be difficult, which include not being able to support larger group meetings due to a large data bandwidth, lagging which causes disruptions to sessions, or even having sufficient facilitators for large groups.

Without continuously growing, ministries will lose momentum and will stop functioning as members start to disappear or join other groups which have been able to reach them. The organizations and parishes are currently facing this issue, where parishioners began to lose interest and Zoom fatigue and boredom have crept in. This could be seen as an opportunity for the Church to accelerate the digitalization of the church ministries. This also encourages the Church to look for creative forms of ministering and engagement using digital platforms.

3.3. IDENTIFYING RESOURCE NEEDS AND UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER DEMOGRAPHICS

From the sample size of 50 respondents for the survey, it was apparent that there is a wide range of resource needs, even among local parishes, which are more or less run according to established guidelines and standards. More in-depth study is required of the resource needs specific to each type of organisation, the type of jobs that their volunteers are involved, the organisation's own mission, and the volunteers that it attracts. It is from here that we can better understand how to resource the organisations appropriately according to manpower, financial resources, and digital knowledge.

4. ARCHDIOCESAN EVENTS OF 2021: CATHOLIC200SG AND SYNODAL PROCESS

4.1. CATHOLIC 200 SG

2021 marked 200 years of Catholicism in Singapore and the term "Catholic200SG" was coined to identify all events and happenings associated with the occasion. The year-long celebrations kicked off on 13 December 2020 and ended on 11 December 2021, with more than 20 official events and activities organised to engage Catholics in the celebrations. In addition, over 20 parishes and Catholic groups held their own events and activities to commemorate the anniversary under the Celebrating Catholic200SG umbrella.

The Catholic200SG Festival capped the year's celebrations with more than 150 events and activities held over eight days from 4 to 11 December 2021 at four venues in the central city area, including the Cathedral. This area was termed as the "Mission District" where the early missionaries first operated from. Aside talks and forums, there were also many opportunities for participants to meet different Catholic organisations both in person as well as via virtual means. The eight-day festival attracted 12,000 attendees. One highlight of the Festival was having more than 4,500 people, including Catholics who were lapsed in the faith, received their Sacrament of Reconciliation during the Festival.

The celebrations culminated in Masses held concurrently on 11 December 2021 in the 32 parishes of the archdiocese. More than 6,000 Catholics physically attended the Concurrent Mass in the parishes, while another 6,400 watched the livestream of the Concurrent Mass held at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd.

4.2. COMMENCEMENT OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS IN SINGAPORE

Following the worldwide launch of the Synod on 10 October 2021 by Pope Francis, the Archdiocesan Synod Committee of Singapore made available and launched an online form that both groups and individuals could use to submit their Synodal Responses. Apart from the training of Synod facilitators to conduct the conversations, resources (such as videos and facilitation guides) were created to help people understand how to conduct such conversations. The Archdiocesan Synod Committee of Singapore provided specialised materials that were meant for parents and Catechists to use in engaging their young children in the Synodal conversations.

4.3. EXPANSION OF THE DIGITAL CHURCH INITIATIVES

The Digital Church Office (DCO) continues to expand the functionalities of the MyCatholic.sg site, which serves as a digital church front, enabling Catholics to book for Masses. Its developmental progress in 2021 included allowing the laity to book a space for penitential service as well as registering for catechism classes. These functions were necessitated as Singapore's health regulations in mitigating COVID-19 infections restricted the number of people coming to Church for Mass. One of its new functions allowed Catholics to pen their wishes for the Catholic Church during the Catholic200SG Festival.

4.4. ECUMENICAL ENGAGEMENTS

As a Church, we have also participated in ecumenical engagements with other Christian groups. In particular, we were part of the 2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 2021, where one of our parishes served as the site for the joint prayer sessions. In addition, we also had a specific online dialogue session for Catholic youths to talk to their Christian counterparts on 28 February 2021, aimed at nurturing the next generation of young leaders for ecumenical dialogue.

4.5. ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

With Singapore having more than 90% of its population carrying a smartphone, online social media engagement was a key strength for the Archdiocese with its faithful. An accomplishment on the social media front was the Archdiocese own radio show: CatholicSg Radio had their podcasts made available on Apple, Amazon and Spotify and commencing live online radio shows in June 2021. The Archdiocese also launched a new TikTok channel, expanding its social media reach. As testimony to its

online vibrancy, the Archdiocese's official YouTube was given a plaque from YouTube for achieving the 100K-subscribers' milestone in May 2021.

5. CONCLUSION

While COVID-19 has severely impacted the functions of ministries in the local Catholic Church, it has also revealed several opportunities that can be used to further the Church's relevance and break new ground in Singapore.

Amidst the Pandemic, the local Catholic Church has been blessed with the opportunity to commemorate their 200th anniversary, with events and activities that reached out to the many faithful and brought back Catholics who were lapsed in their faith.

Moving along with the times, the Archdiocese of Singapore has been blessed with technological advancements, which allowed the church to be brought to the many faithful through online means. It proves that the church has the ability to keep up with the technological advancements of the new age. Retrospectively, the COVID-19 restrictions opened up new avenues for us to reach out to the members of the faithful through the internet. It had also forced the church to be more creative. With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in Singapore and globally, 2022 may be a year of recovery for the Church, and an opportune time to implement new ideas that have emerged from the last two years.

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c. APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF BRUNEI

The population in Brunei Darussalam is roughly 429,999 (2021 estimates). Brunei citizens and Permanent Residence accounted for 82.2 per cent (353,313 persons) of the population. The statistics in 2020 shows that Malays formed the largest community in the country with a share of 65.8 per cent. Chinese and others comprised 10.2 per cent and 24 per cent of the total population. Unfortunately, the latest available government statistics on religion is for 2016: Islam represent (81%), Buddhism (7%), Christianity (7%), Others (5%). Today, there are 102 mosques in the country and 6 officially recognized Christian churches (3 - Catholics and 3 - Anglicans). The numbers of Christians today have been much reduced in 2021 due to many of the foreign workers returning back to their home country. Although there are other Protestant denominations in Brunei Darussalam, they are not officially recognized and do not have officially recognized houses of worship.

THE COVID-19 SITUATION IN BRUNEI AND HOW IT HAS IMPACTED THE CHURCH

COVID-19 Situation in Brunei Darussalam



COVID-19 was first detected in Brunei Darussalam on 9th March 2020. This ballooned to 104 cases in just 15 days. To stem the spread of the virus, the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced the suspension of all religious gathering from 16th March. All church services were also halted on 15 th March 2020 (3rd Sunday of Lent). The first phase of COVID-19 impacted the celebration of Holy Week and all the other celebrations/activities of the church. The RCIA catechumens were finally baptized on August 20th. Chrism Mass was also moved to August 28th. The 2020 confirmandi did not receive their sacrament of confirmation until January 24th 2021.

By early May, due to the quick lockdown and people observing the SOP in place, no new infections were recorded in Brunei. Because there hasn't been any local transmission of COVID-19 since 6th May 2020, the

Church resume Sunday services on Holy Trinity Sunday (June 7th, 2020), 84 days after the lockdown. Our lives resumed quite normally with minimal restriction on movement and gatherings. Travel in and out of Brunei, however, remained restricted to mitigate the covid-19 virus and its variant from entering the country. By 3rd August 2020, there is no restriction on the number of people attending church services on Sunday other than taking precautionary measures such as social distancing, temperature check, provision of sanitizer, and BruHealth registration. Mask, although not mandatory at that time, was encouraged all this time. For just over a year, from 3rd August 2020 to 6th August 2021, there has been no local covid-19 transmission in Brunei Darussalam.

The Ministry of Health introduced the 5-phase de-escalation plan for the entire nation in March 2020 and a contact tracing app called BruHealth was introduced on March 2021. The Catholic church also started requiring everyone to scan the Church's BruHealth QR code when they come for Mass. Knowing how important accurate tracing is, the Vicariate develop another system called Parish ID and started using it on 7th February 2021 to speed up registration for Mass attendance. Everyone was requested to register for the Parish ID and this make it easier for us also to get updated information about our congregation. After registering people for 168 days (5 months and 18 days), we stop registering people attending Mass on 25th July 2021 as most people is now using the nation BruHealth contact tracing app. To date, 8,675 have registered with the Vicariate Parish ID system, but Mass attendance on that weekend was only 1,734 (20%) for the entire Vicariate. Previously, we estimated that the number of Catholics in Brunei Darussalam in 2020 to be 16,000. This would indicate that almost 46% are undocumented either because they are not attending Mass or are still following the Livestream Mass or none at all or have returned back to their home country. COVID-19 has drastically reduced the number of Mass attendees even when most of them (those 12 years and above) are allowed to join. Many are worried about getting the virus and the entire household having to isolate themselves.

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic hit our nation on August 7th 2021. All Masses and church gatherings/activities in the Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam were once again suspended immediately, as strict movement control measures was immediately put in place to stem the spread of covid-19. After three months of strict movement control measure, it is with great relief to see the number of local transmission cases in the country dropping significantly on November 7th

2021. This is also the result of the nation vaccination program reaching 70% of the population receiving their complete two-doses of the vaccine. With the consent of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam, the Prime Minister's Office on 9th November announced that the control measures that is currently in place will begin to be gradually reduced, on Friday, 19th November 2021. The second wave affected the celebration of 2021 Confirmation and it is now reschedule to May 31st 2022.

While we would like everyone to return to Church on the day the nation enters its Transition Phase on 19th November 2021, the clergy in the Apostolic Vicariate in Brunei Darussalam have decided not to rush the opening too quickly. The Church re-opened for weekday Mass only on Monday, 22nd November 2021. The Sunday Mass continued to be available via Livestream only at that time. The church finally re-open again for Sunday Mass on December 19th, 2021 (135 days after lockdown) when the nation enters the early endemic phase on 15th December 2021. It was just in time for us to celebrate the last Sunday of Advent and just six days before Christmas.

In 2020 the Vicariate contributed BND 70,000 to the government COVID-19 Relief Fund and again in 2021, the Vicariate contributed another BND 50,000 to the government COVID-19 Relief Fund. The SSVP also handed out over 1000 food rations for the needy during this second phase of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic however has prevented many activities and gatherings to be held. Seminars, retreats and Religious Education classes has all ceased since the Delta variant outbreak in Brunei in August 2021. The Church will survive the pandemic but it will be a very different Church in that it has to keep adapting and changing its ways of spreading the gospel. Children religious education and many meetings and prayer gatherings has gone online. We have also seen an increased in the participation in online prayers than usual church gatherings. The online daily Rosary prayer also enable parishioners from the three parishes and beyond to participate. The dispensation to follow the Mass at home has not been lifted to this day as the COVID-19 situation is still very active in the country.

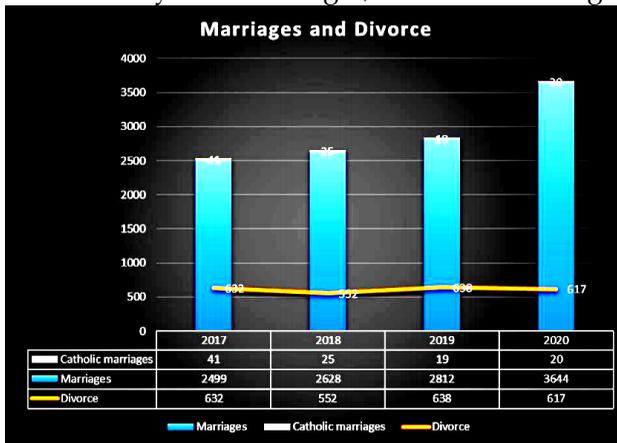
The National Vaccination Program for Covid-19 commenced on 3rd April 2021 and as of 16th March 2022, only 59.2% of the overall rate of the population have received their third shot. Those who have received one

dose and two doses is over 94%. Children under 12 have not yet been vaccinated yet.

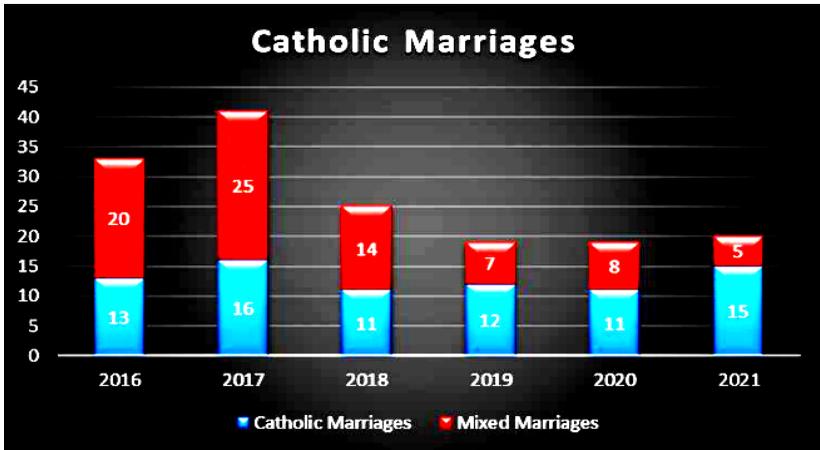
Ever since COVID-19 SOP guidelines was introduced in mid 2020, children under 12 years old are not allowed to join the Sunday and Weekday celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Many parents with young children are also unable to join the physical Mass on Sunday as a result. Close contact with COVID-19 people has also prevented many of them from physical Mass attendance.

MARRIAGES, EDUCATION, LABOR STATISTICS

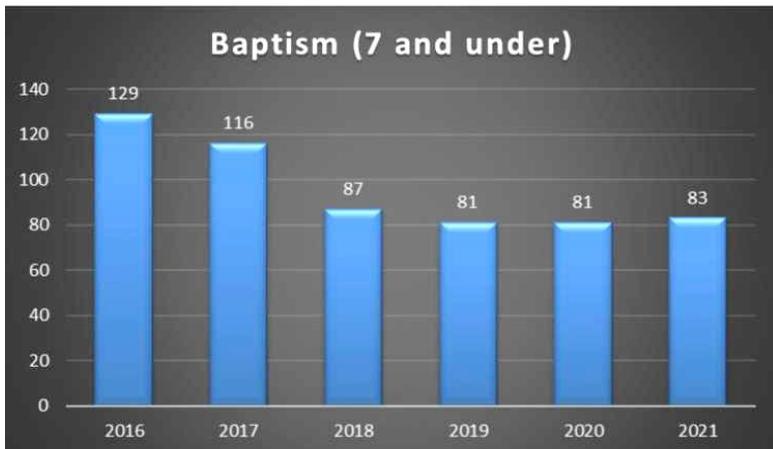
The total number of all marriages in Brunei has slowly increased from 2540 in 2017 to 3664 in 2020. Divorce rates in Brunei however have been persistently high in the last five years, based upon the numbers recorded at the Syariah Court. There were 550 divorce cases in 2016, 632 in 2017, 552 in 2018, 638 in 2019 and 617 in 2020. To have 617 divorces (17%) in 2020 compared with only 3664 marriages, it is a bit alarming.



Over the last 5 years (2017 to 2021), there has been a drop in the number of Catholic marriages, from a high of 41 in 2017 to a record low of 19 in both 2019 and 2020. In total, there was a total of 124 marriages in the last 5 years; 47.6% (59) of which were mixed marriages. The lower number of marriages during the COVID-19 is also due to couples delaying their marriage as celebration is either restricted or prohibited during the lockdown and control periods.

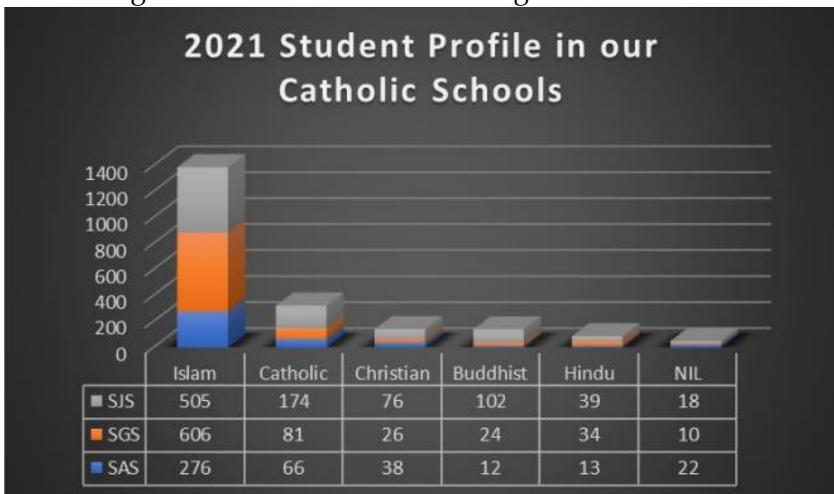


In the same 5 years period, the number of baptisms of those 7 years and under, has also dropped from a high of 116 in 2017 to 83 in 2021.



There are 233 primary and secondary schools in Brunei, of which only 6 are so-called Christian “Mission” schools (in name only). There are 70,814 (67%) in Government schools and 34,948 (33%) in the private schools. Education is made compulsory for every child. All subjects are taught in English except for Bahasa Melayu, Islamic Religious Knowledge and Melayu Islam Beraja, all these three subjects are obligatory subjects for all students. Although the 6 “Mission” schools are privately owned by the Roman Catholic (3) and Anglican Community (3), the Christian religion is not taught in school. Christian religious education classes are conducted on Sunday or another day in the church.

Since Sunday School classes are optional, not all Christian parents enroll their children for these extra classes. Needless to say, Christian religious knowledge is not so deep even in Catholic families if they are not active church goer or have not had much religious education.

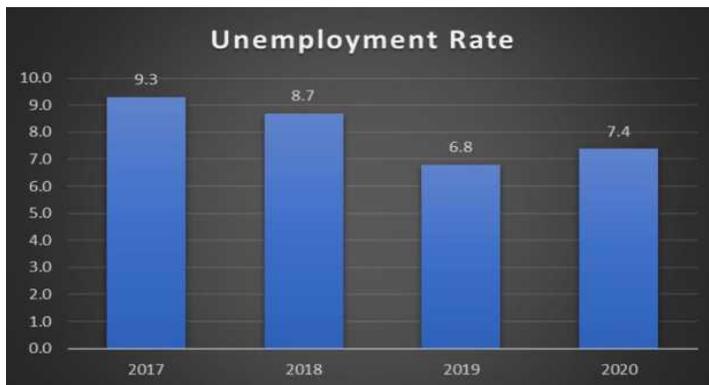


The total number of students in our 3 Catholic School students in 2021 is only 2,123, with only 321 (15%) of them being Catholics. The majority of the students in our “Mission” schools, not surprisingly, are Muslims (1387 - 65%). Needless to say, these Muslim students generally come from well-off families who can afford to pay for their child education in private schools and who wants their children to have a better command of the English language. Government schools are free for citizens. About 7% of the students in the Catholic mission schools are from the other Christian denominations, 7% Buddhist, 4% Hindu and 2% (Nones).

There are 12 vocational technical schools and 7 higher education /universities in Brunei Darussalam, producing 2,853 (vocational graduates)

and 3,254 (university graduates) in 2020. Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) has come a long way since opening its doors in 1985 as the country's premier national university. It is ranked #250 in QS Global World Rankings 2022.

Brunei's unemployment rate has steadily decline from 9.3 in 2017 to 6.8 percent in 2019 and then rose to 7.4 in 2020. The foreign workforce in the Sultanate has been reduced to 56,216 workers in 2021, as compared to 72,713 in 2019.



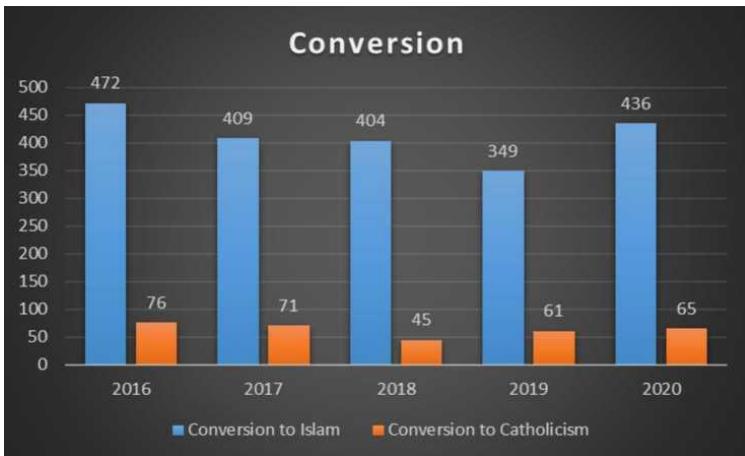
As of 16th March 2022, the number of people registered with the JobCentre Brunei (JCB) currently is 56,820 with 22,356 (~5.2% population) actively seeking jobs. Latest government figures also showed that there are 9,451 heads of households receiving monthly welfare assistance.

VOCATION AND MISSION

Brunei Darussalam does not have its own seminary for priest formation or religious congregation. Two of the three local priests attended the seminary in Singapore. Our late Cardinal went to the University of Steubenville, US and the third priest went to a seminary for older men in Boston, US. At present, we have one seminarian studying in Singapore. He has completed his philosophy year in Manila. While back in Brunei (end 2020) for his holiday before covid-19, he could not return to Philippines once the covid-19 travel restriction came into force. After over a year, the church decided to send him to the seminary in Singapore in January 2022 for his theology formation as Philippines is still not opened for foreign students into the country.

In 2021, there were only 33 adults' conversion to Catholic religion through the RCIA program. The numbers of conversion to Catholic religion through the RCIA program in previous years also do not vary very much: 65 (2020), 61 (2019), 45 (2018) and 71 (2017). For the whole country, these numbers are very small and insignificant.

STATISTICS from the Islamic Da'wah Centre (PDI) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs show that 436 Islamic conversions have taken place in Brunei Darussalam in 2020. In the previous 3 years, the numbers are 409 (2017), 404 (2018), and 349 (2019). Due to the active and public propagation of Islam and a much higher number of mosques (102) compared to 3 Catholic churches, the number of converts to Islam (436 in 2020) are obviously significantly higher than us (65 in 2020). A great majority of the converts to Islam are from the Iban and Dusun community, although there are some from the Chinese community as well.



The Syariah Penal Code that was introduced in 2013 make it an offence to propagate any religion other than Islam. Section 209 state that, "Any person who propagates religion other than religion of Islam, to a Muslim or a person having no religion is guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$20,000, imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or both."

Evangelizing and converting the non-Muslim population will always be a challenge for us unless our Catholics can be motivated to play their part, to put their faith into action, to talk / share more publicly about their faith, to carry out more social works more publicly. Outside of the church, we are basically anonymous Catholics (partly because we are afraid

to be seen as Christians). Although we are not allowed to practice our faith openly / publicly, others should know that we exist, see our contributions to the society, and be able to identify us as such by our lives.

FINAL REMARKS

Ever since our late Cornelius Cardinal Sim became the bishop in 2004, the church have identified 6 priorities for the Vicariate. In not any order, the priorities are: Bible Study, Youth, Adult Faith Formation, Vocation, Evangelization and Catholic Social Work. The Vicariate have been focusing on one or more of these each year. At the last clergy meeting with His Eminence, His Eminence highlighted three of them (Bible Study, Evangelization and Vocation) to be the given more attention. These three items are close to the heart of our late Cardinal. The need to have more lay people deep in the Word of God is clear, in order that we be able to give a convincing answer to those we are evangelizing. If we are familiar with it the Word of God, it has power to change lives and with all the evangelizing tools we have at our disposal in this modern age, we should be able to convert more people and move some of them to give their lives as priests and as consecrated religious.

The other challenges within the Church are basically the lack of interest to grow deeper in their faith, to walk the talk, to get out of our comfort zone, to get our hands dirty, to go in search for the lost and uninitiated, to boldly speak and proclaim the truth, and to find new ways of bringing the Gospel message and teachings of Jesus to those around us. Remaining an anonymous Christian will have a very negative effect on the growth of the Church.

External challenges such as being criticized by others for the failures of the Church and the imperfection of its members, being pressured to convert to other religions, and being criticized for not being patriotic or supportive enough of the nation's MIB philosophy and priorities, are constantly on our mind. Catholics tend to lay low, hide our talent and desire, focus on preserving what we have, what we can do, and the existing cordial relationship we have with the authorities. The people are fearful of rocking anything that can create more controls / suppression on us and fearful of losing whatever we have and allowed to do.

We are comparatively small in numbers, three clergies, three parishes, without a bishop at this time, with none of the comprehensive structures of a normal diocese, without any external financial support other

prominent projects are allowed- everything has to be done under and within was isolated from the rest of the outside world. Practicing policy of neutrality, Myanmar as a nation was isolated from the rest of the outside world. Conversions to Catholicism are tolerated as long as the local community remains undisturbed. Consequently evangelization is concentrated in the minority tribes.

The Catholic Church in Myanmar has remained until now a minority church comprising the different ethnic minorities such as Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Chin, Mon, Barmar, Rakhine, and Shan, This minority church is made up only about one per cent of the total population of 55 million. Isolation of the country cut completely the Church off from the important events in the universal church, such as the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the internal church developments that stemmed from it.

Myanmar has a Catholic Church that can be criticized for many things, yet it has launched on its journey despite of all its weaknesses and external and internal difficulties. It is a Church that sees its great challenges in the field of education and combatting poverty, a Church that wishes its membership to grow and constantly wonders whether it is brave enough, given the poverty and oppression it faces.

The internal and external difficulties faced by the Catholic Church in Myanmar can be seen as posing challenges to the Church. These challenges concern internal communication between lay people and the clergy as well as external communication with the other Christian denominations, followers of other religions. The Church in Myanmar has set itself the objective of providing inward solidarity with the poor in its own ranks and outward solidarity with the poor and the persecuted of other religions. The tasks to be performed in this context are as varied as the problems that are encountered.

1.2 RECENT UPDATE

The Union of Myanmar covers an area of 677,000 square kilometers (261,228 square miles) ranging 936 kilometers (581 miles) from east to west and 2,051 kilometers (1,275 miles) from north to south. It is a land of hills and valleys and is rimmed in the north, east and west by mountain ranges forming a giant horseshoe. Enclosed within the mountain barriers are the flat lands of Ayeyarwady, Chindwin and Sittaung river valleys where most of the country's agricultural land and population are concentrated.

The country is very ethnically diverse with 135 ethnic groups recognized by the government. There are at least 108 ethno-linguistic groups in Myanmar. The Bamar accounts for around 68% of the population, followed by the Shan (10%), Kayin (7%), Rakhine (4%) and overseas Chinese (3%). Ethnic minorities in the country prefer to be called ethnic nationalities to fight against the proliferation of the dominant Bamar people. Other ethnic groups include the Mon (2%), overseas Indians (2%) and the Kachin, Chin, Anglo-Indians, Nepali and Anglo-Burmese.

Religion in Myanmar is spread across Buddhist with 87.9%, Christian, 6.2%, Muslim 4.3%, Animist 0.8%, Hindu 0.5%, other 0.2%, and none at 0.1% of the population.

There are now (16) archdioceses and dioceses with (15) active bishops and (6) retired bishops – all from Myanmar. Catholics remain a minority with the estimated numbers of (713,695), Diocesan and Religious priests (1,078), Religious (women and men) (3,052), Foreign Missionaries (8), Catechists (3,339). (January 2022)

Most of the dioceses are very extensive; most have extensive jungle and mountainous areas with extremely poor transportation and practically non-existent telephone or internet communications, except for city areas.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. DIFFICULTIES AND TORN EXPERIENCES

Difficulties and torn experiences did not spare the mission in Myanmar. From the very first moment of her life in Myanmar, Christianity was seen by local society in a negative view. It was so, because Christianity evidently entered Myanmar only after Vasco di Gama's discovery of the route to the East and that bore the significance of European invasion in the eyes of some people, if not all. Moreover, Christian mission was chanced to revive during the British occupied Myanmar. Therefore, one should not be surprised that with greater demand and challenge the Church made very little impact on the Buddhists.

First of all, a political factor after the British colonization in 1885 marked a wound on the mission. Although the colonial power in Myanmar can never be identical with the Church, the deportation of the Burmese king and the annexation of Myanmar to the British India Empire was a silent blow of prejudice to the Church by the Burmese people. The Burmese nationalist movement started in 1920. The Christians though merely 85,000

and 40 autochthonous priests in number became a target for the movement because of their influence by the schools. The Church had to continuously confront the difficulty of being considered as a foreign body. The situation became worse in 1941-1945 during the occupation of the Japanese when the nationalists came to power. All missionaries, then, were under compulsory residence and almost all mission works - churches, schools, mission stations - were destroyed. In this hard situation, the local clergy providentially had to assure the proper responsibility with great courage and enthusiasm.

At the beginning, the Burmese adopted a policy of *laissez-faire* towards Christianity but as the numbers grew, pressure mounted from the Buddhist monasteries and little by little stringent regulations were set up in order to discourage missionary enterprise. Actually, the missionary enterprise had been much hurt by the stringent regulations.

The hard experience and difficulties faced by the Myanmar Church did not cease even after the Independence gained in 1948. The civil war created by the revolt of the communist party, insurgency of the different ethnic groups demanding for autonomy forced the Church to live in an insecure atmosphere and there was certainly a need to build up a proper local hierarchy.

U Nu who became Myanmar first Prime Minister after the Independence gained in 1948, showed his appreciation, at the Eucharistic Congress in 1956, about the presence of Catholic community as an instrument for building peace in the country. However, the great moment of pride and hope of the Church of Myanmar did not last very long. General Ne Win took over the position from U Nu in March 1962 and socialized the country government system. As a side-effect of his socialism, Ne Win threw a great persecution at the Church. His socialism revived and intensified the nationalization program. Steps of nationalization taken in 1963 and 1964 included the nationalization of all foreign and private banks, imposition stepped tax-rate on businesses, and nationalization of all foreign trade. In 1965, the Church lost 311 Primary schools, 44 Middle schools, 24 High schools and 8 Professional institutes. In 1967, there was an expulsion of 232 foreign missionaries (priests and sisters) who came after 1948. A few missionaries who had come before the Independence were allowed to stay on but under much control. The departure of the missionaries was mourned by the Myanmar Church which conceived no idea of 'Missionaries go Home'. But in a way the Myanmar Church could not waste time by mourning the past but she knew how to profit from the Cross, and this is

exactly shown by the Indigenous Hierarchy which shouldered the full responsibility of the Local Church.

2.2 MILESTONES OF THE CHURCH OF MYANMAR

When we put all vital “milestones” together we see the emergence of joys and sorrows in each Era of our History both with their differences and their commonalities:

Era One - from the 15th to 18th Century was a time of building the foundation of the Church and the faith of the Christians.

Era Two – from the period of the British Protectorate in 1886 that saw the advent of so many Missionaries from so many parts of the world. This was a time of dialogue and openness to the Universal Church with all its charisms and gifts.

Era Three – this began with the Independence of the Nation in 1948, the establishment of the Local Hierarchy in 1955 till the end of second military reign, 2010. We struggled to identify with the aspirations of the people and suffered with them in isolation, but with hope in our hearts.

Era Four – this began with the so called civilian government by the ex-military generals in 2010, the third coup again on the 1st February 2021 till present.

2.3. ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

2.3.1 Catholic Church in Myanmar

We can identify certain trends in our history from which we can learn:

1. Till today we are still a Minority. “The Little Flock of Jesus” only one per cent of the population but undeterred by our numerical weakness but drawing our strength from the Lord.

2. Christian proclamation of the Gospel and Christian life has always been difficult and dangerous. Many have given up their lives at the service of the Gospel and lived lives filled with joy. The words of Jesus come alive today as we ponder in our hearts: “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets” (Lk 6:21-22). Our joy begins when we begin to nurture hope in the lives of our young and enable them to live in freedom and dignity.

3. We have from the beginning been a Church with linguistic and ethnic diversity. Our languages and our cultures have been the roots from which our faith has found expression. We need to use this ethnic and cultural diversity to find a 'new way of being Church' here in Myanmar. It was both this unity among the People and the cooperation of the Bishops, Clergy, Religious and Laity that has resulted in the blessings that we experience today. Unity is not about uniformity but about diversity in harmony.

4. The Missionaries who had come from foreign lands were also the Ministers of the Word and the Sacraments. We need to stress the centrality of the Pastor and his Ministers in the Local Church to ensure the on-going formation and renewal of the Lay Faithful. Men of Faith filled with the love of Lord and His People have thus to be Men of Vision leading them to Missionaries driven by zeal. It is the lives of their Pastors and Ministers filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit that will stir the fire of love in the hearts of the Faithful. It is this Faith-Filled Laity that will be the New Missionaries in their families, their world of work and in society.

2.3.2. Politics and Dynamics of Power

Myanmar has opened up to international community after long years of enclosure and isolation. The government has turned up, as a major change, to the process of democratization of the country. There is functioning parliament, a civil government and related institutions and a robust civil society. There is greater openness, free media, and there is move towards a social welfare state. UN involvement and international community are supporting the transition to democracy. More direct foreign investments came in, and the Civil Society and NGOs become more mobilizing in the rural settings. Diplomatic ties between the Vatican and Myanmar have been signed, and it has paved the way for the Church to play a greater role in building a new Myanmar and getting more visibility and with a higher profile. The ongoing Peace building process in Myanmar creates more opportunities condition to advocate for economic justice for the poor and needy. The rights of the poor and the marginalized are getting noticed in the Myanmar society today along with the roles of women in society. This generates opportunities to support the poor people's livelihoods through social development programmes.

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military overthrew the government in a coup d'état. Subsequently, there were reports of human rights violations that further added to the challenges experienced by those

who were already in need of humanitarian assistance, especially internally displaced populations.

Myanmar is now one of the most political and complex crises globally following Military Coup on February 01, 2021. The multiple crises of Military Coup, COVID-19 and continued armed conflict that conflated and struck Myanmar are currently the focus of people's attention both locally and internationally. These crises have affected every sector of society, bringing enormous suffering and misery to families and communities across the country.

2.3.3. The Economic System

Myanmar is in the process of improving the open market system is introducing and allowing foreign investments in the fields of construction, manufacturing and trading; creating conditions for potential national development and a better taxation system. Infrastructures are improving across the country. Myanmar is rich in natural resources, if well managed with transparency and accountability it could be a key factor for justice and human development. There are new players in the national economy; ethnic people and civil society are aware of economic issues and claim for their economic rights.

After Myanmar military overthrew the government in a coup d'état on 1st Feb 2021. The crisis become worsens fast. Market dysfunction is increasing, and prices of many staple foods have surged, with the World Food Program warning of looming food insecurity for urban and peri-urban populations. The already fragile public health system is also breaking down. Banking system has fallen. Banks across the country remain closed and businesses are unable to reliably make or receive payments, crippling domestic production, supply chains and external trade. Food security analyses are already showing shortages of basic commodities and higher prices, imperiling livelihoods and agricultures.

Myanmar is facing a deep economic crisis that seems poised to push millions into poverty and create huge needs for both humanitarian assistance and broader, longer-term health, education and livelihoods support. These needs will occur across the country, and perhaps especially among peri-urban populations that have more limited social safety nets and less effective coping mechanisms than rural dwellers.

2.3.4. Social System

Building a new nation of Myanmar, presents new opportunities of setting the Rule of Law, promoting a more democratic, respectful and just mindset and change of behaviors. The diverse religious and particularly the Catholic Church can play the role of character forming of the nation through education of the children in the Church, as well as other religions in the Monasteries (Dhama Schools), in the Temples and in the Mosques. There is a greater access for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Social Services, and religious groups to reach out to the poor. Myanmar has a huge human resource capacity, composed of a high percentage of younger generations. The capacity building of the human resources is a great opportunity for the development of Myanmar's population. Myanmar. There is more space for Government Civil Servants to contribute to the Nation Building. There is an increased interest of young people in active participation in politics. Education reform in Myanmar expected to improve education opportunities for children after decades of underinvestment. Legal instruments: National Education Law and its amended bill, Indigenous Law and Disability Law are in place. The National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021) has been launched along with increased government budget allocation. There are some indications that Catholic and other faith-based educational institutions, such as preschools, primary and non-formal academic institutions and private schools, may be allowed to resume their activities soon. For the Catholic Church there are greater opportunities to reach out to Non-Christian communities through its social mission. There are also increased opportunities to train Church's personal in Integral Human Development in collaboration with likeminded actors.

The military seized control on 1st February 2021 and the opposition activists have formed the Campaign for Civil Disobedience (CDM) and have helped organize strikes and mass protests against the coup. The military has put them down with live fire, water cannons and rubber bullets. What started as civil disobedience has now turned into essentially a civil war across Myanmar. Urban poverty in Myanmar will triple under the combined threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing political crisis, a new survey from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) finds. The People's Pulse Survey, a pool of respondents across Myanmar taken in May and June of 2021, measured the socioeconomic situation of households since the political transition in February 2021. The results confirmed UNDP's projections earlier this year that by early 2022, nearly half of Myanmar's 55 million populations – some 25 million people – would

be living below the national poverty line. There now appears little doubt that the country's poverty headcount is likely to return to levels not seen since 2005, effectively erasing 15 years of pre-pandemic economic growth. "The rising level of poverty is not just about the lack of incomes to survive but we are also seeing a significant risk to nutrition, health and education, which will negatively impact on the human capital/resources of the next generation," said the survey report.

2.3.5. Legal analysis

The country has a common law legal system which was adopted from the British post-colonialism.

Myanmar is a very attractive country for foreign investment for a variety of reasons; it is surrounded by countries that have lucrative economies, it has many natural resources, it has a geostrategic position and it has a huge population. The government has finally realized and understood the importance of maintaining strong relations with other countries. Many international countries have already set foot into the country and others are expected to arrive soon because of the liberal policies to which Myanmar has adapted.

It is safe to assume now that Myanmar is a struggling country. The worse thing about the country is the constant violence and the disparity between the various ethnic groups. The constant hold of the military on Myanmar is a problem on its own. The economy is suffering however on the plus side; it is a pretty neat spot for investment. The country has a long way to go, but it also shows potential.

The legal and judicial system is corrupt to the core and in no state of protecting the citizens and foreign investors. They have been bribed in the past by military to feed their own interests and hence the whole institution has lost its credibility and soundness. Economy can flourish when people have faith in the system that whatever belongs to them will not be taken away by force or unfair means and they will be provided help and support to grow.

3. CHURCH RESPONSE

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM) had developed the first Socio-Pastoral Strategic plan in Myanmar in order to face or heal the above mentioned issues. Its aim is to provide clear steer to the Church in Myanmar as a whole, and to the 16 Dioceses in which the church is

articulated across Myanmar, on how to orient its social-pastoral work in order to contribute effectively to the Nation building of Myanmar by addressing the most fundamental challenges from the perspective of the Christian values and mission.

This strategic Plan has been developed under the inputs of the different thematic groups that met on April 2017 to elaborate on the sectors that were identified previously, during the seminar on Church's Role in Nation building in March 2016; and the Nation building Planning Priorities of the Catholic Church in Myanmar Seminar of 7th of January 2017. This Strategic Plan is open to everyone of good will and it is rooted in the gospel and doctrine of the Catholic Church.

The context of Myanmar in socio, political, technological and economic terms, is crucial for casting the Strategic Plan; and it conditions and inspires the interpretation of the Gospel in the concrete reality that our people live and suffer. Reading the signs of the times, as urged in "Gaudium et Spes" encyclical is the main approach taking to articulate this Strategic Plan; this is also done under the guidance of the Catholic teaching through its numerous documents.

The Strategic Delivery Objectives of the Nation building of Myanmar are (1) Indigenous Rights and Environmental Justice (Ethnic protection), (2) education (education for empowerment), (3) Integral Human Development (Social mission to reach out to margin), (4) Women Development (Women's participation in church mission), and (5) Inter-religious Support for Peace (Religions for peace and development).

CBCM also formed "Myanmar Catholic Church Humanitarian Assistance Initiative - MCHAI (COVID-19 response program) in 2020. Overall goal of MCHAI is to protect life and reduce impacts of COVID-19 death causes among vulnerable communities across Myanmar; to assist the most vulnerable people suffering from COVID-19 disease access to right to basic food services; to help low incomes families have coping mechanism to challenge the COVID-19 pandemic in a high risk of outbreaks; and to improve the capacity of COVID-19 affected people to cope with crisis through the provision of psychosocial support. KMSS is now closely working with MACHI and contributing its experiences and resources. KMSS could support and involve in the efforts of the Church through coordinating with medical action Myanmar (MAM) for COVID-19 Care Centers and installation of Oxygen Plants.

With the vision of rendering integrated human development through different commissions and church institutions which are professional and formation of the heart, Nation Building (CBCM) aims to achieve the following key areas of work:

- Follow up of NB Strategic Plan (2018-2022) implementation
- Liaise with commission heads and other church institutions
- Collaborate with 3 commissions: ECE, KMSS, NCYC
- Engage with supporters
- Formulate of new NB strategic Plan (2023-2027)

4. CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCH IN MYANMAR

1. A renewed commitment to the vision of the second Vatican Council

After these years of journeying as diocese and offices, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar (CBCM) sees the need to welcome a national vision of focus. Besides each diocese, commission, congregation having its pastoral plans, it is important as Church in Myanmar that we come together to listen to the Lord and develop our pastoral focus and spell out the priorities. Here, we need to think as one Church in Myanmar about our common pastoral priorities while implementing at the local level these orientations. Local and individual work is no longer enough. New situations demand new actions based on a total and clear vision. Scripture says in Proverbs 29:18, "a people without vision will perish". We hope that this Pastoral Assembly and the preparatory work leading up to it will help give direction and stimulate a sense of mission in our minority Catholic Church in Myanmar. We need to know, understand and live out the "integral faith vision" that Second Vatican Council is calling us to. This journey will begin with separate formation days in June 2005 for all Bishops and delegates of priests, religious and laity. It will be a journey of interiority and prayer, of silence and contemplation, as well as dialogue and renewed relationships. There is no renewal without a conversion of minds and hearts.

2. To live anew our vocation as people of God in a spirituality of communion

We rejoice that we have been called by name to belong to this family of God. Thus, we need to equally promote coordination and collaboration

among dioceses, commissions, offices and congregations for the 'common good' Jesus says in the Gospel, "He who does not gather with me, scatters" (Luke 11:23). Are we gathering with Jesus and one another? We can only become one body if we are ready to die to our self and our interests for the larger common good. Peace is possible when there is concern for the common good of all.

People John Paul II has often reminded us, "To make the Church the home and school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's greatest yearning". We need to promote a spirituality of communion, that is:

- Contemplating the mystery of God within us
- Ability to think of others as those who are a part of me
- To see and appreciate what is positive in others
- To make room for our brothers and sisters, bearing each other's burdens.

Unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures in our church and society would become mechanisms without a "soul", masks of communion, or just a put-on while people are made to suffer in isolation because they are of a different status, tribe, culture or religion.

Therefore, the Planning Committee for the 1st National Pastoral Assembly (NPA) and Jubilee of the Local Church in Myanmar has chosen as theme, the words of Jesus, "Abide in me (Jn 15:4)- Celebrating Church as Communion through Reconciliation" for Myanmar and for the world. Myanmar stands in need of God's grace of healing and reconciliation after years of conflict and suffering. Our society is becoming fragmented with each group, tribe and person pulling away from the other, each feeling justified in their hurts and that they cannot go beyond themselves. As Christians, we too are affected by this fragmentation. The values of the world seem to have influenced us too. Yet as Church we are called to become ever more a sign of intimate union with God and unity among its peoples of various ethnic origins, languages, cultures, religions.

3. To nurture our missionary zeal to build the Kingdom of God in Myanmar

The Second Vatican II Council fathers wrote on the role of the Church in the modern world, that "The joys and hopes of modern

civilization are the joys and hopes of Christians. The sorrows and fears of the people of today, especially the people who are poor, and those who are suffering, are also the sorrows and fears of the people of God. Indeed, everything that is truly human touches the followers of Christ. Christians feel deeply everything that happens in human life. It echoes deep in their hearts. This is true because Christians are also members of the human family.

How are we affected by the sufferings of our country? How do we respond to the pain of so many? What then is our role and mission as bishops, priests, religious and laity? What is our vocation as Church in Myanmar? How do we bring forgiveness and reconciliation to individuals, families, tribes and the nation? How can the Reign of God come in Myanmar? For Christians the world is not evil, but it is where we have to live out our vocation through our words and works. One of the greatest errors we have created is the artificial division between our faith and our daily life. Lay persons should take seriously their task of renewing society. They need to infuse the Christian spirit of the gospel into the mentalities, customs, laws and structures of their communities. But they need to be empowered and given the necessary formation for this task.

5. NEW PATHS

We desire to be a Church that:

- Stays with and accompanies the people. In a situation that changes constantly we need to develop ways of listening, discerning and responding together in a spirit of Synodality. We hope to do this within the Catholic Church and with people from all faith communities.
- A healing Church. Over time we need to build up listening and healing groups that can open up the possibility of some therapeutic presence for people. Professional assistance will also be needed for this.
- A forgiving reconciling Church. At this moment reconciliation and forgiveness are very difficult for people to take on. However we can slowly create step by step a compassionate and kind Christian community. As people receive that compassion from that Church we can share the message of Jesus “as I have done to you so you also must do”

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IV. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF PHILIPPINES (CBCP)

The Catholic Church in the Philippines has just celebrated the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the Christian faith in the country last year (2021). “Five centuries later, we continue to learn to sift the grains from the chaff. But the fact that we continued to embrace the Christian faith even after we rejected colonial rule must mean that our ancestors did not equate Christianity with the treacherous economic and political agenda of the colonists. At some point, the faith that we had embraced was no longer alien to us. It had succeeded in taking root on the fertile ground of our innate spirituality as a people, with our own unique gifts and charisms from the one Spirit that we received at baptism.” An essential aspect of the celebration is the “looking back in history so that we can understand better who we are in the present as communities of disciples, and an opportunity also to look forward in the next 500 years with the same missionary zeal that made it possible for us to receive the Christian faith.”

It is within this context that the report to FABC is made. In responding to this survey from FABC, the report ensures that the responses fully represent the view and collective spirit of the Bishops in the Philippines. Thus, the answers are taken from the various pastoral statements of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP). Data are also acquired from credible sources in describing the social realities of the country, and whenever possible, cite studies about the approaches and ministries of the Church addressing these social problems and concerns.

1. SITUATION

As of May 2020, the total population of the Philippines is 109 million, with an average annual growth rate of 1.63% and 363 population density per square kilometer. There are 84 million Catholics which is 83% of the total population making us the only Catholic nation in Asia, (Protestant 9.13%, Islam 6.01%, other Christians 1.86%). According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) the poverty incidence among the population, or the proportion of poor Filipinos whose per capita income is not sufficient to meet their basic food and non-food needs, was estimated at 23.7%. There is an estimated 3.9 million unemployed Filipinos in January 2021, which translates to an unemployment rate of 8.7% based on the labor

force survey report of the PSA (released December 17, 2021). Poverty has exacerbated the many complicated problems and issues.

1.1. CLIMATE EMERGENCY

After the celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in the Philippines last year, the first pastoral statement of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines is on Ecology calling for "unity and action amid a climate emergency and planetary crisis." This clearly indicates that climate emergency, based on the collective reading and analysis of the bishops in consultation with experts, is the most pressing social reality that afflicts the life and future of the Filipinos. In fact, since 1988 in its pastoral statement, "What is Happening in our Beautiful Land?" the Church said that "The Philippines is now at a critical point in its history. ... Our country is in peril. All the living systems on land and in the seas around us are being ruthlessly exploited. The damage to date is extensive and, sad to say, it is often irreversible." Some of the key environmental issues are the following: Biodiversity, Deforestation, Destructive mining operations, Dependence on Fossil-fuel based energy such as coal, construction of mega dams and others.

1.2. POLITICS, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ELECTION

Politics, good governance and election issues continue to deprive the Philippines social security and brighter future. The Bishops said in their Pastoral Exhortation on Politics that "Philippine Politics – the way it is practiced – has been most hurtful to us as a people. It is possibly the biggest bane in our life as a nation and the most pernicious obstacle to our achieving of full human development." Politics is generally founded on power and greed and not on lofty principles of self-sacrificing services and dedication to the welfare of the entire country.

The following are some of the key realities besetting Philippine politics: Family dynasties -- Political power are under the control of one or two families in barangays, municipalities, cities, provinces, and even at the national level for generations already." Election fraud and malpractices – The country has just officially started the national election, including the office of the president. Election campaigns have always been bloody and rigged with many human rights violations, including the proliferation of the mud-slinging culture among the candidates, which cascades to further division and chaos among followers. According to the CBCP, it is the

various malpractices in the election process that account for the sad state of Philippine politics.

1.3. THREAT TO FILIPINO FAMILIES

The Christian faith remains vibrant in the life of the Filipino families. Families face multiple layers of challenges internally and externally to keep their identity as *ecclesia domestica*. The pandemic has exacerbated the situation of families. In their pastoral statement "On the Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium" for the Fourth World Meeting of Families, the CBCP description of the situation of families is still very relevant today.

Among the key issues faced by Filipino families are the following: Poverty - a greater portion of the Filipino population lives in abject poverty, forcing family separation due to work-migration, high incidence of child labor, and continuing lack of education. Materialist and consumerist values are also gaining inroads even among the poor. Anti-Family Legislation - Anti-family legislations are on the rise. Divorce bill, same sex marriage, safe abortions are some of them. Culture of death -- Indeed, with principles arising from materialism and secularism, a culture of death is gradually setting in, one that would spell the death of Gospel values regarding the dignity and worth of every human person, including the unborn, regarding the very nature of life and death, love and marriage, the family and its relationships with others.

1.4. WAR ON DRUGS

In 2016, then candidate Rodrigo Duterte campaigned on an anti-crime and anti-illegal drugs platform, vowing to wipe out the illegal drugs trade in three months. Once in office, he unleashed a bloody anti-drugs campaign that is associated with over 12,000 killings, including those related to official police operations as well as so-called "vigilante killings". There is strong evidence that state agents have been involved in many of these killings, triggering investigations, and eventually several recalibrations of the government's anti-drugs campaign.

Duterte under his term considered drug users "no longer viable as human beings". Extra judicial killings in the Philippines in 2020 increased by more than 50% during the early months of the pandemic. In 2020 more than 160 political activists have been red-tagged and killed under Duterte administration.

1.5. FILIPINO MIGRANTS

An 'overseas Filipino' is a term generally applies to both people of Filipino ancestry and citizens abroad. As of 2019, there were 12 million Filipino overseas. This sums up the social phenomenon which we call "the Filipino diaspora". Based on the 2019 survey of the Philippine Statistics Office there are 2.2 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) who work abroad during the period of April to September 2019 with a total cash remittance of US\$2.9 billion. These "modern-day heroes" are one of the main drivers behind the economic growth of the Philippines and has kept the Philippine economy afloat through the most difficult times.

The Philippines, more than any other country in Asia, has witnessed these past years an unprecedented exodus of its people to all points of the globe. It is estimated that, at present, there are three million OFW's: permanent migrants, overseas workers, seamen, and other kinds of expatriates. If each belongs to a family of five, then around fifteen million Filipinos are directly affected by migration.

1.6. THE SOCIAL MEDIA, FAKE NEWS & FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

The Filipino psyche is being shaped by social media. Recently, the social media has become the locus for fake news and disinformation. Its influence is being used in the proliferation of revisionist narratives in political campaigns hence online disinformation is the new form of election fraud whose operations are fueled by troll farms. According to Rappler, the Philippines' leading digital media company, Filipinos spend almost 11 hours online every day, nearly 4 hours more than the global average of 7 hours. They spend most amount of time on social media as compared to the rest of the world, an average of 4.15 hours a day, topping all countries. In this new addiction their consciousness is highly shaped and influences their outlook and decisions. The digital consumers in the Philippines account for 37% of all digital service consumers in 2020.

There are 89 million social media users in the Philippines or 80.7% of the population, an increase of 22% in social media users since the start of the pandemic. Between 2020-2021, the number of social media users in the Philippines increased by 16 million as of January 2021, making it the 3rd top country globally in terms of largest absolute growth. In fact, a big majority of Filipinos use social media every day, and according to the data there were 57 million on Facebook in 2016.

Interestingly, Maria Ressa, a champion of the freedom of the press has been the first Filipino to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. On October 11, 2021, Archbishop Romulo Valles, then CBCP President stated in his congratulatory message:

“Today, all over the world, this journalistic work has become more and more difficult because of the level of disinformation and fake news that continue to spread through the means of social communications. The vocation and mission, therefore, of the members of the Press (as envisioned by our Popes) is to contribute not only for the search for truth but more importantly, to help build a culture of dialogue.” (cf. Pope Francis, Message to the Members of the Foreign Press Association in Italy, 18 May 2019).

2. ANALYSIS - ARE THERE CAUSES THAT YOU CAN IDENTIFY FOR THE ABOVE?

Tragic dichotomy between faith and life among the Filipino people in many aspects of their social and individual life.

Poverty -- The CBCP in its latest pastoral letter, while focused mainly on ecology, acknowledges that the root causes of all these problems tend to point towards the very high rate of poverty in the Philippines. According to Rappler, during the first semester of 2021 the poverty incidence among Filipinos rose to 26.1 million based on the statistics of the Philippine Statistics Office. Poverty and environmental degradation mutually reinforce each other. In fact, it asserts that today, hunger, violence and poverty cannot be understood apart from the changes and degradation affecting the environment.

In its pastoral exhortation on Philippine culture, the CBCP, after its exhortations on Philippine Politics and Economics, said that “it is clear much of the evil as well as the good we have noted in them stem to a large extent from our culture—the way of life distinctive of us as a people, especially the values that we live by.” The pastoral exhortation lists down the various cultural issues that could be considered as the causes of the problems cited above:

Family-centeredness -- Filipino’s family-centeredness is quite all-encompassing. Family networks facilitate the individual’s access to the broader society. The family is the principal means for gaining entry into the public realm of Philippine society where both economic and political transactions are carried out, facilitated and mediated through family networks. Social alliances, whether in business or in politics, are often based

on family ties too inasmuch as trust and loyalty tend to be confined to family members. A family-against-the-world mentality is often the result.

Familism as a central value shaping social behavior also underlies, to a very large extent, our notions of authority, legitimacy and power. Authority, legitimacy and power are generally seen as emanating from those who hold and exercise them, i.e., the rulers, rather than as coming from those who give them, i.e., the ruled. Relationship is dominated by a patron-client ties, a vertical mode of relationships. The tenant of a landed family or the driver of a company executive, for example, would more easily connect his own interests and status with those of his landlord or employer than with those of other tenants or members of the working class. Employers are sometimes seen as extensions of one's family to whom loyalty, obedience and debts of gratitude are owed. There is little class consciousness or solidarity beyond that fostered by face-to-face interaction.

Highly personalistic culture. We rely to a large extent, for the fostering of social ties, on face-to-face interaction. Consequently, social bonds and group solidarity depend not so much on common interests as on interpersonal ties based on reciprocity and mutual trust. Debt of gratitude, disgrace and fellow feeling become operative social norms in the context of this highly personalistic culture in which social behavior is very much oriented towards keeping interpersonal relations running smoothly.

Corruption and Weak Economic System-- The CBCP Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Economy clearly identifies the weak economic system as key contributor to the widening gap between the rich and increasing number of poor. The weaknesses in the "fundamentals and policies" has resulted to the skyrocketing of the foreign debt, which exacerbated the suffering of the majority of the Filipinos. A weak economic system plus corrupt officials have become the ingredients of the perfect storm that continue to knockdown the basic family and social values. Corruption is endemic.

Globalization -- The CBCP also acknowledges that the cause of the weak economic system is due largely to its incapacity to compete and survive in the era of globalization defined by its instruments of Liberalization, deregulation, and privatization.

Trickle-down economics. Admittedly, there is economic development in the country, and that economy even amidst corruption and problematic policies tend to slowly move forward. Yet, the system

produces an exorbitant inequality of income, growth disproportionately against the poor, which lead to the worsening condition of the poor and the increase in social conflicts. In short, this economic development brought about by globalization does not significantly uplift the condition of the poor. Moreover, and this must be emphasized, such economic system has committed, what CBCP calls “development aggression,” because of its disregard and utter destruction of the environment.

Addiction and pack of ethical standards in using social media – social media has become the main source of information, and the various political, economic, and other propaganda online, fake news and disinformation have become the very norm for public opinions, social “norms” and public standards of “truths.”

3. CHURCH RESPONSE – WHAT HAS BEEN THE CHURCH’S RESPONSE TO THESE REALITIES? HOW HAS THE CHURCH CONTRIBUTED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY IN GENERAL?

The CBCP has never been silent in all the issues and challenges that afflict the Philippine society. The regular Pastoral letters, Statements, and Exhortations are serious reflections about the social situations and problems in the light of the Christian faith. Through these Pastoral letters, the CBCP continues to journey and guides the Filipino people in addressing these problems based on Christian morality. Moreover, CBCP has made commitments in pursuing pastoral approaches in various levels, national, diocesan, and parishes, to address these concerns.

Response to Ecology: the recent Pastoral Statement on Ecology (2021) very concretely indicates what the Church has been doing and commits to continue to realize the vision of a healthy and sustainable common home. Some of the key responses are the following:

- Divest investments not later than 2025 from banks and other institutions that do not have policies and plans to phase out their exposure to coal, fossil gas, and destructive energy in line with the 1.5°C ambition, and hold them accountable to their fiduciary duties and moral obligations as climate actors;
- Lead by example by promoting the use of renewable energy and other sustainable systems in our own facilities and communities;
- Assert a CBCP-initiated non-acceptance policy of donations of whatever kind, from owners or operators and any representative of

extractive industries especially coal, fossil gas, mining, quarrying, logging, etc. (regardless of scale of operation);

- Continue the creation of an Ecology Desk in every diocese. Bishops and religious superiors to prioritize the allocation of budget and financial support for the desk and its activities aligning with the 13 ecological actions of the 2019 Pastoral Letter on Ecology;

- Engage the members of the communities of faith, civil society, faith-based organizations and the academe to work together, to participate in the education campaign such as the Deep Journey to *Laudato Si'* in promoting and supporting the Church's *Laudato Si'* Action Platform (LSAP);

- Advocate the Rights of Nature Bill and engage government agencies to implement eco-governance initiatives and programs.

RESPONSE TO POLITICS, GOOD GOVERNANCE, AND ELECTION

- Prophets in our times – The Church continues to provide the moral compass to the Filipino people as shown by their pastoral statements on political and election issues even amidst red-tagging (tagging community based organizations as communists), and other forms of state sponsored harassment to the Church. In fact, a number of bishops and priests have been accused of committing sedition because of their moral stance against the policies and actions of the government.”

- Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) -- a national parish-based political but non- partisan lay movement that works assiduously for Clean, Honest, Accurate, Meaningful, and Peaceful elections.

- Catechesis and Political Education. The most basic work that has to be done is catechesis on politics or Christian education in politics.

- Political Advocacy. Pastoral action in the political sphere takes the form of active advocacy. In solidarity with civil society, the church advocates for laws, policies, and structural changes that will improve our lives in society and our political processes.

RESPONSE TO THE THREAT FOR FAMILIES

- Strengthen pastoral programs for marriage preparation with new catechumenal itineraries at Diocesan and Parish levels (cf. *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) 205-222).

- Foster the pastoral ministry of accompaniment of spouses, by means of formation encounters and times dedicated to prayer and spiritual development (cf. AL 58-ff. And 223-230).

- Enhance the accompaniment of couples in crisis, (cf. AL 232-ff.) to form them into an attitude of resilience, which will help them see challenges as an opportunity to become stronger and grow in love.

- Involve married couples into Diocesan and Parish structures to set up family ministry (cf. AL 86-88), and rethink the formation of pastoral workers, seminarians, and priests, (cf. AL 202-ff.).

- Launch initiatives of accompaniment and discernment of wounded families, (cf. AL 50-ff., 241-ff. and 291-ff.) to help them discover and carry out their mission within their family and in the community, starting from their Baptism.

RESPONSE TO THE WAR ON DRUGS

The Church has univocally expressed its discontent with the war on drugs, which lead to many senseless killing and the rise of vigilantism. The CBCP has even called upon the law enforcers to be guided by the Christian morality in the performance of their duties and responsibilities. The CBCP has resolved to do the following:

- We in the Church will continue to speak against evil even as we acknowledge and repent of our own shortcomings.

- We will help drug addicts so that they may be healed and start a new life. We will stand in solidarity and care for those left behind by those who have been killed and for the victims of drug addicts.

- The Church should strive to push forward or continue programs that will uplift the poor, like livelihood, education and health programs

- Above all we will live up to – we all will live up to – becoming a Church of the Poor.

In the same year, due to severity and worsening situation of the war on drugs, the CBCP has issued a stronger appeal to the Filipino people “to heal our land.” “In the name of God, stop the killings! May the justice of God come upon those responsible for the killings! For the good of the country, stop the killings! The toll of “murders under investigation” must stop now. They have called upon the people to pray for the victims and the to stop killing. Concretely, they appeal to all “to contribute to the support

and the schooling of the orphaned children of the victims of these murders, or of their siblings, or the support and sustenance of their families.”

RESPONSE TO MIGRANTS

It behooves on the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines to ask the Holy See for the establishment of a personal prelatore for Filipino Migrants in its apostolic desire in response to the Second Vatican Council on the distribution of priests for universal mission (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* #10) as reaffirmed by the 1983 Code of Canon Law, Canons 294-297. The personal prelatore aims 1) to provide coordination of pastoral activities in the chaplaincies and pastoral centers around the world, 2) to mediate with and supervise the chaplaincies, 3) to form, assign/appoint chaplains 4) to communicate and negotiate with receiving churches with the ecclesiastical power of jurisdiction.

A Prelate will head the personal prelatore with ecclesiastical power of governance whose juridical personality will enable him to ensure pastoral care to the Filipino migrants through priests, deacons, and lay men and women who would minister under his jurisdiction.

Under the preparatory stage, the CBCP Permanent Council tasked a multi-commission ad hoc committee composed of the Commissions on Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, Canon Law, Seminaries and Clergy, to study and make proposals.

4. CHALLENGES – keeping in mind the situation and the Church’s response, what are the challenges you are facing both internal and external? In the midst of these challenges what are your immediate concerns? What are the strengths?

INTERNAL CHALLENGE:

Lifestyle of the clergy – the renewal towards living a simple life remains a challenge in many of the clergy

Being Church of the Poor – the renewal of diocesan structures that would realize this model remains wanting. An example is the extent of the implementation of the gradual abolition of the arancel system.

EXTERNAL CHALLENGE:

Perceive as lacking unity due to the different, and at times contradictory, stands and pronouncements from the clergy and church hierarchy.

The increasing influence of the secular in the public life through anti-family (anti-morality) legislations.

5. NEW PATHS – how do you perceive a new way of being Church in your situation? How can the Church contribute more to a better Asia?

In its Pastoral Letter for the Celebration of the 500th year of Christianity in the Philippines, the Church in the Philippines is contemplating on “whether or not it is opportune to call for a Third Plenary Council of the Philippines, that would set our missionary agenda as a Local Church in the next 500 years ahead.” Based on the above concerns, challenges, and approaches, it can be said that the Church envisions herself as:

An Ecological Church – We owe it to the next generation of Filipinos to ensure ecological integrity and biodiversity conservation for their own benefit in their own time. By becoming an ecological church, pastoral approaches towards “integral ecology” are prioritized thus healing the land. The CBCP, in its pastoral letter on ecology (2021) commits “to advance the teachings of the *Laudato Si'* and be bearers of hope in the face of an ecological crisis, following our Lord Jesus, our redeemer. As such, we commit to “integrate the care of creation as our common home in our teaching and practice of Christian discipleship” through concrete ecological actions in caring for our Common Home.”

A Migrant Church – We are a nation of migrants, hence it is imperative that the Church renews her pastoral care for the migrants and Filipino families living separately by training and assigning more church personnel, clergy as well as laity, to this particular ministry. The CBCP plans to establish a Personal Prelature for the Filipino Migrants clearly indicate her desire of becoming a migrant church.

The Church of the Poor -- The CBCP in its Pastoral Statement on Stewardship, January 28, 2021 once again renews the call of PCP II: “We, then, take the banner of preferential love for the poor. On this, Pope Francis tells us: “Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care” (*Evangelii Gaudium* #200).

The Church as a Family -- our Christian faith encourages us to hope and to sacrifice all the more so that our families and communities may live and thrive in “a free nation, nurturing a civilization of life and love”. We, Filipino Catholics, continue to hold that “The family is meant by God to be the first school of discipleship where the parents are the first catechists of

their children” and “the first school of evangelization where the members learn to share with others the grace and light of Christ”.

Since then, the Family and Life Apostolate/Ministry in the Philippines has sought to implement the recommendations of the Synods on the Family and the teachings of *Familiaris Consortio* (FC) and *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) which is significant among the many worthy initiatives on various levels – BEC, parish, vicariate, diocesan, metropolitan province, regional and national.

A Missionary Church – In the celebration of the 500th years of Christianity in the Philippines, the Christian faith arrived and prospered in our land through the dedication and heroic sacrifices of thousands of men and women missionaries from various parts of the world. They treasured the gift of faith they had received and desired to share this gift with us. As this “giftedness” motivated generous missionaries over the centuries, it must also enflame the hearts of all of us today to engage in mission here at home and in other countries (*missio ad gentes*). Indeed, this is part of Jesus’ mission mandate to his disciples: “What you have received as a gift, give as a gift” (Mt 10:8). We pray for a missionary renewal of our Church—both at home (ad intra) and beyond our borders (ad extra) during our celebration of the 500 years—and into the future! We recall the challenge of Pope John Paul II during his 1981 visit to our Church: “I wish to tell you of my special desire: that the Filipinos will become the foremost missionaries of the Church in Asia.”

CONCLUSION:

Guided by the wisdom of the Universal Church, the pastoral letters represent the unity and collegial reflections of the Bishops on the pressing situations and concerns in the country, and their insights and resolutions in the light of the Christian faith. The CBCP Pastoral Letters are testimonies of the Church’s long-standing “love and service,” in journeying with the Filipino people to transform the country according to the Christian vision of society. The sensitivity to the Filipino situation, their “lights and shadows,” sufferings and aspirations, continue to be the locus of the pastoral ministry of the CBCP

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FABC Papers:

168. The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflections from Asian Perspectives, submitted by FABC-Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), edited by Estela Padilla, Executive Secretary, OTC, August 2022
169. The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflections from Asian Perspectives, submitted by FABC-Office of Theological Concerns (OTC), edited by Estela Padilla, Executive Secretary, OTC, August 2022
170. Country Reports: FABC 50 General Conference, submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Bangladesh (CBCB), Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), The Syro-Malabar Church, The Syro-Malankara Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church, compiled by the FABC Central Secretariat, September 2022
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